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Reagan's Foreign Policy— His No. 1 Aide Speaks Out

In his first major interview, the President's right-hand man at the White House hits back at critics of administration strategy on Central America, the Middle East, Russia, China.

Q On Central America: Why has the President, by appearing before a joint session of Congress, created a new sense of crisis? Has the situation there deteriorated dangerously?

A Central America was a high priority in the very beginning of the administration, as you'll recall. Press attention was very high—front page for many months—focusing on the Marxist insurgency in El Salvador, with little attention being paid to a buildup in Nicaragua of military force far in excess of any defensive need.

While attention on Central America seemed to drop, our attention did not. Last fall and winter, in the realization that the Marxist insurgency was gaining in power primarily through the Soviet and Cuban support through Nicaragua, the President became increasingly concerned.

The point now is that he is concerned that the Congress has failed to recognize the threat, failing to recognize the basic differences between the government in Nicaragua on one hand and that in El Salvador on the other. He felt it necessary to go to Congress and to the people, believing as he always has that, given the facts, the American people always do the correct thing.

Stemming from a complete review of Central American policy, the President did what he was so effective at doing when he was Governor of California: Going to the Legislature—now the Congress—and to the people. He made the decision to go to a joint session of Congress to warn of a crisis before it begins and to get more of a response than we've been able to get from individual congressional committees so far.

Interview With William Clark, President's National-Security Adviser

William Clark assumed his current position in January, 1982, after 11 months as deputy secretary of state. A lawyer, he was Governor Ronald Reagan's chief of staff in California and resigned from the State Supreme Court to join the administration.



STEPHEN R. BROWN—USNAWR

Q What, specifically, have you found objectionable about the actions of Congress?

A What has not been recognized in several of the subcommittees in the House is the necessity of establishing security within a society so that it can have a continuing democratic process. It is in the best interest of El Salvador that it call early elections, as it has, and include all factions and all parties in those elections. But unless the Salvadoran military are able to create a secure society for the purpose of conducting elections in December, all positive efforts will be in jeopardy.

The President feels that the word simply has not gotten out about the threat to the Caribbean, to this hemisphere. And, of course, there are elements in the Congress and individuals who are unwilling to accept either the threat or the necessity to meet a threat in Central America.

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Q Is the objective of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinista government—or what?

A The objective is not to overthrow any government. But a key objective is to make known what is truly occurring there—that they have a Marxist government, supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, which is creating a military threat to the region, destabilizing the area through subversion. The President wants to explain effectively to the people what the consequences are going to be if we do not act through political, economic and security assistance to prevent the subversion of democratic governments in the region.

Q But what about covert actions in Nicaragua? How do you respond to those in Congress who challenge the use of such clandestine operations?

A The instrument of covert action has existed in every administration. It is a vital and effective tool of every President, to be used with great discretion and under great legal constraint. Any attempt to curtail that authority is always a concern to a President.

The Boland Amendment, which prohibits the U.S. from attempting to overthrow the Managua government, is the law. And the administration finds no problem with the conditions of that amendment. In Congress it's more a questioning of our overall policy rather than whether there should or should not be a covert element in that policy. I don't think even Mr. Boland has suggested that we are operating outside of his amendment.

Q Over all, are you saying that Soviet activity in Central America poses the major challenge to the United States?

A It has been a major challenge for some time. To suggest that it's greater there than in the Middle East—I'm not going to do that. I think that they're of equal rank in the necessity of moving to meet it. But I will not go beyond that.

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