

A14 Transcript of President's Session With Newspaper Editors

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington yesterday and questions and answers, as recorded by The New York Times through the facilities of Cable News-News.

REAGAN'S ADDRESS

Thank you. Well, thank you very much. I am delighted to have this opportunity to be with all of you today. I know the purpose of this get-together is to bring you back and forth between us so I'll try to keep my remarks short. But this is a very influential group, and what politician worth his salt would give up the chance to make a few points to you this morning.

It reminds me of a story that my friend Punch Sulzberger tells about the time he had lunch at the White House. That evening he went home and called his mother, who as you know is the most remarkable woman, and he said to her, "Mother, I had lunch at the White House with the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, and the Secretary of State."

"Yes, dear," his mother said dryly, "but what did they want?" "I didn't want this opportunity to go by without pointing to some of the enormous changes that we've seen in American politics during this decade. I don't have to remind those of you who report and edit the news of the scope of this change, but I do think it's a good idea now and then to take a moment and reflect on the meaning of that change and gain some perspective on a decade that is now more than half over."

I'm sure you all remember that when we took office last year, the appalling economic conditions, and that's not to mention the crisis of confidence in America's military strength and her international prestige. Our program for economic recovery was much criticized, and getting it through the Congress was the first of many tough struggles to come. We also faced opposition to our efforts to restore America's military strength and carry out a foreign policy that pursued peace while it also sought to halt Soviet expansionism and expand the borders of freedom.

Much of this opposition was understandable. A number of the people in policy- and opinion-making circles had trouble dealing with the new ideas that we brought to Washington. As Bill Buckley once put it, though liberals do a great deal of talking about hearing other points of view, it sometimes shocks them to learn that there are other points of view.

But despite the parochialism of one of our critics, our programs, with the support of the American people, gained passage. I think the results achieved thus far with the revitalization of the economy, our military strength and the restoration of our international prestige bear out the merit of our conservative program.

A few years back, our simple efforts to get aide to El Salvador, so a democratic government could be firmly established there, met with fierce opposition. But thanks in no small part to the Salvadoran people who braved guerrilla threats and gunfire to march to the polls, we prevailed — and so did the dream of democracy.

My favorite story is of an elderly woman standing in line waiting hours for votes in the hot sunshine in the first of the Salvador election. And she had been hurt by the guerrillas because of her determination to vote, and they had told her that they would kill her and her friends if she went on and voted. And she said, "You may kill me and you may kill my family, my friends. You can't kill us all."

And so she went in defiance of them and stood and voted.

doubters were quickly rebutted. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith quickly issued a strong statement confirming the truth of what we said about the persecution of Jews in Nicaragua.

Extremely persuasive testimony has also come from Alvaro Baldizan, the former chief investigator of the Special Investigations Commission of the Ministry of Interior in Nicaragua. And by the way, besides his descriptions of what he learned about the Sandinistas' involvement in the drug trade, Señor Baldizan's testimony, called "Inside the Sandinista Regime," is a richly detailed harrowing look at the Sandinista regime.

It's been published for the State Department, and I recommend it to you. I think your readers would be intrigued by his revelations, especially his portrait of Sandinista leaders like Interior Minister Tomás Borge and Communist Minister Jaime Chánzy. Attempts to mislead visiting dignitaries.

La Prensa Editor's Article
I hope you'll permit me one other comment. I am a frequent reader of the editor of La Prensa, the heavily censored but still remaining non-Government newspaper in Managua, and I'm sure you know the Washington Post. He put it quite plainly. He said the Sandinistas are transforming Nicaragua into a revolution fought for by all Nicaraguans into a revolution that serves the purposes of Marxism-Leninism.

And he went on to say that the Sandinistas want to use his country as a Communist expansion. He said they were filling Nicaragua with quote "internationalist whose aims are the expansion of Communism in Latin America and Soviet domination in the region."

And he adds: "When Latin America is under the influence of the Eastern bloc, NATO will no longer be in Europe. It will be San Antonio, Tex."

You know, he said that. I'm just quoting.

You know, a number of people here in Washington are making a big deal out of the support for the freedom fighters only on the strength of the national security issue. We're not talking about the national security issue. We're talking about the national security issue. We're not talking about the national security issue.

The Sandinista Regime
The American people are just now getting the full impact of the Sandinista regime. Its atrocities against groups like the Miskito Indians, its persecution of the Christians, the verbal attacks on Cardinal Obando, who we intend to prevent from becoming the Cardinal Minskizny of this hemisphere. And the list goes on.



