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CIA manual probers split over meaning of 'neutralization'

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By Terry Atlas
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON—A CIA review of its psychological-warfare manual for Nicaraguan rebels left intact language advocating "neutralization" of key Nicaraguan government officials, the agency told the Senate Intelligence Committee on Monday.

After a three-hour closed-door briefing, Sen. Sam Nunn [D., Ga.] said that while CIA officials made some deletions in the 90-page manual, "the term 'neutralization' was in all the documents."

Nunn said he interprets the word to mean assassination of government officials, but another member of the panel, Sen. Malcolm Wallop [R., Wyo.], said he thinks the word can cover a number of actions short of that, such as discrediting, blackmailing or kidnaping. "Sen. Nunn and I disagree over what that word implies," Wallop said.

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But the CIA explanation to the senators appears to conflict with the scenario President Reagan offered in his debate with Walter Mondale in Kansas City Sunday night.

Reagan had said CIA officials had deleted portions of the text after they recognized that they were a "direct contravention" of an executive order prohibiting American officials from conducting or advocating political assassinations. He added that 12 copies of the original manual escaped that review, and "some way or other . . . got out down there."

BUT NUNN said that even after the deletions had been made by CIA officials, the manual contained a reference to neutralization and encouraged the rebels to create a "martyr" among their members killed by Nicaraguan forces.

"There were deletions before some printings were made and before some distribution was made, but all of the documents presumably . . . had some of what would be called questionable to some and to others offensive language, including language relating to so-called 'neutralization,'" he said.

Nunn and Wallop were the only members of the Senate Intelligence Committee who attended the briefing by CIA officials on the agency's continuing investigation of the manual's production. The matter is also being investigated by the White House Intelligence Oversight Board.

Wallop said he was satisfied that the CIA is proceeding quickly with its review and said there is "no indication of any desire to hide anything." He said the psychological-warfare manual was prepared to help bring some order and discipline to the "wildly disorganized and wildly operating bunch of guerrillas" fighting the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

THE CIA knows the identity of the manual's author, a former Army officer from Ft. Bragg, N.C., but it is still tracking down who was involved in the review process, he said.

But the committee's vice chairman, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan [D., N.Y.], who was filled in on the CIA's briefing by the committee staff, criticized the agency late in the day for failing to tell the panel who was responsible. "The CIA has still not told us who ordered this manual, who wrote it and who approved it," he said.

In another development, Newsweek magazine reported in its current edition that key aides to United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and CIA Director William Casey and Defense Department officials discussed the need for a handbook on guerrilla warfare in meetings during August, 1983. About the same time, a U.S. expert in psychological warfare was sent to Honduras along with other CIA advisers to train Honduran-based Nicaraguan rebels, the magazine said.

Speaking in Dayton, Ohio, on Monday, Kirkpatrick called the Newsweek report "totally mistaken" and said "there is nobody on my staff who has had any such role."

LAST WEEK, after the existence of the manual became known, a senior White House official said it was the work of a "low-level" CIA contract employee, and was "not ever approved or condoned at any reasonable level" within the CIA. He also said the administration maintains its prohibition on political assassinations.

Sunday night, attacked by Walter Mondale for producing a manual "ordering political assassinations . . . and other forms of terrorism," Reagan replied that it was written by a "gentleman down in Nicaragua who is on contract to the CIA advising, supposedly on military tactics, the contras."

Reagan said only 12 copies escaped deletions made by the CIA "agency head" in Nicaragua and officials at CIA headquarters outside Washington. A minute later, Reagan said he "misspoke" about the CIA official in Nicaragua and simply meant to say, "It was a man down there in that area."

Speaking to reporters Monday morning, former CIA director Stansfield Turner said Reagan made a significant slip of the tongue. "I don't think that even after he corrected himself he really understood what he had given away," said Turner, who headed the agency during the Carter administration.

"We have never, to my knowledge, ever acknowledged having a CIA station in any country," he said. "It's just a matter of policy. You don't want the Nicaraguan government, or any government, to come along and say we don't want a CIA station in our country."

TURNER SAID Monday that the pattern of American covert activity in Central America suggests an effort by the CIA to topple the Nicaraguan government.

The CIA-prepared manual for U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebels, which follows CIA mining of Nicaraguan harbors earlier this year, seems to go beyond Reagan's publicly stated goal of preventing the Sandinistas from exporting their revolution to other countries in the region, he said.

"I don't believe the majority of the American people want to have the CIA overthrow the government of Nicaragua," he told a group of reporters. "But there is no way you can put what is going on in Nicaragua in any other terms."

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