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Remarks

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Executive Secretary
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THE WHITE HOUSE
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5/8/84

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CHARUE HILL
JOHN STANFORD



Latest draft of 5/9 speech,
for Messrs. Shultz, Weinberger,
and Casey.

Bob Kimmitt



L-299A

May 8, 1984
9:30 a.m.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: CENTRAL AMERICA
WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 1984

My fellow Americans, last week I was in Beijing and Shanghai -- 3 weeks from now I will be preparing to leave for Dublin and London, for the annual Economic Summit, then Normandy.

I am pleased that our trip to China was a success. Though our two countries are very different, we are building a strong relationship in a genuine spirit of cooperation, and that is good for the cause of peace.

This was our second trip to Asia in the last 6 months. It demonstrates our awareness of America's responsibility for leadership in the Pacific Basin -- an area of tremendous economic vitality. I believe our relations with our Asian allies and friends have never been better.

But that isn't what I want to talk to you about.

I asked for this time to tell you of some basic decisions which are yours to make. I believe it is my constitutional responsibility to place these matters before you. They have to do with your national security and that security is the single most important function of the Federal Government. In that context, it is my duty to anticipate problems; warn of dangers, and act so as to keep harm away from our shores.

Our diplomatic objectives will not be attained by goodwill and noble aspirations alone. In the last 15 years the growth of Soviet military power has meant a radical change in the nature of the world we live in. This does not mean, as some would have us

believe, that we are in imminent danger of nuclear war. We are not.

As long as we maintain the strategic balance and make it more stable by reducing the level of such weapons on both sides, then we can count on the basic prudence of the Soviet leaders to avoid that kind of challenge to us. They are presently challenging us with a different kind of weapon, subversion and the use of surrogate forces, Cubans, for example. We have seen it intensifying during the last 10 years as the Soviet Union and its surrogates moved to establish control over Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Afghanistan, and recently, closer to home in Nicaragua and now El Salvador. It is the fate of this region, Central America, that I want to talk to you about tonight.

Let me say first what the debate on Central America is not about. It is not about harbor mining, or about procedures of consultation with the Congress. It is definitely not about plans to send American troops into combat in Central America.

The issue is our efforts to promote democracy and economic well-being in the face of Cuban and Nicaraguan aggression, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union. Each year, the Soviet Union provides Cuba with \$4 billion in economic assistance; and it sends tons of weapons to foment revolution in our hemisphere.

The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: We do not start wars. We will never be the aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against

aggression -- to preserve freedom and peace. We help our friends defend themselves.

Central America is a region of great importance to the United States. Central America is America, it is at our doorstep, and it has become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua to install communism by force throughout the hemisphere.

When half of our shipping tonnage and imported oil passes through Caribbean shipping lanes, our well-being is at stake. When two-thirds of all our foreign trade passes through the Panama Canal and Caribbean waters, America's economy is at stake.

Right now in El Salvador, Cuban-supported aggression has caused more than 400,000 men, women, and children to flee their homes. And in all of Central America, there are more than 850,000 refugees. Concerns about millions of refugees fleeing communist oppression to seek entry into our country are well-founded.

It is not hard to imagine the consequences of a sequence of communist take-overs throughout Central America. What we see in El Salvador is an attempt to destabilize the entire region, and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border.

If we do nothing or if the Congress continues to provide too little help, our choice would be a communist Central America with communist military bases on the North American mainland, and communist subversion spreading southward and northward. As the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, chaired by Henry Kissinger, agreed, this communist subversion poses the

threat that 100 million people from Panama to the United States border could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes. It's important to remember that we have a 2,000-mile open border with Mexico.

If we come to our senses too late, when our vital interests are even more directly threatened, and after a lack of American support causes our friends to lose the ability to defend themselves, then the risks to our security and our way of life will be infinitely greater.

But there is a way to avoid these risks, the one recommended by the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America. It requires long-term American support for democratic development, economic and security assistance, and strong-willed diplomacy.

