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Congress supports president on resistance to Marxism

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In the fifth year of his presidency, Ronald Reagan's anti-communist world view has gained new ground in Congress.

The turnaround in the seven months since Mr. Reagan took the oath for his second term may be his single greatest foreign policy accomplishment of this year.

Since January, Congress has:

- Lifted the ban on aid to the resistance fighters in Nicaragua and approved \$27 million in non-military aid to them.

- Lifted the ban on the CIA sharing intelligence with the Nicaraguan resistance.

- Lifted the ban on the CIA aiding the anti-communist resistance in Angola. (This came through repeal of the 1976 Clark Amendment.)

- Started a multimillion-dollar aid program to anti-communist resistance fighters in Cambodia. (This is in addition to humanitarian aid for refugees.)

- Initiated an open, multimillion-dollar aid program to anti-communist resistance fighters in Afghanistan. (This is on top of a classified CIA aid program to the same forces thought to total nearly \$300 million.)

The shift, however, has limits.

None of the changes allows direct involvement by U.S. forces. Neither is there a call for CIA covert actions like those that created an uproar in Congress in 1984 when operatives aided in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors.

Why the shift?

A major element is clearly the Democrats' decision, based on a

review of the 1984 presidential election results, to "toughen" the image of their foreign and defense policies but without resorting to conservative style commie-bashing.

That allows Democrats to support aid to the Nicaraguan, Cambodian

and Afghan resistance without endorsing the "Vietnamization" of those conflicts with U.S. troops.

It also got Democrats out of direct opposition to a president with immense personal popularity.

A lingering background factor is the 1983 Grenada invasion, which ousted a tiny island government of communists at the cost of few American lives. The apparent popularity of that action among many Americans is strong in the memories of members of Congress.

Frustration, created by the aura of America as the helpless giant, is another big element. The frustration started when many Americans were killed in the terrorist bombings of

Marine headquarters at Beirut airport and also at the U.S. Embassy in This year the frustration continued when Maj. Arthur Nicholson was killed by Soviet forces in East Germany and TWA Flight 847 out of Athens was hijacked, resulting in the murder of an American sailor, Robert Stethem of Maryland, and the prolonged plight of 39 hostages.

Not all these events are directly tied to Mr. Reagan's black-and-white view of the communist threat and the need for the United States to take the lead among nations in opposing Marxism-Leninism.

The Moslem terrorist attacks, for instance, are an outgrowth of strong U.S. support for Israel. But collectively these events generated a mood in Congress to strike out at America's tormentors.

The administration was ready with aid programs to rebel forces on three continents. Though none of these rebel groups relate in a direct way to Middle East terrorism, the votes to provide aid to them gave members of Congress a relief valve.

They allowed a "yes" vote for a clearly defined foreign policy initiative.

The bellwether vote in Congress came June 12 when the House, reversing a position it had taken in April, approved \$27 million in aid for the Nicaraguans.

It was the first time since July 1983 that the House had agreed to the Reagan administration's request to back the resistance forces.

The turnaround House vote on Angola came later in the summer, along with the new aid programs for Cambodia and Afghanistan.

An important reason for Congress' acquiescence to the president is his avowal that he is not seeking to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. He said it in a letter to House members, for instance, the day before the June 12 vote.

Many in Congress do not believe

Mr. Reagan. The Speaker of the House, Thomas P. O'Neill, D-Mass., has said many times that he believes Mr. Reagan is intent on sending U.S. forces into Nicaragua.

Other Democrats who still oppose the president's Central American policy assert that while Mr. Reagan tells Congress he will not invade, the thrust of U.S. policy in Nicaragua is to make that government believe that the United States is on the verge of doing so.

Still, the votes of many congressmen who have switched from opposition to support for the president's programs is based on that pledge to seek a peaceful solution.

One of this year's switchers is Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., who in June said: "I am willing to give the president of the United States a chance and the benefit of the doubt. I hope and pray he does not let us down."