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# U.S. saw threat by Cuba, Soviets

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WASHINGTON — A flurry of hints that Cuba and the Soviet Union were preparing to expand their military role in Nicaragua led President Reagan to increase the U.S. military presence in Central America, according to Pentagon and National Security Council officials.

"All our indications were that

Cuba and the Soviet Union were preparing major military moves in Nicaragua, and so we had to move, too," one NSC official said Thursday.

"Our move was a pre-emptive strike, so to speak," said a Pentagon official who, like other sources knowledgeable about the situation, agreed to talk on condition that they remained anonymous.

Administration officials admitted,

however, that there's been no hard evidence that Cuba is mobilizing troops or warplanes to intervene in Central America.

And congressional critics suggested Thursday that U.S. intelligence analysts may have "misread" the evidence under pressure to supply proof for Reagan's hard-line stance on the region.

The Reagan Administration surprised the American public and an-

gered critics Monday when it announced that it would dispatch 19 U.S. warships, including two aircraft carriers, and 3,000 to 4,000 ground troops to Central America for maneuvers that will last six months.

Reagan Tuesday described the deployments as "routine exercises." But senior administration officials privately said they are meant to show support for U.S. allies in the region; step up U.S. pressures on Nicaragua's Sandinista rulers to moderate their Marxist stance; and prove to U.S. foes that Reagan can act decisively in Central America, despite congressional opposition to his policies.

Pentagon, State and NSC officials interviewed this week said that while these factors explain what Reagan wants the maneuvers to accomplish, they do not explain his decision to order the exercises.

In fact, they said, Reagan's key reason for deploying the U.S. forces was the U.S. perception that Cuba and the Soviet Union were planning a significant escalation of their military roles in Nicaragua.

State Department sources said U.S. ambassadors in Latin America have been instructed to tell "trusted" leaders in the region that Reagan has fresh intelligence data suggesting such an escalation.

The Cuban moves are to be described as amounting to a direct challenge to vital U.S. interests and national security, said the sources, who saw the cables sent to the American diplomats.

## Alarm bells in CIA

NSC and Pentagon officials said hints of the Cuban and Soviet build-ups in Central America began flowing into U.S. intelligence agencies 10 to 15 weeks ago.

Officials said alarm bells began ringing at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., in May when photographs snapped by an SR71, a high-flying spy aircraft, showed about 400 Cuban marines practicing "sophisticated amphibious landings" on beaches near the Cuban port of Mariel, 25 miles west of Havana.

The CIA's chief aerial photography analyst, John Hughes, concluded that the Cubans were practicing an invasion of a foreign country, not a defense of their own beaches, the officials said.

Administration officials said they initially interpreted the Cuban maneuvers as preparation for an invasion of some Caribbean mini-state. Now, however, they believe the Cubans may have been practicing for landings in Nicaragua, and perhaps even Honduras, a staunch U.S. ally.

At about this same time, the officials said, Hughes reported that four Soviet merchant ships were photographed unloading military equipment at Nicaragua's Pacific port of Corinto.

## Administration jolted

The Administration was further "jolted," the officials said, when the National Intelligence Daily (NID) — a CIA journal distributed to senior policymakers — reported June 1 that Cuban army Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez had been in Nicaragua since early May.

The NID report said Ochoa had been instrumental in negotiating, organizing and leading the deployment of Cuban troops to Angola in 1976 and to Ethiopia in 1977, totaling about 42,000 soldiers.

"Ochoa's record in Angola and Ethiopia is such that one needs to be cautious," said one NSC official.

The NID June 1 report said that the Soviet-trained Ochoa apparently was in Nicaragua to compile a report for Fidel Castro on whether it would be feasible to send Cuban troops to Nicaragua.

Officials who read the NID reports said one July issue noted that 1,200 Cuban military advisers had arrived in Nicaragua in recent months, raising the total of Cuban civilian and security advisers there to about 5,500.

## Soviet military role

Finally, said one NSC official, U.S. diplomats around the world noticed in recent weeks that their Cuban counterparts were "probing" to assess how Reagan would react should Havana send troops or Soviet-made MIG warplanes to Managua.

"We took this as a further sign that the Cubans were up to some-

thing," the official noted.

While all this was going on, U.S. intelligence agencies were reporting an ongoing expansion of the Soviet military role in Cuba and Nicaragua.

Undersecretary of Defense Fred Ikle advised the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last March that Moscow had shipped 63,000 tons of arms to Cuba in 1981 and 68,000 tons in 1982 — the highest yearly totals since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

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Ikle also said that the number of Soviet military advisers in Cuba increased by 20 per cent in 1982, up to 2,500. In addition, he said, the Soviets have 6,000 to 8,000 civilian advisers and a 1,700-man combat brigade in Cuba.

By last week, the Pentagon had revised upward the number of Soviet civilian advisers in Cuba to 8,500-10,500. The Pentagon also said that in the first six months of 1983, approximately 20,000 metric tons of military equipment were shipped from Moscow to Cuba.

Administration sources noted that while Soviet shipments to Cuba this year are running below the 1982 level, U.S. intelligence circles suspect Moscow may be diverting some weapons from Cuba to Nicaragua.

Pentagon and NSC officials reported Wednesday that nine Soviet bloc shiploads of arms have already been delivered to Nicaragua this year and another 13 are on the way — compared to five in all of 1982.

### 1982 shipments

The 1982 shipments included deliveries of about 270 military transport trucks, 12 BM21 mobile multiple rocket launchers, 25 T54 and T55 tanks, four tank ferries, one small patrol boat, MI8 helicopters, AN2 transport planes, armored personnel carriers, eight 122mm howitzers and a sophisticated communications interception facility.

Administration officials say that taken together, these signs of the expanding Soviet and Cuban military activities in Nicaragua triggered Reagan's decision to send U.S. troops on maneuvers in Central America.

Critics of Reagan's policies in Central America believe, however, that the Administration's analysis of Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan intentions in the region is erroneous.

Cuban officials claim the number of the advisers in Nicaragua is only "several dozen." There is speculation in some official Cuban circles, however, that the true figure is probably between 500 and 1,000.

These circles also speculate that it was no accident that Ochoa was seen in Nicaragua: His trip and the amphibious maneuvers were an ostentatious response to Reagan's saber-rattling — in effect Fidel Castro's indication that he had some cards to play in a high-stakes poker game with Reagan.

Robert Leiken, director of the Soviet-Latin America Project at Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Thursday that he doubted Cuba was preparing to dispatch troops to Nicaragua.

"It may be that Ochoa is there to help the Sandinistas organize themselves better" to fight the CIA-backed Nicaraguan guerrillas operating along the borders with Honduras and Costa Rica, he said.

Democratic sources on the House Intelligence Committee, meanwhile, said they believed U.S. intelligence analysts may have "misread" the evidence.

They pointed to a panel report Sept. 22 which accused American intelligence agencies of sloppy and politically biased interpretations, and added, "The conclusions of that report still apply."

The report said that "the environment in which analytic thought and production decisions occur is under pressure to reinforce policy — or perhaps to oppose it — rather than to inform it."

According to the report, the intelligence community has often suggested "greater certainty" about an interpretation of evidence "than is warranted by the evidence."