We have given careful and continuing attention to diplomacy through my Administration. There have been a number of high level bilateral meetings with the Nicaraguan government where we have presented specific proposals for peace. I have appointed two special Ambassadors who have made more than ___ trips to the region in pursuit of peace during the last ___ months. And we continue to support the objective of the regional countries working through what is called the Contadora process.

This is the course our Administration has chosen to follow and for which we have asked congressional cooperation. We can and must help Central America. It's in our national interest to do so, and, morally, it's the only right thing to do. Helping means doing enough -- enough to protect our security and enough to protect the lives of our neighbors so that they may live in

peace and democracy without the threat of communist aggression and subversion. This has been the policy of our Administration for more than 3 years.

But making this choice requires a commitment from our Administration, the American people, and the Congress. The Congress has not yet made that commitment. Congress has provided just enough aid to avoid outright disaster, but not enough to resolve the crisis, so El Salvador is being left to slowly bleed to death.

Part of the problem, I suspect, is not that Central America isn't important, but that some people think our Administration may be exaggerating the threat we face. Well, if that's true, let me put that issue to rest.

I want to tell you a few things tonight about the real nature of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas who rule Nicaragua are communists whose relationship and ties to Fidel Castro of Cuba go back to 1960. A number of the Sandinista commanders were trained in terrorist camps supported by Cuba, the Soviet bloc, and the PLO. It is important to note that Cuba, the Sandinistas, the Salvadoran communist guerrillas, and the PLO have all worked together for many years. And in 1978, the Sandinistas joined the PLO in a "declaration of war" against Israel.

The Cuban-backed Sandinistas made a major attempt to topple the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in the fall of 1978. They failed. They were then called to Havana, where Castro cynically instructed them in the ways of successful communist insurrection.

He told them to tell the world they were fighting for political democracy. But most important, he instructed them to form a broad alliance with the genuinely democratic opposition to the Somoza regime. He explained this would deceive western public opinion, confuse potential critics and make it difficult for western democracies to oppose their revolution without causing great dissent at home.

You see, that's how Castro managed his revolution. And we have to confess he fooled many people here in our own country -- or don't you remember when he was referred to as the George Washington of Cuba?

The Sandinistas returned to Nicaragua and promised to establish democracy. They promised in writing to the OAS -- the Organization of American States -- that they were for free labor unions, freedom of speech, religion, and press, and that they would hold elections within a few months of their takeover, in July 1979. Because of these promises, the OAS asked Somoza to step down and prevent further bloodshed, which he did. This was a negotiated settlement based on power sharing between communists and genuine democrats like the one proposed by some for El Salvador today. Because of these promises, the Carter Administration and other Western governments tried, in a hopeful way, to encourage Sandinista success.

It took some time to realize what was actually taking place; that almost from the moment the Sandinistas and their cadre of 50 Cuban covert advisors took power in Managua in July of 1979, the internal repression of democratic groups, trade unions, and

civic groups began. Dissent was squashed. Freedom of the press and freedom of assembly became virtually nonexistent. There was an outright refusal to hold genuine elections coupled with the continual promise to do so soon, by 1985. There has been an attempt to wipe out an entire culture, the Miskito Indians, thousands of whom have been slaughtered or herded into detention camps, where they have been starved and abused.

The Sandinistas persecuted Jewish rabbis and engaged in particularly vicious forms of anti-Semitism. And they persecuted the Catholic church and publicly humiliated individual priests. When Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua last year, the Sandinistas organized public demonstrations, hurling insults at him and his message of peace. On this Good Friday, some 100,000 Catholic faithfuls staged a march of defiance. Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega said, "We are living with a totalitarian ideology that no one wants."

We must not be duped about the true nature of the Sandinista rule. It is a communist Reign of Terror. Many of the soldiers who fought alongside the Sandinistas saw their revolution betrayed; they were given no place in the new government, some were imprisoned, others exiled. Many of the soldiers who fought with the Sandinistas have taken up arms against them and are now called the Contras. They are freedom-fighters.

