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# Bradley on Contra-Aid

*Senator Bill Bradley, D-N.J., was the only East-Coast liberal Democrat to support President Reagan's request for \$100 million to aid "contra" guerrillas fighting the Nicaraguan government. His explanation of his vote is excerpted from the March 27 Congressional Record.*

**M**R. PRESIDENT, I am going to vote for military aid to the "contras," though I will do so with misgivings and reservations.

I have opposed military assistance in the past. I did so because I believed — and still believe — that the best hope for peace and democracy in Central America is constructive collaboration with our Latin neighbors to contain threats to our collective security interests there.

Instead of collaborating in a partnership to enhance our collective security, the administration has alienated and alarmed many of the very nations on whose active, sustained support the region's stability ultimately depends. In particular by slighting the Contadora process, the administration has undermined the mechanism these countries set up to contain Nicaragua's territorial ambitions by political rather than military means.

In the final analysis, then, the threat to the region's security, and ultimately to ourselves, is greater today than it was when Ronald Reagan took office.

Unfortunately, enlisting key Latin American states, especially Mexico, in support of democratic revolution in Nicaragua would have required a more generous vision and a more sophisticated approach to political and economic leadership than this administration was apparently capable of. For the United States to be taken as seriously interested in the region's future — in democracy and partnership, not just sporadic adventurism to impress domestic audiences — the American government needed to do much more to help the area develop and grow.

Nowhere is this more true than in Mexico. If the administration's real fear is that Nicaragua will engulf Central America and unleash a communist, or at least anti-American revolution in Mexico, the President has done little to avert it and much to promote it. Our economic policies have weakened Mexico, not strengthened it. Mexico's economy has been badly mismanaged, there is no doubt about that. But the Unit-

ed States, with the IMF, decided austerity was the answer to Mexico's problems, especially its huge foreign debt burden. The Mexicans were supposed to run their economy through a wringer.

United States economic policies have weakened Mexico's political spine. And they continue to undermine other fragile democracies in Latin America. If we want these countries' cooperation on regional security matters, I believe we do, we had better rethink our debt policy — quickly. Not austerity, but growth. Not unilateralism, but partnership. Not authoritarian military regimes, but democracy. Not despair, but hope. This is what America must hold out to our Latin neighbors if we are serious about converting them to our causes.

But here we are. The administration's failed policies have alienated potential allies, facilitated consolidation of the Sandinista regime, and may have precipitated the outbreak of a regional war. Indeed, even as we debated this question, fighting [broke out] between the "contras" and the Sandinista forces within Honduras after a Sandinista invasion.

Given these circumstances, we face a genuine dilemma. We know the Sandinistas will try and destabilize fledgling democracies in Central America. We are all aware they have sent weapons through Honduras to the insurgents in El Salvador. And while I do not believe the Sandinistas are a threat to our borders, they do pose a threat to their democratic neighbors. It is in our interest to help these democracies, politically and economically. But they need time to grow and prosper and the best hope for buying them that time is to support the "contra" opposition.

I believe the Nicaraguan people deserve a chance at democracy. That chance will be denied them if the Sandinistas are allowed to consolidate their totalitarian regime. By aiding the "contras," we are putting pressure on the Sandinistas to moderate their repressive system and keep some pluralism alive.

In the final analysis, the President has left us little choice but to back the "contras." Once the Sandinistas have quashed the domestic opposition, what is to stop them from subverting their neighbors or bringing in Soviet Mig's and submarines as Cuba has done for years? The only thing that could stop that is American force. But before I have to face a vote to send American boys to fight in the jungles of Nicaragua, I need to know I did everything possible to avoid that outcome.

But in voting for this \$100 million, I am not signing a blank check. I will need to see that the "contras" are promoting values Americans believe in — democracy, human rights, free markets. I will also need to see that the Nicaraguan people support the "contras" and believe they are committed to, and capable of, producing democracy. . . .