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Congress Moving to Tighten Controls on U.S. Military Aid to Insurgents

By SARA FRITZ, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—As a direct result of the Iran-contra scandal, Congress is moving to put strict new controls on the clandestine military assistance that President Reagan has been giving to anti-Communist insurgencies around the globe.

Under the policy known as the Reagan Doctrine, the Administration funnels millions of dollars through the CIA each year to rebel groups in Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia as well as to the anti-Sandinista forces in Nicaragua. Details of the program are secret, in keeping with the CIA tradition of covert operations.

Although the aid program has congressional support, members of Congress frequently have criticized the way it is operated, and their complaints have escalated since the Iran-contra scandal exposed the curious web of private and government-supported operations involved in the diversion of Iranian arms funds to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Revamping Considered

"I think obviously the worst enemy of the Reagan Doctrine has been the way that the Reagan Administration has implemented the Reagan Doctrine," declared Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. "It will be imperiled if they don't change the

way that it is administered."

In an effort to bolster the policy, members of the congressional committees that oversee CIA operations are considering a variety of proposals to revamp the Administration's covert military assistance program to make it more accountable to Congress and the American public.

The biggest legislative test of the Reagan Doctrine in the wake of the Iran-contra affair will come later this year when Congress decides whether to continue funding the Nicaraguan rebels. The contras have long been the most controversial recipients of covert U.S. military assistance, and opponents hope that the current scandal will cause Congress to reject the Administration's request of \$105 million for them in fiscal 1988, which begins Oct. 1.

But even if the contra aid program survives, Reagan Doctrine supporters are prepared to defend it against an onslaught of legislative attacks during the coming year. "There will be people who will use elements of the Iran-contra affair to marshal opposition to the Reagan Doctrine," predicted Rep. Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.), vice chairman of the House committee investigating the Iran-contra affair. Cheney predicted that there would also be an effort led by

liberal Democrats to halt aid to the UNITA rebels, headed by Jonas Savimbi, who are battling the Soviet- and Cuban-backed government of Angola. UNITA—the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola—received an estimated \$15 million in direct U.S. assistance in the current fiscal year, including shoulder-fired Stinger missiles.

Perhaps the only covert military assistance program that appears entirely safe from a congressional assault this year is the one that funds forces fighting the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Congress regularly increases military assistance to the Afghan guerrillas, who received more than \$600 million in fiscal 1987.

Want Dramatic Changes

Even leading defenders of the Reagan Doctrine such as Boren and Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Me.), who is vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, are advocating dramatic changes in the assistance program for insurgencies. Their ideas are expected to come up during confirmation hearings for William H. Webster as director of central intelligence.

Boren, a critic of aid to UNITA, said the Reagan Administration has overextended itself by supporting anti-Communist rebels in too many countries.

"If you are going to be involved effectively in various areas of the

world in supporting insurgencies, you have to hold to a minimum the number of involvements you have," Boren said. "It's like being on a family budget. You have only so much money to spend, and you better spend it effectively. If you spread yourself too thin by being involved in too many places, it won't work."

Boren and Cohen criticize the Administration's heavy reliance on the CIA to administer the program, arguing that much of the assistance should be provided without the cloak of secrecy since support for the rebel groups is well known.

"It is hard for me to accept the proposition that this is a covert action program when you see the President or the vice president embracing Savimbi," Cohen said, referring to a visit that the UNITA leader made to the White House last year.

Says Secrecy Backfires

Cohen argued that the Administration's emphasis on secrecy has undermined efforts to build wider support for the program in the Congress. He noted that covert programs are reviewed in secret by the House and Senate intelligence committees instead of being debated along with other foreign policy and military initiatives in open congressional hearings.

"You end up having a covert program which is deniable only to

the American people," he said. "The people who receive the money know it. You want the enemy to know it. You want the Soviet Union to know it. You want the Cubans to know it. But we take the position that we can't tell the American people, and that gives us deniability."

But even if these programs are not shifted from the CIA to the control of the Defense or State departments, as some have suggested, congressional leaders are determined to get a better accounting of how the funds are spent than they normally receive from the CIA.

At present, CIA accounts cannot be audited by Congress' General Accounting Office, which reviews the books of all other agencies. CIA officials, who conduct their own internal audit, argue that the secrecy of their operations might be jeopardized by GAO reviews.

The issue of CIA accounts came to light recently when Rep. William H. Gray III (D-Pa.), chairman of the House Budget Committee, asked the GAO to look into persistent reports that a high percentage of the funds that Congress has appropriated for the Afghan guerrillas is going into the pockets of intermediaries in Pakistan. GAO officials replied that they have no power to force the CIA to cooperate with the review requested by Gray.

John Glenn (D-Ohio), chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, is preparing legislation that would give the GAO explicit authority to audit the accounts of the CIA.

At the same time, members of the Senate Intelligence Committee are considering a proposal by Boren to create their own small, independent auditing unit to review covert aid. Boren said the committee, which is responsible for overseeing CIA operations, now has no way of knowing whether rebel groups receive the aid intended for them.

Spot Checks Planned

Boren said the unit would conduct only "spot checks" and not a complete review of CIA spending. "It's a deterrent to wrongdoing if they know that we have the ability to go in and 'zap' in some unpredictable, totally unexpected place, put the microscope on 1% of what they are doing," he said.

While these steps are expected to give Congress more control over covert aid programs, Cheney emphasized that there is still no legislative way to guarantee that U.S. money will not fall into the hands of people who might divert it to other purposes.

"When you are dealing in the area of covert action," he said, "you are going to deal with some pretty strange characters."