What the Sandinistas have done to Nicaragua is a tragedy. But we Americans must understand and come to grips with the fact that the Sandinistas are not content to brutalize their own land.

They seek to export their terror to every other country in the region.

I ask you to listen closely to the following quotation:

"The revolutionary process of Central America is a single process, the triumphs of one are the triumphs of the other . . . Guatemala will have its hour. Honduras its, Costa Rica, too, will have its hour of glory. The first note was heard in Nicaragua." That was the statement of Cayetano Carpio, who was then the leader of the Nicaraguan and Cuban-backed guerrillas in El Salvador.

Within weeks of taking power, the Sandinistas -- in partnership with Cuba and the Soviet Union -- began supporting aggression against El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. The Sandinistas opened training camps for guerrillas from El Salvador so they could return to their country and attack its government. The camps still operate. Nicaragua is still the headquarters for various communist guerrilla movements. Since 1980, Nicaraguan agents and diplomats have been caught in Costa Rica and Honduras supervising attacks carried out by communist terrorists.

The role that Cuba has long performed for the Soviet Union is now also being played by the Sandinistas. They have become Cuba's Cubans. Weapons, supplies, and funds are shipped from the Soviet bloc to Cuba, from Cuba to Nicaragua, from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran guerrillas. These facts were confirmed by a bipartisan majority of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

The Sandinista regime has been waging war against its neighbors since August of 1979. This has included military raids into Honduras and Costa Rica which still continue today. And they're getting a great deal of help from their friends.

Today, there are roughly 11,000 Cuban and Soviet bloc personnel in Nicaragua, with about 40 percent having military and security functions. We're being criticized for having 55 military trainers in El Salvador. Manpower support is also coming from other parts of the terror network: the PLO has sent men and so has Libya's dictator Quadaffi.

Nicaragua's own military forces have grown enormously. Their trained forces increased from 10,000 to 100,000. Last year, communist countries provided over \$400 million in new military assistance, including tanks, artillery, rocket launchers, and helped with the construction of more than 40 new military bases and support facilities.

Why does Nicaragua need this power? Why did this country of only 2.8 million people build a military force larger than those of all other Central American countries combined?

They claim the buildup is the result of the anti-Sandinista forces. But that is a lie. The Sandinista military buildup began 2-1/2 years before the anti-Sandinista freedom-fighters had taken up arms.

They claim the buildup is because they are threatened by their neighbors. That, too, is a lie. Nicaragua's next door neighbor, Costa Rica, doesn't even have an army. Another neighbor, Honduras, has a small army of 16,000.

They claim the buildup is in response to American aggression. That is the most cynical lie of all. The truth is they announced at their first anniversary, in July 1980, that their revolution was going to spread beyond their own borders.

When the Sandinistas were fighting the Somoza regime, the United States' policy was: hands off. We did not attempt to prop up the regime. The United States did everything to show its openness toward the Sandinistas, its friendliness, its willingness to become friends. The Carter Administration provided the Sandinistas more economic assistance in the first 2 years of its life than any other country. But the Carter Administration suspended economic aid to Nicaragua in January 1981, because it concluded that the Sandinistas were arming the Salvadoran guerrillas.

As soon as I took office, we attempted to show friendship and our willingness to resume economic aid. But it did no good. They kept on exporting terrorism. They kept on treating us as their party anthem describes us, as the United States, the enemy of all mankind.

So much for our misconceptions and our fond but unrealistic hopes that if only we'd try harder to be friends, Nicaragua would flourish in the glow of our friendship and install liberty and freedom for their people.

The truth is: They haven't.

In 1958, Fidel Castro pledged that, once his revolution had triumphed, he would start a much longer and bigger war -- a war against the Americans. That war, Castro said, will be my true

destiny. For 26 years, during Republican and Democratic administrations, Castro has kept to his own path of revolutionary violence. Today, Cuba even provides safe passage for drug traffickers who poison our children. In return, Castro gets hard currency to buy more weapons of war.

We are in the midst of what President John F. Kennedy called "a long twilight struggle" to defend freedom in the world. He understood the problem of Central America. He understood Castro. And he understood the long-term goals of the Soviet Union in this region.

