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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

19 March 1986

The Honorable Lee H. Hamilton, Chairman
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I note with concern a statement in the Adverse Report issued by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on the Joint Resolution relating to the additional authority and assistance for the Nicaraguan democratic resistance requested by the President. I refer to the statement on page 6 which says, "It continues to be the assessment of the United States intelligence community, that only United States forces could truly resolve the conflict in Nicaragua on a military basis."

I am not aware of any intelligence community assessment that supports your Committee's assertion although a number of National Intelligence Estimates have addressed the general topic of the ability of the democratic resistance to overthrow the Sandinista government. In fact the most recent community assessment on this issue judged that military pressure from the democratic resistance would be a key factor in bringing the Sandinista government to the negotiating table.

If your sentence is drawn from my testimony before your Committee on 4 March on this subject, I believe it does not fairly state the substance of my exchange with Representative Dave McCurdy. In response to a question from Mr. McCurdy as to what in my opinion it would take for the Contras to topple the Sandinista government militarily--or just topple it--I said I thought it would probably take the intervention of U.S. forces. As the Committee knows, it is not the President's announced intention to seek a military solution in Nicaragua so my response addressed a hypothetical situation. Such an exchange does not support your Committee's assertion and further represents my opinion, not an Intelligence Community assessment.

Sincerely,

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John N. McMahon
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

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