

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT  
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NICARAGUA/  
CIA MINING

JENNINGS: And now Central America, Congress and the CIA. CIA Director William Casey went to face a very angry Senate Intelligence Committee today. Afterwards, senators said Casey admitted he could have done a better job of informing them about the mining of Nicaragua's harbors. That is why Senator Moynihan said again yesterday he would resign as vice chairman of the committee. After Casey's apologies and press from his fellow senators, Moynihan has changed his mind.

JENNINGS: Richard Threlkeld has a status report on the CIA tonight. Once again, the agency's image is pretty badly tarnished.

THRELKELD: No secret war was ever less secret than the one the CIA is running against Nicaragua. Its secret army, the so-called contras, seem to show up on the TV news every night. The CIA might as well be bankrolling the Los Angeles Raiders. The president won't talk about it. PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: That's a subject I will pick another time to talk about.

THRELKELD: But everybody else is and saying not very nice things about the CIA's handiwork mining Nicaragua's harbors. REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL (D-Mass.): America is a country that abhors terrorists, and that certainly is an act of terrorism.

THRELKELD: The last time the CIA became such a cause celebre was in 1975. In hearings chaired by the late Senator Frank Church, the CIA was called to account for a number of misdeeds and ultimately punished in the Carter years. Half its staff and close to half its budget were blue-penciled. The Reagan administration raised the CIA's budget to an estimated \$1.5 billion a year and brought in as director Mr. Reagan's campaign manager and close friend, William Casey, to put the CIA's 18,000 employees into fighting trim and get back in the business of covert secret action. DAVID WISE: Both in number and in scope and size, the covert operations have increased. The budget of CIA has increased as well, especially in the covert area.

THRELKELD: As author and CIA-watcher David Wise notes, the CIA is now secretly active in at least a dozen countries around the world. Yet from Nicaragua's Puerto Sandino all the way back to the Bay of Pigs, covert action has often come back to haunt the CIA and whoever was president. MORTON HALPERIN (Center for Nat'l Security

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Studies): None of the senior officials of the Reagan administration seem to have learned the basic lesson, which is that if the CIA is sent off to do things that don't have a public consensus within the United States, they're sent off to engage in activities that are inconsistent with what Americans think of as appropriate behavior for its government. But they ultimately fail and fail in a way that, ah, affects the ability of the agency to do the thing that it's supposed to do, which is to provide information to the president.

THRELKELD: The current complaint is that Director Casey, an impatient man, who does not suffer Congress gladly, didn't tell the CIA's two congressional oversight committees all he should have about Nicaragua. Now Congress is embarrassed and fed up with the CIA and covert action. RAY CLINE (Georgetown University): There is a legitimate role for the United States government to do a few things secretly.

THRELKELD: Old CIA hands like former Deputy Director Ray Cline think the fuss over Nicaragua is giving all covert action a bad name, and that's dangerous. CLINE: And yet we're in a fair way of sealing ourself off from that kind of counteraction to hostile foreign policies that, ah, keeps you out of big wars and avoids the alternative of just surrender and letting your friends go down the drain.

THRELKELD: If that's so, David Wise thinks the CIA has only itself to blame. WISE: I think the CIA has shot itself in the foot. Ah, by mining the harbors in Nicaragua, number one, and by failing to tell the Senate committee at least fully and accurately the CIA has hurt itself more than at any time since the investigations of the mid-1970s that brought out the abuses of the intelligence agencies.

THRELKELD: Americans need to trust that their secret agents are not going to go off on their own or on orders from the White House and do something we'll all later come to regret. The Nicaraguan affair has destroyed that trust and made the CIA once again the butt of an argument. If, in this election year, Americans can finally decide just how they expect their CIA to behave in the national interest, maybe it'll be just as well the CIA's cover has been blown. Richard Threlkeld, ABC News, Washington.