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Administration Seeks 41% Rise in Honduras Aid

By DOYLE McMANUS, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—The Reagan Administration plans to ask Congress for a 41% increase in military aid to Honduras but only a small boost in arms aid to El Salvador in the budget being prepared for fiscal 1986, U.S. officials said Monday.

The large increase in aid to Honduras, from \$62.5 million this year to a requested \$88.2 million in the new budget, is partly a response to Honduran leaders' complaints that they are bearing the brunt of the U.S. confrontation with Nicaragua's leftist regime but getting insufficient benefits in return, the officials said.

"The Hondurans are in the front line, facing a major buildup of Nicaragua's military strength and they need more help," a State Department official said.

The leveling off of requests for aid to El Salvador—after several years of huge increases—reflects new confidence in the ability of the Salvadoran army to hold its own against leftist guerrillas, they said.

The budget, to be submitted to Congress on Feb. 4, proposes \$132.6 million in military aid to El Salvador in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, a 4% increase over the \$127.2 million appropriated by Congress this year.

El Salvador received a peak of \$197 million in U.S. military aid in fiscal 1984. Under Secretary of Defense Fred C. Ikle said recently that he expects aid levels to begin declining soon because of the Salvadorans' improved military performance.

"The tactics have improved, they're more effective and, very

importantly, the Salvadoran armed forces can now count on a steady flow of U.S. assistance," Ikle said.

No request is planned for a supplemental appropriation of military aid for El Salvador this year, the officials said—the first time in four years that no mid-year appropriation has been asked.

Hondurans Asked More

Neighboring Honduras, on the other hand, has complained that its needs are as great as El Salvador's but that it receives far less U.S. aid. Honduras, Central America's poorest country, has let CIA-backed Nicaraguan rebels operate from its territory and has invited the United States to build a complex of airstrips and other military facilities there in case of war in the area.

Honduran officials suggested last year that the United States roughly double its economic aid. But the Administration's budget proposal includes only a small increase in economic aid to Honduras, from \$134.8 million to \$137 million, U.S. officials said.

A Democratic congressional aide said it appeared unlikely that Democrats will mount any significant resistance to the aid proposals.

"There are no red flags there," he said. "None of the increases are out of line. The support for El Salvador is still there (in Congress)."

Total military aid to Central America in the proposed budget is \$261.4 million, up from \$231.4 million provided by Congress this year. Total economic aid is a proposed \$1.33 billion, up from \$1.19 billion this year.