Nearly 23 years ago, President Kennedy warned against the threat of communist penetration in our hemisphere. He said, "I want it clearly understood that this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our nation." And the House and Senate supported him, overwhelmingly, by passing a law calling on the United States to prevent Cuba from extending its aggressive or subversive activities to any part of this hemisphere. Were John Kennedy alive today, I think he would be appalled by the gullibility of some who invoke his name.

I have told you that Cuba's and Nicaragua's prime target is El Salvador. And I want to talk to you about that country because there is a lot of misunderstanding about it.

El Salvador, too, had a revolution and is struggling valiantly to achieve a workable democracy, and, at the same time, to achieve a stable economic system and to redress historical injustices. But their yearning for democracy has been met by

Cuban-trained and armed guerrillas, leading a campaign of violence against people, and destruction of bridges, roads, power stations, trucks, buses, and other vital elements of their economy. Destroying this infrastructure, has brought more unemployment and poverty to the people of El Salvador.

Some argue that El Salvador has only two political extremes -- the communist left and the violent right. Nothing could be more wrong. Democratic political parties range from the democratic left, to center, to conservative. Trade unions, religious organizations, civic groups, and business associations are numerous and flourishing. There is a small, violent right-wing as opposed to democracy as are the guerrillas, but they are not part of the government, and we have consistently opposed both extremes.

Land reform is moving forward. Since March 1980, the program has benefitted about 525,000 peasants, nearly half of the formerly landless population. But many of these can't farm this land for they will be killed by the guerrillas if they do.

The people of Central America want democracy and freedom. They want and hope for a better future. Costa Rica is a well-established and healthy democracy. Honduras made a peaceful transition to democracy in 1982. And in Guatemala, political parties and trade unions are functioning. An election is scheduled for July, and there is a real prospect that country can return to full constitutional government in 1985.

In fact, 26 of 33 Latin American countries with 90 percent of the region's population, are democracies or striving to become democracies. But they are vulnerable.

By aiding the communist guerrillas in El Salvador, Nicaragua is trying to overthrow the duly-elected government of a neighboring country. The government of El Salvador was born of revolution, but unlike Nicaragua it has held 3 elections, the most recent a presidential election last Sunday. It has made great progress toward democracy. In this last election, _____ percent of the people of El Salvador braved communists threats of "Vote today, Die tonight" to vote for peace in freedom.

The government of El Salvador has offered amnesty to the guerrillas and asked them to participate in the elections and democratic processes. The guerrillas said no, they want to shoot their way into power and establish totalitarian rule.

By contrast, the freedom-fighters in Nicaragua have offered to lay down their weapons and take part in democratic elections; but there the communist Sandinista government has refused.

Therefore the United States has been supporting -- and properly so -- not only the elected government of El Salvador, but also the thousands of Nicaraguans resisting a totalitarian takeover of their homeland.

If the communists can start war against the people of El Salvador, then El Salvador and its friends are surely justified in defending themselves by blocking the flow of arms. If the Soviet Union can aid and abet subversion in our

hemisphere, then the United States has a legal right and a moral duty to help resist it. This is not only in our strategic interest; it is morally right. It would be profoundly immoral to let peace-loving friends depending on our help be overwhelmed by brute force if we have any capacity to prevent it.

If our political process pulls together, Soviet- and Cuban-supported aggression can be defeated. On this, the centennial anniversary of President Harry Truman's birth, it is fitting to recall his words spoken to a joint session of the Congress in a similar situation: "The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter . . . we may endanger the peace of the world, and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation."

The speech was given in 1947. The problem was 2 years of Soviet-supported indirect aggression against Greece. The communists were close to victory. President Truman called the Congress to provide decisive aid to the Greek Government. The Republican minority rallied behind President Truman's call. Democratic forces succeeded and Greece became a parliamentary democracy.

Communist subversion is not an irreversible tide. We've seen it rolled back in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and most recently, in Grenada. The tide of the future can be a freedom tide. All it takes is the will and resources to get the job done.

