

CENTRAL AMERICA BROKAW: Good evening. The CIA mining of the ports in Nicaragua remains an explosive political issue tonight. House Speaker Tip O'Neill today called it terrorism at its worst. A State Department official, however, defended the right of the United States to mine those harbors. However, that did not persuade the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It overwhelmingly approved a resolution similar to the one passed by the Senate last night, a non-binding resolution calling for no more money for mining operations. Marvin Kalb tonight on the increasingly bitter fight between Congress and the administration over Nicaragua policy.

KALB: The vote was heavily one-sided, 32-to-3, the non-binding resolution reading, 'No funds shall be obligated or expended for the purpose of planning, directing, executing or supporting the mining of the ports or territorial waters of Nicaragua.' Afterward, a leading critic predicted the House would now cut off all funds for covert operations against Nicaragua. REP. MICHAEL BARNES (D-Md.): It's an extraordinarily bad policy, and it never should have been started. And it certainly should be ended.

KALB: Earlier, Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam appeared before the committee, denying that the mining was an act of war and defending it as an example of collective self-defense, a position that excited rage or opposition. REP. GERRY STUDDS (D-Mass.): What the hell are you doing? What are you doing with and to our country?

KALB: President Reagan, visiting a Missouri auto plant, brushed aside the overwhelming 'sense of the Senate' vote last night in opposition to the mining. UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: Sir, you must have some reaction to the Senate vote? REAGAN: To what? UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: You must have some reaction to the Senate vote? REAGAN: You wouldn't wanna hear it.'

KALB: That vote followed a long justification of the mining policy by CIA Director William Casey. SEN. ROBERT BYRD (D-W. Va): I think it was pathetic.

KALB: And Byrd is now proposing new confirmation hearings for the president's top advisers if he gets re-elected. BYRD. ...departmental heads, and I'm including the CIA director in this as well as the OMB director. They have tremendous power, and they oughtta have to, they oughta have to pass, ah, a test the second time.

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KALB: Officials here say that Secretary of State Shultz had reservations about the mining, but once again, he lost out to Defense Secretary Weinberger and CIA Director Casey, whose hard-line position was ultimately adopted by the president. Marvin Kalb, NBC News, the State Department.

CENTRAL AMERICA /U.S. AID BROKAW: An administration official claimed today that the mining stopped two weeks ago. But in Nicaragua tonight, the Sandinista government is keeping the issue alive, claiming the ports there are under siege. Mike Boettcher is in Nicaragua tonight.

BOETTCHER: The port of Corinto is Nicaragua's economic heart. Seventy-five percent of the crops, raw materials and manufactured goods that Nicaragua needs and sells pass through Corinto. Because it is economically strategic, Corinto was the prime target of CIA-supported anti-government rebels who tried to shut it down with submerged mines. The Nicaragua navy claims freighters waiting to enter this harbor were used as shields by rebel speedboats launched from a spy frigate that attacked and laid mines as they left. The crew of this Panamanian freighter said their ship was attacked on three consecutive pitch-black nights by small boats. They kept a souvenir bullet on the ships bridge. The crew of the *Hille Oldendorf was also attack, but its crew says their ship was fired on by Nicaraguan patrol boats, which mistakenly thought they were being attacked during a harbor blackout. Nicaraguan officials say they will do whatever it takes to keep Corinto open. An old fishing boat, now used as a mine-sweeper, stands ready to search for mines, the hard way, by running into them. The Nicaraguans don't think the mining operation is over. As one top port official in Corinto put it, 'If the CIA-backed rebels had the audacity to mine our ports in the first place, how can we believe they still stop now? Mike Boettcher, NBC News, Corinto, Nicaragua.

BROKAW: At the same time in Washington today, administration officials who would not let their names be used said the mining was designed to cut off what they described as a steady flow of arms and ammunition from Nicaragua to those guerrillas in El Salvador.