President Reagan with Robert P. Clark, editor of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, as he greeted editors yesterday in Washington.

Miami Herald. Mr. President, diplomatically you said you supported the Contadora peace initiative in Central America. Yet those nations of the Contadora pact have said that they don't think that aid to the Contras will help their effort. How do you resolve the contradiction between support of the Contadora initiative and your own push for aid to the Contras?

A. Well, we may disagree on whether it is necessary now to give the Contras what we believe is necessary, and I'm wondering if your view would not be the same about help to the Contras in view of what just happened at the last meeting, because once again — and we have subscribed to their goals that they have put down as to what it is they're trying to achieve, and they know we fully subscribe to them.

But in this last meeting, it was Nicaragua once again — the Sandinista Government — that refused the proposals of Contadora and walked out. So, maybe now they'll join us in believing that there's going to have to be some pressure put on the Sandinista Government to make it return to the goals of the revolutionary army since the Somoza regime. They announced publicly and informed the Organization of American States that their revolutionary goals were, and they're democratic, pluralistic society, freedom of press, religion, freedom of speech, observance of human rights and the rights of the people to choose their own government. And that's what is at issue.

The Sandinistas were only part of that revolution. And they ousted the revolutionary companions who are mainly now the Contras. Once the revolution succeeded, they took over and have established a totalitarian Communist state.

And we think they're not going to — when have we ever seen a Communist government that has achieved that totalitarian statehood? When have we ever seen them voluntarily and without some pressure or force give up their power? So we believe that in arming the Contras is necessary, and I hope maybe now the Contadora will agree with us.

Fall in Oil Prices
Chairman: Don, on the right here.

Q. Don James, Wichita Falls Times Herald-Record. Mr. President, the free fall in oil prices is concerning a lot of people, particularly with regard to what it will do for exploration. Do you have any concerns about the long-term effect of a virtual halt in production for oil on the national security?

counter in the Gulf of Sidra, there were six journalists that were on the U.S.S. Saratoga as part of a press pool. But when the military encounter began, they were removed from the ship and flown back to Rome and were not even made aware of the fact that there was a military encounter going on in the Gulf of Sidra.

I'd like to know if you'd give us an explanation as to why the reporters were removed from the ship and if you could restate your attitude on reporters covering military encounters involving the United States?

A. Well, with the Grenada situation, we had found out how leaky Washington is in a number of things. We realized that for the safety of our work that operation had to be top secret. It came about with a direct request to us from the other Caribbean island nations that they didn't have the power and asked us. As a matter of fact, at about 3 o'clock in the morning, I was called by the press. Shultz ever asks you for a quiet weekend of golf at Augusta, don't take him up on it — that's where I was awakened. And I knew that we had to accede to their request.

Now, we only had 48 hours to put this operation together, and we feared very definitely that any leak would result in higher casualties for our forces. We immediately that we had landed, as you know, then, did provide the transportation and make possible the bringing in of the press.

On this latest one that you're asking about, I was not aware of those six being taken off. It seemed to me that we started, once there were hostilities, we started trying to round up the press in Italy. But this in response to the reports that we deliberately went in there as a provocation. That was the seventh such maneuver — war games, you may want to recall that we had conducted in that same area. And we knew that we were risking the nature of Qaddafi, that there might possibly be something.

And I've always had one order: any place we ever sent our personnel, I declared to the Navy that it was my policy that if hostilities were launched against us, we'll be sending American military personnel without the right to fight back and fire back if they're first upon. So that was the policy that we had. And we went in on what had planned for months and months, and they'll probably be another such maneuver next year. And then when the hostilities — when they did launch the attack against us — why it was my understanding that then following that, when it did become an operation that was going to round up the press and so informed them, we were available to them then.

A. Yes, but I think that the — and we have had such a policy — but I think also that you must understand where we believe that there is an operation, that where secrecy is so important, that you give us the right to protect our forces against a leak of information. And that leak does not necessarily come from you. We found that the White House is the least leaky place we've been in. So, you'd be surprised how few people know that we were planning that operation. Not even our own secretaries knew — not that he's the leaker — we just kept it that close.

Q. We'd like to be there for the leaks.

A. But I'm going to look into what you said about the six.

Dealing With Terrorism

Q. Mr. President, Randy Hatch, from Ogden, Utah, the Ogden Standard-Examiner. After increasing terrorism and incidents of terrorism and reviews of all the options available, do you have a specific plan of dealing with terrorism in the future now?

