

STAT

DETROIT FREE PRESS (MI)
27 July 1985

U.S. mulls anti-communist 'freedom fighters bureau'

STAT

By ALFONSO CHARDY
Free Press Washington Staff

WASHINGTON — Reagan administration officials are debating the possibility of opening a "freedom fighters bureau" to co-ordinate U.S. support for anti-communist insurgents around the world — including the Nicaraguan rebels known as contras, administration sources say.

If President Reagan approves the plan, the United States conceivably could finance or endorse the activities of about 329,000 guerillas in eight Marxist-ruled countries — Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Vietnam.

If the United States finances all of them, the cost could run as high as \$1 billion a year, according to congressional computer projections based on current costs for Afghan and Cambodian rebels.

ADMINISTRATION SOURCES said the project was encouraged by a June 2 summit of pro-U.S. rebels in Jamba, Angola, as well as by congressional votes in June and July renewing aid to the contras fighting the Sandinista Nicaraguan government. Congressional action also lifted a ban on aid to Angolan rebels, and approved additional money for the Cambodian rebels.

Nevertheless, the sources said, creation of a co-ordinating agency is a long way away. First, Congress must complete action on restoring aid to the contras, a process that began last week in a House-Senate conference committee.

And second, there is a lack of consensus within the administration about the need for such an agency, the sources said. There also are disagreements over whether to back all anti-communist rebels and whether to put the co-ordinating office in the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, the State Department or the National Security Council.

Sources said that administration moderates argue that supporting rightist rebels everywhere would equate the United States with the Soviet Union, increase tensions with Moscow, drain the U.S. Treasury and dilute support for the Nicaraguans.

BUT THOSE SUPPORTING the idea argue that the United States should put its money

where its mouth is. They note that although Reagan espouses the rebel causes, the administration has given little or no money to any except the Afghan, Cambodian and Nicaraguan rebels. In Mozambique, they point out, the State Department even supports the Marxist regime there.

They also say the United States should counter Soviet support for insurgencies just as Moscow does — because they are a part of a worldwide war between the superpowers.

Spokesmen for the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon said they are not aware of plans for a freedom fighters office. But CIA spokeswoman Patti Volz indicated the spy agency knows about it.

"As to whether the administration is planning to set up a freedom fighters bureau," she said, "it's not up to the CIA to comment. If they, indeed, intend to do such a thing it would be up to the White House to comment."