

NICARAGUA REBELS REPORTED TO HAVE NEW FLOW OF ARMS

AMERICAN HELP REPLACED

U.S. Officials Say Honduras, El Salvador and Israel Are Increasing Aid Levels

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 12 — Honduras and El Salvador have replaced the United States as key sources of aid to Nicaraguan rebels, according to Reagan Administration officials and members of Congress.

At the same time, they said, Israel has also increased its aid to the rebels, providing more weapons and advice.

The officials said that although the three countries began assisting the rebels several years ago, the level of their support and its importance to the insurgents increased as assistance from the United States diminished and eventually ended during 1984.

Public Denial on Aid

Salvadoran and Honduran officials, while denying publicly that their Governments have been helping the rebels, have said privately that aid has been provided. El Salvador and Honduras are heavily dependent on United States aid.

Officials in Israel, which also gets a large amount of military and economic aid from the United States, have also denied aiding the rebels.

The reported support has raised questions in Congress on whether American arms and other supplies sold or given to Honduras, El Salvador and Israel are being diverted to the Nicaraguan rebels. Such a diversion is barred by both foreign aid legislation and a specific ban on American aid to the rebels.

Ammunition From Honduras

As United States aid to the rebels ran out last year, the officials and lawmakers said, Honduras became a major supplier of ammunition to the insurgents, and El Salvador took over the job of maintaining the rebels' small air force.

NEW YORK TIMES
13 January 1985

Representative Joseph P. Addabbo, Democrat of Queens and chairman of the defense subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, said in a recent letter to Secretary of State George P. Shultz, "I am concerned that countries receiving U.S. foreign assistance aid may be utilizing a portion of such aid to assist the 'contras' and, in so doing, effect a rather devious contravention of the law."

Administration officials denied that any United States foreign aid had been funneled to the rebels.

The State Department, commenting on the Addabbo letter, said: "As we have stated before, the United States has not provided funds to third countries for the purpose of supporting covert activities in Central America. We are not in a position to comment on allegations of activities pursued independently by other nations."

The recent Honduran assistance, according to one Administration official, has included "tons of ammunition." He said that although there is no formal agreement with Honduras that the ammunition would be replaced by the United States, it is understood by both American and Honduran officials that "Honduras won't end up with a shortage of bullets."

Administration officials said this indirect method of aiding the rebels followed a pattern set in 1982 and 1983 when Honduras supplied the insurgents with more than 6,000 Belgian automatic rifles.

The Hondurans gave the rebels the rifles, which one former Honduran military officer said were "like new," after the Honduran Army got new automatic rifles from the United States, Administration officials and members of Congress said.

Honduran civilian and military leaders have recently distanced themselves from Washington, asking for increased military and economic aid in return for continued Honduran security cooperation with the United States. They have also announced that the rebels are no longer welcome to train troops and operate base camps in Honduras.

Airfield Assistance Reported

Despite these statements, Honduras has increased aid to the rebels, Administration officials and members of Congress said.

The Salvadoran aid, the officials said, consists primarily of letting the rebels use Salvadoran military airfields to base their aircraft, which include several observation planes and Cessnas modified for military missions.

The Salvadoran Air Force has helped maintain the planes, and has provided fuel and ground-control support, Administration officials said. When the planes were based in Honduras at airfields maintained by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, these support activities were financed by the United States, the officials added.

Israel, which started aiding the rebels in 1983, has continued to provide them with Soviet arms captured in Lebanon during the Israeli invasion in 1982, according to Reagan Administration officials. They said Israeli shipments of rifles, grenades and ammunition to the rebels had picked up since last summer when United States aid began to run out.

Nicaragua Gets Soviet Aid

At the same time, Administration officials note that Nicaragua's Sandinista Government received \$100 million in military aid from the Soviet Union and other Eastern-bloc countries in 1983, most of it in weapons.

The Honduran, Salvadoran and Israeli help is one of several issues involving the insurgents that are likely to be debated in Congress over the next several months as the Administration seeks to resume aid to the rebels. American aid was stopped last year by Congress.

In October Congress approved \$14 million for the rebels for this fiscal year but tied the money to a second vote by Congress after February.

The handling of the rebel operation by the intelligence agency is expected to be scrutinized by the intelligence committees in the Senate and House, both of which have new leaders.

C.I.A. Spending Investigated

The House Select Committee on Intelligence, now headed by Representative Lee H. Hamilton, Democrat of Indiana, is investigating reports that the intelligence agency spent more than the ceiling of \$24 million for rebel aid set by Congress for the 1984 fiscal year, which ended last Sept. 30. The committee, in a report issued Jan. 2, said it had "identified several possible departures" from the authorization. The report added that the committee "has ordered a further review of these matters."

One committee member said this week that the intelligence agency charged some costs of the rebel program to accounts other than the ones covered by the \$24 million. He said, for example, that part of the cost of printing a rebel manual on guerrilla warfare was charged to the Office of Technical Services.

In another case, he said, the salaries of some agency employees sent to Honduras to work with the rebels was covered by normal payroll accounts.

The agency also paid the living expenses for the families of several rebel leaders, but those costs were not charged to the \$24 million account, he said.

Questioned About Accounting

A CIA spokesman, Cathy Pherson, declined to comment on the agency's accounting practices. She said that any questions would be handled directly between the agency and Congress.

"We respond to all questions raised by the Senate and House Intelligence committees," she said.

When asked about their accounting practices during committee hearings last year, intelligence agency officials said they had been using the same procedures for decades, intelligence committee members said.

Last June the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, after looking into similar accounting practices involving the rebel program, concluded that they were legitimate.

But the House intelligence committee said in the report issued last week that, in general, the C.I.A. "did not have adequate command and control of the entire Nicaraguan covert action."

The Senate committee, now directed by Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, reached a similar conclusion in a recent report.