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NEW PROBE OF NICARAGUA REBELS ASKED
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WASHINGTON

A civil liberties group called Thursday for a congressional investigation into Honduran allegations that CIA-trained Nicaraguan rebels engaged in "death squad" activities in Honduras.

Morton H. Halperin, director of the Center for National Security Studies, urged the chairmen of the House and Senate Intelligence committees to request any information the administration might have on the allegations. Halperin's group is sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Honduran military sources have told American news organizations that Nicaraguan rebels were implicated in between 15 and 18 political murders since 1980. But Nicaraguan rebel officials have denied the charges and the allegations have never been lodged formally.

Halperin, who was a staff adviser to President Nixon's National Security Council, also urged the committees to determine if Col. Ricardo Lau, who has been linked to the reported killings, is still associated with the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest rebel group, known by its Spanish initials FDN.

The Associated Press reported last month that FDN officials had assured the CIA that Lau, a former National Guard officer under deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza, was removed from the rebel group by the start of 1983.

But according to statements by two rebel leaders, Lau was still with the FDN at least until last year and, according to one American, was spotted this year traveling with Enrique Bermudez, the FDN's top general.

Congress cut off CIA aid to the rebels last year, but President Reagan has vowed to fight to restore funding through congressional votes expected in April.

"I believe recent controversies about the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in political violence in El Salvador, and in encouraging the use of assassination as part of an effort to overthrow the government of Nicaragua, make urgent an investigation of the Honduran military's allegations concerning the (FDN) before further aid ... is authorized by ... Congress," Halperin said.

His letters were sent to Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, and Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., House Intelligence Committee chairman. Officials of the panels could not be reached by telephone immediately to comment on the request.