

IN THE NATION | Tom Wicker

A False 'Parallel'

President Reagan, citing parallels where none exist between the Philippines and Nicaragua, insisted to members of Congress in a White House meeting that "we stood for democracy in the Philippines; we have to stand for democracy in Nicaragua and throughout Central America and in our hemisphere."

This "parallel" denigrates the remarkable achievement of the Philippine people in their spontaneous uprising against Ferdinand Marcos. It is meaningless rhetoric if anyone thinks it should apply to the dictatorial Pinochet Government, though Chile is "in our own hemisphere." And it's only one more excuse with which to pursue Mr. Reagan's pathological fixation on the overthrow of the Sandinistas — this time with \$100 million of U.S. taxpayers' money — because there are no parallels between the Philippines and Nicaragua.

In the former, a real tyrant, through corruption, brutality and murder, brought the population to the boiling point; whatever charges may be made against the Sandinistas, that cannot be said of them. By massive fraud and violence, the tyrant ignored and reversed the clear will of the people expressed in a national election; whatever deficiencies may be laid to the Nicaraguan election of 1984, nothing in it remotely approached the outrage perpetrated by Mr. Marcos.

Filipinos who rose in their wrath to rid their country of the tyrant were not organized and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency or "covert" funds from Washington, as were the Nicaraguan "contras." And when Filipinos had had enough, they swept all before them, disclosing in a matter of days the rotten underpinnings of the tyrant's regime; but after five years of effort and millions of U.S. dollars, the contras have yet to take and hold a single town in Nicaragua, or to set off the smallest ripple of popular uprising anywhere in that unhappy country. Filipinos staged a Glorious Revolution; the contras wage a minor guerrilla war, paid for by U.S. taxpayers.

Now, the Administration — joined by Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — advances the proposition that \$100 million in additional aid, \$70 million of it for military equipment, must be supplied to the contras, so that they can force the Sandinistas to participate in the so-called Contadora negotiating process.

Aside from the fact that, with or without U.S. aid, the contras have shown no ability to impose Mr. Reagan's will on Managua, this is a deceptive argument. Not only did the Sandinistas agree to accept a Contadora draft treaty in 1984, which the Reagan

Administration promptly rejected; but just this year they also accepted a statement of principles, advanced by Guatemala and other nations in the region, as a basis for a peaceful settlement in Central America.

That statement called for the elimination of foreign military advisers from the region, including Cuban and Soviet-bloc personnel in Nicaragua. Is the Reagan Administration willing to negotiate on the basis of those principles? No — it insists that the Sandinistas must first negotiate with the contras, although the contras as yet have earned no right whatever to sit down as equals with the Sandinistas.

Secretary Shultz, meanwhile, continues to assert that Nicaragua subverts other Latin countries with arms and military training. If that is even partly so, it's all the more remarkable that the foreign ministers of the eight most

Nicaragua isn't like the Philippines

important Latin nations — Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay and Panama — came to Washington last month to urge Mr. Shultz and the Administration (a) to stop the contra war against Nicaragua, and (b) to negotiate directly with the Sandinistas. They got nowhere.

Mr. Shultz also has raised again the tired old threat of a "Soviet and Cuban base on the mainland of Latin America." There's no evidence that Moscow wants such a provocative base; but if it does, the U.S. could hardly stop it with \$70 million in guns and ammunition to a ragtag guerrilla band with no real political support and fatal ties to both the C.I.A. and the hated Somoza regime the U.S. once backed. That the Soviet-base argument may be the Administration's strongest political medicine suggests how weak its case is.

Mr. Lugar concedes that the appropriation will have a tough time even in the Republican Senate. In the Democratic House, Representative David Bonior of Michigan, chairman of the Democrats' Task Force on Nicaragua, sees a good chance to defeat it. That's why the Administration is pulling out all stops. If aid to the contras is cut off, Mr. Reagan will have to turn to diplomacy, which means accepting the Sandinistas in some degree of power, or use U.S. forces to overthrow them directly. □