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SUBJECT CIA Accused of Involvement in Nicaragua

DAVID HARTMAN: This week, world attention has focused again on Central America, now on Nicaragua.

Many people believe that the new fighting there could develop into a full-scale civil war. Just this week there have been reports of major battles between guerrillas and the army of the Marxist government of Nicaragua. We just heard some reports a few minutes ago on our newscast.

The roots of the fighting go back almost half-a-century. For more than 40 years, Nicaragua was ruled by members of the Somoza family. Anastasio Somoza was the last dictator in the line. He was overthrown by rebels in 1979. At first, our government gave some support to the new Sandinistas regime, but that ended as the Sandinistas replaced the repressive Somoza government with what is considered here to be a harsh Communist government. Many of those now fighting the Sandinistas were soldiers under Somoza. The Sandinista government has charged that our CIA is deeply involved in the fighting. Our government has neither confirmed nor denied any American involvement.

Victor Hugo Tinoco is Nicaragua's Deputy Foreign Minister, and he is with us this morning here in New York.

Good morning, Mr. Deputy Foreign Minister. It's nice to have you with us this morning.

VICTOR HUGO TINOCO: Good morning.

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HARTMAN: As you see it, exactly what charges -- what are you charging the United States Government with doing?

TINOCO: We have made three different charges to the Reagan Administration in the Security Council.

First, that the CIA is organizing and directing the whole plan in the detail of the counter-revolutionary attacks of the Sandinistas bands against Nicaragua.

Second, that a -- the Reagan Administration has approved official funds to support the Sandinista bands trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

And, third, that there are counter-revolutionary camps where Gringos are training in U.S. territory.

HARTMAN: This morning, there are a number of news reports in both the "Washington Post" and the "New York Times" indicating that the amount of activity along the border in Honduras is even less than usual. There is very little military activity, that there are fewer guards than usual along the borders.

The Honduran government denies these charges completely. What are you saying to that?

TINOCO: In reference to the concentration of Honduran troops in the area near the Nicaraguan border, I want to remember that yesterday, and before yesterday, the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua -- Honduras, Edgardo Paz Barnica, confirmed that they are massing troops in our border. But he said they had no aggressive position against Nicaragua. That was a month ago -- of preventing -- but they confirm that they are massing troops.

HARTMAN: All right, they say they are preventing. On Saturday, 12 Nicaraguan soldiers were arrested in Honduras trying to get arms from Nicaragua into El Salvador. This was on Saturday. I assume you know of the report. Twelve Nicaraguan soldiers arrested by Honduras authorities in Honduras. Why is that not a complete violation of international law?

TINOCO: Well, I read this report, but I want to remember -- first of all, we haven't received any official complaint from the Honduran government. I haven't heard about a diplomat now, and that's very important [sic].

On the other hand, we have sent in the last 10 days five official notes to the Honduran government complaining because attacks from Honduran military units against Nicaraguan military forces in our territory.

HARTMAN: What proof do you have of the charges you're making today?

TINOCO: Well, the shellings, the mortars against the military force in the area.

Now, of course, we are -- in the next days, we are planning to bring the press the -- we now concentrate many men in our central areas of Nicaragua to the border area [sic]. But now it is just an area of fighting, and we're going to have to take some measures.

HARTMAN: Communist governments -- we'll call them Communist governments -- are the antithesis of what the American form of life is. We believe in freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, pursuit of life, liberty, happiness, which is not the same as in Communist governments.

Why shouldn't the United States try to protect themselves and their way of life from Communist governments?

TINOCO: Well, first of all, I want to call your attention to the fact that I think in Nicaragua it's not a Communist government. I want to remember you first that we have a private enterprise in Nicaragua, and that the private enterprise is the owner of more than 70 percent of -- of our basis for production. We have more private enterprise than the -- than Italy, for example, or something like that. And we have a political parties [sic]. Of course, there are some limitations of political activities because we're suffering a migration, we are receiving attacks, and there are goals and master plans, a deal managed by the Reagan Administration, against our country. We are trying to create a democratic and popular society in our country with a good margin for private [words unintelligible], is a very difficult situation.

