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SUBJECT The Nicaraguan Rebellion and the CIA

ANNOUNCER: From Washington, Crossfire. Tonight, the Nicaraguan rebellion and the CIA. The host for Crossfire, on the left, sitting in for Tom Braden, Joe Rauh. On the right, Pat Buchanan. In the crossfire, Adolfo Calero, Nicaraguan rebel leader.

PAT BUCHANAN: Last week's political firestorm in Washington involved a sharp Senate rebuke to the President of the United States and a threat to terminate all covert funding of the Nicaraguan rebels known as the Contras. The reason? Senate anger over CIA involvement in the rebel mining of Nicaragua's ports.

Tonight's guest is the supreme commander of the Contras, the President of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force.

JOSEPH RAUH: Well, Mr. Calero, I'm an old American liberal that's fought communists on the left and fascists on the right. Now, your Nicaraguan Democratic Front accepts support, you have people in your movement who were in the old Somoza regime. I know you weren't, but you have people in there that were.

Isn't it a fact that the old Somoza regime, the old fascist regime was far worse than the Sandinista Marxist crowd?

ADOLFO CALERO: Well, I wish it had been, because we would have a lot better regime than we have now, in as far as having the Somozistas in our midst. Somoza's dead.

RAUH: Yeah, but you've got a lot of their old people with you now. All the reporters have said that.

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CALERO: Wait a second. Wait a second. He's dead. He had no doctrine. He had no philosophy. What we have in our forces, Nicaraguans decided to bring about democracy in our country. We have some former National Guardsmen, but...

RAUH: The National Guardsmen are Somoza people.

BUCHANAN: What percentage?

CALERO: By the same token that you cannot accuse the Germany Army of being Nazi, you cannot accuse the Nicaraguan Army of being Somozista. We have less than one percent National Guardsmen in our force. And out of 400 platoon leaders, less than 30 are National Guardsmen.

RAUH: Well, 30 is a pretty number of National Guardsmen, old Somoza crowd. Couldn't you get rid of them?

BUCHANAN: Joe, did you object to the old -- the ex-Nazis serving in the German Army or the origin of NATO?

RAUH: Are these people -- are you saying that the Somoza people are now great democrats? Is that your point?

CALERO: I'm saying that Somozista is dead, is buried with the bones of the dictator. What we have now is 18-year-olds, 19-year-olds, 8000 men...

BUCHANAN: Who were 14 and 15 when the revolution took place.

CALERO: Oh, they were 12, 13.

BUCHANAN: Let me ask you this, Adolfo Calero, the key question. If the Senate -- some say it behaved like a rabbit warren last week, it panicked. There's a threat by Tip O'Neill not to let a single dime for the Contras come out of the Congress of the United States. If all your economic and military assistance from the United States, from the CIA and elsewhere, is cut off, what happens to your movement?

CALERO: Well, you are speculating on something that hasn't happened. And I would say that I'm pretty sure that we are going to continue to be supported, as he has been in the past. The Senate has already voted for the support. The House has voted against it. In the conference they have agreed...

BUCHANAN: Tell the American people out there...

RAUH: You get 75 percent of your material from the United States. Time magazine reported that you get 75 percent.

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Actually, it says in Time, also, that you got 8000 in the field, and without our help you couldn't keep 2000 there.

Just following up Pat's question, if that were to slow down or stop, aren't you gone?

CALERO: Well, I'll tell you something. I don't think that this country is going to abandon us. I don't think that this country is going to leave us inside of Nicaragua with an empty bag. And if that should happen, if that should come about, which I don't believe it will come about, there will be thousands of people killed. Not only our troops, but the civilians who are aiding our troops. And you can be sure that in no time at all -- 300,000 Nicaraguans have left Nicaragua -- half a million will leave Nicaragua.

RAUH: But isn't it a fact that the CIA started your operation? It's reported all over that the first 200 Contras were all on the CIA payroll. Isn't that right?

CALERO: Look, we are not the creation of the CIA, nor anybody. Nobody can create a patriotic effort of thousands of men trying and struggling for freedom and democracy.

RAUH: Why were the first 200 Contras on the CIA payroll?

CALERO: That's -- I mean the fact that reporters speak about that doesn't mean that it's true.

RAUH: Well, the CIA apparently speaks about it, or reporters wouldn't have it, Mr. Calero.

