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EDITORIALS.

The Good Guys?

Having failed to make a convincing case for his theory that the trouble in Central America stems from the flow of arms and rebellion from Nicaragua to El Salvador under the aegis of the Soviet Union, President Reagan now stands truth on its head and makes his own war in the reverse direction. In fact, the trouble begins with the United States, which is flying arms and exporting counterrevolution from bases in El Salvador to *contra* outposts in Nicaragua. This is American aggression on a grand scale, and it is crassly hypocritical for the President to tell the world otherwise.

Some small comfort may be found in the lingering skepticism of the mainstream media under a barrage of White House propaganda. If Americans learned one lesson from the Vietnam era it is that the government cannot be trusted to tell the truth about foreign affairs. The result is that secret wars, covert ops and disinformation campaigns still make legitimate news stories.

Thus *The New York Times* reported on October 2 that "the Central Intelligence Agency is using a Salvadoran Air Force base and some Salvadoran pilots to resupply the United States-backed rebels in Nicaragua," and *Newsweek* rediscovered "the secret warriors" of the C.I.A. in its Oc-

tober 10 cover splash. In Central America, the magazine reported, the agency is spending some \$80 million this year on military operations, propaganda, destabilization and harassment, including a disinformation campaign to convince the Salvadoran people "that the guerrillas, not the Army, are the real bad guys." And in a story that appeared in *The Times* on October 6, Jeff Gerth convincingly demonstrated that one of the planes used in last month's air raids on Managua had been owned by a C.I.A. proprietary company, the Investair Leasing Corporation.

Unfortunately, such revelations seem to have lost the power to stir Congress to remedial action. Legislators, fearful of a backlash from a jingoistic electorate, are disinclined to buck the President on any issue he defines as a "national security" matter. No strong words have yet been heard from the leading Democratic Presidential candidates, who might be expected to pursue similar policies if they had the opportunity. After all, C.I.A. global skulduggery is as hallowed a Democratic tradition as it is a Republican one.

Only a popular grass-roots movement against the war will create the political conditions for ending it. That process has begun—this is not, after all, an utterly silent generation—but it will take time and, perhaps, fresh encounters with the consequences of imperial adventure. It was the nightly news-cast body count—ours, not theirs—that finally forced the United States out of Vietnam. But despite the geographic proximity, Central America still seems far away from Central Park.