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Letters

T H E E D I T O R

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Honduras Perspective

Robert E. White's article "Central America: The Problem That Won't Go Away" (July 18) distorts beyond recognition the image of democratic Honduras and our policies here. His article suggests that Honduras has an unjust political system backed with our blessing by a repressive military establishment. He also implies that human rights and press freedoms are better observed in neighboring Nicaragua. The facts are that Honduras has a freely elected civilian government and liberal democratic institutions, including a free and privately owned radio, press and television. Honduras can also be proud of its vigorous labor movement, considered a model in the region, and of its land-reform program, whose origins date back more than 20 years. The United States, continuing a policy established by the previous Administration, fully supports Honduras's commitment to this democratic and pluralistic process.

Honduras's increasingly professional armed forces are dedicated to defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, and they



are publicly committed to civilian constitutional rule. Neighboring Nicaragua has an army more than twice the size of Honduras's, and a stated intention to double the figure yet again, far beyond any plausible defensive need. Honduras is also concerned by the turbulence in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala. Faced with this difficult situation, Honduras, as a traditional friend, has quite understandably asked for some additional United States military assistance. We have responded positively with modest increases. But there are no United States Air Force officers flying helicopter missions, as Mr. White so incorrectly alleges, and the since-departed Special Forces personnel, to whom Mr. White refers, emphasized training in the interdiction of arms and other supplies transiting from Nicaragua to El Salvador guerrillas in violation of Honduran sovereignty. To put our military effort here in perspective, your readers will be interested in knowing that at any given time there may be between 30 and 50 United States military personnel on temporary training duty in Honduras, as compared with an estimated 2,000 Cuban personnel engaged in military and security activities in Nicaragua. Also, our current A.I.D. program, some five times the cost of United States military assistance here, reflects the United States' longstanding commitment to Honduras's economic development.

Finally, Mr. White is completely wrong in stating that Honduran troops have begun fighting guerrillas in El Salvador. The truth of the matter is that Honduran forces have periodically patrolled areas which are still in dispute between the two countries. These activities have been completely consistent with the principle of Honduran self-defense and in no way signal a Honduran involvement in the Salvador fighting. To the contrary, it is Honduras which has been reacting to expanded operations by Salvadoran guerrillas in the Honduran-claimed territory.

Honduras is a friendly democratic nation in an increasingly difficult position. It needs and deserves our sym-

pathetic support and assistance.

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to Honduras
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