A. Well, we've taken very seriously things — as I've said, we're not going to just sit here and hold still. We're trying to work with our allies, and we've been successful in part, with regard to cooperation and intelligence to working with our allies, and that cooperation between our countries, we were able to abort 128 planned terrorist attacks throughout the world.

And we're continuing to try and get more support now for action that would be appropriate in view of the greater threats that are being uttered of terrorist activities. And right now, why can't those other Americans who've committed no crime against anyone, why can't they walk out of here with us?

Attacks on Critics
Q. Mr. President, I'm David Corcoran from the Record of Hackensack, N.J. A personal question, if I may, I think Americans overwhelmingly regard you as a nice guy, and yet in your talk today and in talks around the country you have denounced your critics and liberals and the previous Administration in language that I think is unusually harsh for a President in the sixth year of what's overwhelmingly considered to be a very successful Administration. Can you tell us, sir, why at this stage of your Presidency you find it necessary to engage in such attacks?

A. Well, now, my quoting of Bill Buckley and his line, is that what I'm saying is that I don't think that I often quote him because he uses too big a word, but I didn't think that was harsh. My question, can you tell me, sir, why at this stage of your Presidency you find it necessary to engage in such attacks?

Back in the beginning of our economic program that started this recovery, I was aware that my critics had named the plan Reaganomics, and I knew I was a success when they stopped calling it that.

Where have I been so — I don't think I've been all that harsh. Q. Well, sir, would you say then that your remarks about liberals and your critics in the media are just a normal part of the ongoing dialogue and exchange in the marketplace of ideas?

blood of terrorism. Perhaps without so much publicity terrorist acts might diminish in scope and in number. Would you care to comment, please, on how well or how poorly you think the American media have covered terrorist acts up to this point?

A. I know there's talk about publicity and so forth, and I know they strive for it. On the other hand, just trying to present that doesn't happen, keeping quiet about it, isn't going to end it. I think we all — and by all I mean that we in our country plus our friends and allies throughout the free world — have got to set down standards and make it plain that there will be retaliation and that terrorism cannot succeed. And thus part of our policy is that we will never pay off terrorists because that only encourages more of it.

I think the only time that I ever wondered about the media was in the terrorist kidnapping of a plane in Beirut, and then when Nabih Berrit took away from the original hijackers our people and held them and then started negotiating for their release.

I did wonder why some of the press that was present, when they could come in and out and go back to their hotels at night and then meet with Nabih Berrit the next day and there he sat, flanked by their fellow Americans who were prisoners, kidnap victims. Even though Nabih had been the man who hijacked the plane, he hijacked it from the hijackers.

And I wondered why at some time someone didn't say: "We are Americans, we've committed no crime or anything, we're going when this press conference is over, be able to walk out of here and go where we want to go. Why can't those other Americans who've committed no crime against anyone, why can't they walk out of here with us?"

And I just — I would have liked to have seen the look on his face on the TV news program if someone had asked him to hold them and then the conference is over, be able to walk out of here and go where we want to go. Why can't those other Americans who've committed no crime against anyone, why can't they walk out of here with us?

Q. Can you indicate if it might be Mr. Qaddafi?

A. Let us say he is definitely a suspect.

Q. Thank you.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. President. We will have questions from the floor. Let me remind you that members only will ask questions and please state clearly your name and your newspaper affiliation. And that not only the others in the hall but the President can understand who you are.

And I'll recognize the questioners, and I recognize Dick Smysler, Dick Marcos, President.

representative that was meeting with him quite consistently. Our only problem was that we did during that entire time — was to try and see that the Philippines, which historically the Filipino people have been our close friends, that this did not degenerate into civil war. And when he himself publicly announced he refused to order an army to fight, we were very pleased with that, and I thought it was very worthy of him that he did that.

And this was all. We just wanted to see that there would be no civil war, and we respect his right to his rightness to leave the island. But, as far as we knew, he was aware that his destination when he left the palace was Clark Field.

Coverage of Fighting

Q. Bill Ketter, from The Patriot Ledger in Quincy, Mass. Mr. President, as you know, our members of A.S.N.E. and the press in general were concerned when the press was excluded from the Grenada exercise sometime ago. After that we worked out this situation with the Defense Department when we had these ethics pools, where reporters would be able to go with the military on these exercises. And recently, in the Libyan exer-

Chairman: Over here on my left. Q. Heath Meriwether with The

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