BUCHANAN: Tell the American people why you think the United States should continue to support with weapons, materiel, ammunition, assistance your organization inside -- which is fighting inside Nicaragua right now. What is the national security interest of the United States that's involved here?

CALERO: We're fighting Soviet expansionism. If Nicaragua should really fall to the communists, Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, all of Central America will fall to communism, as it has happened in Eastern Europe that country after country has fallen to communism. The Soviet Union every 30 years has expanded itself in territory the size of Alaska since the Duchy of Muscovy.

RAUH: Let me ask you this. President Reagan says that the reason we're there helping you is so we can stop supplies going to El Salvador. But your purpose is to overthrow the Sandinista government. How can you work together? One wants

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to stop guns to El Salvador and the other one wants to knock off the Sandinista government.

CALERO: That's what young and old liberals are saying. But the fact is that we are the containing force in Nicaragua. We're keeping the Sandinistas at bay in Nicaragua. If it were not for us, they would not only send material supplies to Salvador...

RAUH: Are you trying to get rid of the Sandinista government? Are you trying to overthrow the Sandinista government, or not?

CALERO: Listen to what I'm saying.

RAUH: I am listening.

CALERO: If we did not keep the Sandinistas at bay, there would not only be material supplies to El Salvador, but there would be also men, Sandinistas, Nicaraguans, fighting in El Salvador...

RAUH: But are you trying to overthrow the Sandinista government, or not?

CALERO: We are trying to oblige, to force the Sandinistas to fulfill the commitments they made to freedom and democracy back in 1979 to the Nicaraguan people, to the Organization of American States, and to fulfill their own program.

BUCHANAN: How can you win? How can you win? They're got a hundred thousand troops and militia under arms. They've got 3000 Cuban military advisers in there. They've got hundreds of East German and Soviet advisers, technicians. You, yourself, have said 8000, 10,000 troops. The highest I've ever seen given for the entire Contra force is 18,000. That gives the Sandinistas at least a five-to-one advantage as of right now, and an advantage that's building. How can you win?

CALERO: That five-to-one advantage is not enough in the type of guerrilla [war] we are conducting. And Somoza, in 1979, in May 27th, 1979, he had 50,000 people cheering him on. And a month and a half later he...

BUCHANAN: But he never had a hundred thousand troops under arms.

CALERO: But the Sandinistas never had 17-18 thousand troops.

BUCHANAN: Against him.

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CALERO: No, never. Never.

BUCHANAN: But again, how do you defeat an army -- look, what I'm giving you is a historic example. There has never been a case where a communist regime has installed itself for four years, police apparatus, controlled the military, that that government, communist regime, has ever been dumped over. It has never happened. The only case...

RAUH: It was dumped over in Grenada.

BUCHANAN: The only case is Grenada, outside intervention by a superpower.

So, what you're trying to do is something that no indigenous force, even supplied from the outside, has ever been able to do.

CALERO: Well, the Persians were stopped in Marathon, and no one had been able to stop them before. The Arabs were stopped in tours by Charles Martel in the year 700-and-something. No one had stopped them before. And we Nicaraguans are going to stop the communists in Nicaragua.

I should state...

BUCHANAN: Can you win without a bloodbath, in this sense? Look...

RAUH: Can you win without American troops?

CALERO: We can win democracy for Nicaragua with our own troops and material support from the democratic countries in order to offset the massive flow of arms that...

[Confusion of voices]

BUCHANAN: ...and the Ortega brothers, these are Castroites. These people are communists. They're not going to surrender power. Again, there's no communist government that I know of that has, after a revolution has come in and held free elections and allowed the voters to throw them out. That has never occurred. They've always been thrown out -- I mean they have never -- it's been tried by military force, but it has never been done.

How, exactly, does this war end?

CALERO: Well, how, exactly, did this war begin? This war begun because the Sandinistas, rather to give freedom and democracy to the Nicaraguan people, tried to repress the Nicaraguan people. That's how it began.

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RAUH: Well, I thought it began by the CIA putting on their payroll 200 of your people.

CALERO: No. No, sir. Look, no organization, no matter how great the CIA is, they cannot create patriots. They cannot create...

BUCHANAN: People don't die for the CIA in Nicaragua.

CALERO: Not Nicaraguans. Maybe Americans do.

