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Photos on Nicaragua 'Buildup' Released

U.S. Says Aerial Pictures Support Charge of Cuban, Soviet-Backed Arms Expansion

By OSWALD JOHNSTON, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—The Reagan Administration on Tuesday released the largest array of secret U.S. reconnaissance photographs to be made public since the Cuban missile crisis to back up its charge that a Cuban-led, Soviet-supplied military buildup is under way in Nicaragua.

Adm. Bobby R. Inman, CIA deputy director and one of two top intelligence officials who presented the Administration's case, said he is "concerned and angry" that warnings about the military buildup have not been widely accepted in this country.

Adm. John Hughes, deputy director of the Defense Intelligence Agency—and the man who briefed the White House on the Cuban missile crisis nearly 20 years ago—presented the recently declassified aerial photographs.

Photographic Evidence

The photographs, whose existence disclosed that U.S. reconnaissance planes have been flying over Nicaraguan territory, showed:

—Four newly improved military airstrips, recently paved or lengthened to accept Soviet-built MiG-17 or MiG-21 fighter-bombers. The airstrips, two of them on the east coast of Nicaragua, are equipped with defensive embankments and Soviet-made anti-aircraft batteries. The airfields are at Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields on the Caribbean coast, at Montecimar on the Pacific coast and at Sandino, near Managua. It was previously reported that 75 Nicaraguan pilots are being trained in Bulgaria and Cuba.

—A commando training area on the shores of Lake Managua, near the capital, including a mock airfield, presumably for training in offensive guerrilla tactics such as the successful raid in January on the main military airfield in El Salvador.

—An armor training area, including 25 Soviet-made T-54 or T-55 tanks and a firing range. The photo-

tank guns nearby. These are older-model tanks, but Inman said the only other armor in all Central America is one World War II-vintage tank in Guatemala and another in Honduras.

—A permanent garrison for a 25-tank armored battalion under construction. Hughes described the installation as similar to such garrisons in Cuba—complete with barracks, an obstacle course, a training ground and covered bays for the tanks. Inman said he expects the eventual Nicaraguan armored buildup to reach 50 or even 75 tanks.

—Several examples of what Hughes described as Cuban-style military garrisons, with a truck garage, barracks, a training and exercise area, walled fortifications with watchtowers and Soviet-built anti-aircraft installations nearby. Hughes said 36 new garrisons of this type are in operation or are being constructed in addition to 13 older garrisons dating from the regime of President Anastasio Somoza, who was overthrown by the Sandinistas who control the present government.

Nicaraguan Buildup

Inman and Hughes claimed that the photographs are clear proof that Nicaragua is building a military structure far more sophisticated and larger than anything that existed under Somoza, when Nicaragua's army numbered 14,000.

Inman expressed annoyance that Nicaragua's agriculture minister, Jaime Wheelock, won substantial press coverage with his claim to U.S. reporters last week that Nicaragua's army is no larger now than it was in the previous regime. "He lied directly, and no one seemed to challenge him," Inman said.

He said the facilities displayed in the reconnaissance photographs prove earlier estimates that Nicaragua's regular forces now amount to 25,000 to 30,000 men, with a militia that could be as large as 150,000