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Central America as a NATO issue

Those in the Reagan Administration who have conceived its Central America policies are fond of justifying them as geopolitical necessities. They say that vital US security interests are endangered by left-wing forces in El Salvador and by the Sandinista revolutionaries in Nicaragua. At symposiums and in background briefings, they evoke a need to protect hemispheric shipping lanes and they warn of the disastrous strategic consequences that would follow more Cubas in the US backyard.

A strategic rationale for the proxy wars that Washington sponsors in El Salvador and Nicaragua cannot be confined, however, to the Central American isthmus. To be truly strategic, the Administration's policymaking would have to take into account how the world views the effects of US actions.

A recent study by the US Council on Foreign Relations suggests that the very foundation of America's global strategy, the NATO alliance, might be jeopardized should the Reagan Administration follow its policy premises to their ultimate conclusion - an intervention by US combat troops.

The title of the Council's book, "Third World Instability: Central America as a Euro-

pean-American Issue," defines European anxieties in an explicit manner. An essay by Spanish Foreign Minister Fernando Moran Lopez predicts that a US military intervention in Central America "would strengthen neutralist and pacifist movements [in Europe] to such an extent that it could jeopardize the continued participation in NATO of some of its members, especially Spain."

Alos Mertes, minister of state in the foreign ministry of West Germany, laments that Reagan Administration deeds such as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and publication of a CIA primer on contra terror "create in Europe, especially among young people, the impression that the United States is enmeshed in sinister intrigues." Mertes says he is disturbed by these actions because they foster "a virulent anti-Americanism that leads straight to pacifism and neutralism."

The NATO allies are not making a moral argument against US actions in Central America. They are hinting that their peoples may not stand for the scandal of an American military intervention. In this instance, the feelings of millions of private citizens could be a strategic consideration.