

7 November 1984

MCWETHY: In the last 24 hours, the U.S. government has privately warned the Soviet Union in both Washington and Moscow that it would be a 'very big mistake' for the Soviets to deliver high performance jet aircraft to Nicaragua, if such jet aircraft are indeed aboard a Russian ship that docked today in a Nicaraguan port. The Sandinista government in Nicaragua also got a warning. PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: We have informed them that for them to bring something that is absolutely unnecessary to them, these high performance craft, in here, indicates that they are contemplating being a threat to their neighbors here in the Americas.

MCWETHY: And while the president was speaking, the CIA was notifying the intelligence committees in Congress of a 'potentially serious development in Nicaragua,' a development the CIA has been tracking for more than a month. In early October, American spy satellites observed a Soviet merchant vessel called the *Bacheroni loading military supplies at the Russian Black Sea port of Nikolajev. As one satellite flew over the port, a dozen large crates were photographed at dockside, crates of the size, shape and markings of those that normally carry disassembled MiG jet fighters. When American spy satellites next photographed the port, the crates were gone and so was the ship. It is assumed that the crates were loaded onto the ship and that the MiGs were inside the crates, but intelligence sources stress they know neither fact for sure. The ship sailed through the Mediterranean into the Atlantic. Instead of going through the Panama Canal, where its cargo would be inspected, it took the long route around South America and is now at Nicaragua's main port called Corinto. At a press conference today, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister D'Escoto denied that his country is taking delivery of MiG fighters. He claimed that the U.S. is trying to start a war, that an American warship today violated Nicaragua's territorial waters and that the Corinto port was overflowed by U.S. spy planes at least twice this morning. FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: No boat has arrived on

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Nicaragua either now nor at any time in the past bringing MiG airplanes.

MCWETHY: U.S. officials deny that an American ship was anywhere near the port, but confirmed that U.S. spy planes have been very busy and are regularly overflying Nicaraguan territory. In fact, last week an SR-71 spy plane, one of the fastest aircraft on earth, was ordered to come in low, under the cloud cover, so it could get a good picture of a Bulgarian freighter that was then unloading weapons. At supersonic speed, the SR-71 flew over the port of El Bluff and then, at low altitude, leaving a window-shattering sonic boom in its wake, the plane rocketed across the entire country. From that mission, the U.S. learned that Nicaragua had just taken delivery of at least top-of-the-line Soviet *Hind helicopters. These are among the world's fastest helicopters, routinely flying more than 200 mph. They are heavily armed, capable of shooting down other helicopters or planes and of destroying targets on the ground. But the Reagan administration, while noting the arrival of new helicopters, is focusing on what it fears will be the next step up the line. Officials say Nicaragua should make no mistake about it, Ronald Reagan will not allow high-performance jet fighters to be based in Nicaragua. And, if necessary, he will use U.S. military force to make sure it does not happen. John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.