In April 1983, I addressed a joint session of the Congress and asked for bipartisan cooperation on behalf of our policies to

protect liberty and democracy in Central America. Shortly after that speech, the late Senator Henry Jackson encouraged the appointment of a blue-ribbon, bipartisan commission to chart a long-term course for democracy, economic improvement, and peace in Central America. I appointed twelve distinguished Americans from both political parties to the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, people like Henry Kissinger, former Democratic Party Chairman, Robert Strauss, and AFL-CIO President, Lane Kirkland.

The Bipartisan Commission rendered an important service to all Americans -- all of us from pole to pole in this Western Hemisphere. Last January, the Commission presented positive recommendations to support democratic development, improve living conditions, and bring the long-sought dream for peace to this troubled region so close to home. The recommendations reinforce the spirit of our Administration's policies that help to our neighbors should be primarily economic and humanitarian, but must also include sufficient military aid.

In February I submitted a comprehensive legislative proposal to the Congress which would implement the Commission's recommendations. And since this report presented a bipartisan consensus, I was hopeful that the Congress would take prompt action. This proposal calls for an increased commitment of resources beginning immediately and extending regularly over the next 5 years. The program is a balanced combination of support for democracy, economic development, diplomacy, security measures, with 70 percent of the dollars to be used for economic

and social development. This program can get the job done. But so far, the Congress has failed to act. Meanwhile, evidence mounts of Cuban intentions to double Salvadoran opposition and bring down that newly-elected government in the fall. Unless the Congress provides the resources, the communists will likely prevail.

The National Bipartisan Commission on Central America has done its work. Our Administration has done its work. For more than 2 months, the Congress has had the opportunity to do its work. But it hasn't.

The simple questions are: Will we support freedom in this hemisphere or not? Will we defend our vital interests in this hemisphere or not? Will we stop the spread of communism in this hemisphere or not? Will we act while there's still time?

There are those in this country who would yield to the temptation to do nothing. They are the New Isolationists, very much like the isolationists of the late 1930's, who knew what was happening in Europe but chose not to face the terrible challenge history had given them. They preferred a policy of wishful thinking that if they only gave Hitler one more country, allowed him just one more international transgression, then surely sooner or later his appetite would be satisfied.

Well, they didn't stop Hitler -- they emboldened him. They didn't prevent war -- they guaranteed it.

They were victims of the isolationist delusion: paraphrasing Churchill, if you feed the alligator, he won't eat you.

Legislation is before the Congress that will carry out the recommendations of the National Bipartisan Commission. Requests for interim appropriations to give the freedom fighters in Nicaragua, and the soldiers fighting for their country in El Salvador, the tools they need also await action by the House of Representatives.

For the last 4 years, Congress has provided only half of the military aid I had requested for El Salvador -- even though total aid for El Salvador is only 3 percent of our world-wide assistance. I am asking the Congress to provide, in full, the funds I have requested for fiscal year 1984 and also to enact the entire Henry Jackson Plan for democracy, economic development, and peace in Central America.

As I talk to you tonight, there are young Salvadoran soldiers in the field facing the terrorists and guerrillas in El Salvador with the clips in their rifles the only ammunition they have. The lack of evacuation helicopters for the wounded and the lack of medical supplies if they are evacuated has resulted in one out of three of the wounded dying. This is no way to support friends -- particularly when supporting them is supporting ourselves.

[Last week, as we returned across the vast Pacific to Alaska, I could not help being struck again by how blessed has been our land. For 200 years, the oceans have protected us from much that has troubled the world. But clearly, our world is shrinking. We cannot pretend otherwise if we wish to protect our freedom, our economic vitality, and our precious way of life.]

It's up to all of us, you as citizens and your Representatives in the Congress. Believe me, the people of Central America can succeed if we provide the assistance I have requested from the Congress. Let the Congress know we want no hostile, communist colonies here in the Americas: South, Central, or North.

Thank you, God bless you, and good night.