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Reagan offers captured arms as the proof of 'the crimes'

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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President Reagan had an "eye-opening" look at weapons captured from Central American Marxists yesterday and declared they were proof of Sandinista crimes against the people of Nicaragua and their neighbors.

The president viewed the display of rifles, grenade launchers and mines at the State Department.

Mr. Reagan said if Congress does not act now on his \$100 million bill for military and other assistance to the rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista regime, "irreparable disaster" will result in Central America.

"If we do not act now to counter this subversive aggression by helping the brave men and women of the Nicaraguan democratic resistance, Americans will in the not too distant future look to the south and see a string of anti-American communist dictatorships," the president said after listening to three defectors from the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran leftist movements.

"If that happens, it will do no good to ask who's to blame," he said. "That's why I'm asking the Congress to set aside partisan politics and act now to protect our national security by helping those who want a democratic outcome in Nicaragua."

The arms display, assembled largely for the benefit of television cameras, marked the increasing escalation of Mr. Reagan's all-out effort to win a vote on the \$100 million,

scheduled Wednesday in the House.

Well aware that he faces an uphill fight and does not yet have the votes in the Democratic-controlled House, Mr. Reagan is stepping up the tempo of his drive to pull victory out of defeat. He continued the pressure yesterday by receiving another two dozen members of Congress at the White House. He also is granting a number of interviews in hopes of swaying public opinion to his side.

House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. said yesterday 220 Democrats and 15 Republicans in the 435-member House oppose the president's plan.

A bipartisan group of House members was scheduled to leave this morning on a one-day fact-finding trip to Nicaragua and El Salvador, the White House said.

The hastily organized trip will include about a dozen lawmakers.

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Mr. Reagan's campaign on behalf of the aid proposal comes to a climax this weekend when his regular Saturday radio broadcast and an 8 p.m. Sunday televised address to the nation will focus on aid to the rebels.

He told listeners at the State Department that the Nicaraguan government is conducting a well-managed campaign of lies, distortion and disinformation. "The masters of deceit have outdone themselves, but Americans can and will see through this smokescreen," he said. "The communist goal is to paralyze us, to prevent us from doing what is necessary to save Central America; but they will not succeed."

The three Central Americans who spoke before the president were

Alvaro Baldizon, a former high-ranking Sandinista official; Teofilo Archibald, a political spokesman for the Creoles and Indians of Nicaragua, who was imprisoned, tortured and then defected; and Napoleon Romero, former third-ranking member of the Marxist FPL (Popular Liberation Front) in El Salvador, who defected after becoming disillusioned with the revolution.

Mr. Reagan said he wished all members of Congress could have heard their message and seen the weapons display.

He said the fledgling democracies of Central America cannot be expected to stand alone against this kind of concerted international communist effort. "Make no mistake," Mr. Reagan said. "This nation, too, is threatened."

Senior administration officials said yesterday the president still is standing firm for his \$100 million aid bill, with no compromise.

As the House vote draws closer, sources say Mr. Reagan has two options: accept a measure that would delay disbursement of \$70 million in military aid while diplomatic efforts are stepped up, or face a possible defeat and then redouble his efforts for a victory in the Senate.

In an interview with The Baltimore Sun, published yesterday, Mr. Reagan said he would not want to commit himself to any proposal from members of Congress that would delay arrival of the aid to the resistance forces in Nicaragua.

It would be counterproductive, Mr. Reagan said, if Congress imposed a 60- or 75-day delay that would "take the trigger away from me." Mr. Reagan said he would be willing to talk to the legislators about a delay only if no second vote was required.

But he did acknowledge that it would be fine with him if Congress passes the aid bill with a period of time established before it would be carried out, so long as the Sandinistas would be willing to come to the negotiating table with the rebels who oppose them.

"The important thing is that the Sandinista government must not be left any loopholes in which they believe there might still be a denial of this help," Mr. Reagan said in the interview.

The president said it would be foolish to commit himself to a pledge not to come back seeking more military assistance for the democratic forces after 18 months. He said that would stiffen the Sandinistas' resistance and send them the message that all they have to do is hold out for 18 months.

"If we do nothing and this is allowed to grow and carry its revolution across other borders, then the threat will remain that there would come a day when their hostilities would be directed at our own interests," Mr. Reagan said.

"And that is the time in which you could say that a — yes, then American forces would be involved because the hostilities were directed at us."

But the president hastened to deny the interpretation of this as leaving the door open for use of American troops in Nicaragua. "I don't think we'd have a friend left in Latin America if we used American forces," he said.

Mr. Reagan refused to say whether he would have any political hard feelings toward Republicans who do not back him up in next Wednesday's vote on the aid bill. "I'd just better swallow hard and not answer a question like that," he said.