

9 April 1984

CENTRAL AMERICA BROKAW: Nicaragua went to the World Court in the Netherlands today, and it asked the court to order an end to United States undercover operations in Nicaragua, including the mining of that country's ports. The Reagan administration has shown what some critics say is contempt for the World Court. It says it won't accept the court's rulings in Central America for at least two years. Marvin Kalb tonight on what that means for U.S. policy.

KALB: Officials admit by this action the administration has badly damaged its case on Capitol Hill and funding for covert operations against Nicaragua, including the mining, may now be cut off. On the House side, Speaker Tip O'Neill... REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL (D-Mass.): Up to this point, I have contended that the Reagan administration's secret war against Nicaragua has been morally indefensible. Today it is clear that it's legally indefensible as well. REP. PETER KOSTMAYER (D-Pa.): Congress should immediately end all funding for his illegal adventure in Nicaragua before the mining of harbors escalates into the deployment of American armed forces.

KALB: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, dominated by Republicans, vibrated with unhappiness. SEN. CHARLES PERCY (D-Ill.): I was just as surprised and shocked when I read this report as all of us were. SEN. CHARLES MCC. MATHIS (R-Md.): I hope that the administration will reconsider this decision.

KALB: One authority on international law strongly disapproved of the U.S. action. EDITH BROWN WEISS (Georgetown University): Again, I think it makes a mockery of our great emphasis that we've always placed on the rule of law in the international arena.

KALB: The State Department explanation is that the U.S. was merely trying to head off a long propaganda diversion at the World Court. And besides... JOHN HUGHES (State Dept. Spokesman): There may well be classified data that we don't wish to publicize.

KALB: Nicaragua's foreign minister, Miguel D'Escoto, denounced the mining as well as the pre-emptive U.S. move at the World Court. MIGUEL D'ESCOTO (Nicaraguan Foreign Minister): This is something that is intolerable, that is illegal, that is unjust.

KALB: The mining of Nicaragua's ports began early in January, a move designed by the CIA to hurt the Nicaraguan economy. Seven ships have been damaged in recent weeks, including a Soviet tanker and a Japanese freighter. Capitol Hill reaction has been so stinging that officials here are now saying the mining operation may have to be called off. Marvin Kalb, NBC News, the State Department.