

MIAMI HERALD  
21 June 1983

# U.S. confirms that Cuban general carried out duties in Nicaragua

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WASHINGTON — Cuba has dispatched one of its top military combat officers — Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez — to Nicaragua, the State Department confirmed Monday.

Ochoa, said to be a deputy to armed forces minister Raul Castro, reportedly played a major role in organizing the Cuban military involvement and buildup in Angola and Ethiopia in 1976 and 1977, respectively.

How the news about Ochoa surfaced and the way the Reagan Administration handled the affair suggested that it was deliberately designed to create speculation that Cuba may be preparing to widen its military involvement in Nicaragua.

High-level administration officials have been saying in recent weeks that the United States could no longer rule out the possibility of deploying combat troops in Central America if Cuba put troops of its own into the region.

However, the same officials said Monday that Ochoa's presence in Nicaragua should not be taken as an "automatic signal" that Cuban troops would follow.

"We do have information that places General Ochoa in Nicaragua and which suggests that he has been assigned duties there, but beyond that I really can't offer you anything," State Department spokesman Alan Romberg said in

answer to a question at a press briefing.

Another administration official said both the Pentagon and the CIA believe the principal reason for Ochoa's presence in Nicaragua is to assess the military situation in light of the U.S.-backed, anti-Sandinista insurgency and determine whether it may require increased Cuban military involvement.

The Nicaraguan Embassy had no comment. But a Cuban diplomatic source in Washington said that although he could neither confirm nor deny the State Department infor-

mation, he could say that Ochoa "is one of our leading generals who has been active both in Angola and Ethiopia."

The report about Ochoa's presence in Nicaragua first appeared in Sunday's editions of *The New York Times*. It said that according to an intelligence report disclosed by a Reagan Administration official, Ochoa — described as Cuba's top military combat commander — had been working in Nicaragua for about a month and had been "secretly assigned to duty" there.