RAUH: Would you be able to go on today without the CIA?

CALERO: We would be able to keep on going with the support of the American government, which has been giving us support, and which I am sure...

RAUH: The CIA has done everything for you. It was just revealed today that the CIA blew up that gasoline dump. You guys didn't do it, the CIA did it for you. It was just revealed this morning.

CALERO: Well, Commandante Bermudez was on the boat the attacked Corinto on October 10th of 1983. And we can assure that, we can attest to that, and we can prove that.

RAUH: But CIA had nothing to do with that, even though they now concede it.

CALERO: Who has conceded it?

RAUH: Well, it was in the morning paper that the CIA was...

BUCHANAN: The CIA didn't concede it.

RAUH: You don't have any question that the report this morning was correct, that the CIA was in there to blow up all that gasoline?

CALERO: Oh, my.

RAUH: Well, on the mining. Isn't it true the CIA did all the mining?

CALERO: Are 8000 Nicaraguan members of the CIA fighting patriotically to establish democracy in our country [unintelligible]? And there are 3000 Miskito (?) Indians that have been kicked out of their natural habitat by the Sandinistas also fighting for the CIA?

RAUH: You didn't answer my question about the mining,

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though. Didn't the CIA do the mining?

CALERO: The CIA didn't. There was no American citizen involved in the mining of the Nicaraguan ports.

BUCHANAN: Okay, Joe. We'll take that up when we come back.

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RAUH: Our guest tonight on Crossfire is Adolfo Calero, the head of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, a leader of the Contras, and a very distinguished gentleman in his country.

But what I can't still understand, Mr. Calero, is you're saying that the CIA had nothing to do with the mining, when the CIA has admitted it and has said they've stopped it.

CALERO: I have said that the mines were laid by FDN, and there was no American citizen involved in the mining, in the actual, in the direct mining, in conducting those speedboats that mined the port.

RAUH: What you're saying is the CIA handed the guy a mine and he put it down? I can't quite understand. When the CIA admits they've done it, you're saying they didn't.

CALERO: President is the Reagan is the one who requests the support. So, I mean, we will say that President Reagan laid the mines. Would that be it?

RAUH: No, no. I said the CIA. I didn't say they laid the mine, I said they've admitted responsibility.

But let me ask you this question. You said in Honduras this, and I quote, that the Nicaraguan Democratic Front reserves the right to start up the mining again.

Now, the CIA has said that they're stopping it. Are you going ahead without them?

RAUH: I said in Honduras that we assert the right, our right, to mine Nicaraguan ports to offset the flow of Soviet weapons into Central America. I repeat it.

BUCHANAN: Are you going to establish a government-in-exile?

CALERO: Well, that's an option we have open. There've been the way -- our troops have been conducting themselves -- the way the civilian population has been reacting and coming over as

volunteers to our forces, we are not far from the day when we will be able to impose democratic conditions on the Sandinistas.

BUCHANAN: You've said, look, if you use the Miskito Indians, you use your forces, you use Commander Zero forces on the Southeast Coast, I guess, which have taken over a town down there, what have you got, 15,000 combatants?

CALERO: Yes, we have 15,000, plus more volunteers coming in every day.

BUCHANAN: Is there any plan to take any provincial capital and establish yourselves there?

CALERO: Well, we have taken a whole lot of territory. We have not gone into the cities, except on a few occasions. We don't want to inflict unnecessary harm on the civilian population.

BUCHANAN: Why don't you take -- the Sandinistas have said, "Look, come on back. There's an amnesty. We'll hold free elections." Why don't you take them up on it?

CALERO: Well, to begin with, the amnesty was just a farce. A lot of people...

RAUH: Why was it a farce? Why would an offer of amnesty be a farce?

CALERO: Well, because we were excluded from the amnesty. That is why it is a farce.

RAUH: Well, if you put down your arms you're not excluded from going back.

CALERO: But, look, we have made four peace initiatives, four peace offers to the Sandinistas. We have offered to lay down our arms if they will fulfill the commitments to democracy that they made.

BUCHANAN: What would it take for you all to lay down your arms, to come into town and say, "Okay. We're back and we want to have a democratic" -- what would it take?

