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PROGRAM NBC Nightly News STATION WRC TV
NBC Network

DATE October 16, 1986 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Assessing the Political Fallout

TOM BROKAW: The government of El Salvador says that the known death toll from last Friday's earthquake now is 982. But unofficial reports put that toll at much higher figures.

Secretary of State George Shultz made a three-and-a-half-hour visit there today. He offered \$50 million in American aid with a promise to try to get more.

But as NBC's Anne Garrels reports from San Salvador tonight, the earthquake was not the only event in that region troubling Shultz today.

SEC. OF STATE GEORGE SHULTZ: The people in the United States are going to help you.

ANNE GARRELS: Secretary of State Shultz came to a country in shock to show American support. He and his wife toured the areas hit hardest by the earthquake assessing what needs to be done. Shultz also came here to assess the political fallout following reports that Nicaraguan rebels have been based at Salvador's military airport with American help.

According to Salvadoran officials, President Duarte is now in a difficult political situation. Right after he denied any knowledge of the contra operation, Vice President Bush linked him to it.

U.S. officials say the contra operation will now be moved to an island off Honduras, far from public scrutiny.

Salvador's cooperation has been key to contra operations since 1983 when a plane based here bombed Managua's Sandino

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Airport. According to U.S. officials, the CIA set up a small contra air force in El Salvador. When Congress prohibited official U.S. involvement, the administration organized an elaborate private network, complying with the letter if not the spirit of the law.

Last year Honduras barred the use of its airport after NBC filmed a supply delivery. More and more supplies have been moved through Salvador, hundreds of missions called essential for keeping the contra effort alive.

Secretary of State Shultz wouldn't discuss the contras, but privately, officials say, they were lucky the Salvadoran operation lasted as long as it did.

Anne Garrels, NBC News, San Salvador.