

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-1BOSTON GLOBE  
4 November 1983

# Senate OK's covert aid to Nicaragua rebels

By David Rogers  
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON — The Republican-controlled Senate, despite its continued criticism of President Ronald Reagan's policy in Central America, yesterday approved a 1984 intelligence authorization bill that includes limited funding for covert military aid to Nicaraguan insurgents.

The action came on a simple voice vote, and the proceedings were in striking con-

trast with the often emotional debate in the House, which has twice voted to end funding for the CIA operation.

Only two weeks ago, the Democratic-controlled chamber voted for the second time to cut off all aid after a classified date, and the House version of the 1984 defense appropriation bill approved Wednesday prohibits any funding after April 1 unless some agreement is reached between the two chambers.

The low-key debate yesterday belied tensions in the Senate over the same issue, but it is clear

the Administration retains strong support for at least the limited funding provided in the bill. Rather than risk almost certain defeat, critics of the CIA operation made no effort to strike the Nicaragua funding, and going into conference with the House, the Senate is seen in the stronger position.

"At the moment they [the Senate] have the strong hand," admitted an aide to the House Intelligence Committee. "We don't hold the cards. It isn't yet at the point where it is a symbolic vote, but it's tough sledding from here on."

Both Intelligence Committees have an institutional stake in reaching some agreement, but the Administration is in a stronger position if no compromise is found before the appropriation process takes control. The Senate defense bill includes no prohibition regarding Nicaragua, and key members of the House defense appropriations subcommittee have also opposed the April 1 cutoff, which survived only narrowly in the full panel last month.

These members will be critical in any conference on the military bill, and ultimately their judgment may decide the issue this year if no agreement is reached on the authorizing legislation.

Senate Intelligence chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) indicated yesterday he remains opposed to any compromise, and the Senate's

approach has been to provide limited funding, which allows the operation to continue but also gives Congress some control over the CIA.

According to sources, an estimated \$19 million is provided, but as the force has grown to over 10,000 insurgents under arms, the annual cost has more than doubled to nearer \$50 million. The CIA can draw funds from the contingency for reserves, but sources have said the budget is tightly enough written to effectively force the agency to come back to the Intelligence Committees again if it wants to continue the war.

"We are permitting the operation to continue with a limited amount of funding," said Sen. Walter Huddleston (D-Ky.), expressing misgivings about the covert aid. "And if in that time period more persuasive evidence is not presented, then a different course of action may be adopted."

This approach has prevented a major split in the Senate committee to date. But in a speech sharply critical of the continued operation, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) said the aid is illegal and risks a war between Nicaragua and Honduras, where the insurgents have been based. "Covert action is never an adequate substitute for a foreign policy," said Leahy, a member of the Intelligence Committee.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), the committee vice chairman, warned the support in the panel rests on a "fragile consensus," and from the right, Leahy's comments provoked a rebuttal from Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.). "You're not dealing with people who have support of the masses, you're dealing with people who have taken control of the masses," said Wallop.

The debate over Nicaragua is linked to the Administration's commitment to El Salvador, and in the aftermath of the Grenada invasion, there is a broader concern about the President's use of force in the region. On the evening before the invasion, Reagan signed a notification to Congress of additional CIA covert operations in the eastern Caribbean, according to sources. And while the total cost is expected to be only about \$2 million, the finding, or plan, submitted to the Intelligence Committees was criticized by members as being too general.

A related concern is the disposition of large arms caches found in Grenada, but Senate sources said last night the committee had been assured by the CIA that the weapons would first be audited by the Treasury and not secretly transferred to the insurgents.

CONTINUED

In the House committee, Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), a senior member, was described by sources as angered by the finding. And while Senate sources said the notification was only to give the CIA latitude during the invasion, other sources said there is a more long-term commitment to aid and train police forces in the islands.

Like the Nicaragua insurgents, the El Salvador regime is receiving its military assistance under a continuing resolution running through next week, and it seems unlikely that Congress will act on a formal foreign aid bill before adjournment this year. A simple extension of the continuing resolution through Feb. 29 was approved by House Appropriations late Wednesday, but at the same time the panel voted 23-20 to accept an Administration-backed amendment to foreign aid funding.

Some confusion still surrounds this language, but committee staff said the technical impact is to allow military aid for El Salvador to grow from \$64.8 million today to \$86.3 million or the Administration's 1984 request.