CALERO: What it would take? For the Sandinistas to lift up the state of emergency which cancels out all the civil and political rights of Nicaraguan citizens. Two, stop the censorship of the press. Two -- three, I mean, to have freedom of expression, to have freedom of religion, to separate the state from the party organization, like they have. I mean it's a confusion, like in Russia, in the Soviet Union. Party, state,

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army, police are all the Sandinistas, which is equivalent to say the communists, the Red Army, the Red government.

BUCHANAN: What you're saying is, "Dismantle your Marxist-Leninist state and have a democracy, and we'll come home."

CALERO: Right.

BUCHANAN: And they say -- what's wrong with that?

RAUH: Well, you know that the Marxists are not going to give up being Marxists, any more than anybody else is going to give up anything.

But let me ask you a question...

CALERO: Communists are not going to give up being communists.

RAUH: Well, that's right. And neither are facists going to give up being facists. And that's what we've got in El Salvador that you're trying to protect.

CALERO: Look, I'm trying to protect democracy. I'm trying to protect freedom.

RAUH: Well, we can agree on that. The three of us will all agree on that.

CALERO: I'm fighting for freedom against the Sandinistas, the same way as I opposed the Somoza dictatorship.

RAUH: Well, let me ask you this. You said -- I think this was in one of your interviews -- that you just are a group of peasants and workers. You, yourself, own several hotels in Nicaragua, or did before the Marxists came in. You had the Coca-Cola franchise. You're a rich man. I think that's all right. I admire you for it.

CALERO: That's a lie. That's a lie.

RAUH: You don't own several hotels?

CALERO: That's a lie, sir. That's a lie. I was general manager of the Coca-Cola franchise in Nicaragua. I had a few shares in the Hotel [unintelligible]. And by a few, I mean an investment of a few thousand dollars. And I had a few shares also in a Datsun distributorship, after 30 years of work.

RAUH: So the briefing papers that we were given saying

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that you had these hotels and franchise are all wrong, huh?

CALERO: Well, I'm very sorry. Apparently...

RAUH: You're a poor man, like the peasants and workers.

CALERO: No, I am not a poor man. I should not be a poor man because I have worked for 30 -- honestly worked for 30 years. And there is no one who can say anything about my business conduct or my personal conduct.

And that's a lie. That's a lie. And I can prove it is a lie.

RAUH: Well, I just say that that's the briefing papers we were given.

CALERO: Well, I'm very sorry.

RAUH: Let me ask you this. You believe in mining the harbors. What good does this do the people of Nicaragua to have ships that are aimed there, not with guns, not with materiel --after all, the mine can't tell what's on the ship. You blow up ships, you blow up depots, you blow up radio towers. What good does that do the people of Nicaragua?

CALERO: Okay, I'll tell you. The mining. A mining operation is part of any war. And there is a war going on in Nicaragua, a war involving about 60,000 people, of which 15,000 are fighting the Sandinistas and 45, the rest, is fighting for the Sandinistas, including about 10,000 Cubans that are in Nicaragua. Mining, the mining of a port will halt the importation of more weapons.

RAUH: It halts everything else, doesn't it? It means that the people don't get food, don't get the other things they need.

CALERO: No. No, sir. Because 150 miles from Managua there is a port in Costa Rica where they can unload food, they can unload medicine. But what they cannot unload if mines are present is explosives, because nobody in his right mind, captain in his right mind will come with a ship loaded with explosive into a place that he knows is mined.

BUCHANAN: Adolfo Calero, thank you very much for coming on Crossfire.

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RAUH: I think it's perfectly clear that the Contras couldn't get on without the CIA. I don't think we should be

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there. It seems to me that we're getting into another Vietnam, and I think it's very dangerous.

BUCHANAN: Joe, George Washington was a lot wealthier than our guest tonight. The American Army had far more support in French troops and money from the King of France to win our revolution than he's getting right now. I can't understand why you liberals don't support freedom down there when it's being fought for in Nicaragua. Why?

RAUH: I don't believe this can be compared to what we had for our declaration...

BUCHANAN: Why not? They're fighting for their country.

RAUH: We were fighting for local self-government. They've got local self-government. You may not like the government, but they've got it.

BUCHANAN: It's Marxist-Leninist. That's local self-government?

RAUH: Well, this is the answer now.

From the left, sitting in for Tom Braden, this is Joe Rauh.

Good night for Crossfire.