HARTMAN: Mr. Deputy Foreign Minister, thank you for joining us this morning.

We did invite, by the way, our Ambassador to the United Nations, Jean Kirkpatrick, to join us this morning. She declined, as did representatives from the White House and the State Department.

In a moment, we'll talk with an expert on Latin American affairs, and a congressman who says we should reshape our American policy in Central America.

We'll be right back.

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The government in Nicaragua is not alone in claiming our government is heavily involved in the fighting in that country. There have been numerous reports in our news media and in Congress that the United States is supporting the rebels.

Michael Barnes, a Congressman from Maryland, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. Riordan Roett, Director of Latin American Studies at Johns Hopkins down in the Washington area, and they're both joining us.

Congressman, good morning. And good morning, Professor Roett.

CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL BARNES: Good morning.

HARTMAN: Congressman, you've said that this -- what you say is American involvement in sending arms down to Central America is the equivalent of the 1980 -- you call it a "1980 version of the Bay of Pigs." What do you mean?

CONGRESSMAN BARNES: Well, first of all, it's not just what I say. The Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Barry Goldwater, has said that the reports in the press are basically accurate about what the U.S. role is.

The reason I say it's similar to the Bay of Pigs is because the Bay of Pigs was an operation mounted by the CIA, hiring exiles from Cuba with the purpose of trying to destabilize or overthrow the government of Cuba, and that's essentially what's involved here in Nicaragua. The CIA has reportedly, and been confirmed by the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, been authorized by the President to spend a lot of money to mount an attack on -- on Nicaragua with the purpose of destabilizing or overthrowing that government.

HARTMAN: Do you think we're trying to overthrow the government?

CONGRESSMAN BARNES: Well, clearly, the -- the guerrillas who we are supporting have that intent. They don't make any secret about what they want to do. They want to overthrow the Sandinistas and take over the country.

HARTMAN: What do you think we ought to do?

CONGRESSMAN BARNES: Well

HARTMAN: Or not do?

CONGRESSMAN BARNES: Unfortunately, I think the United States is making once again the kind of mistake we've made too often in the past in Latin America. In Chile, in Guatemala, you know, there's a long history of U.S. military direct and indirect involvement in Latin America. What we really ought to be doing in this problem is working with our friends in the region, of which we have quite a few, to resolve this problem through international means.

For the U.S., particularly through the CIA in this way, to be getting involved directly militarily in Central America just confirms all the worst instincts about the United States and strengthens the people we say we want to get rid of -- the Sandinistas.

It's very difficult for people who are opposed to the Sandinistas within Nicaragua, the democrats, people in the private sector, the free press, et cetera, to be critical of them when they're under attack by the Gringos, you know, by the CIA when they have a legitimate threat to their country, and there's a rallying-around going on. You may have seen the piece yesterday in the "Christian Science Monitor" which quoted opposition people in -- in Nicaragua saying that what the U.S. is doing is making the Sandinistas stronger, not weaker.

HARTMAN: Professor Roett, in one minute, put this in perspective for us, would you? You're an academic. You look at all sides to this thing. What should we do down there?

PROFESSOR RIORDAN ROETT: Well, first we need to realize that the leadership of the Nicaraguan government, they are really primitives ideologically. We are not dealing with a very sophisticated group. And no one is arguing that the United States should endorse the government in Managua. I think we are saying that the U.S. does not want to be identified with any process or movement that will overthrow another government that we must remember was a revolutionary government when it came to power in 1979 and still retains a good deal of popular support.

That support is diminishing because of their own ineptitude and their mistakes.

What the United States should not do, it seems to me, is become clearly and historically identified with another disaster in Central America. As Congressman Barnes says, we should work with our allies both in Europe and in Central America first.

Second, we should make it very clear that Nicaragua is not the main force fighting in El Salvador. El Salvador is a

separate issue, and the Administration keeps trying to link both issues.

HARTMAN: Professor Roett, thank you, and thank you for your brevity at the same time.

And thank you, Congressman Barnes.