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ON PAGE 9

STRATEGIC REVIEW
SUMMER 1984

U.S. COVERT ACTION: POLIC
OR POLICY HEDGE?

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IN BRIEF

The hotly debated issue of U.S. covert action in Nicaragua must be viewed against the background of similar U.S. engagements in Angola and Afghanistan. In all those cases, covert action has emerged not as an instrument addressed to clear objectives of policy, but in effect as a substitute for policy itself. Not only does preoccupation with the issue distract from a substantive understanding of the U.S. stakes in the various arenas, but the lack of clearly defined and purposeful U.S. policy militates against the very effectiveness of the covert operations: it engenders "no-win" perspectives at the policy level and fails to marshal the needed public and Congressional support. It is essential for any U.S. Administration to present covert action, in concert with other tools, as integrated parts of an explicit, comprehensive policy and success-oriented plan.

Today in Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua, to mention only the most prominent arenas, thousands of ordinary people are volunteers in irregular wars against the Soviet Army or Soviet-supported regimes. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s anti-Western causes attracted recruits throughout the Third World, the 1980s have emerged as the decade of guerrillas who fight against communist regimes and who, if victorious, would give their countries a pro-Western orientation. The movements in these and other countries represent the responses of peoples subjugated by the Soviet Bloc's major conquests of the 1970s. They are threatening to undo the Soviet Union's most important accomplishments since World War II: the acquisition of strategic promontories in relation to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Subcontinent, the Cape of Good Hope and the Panama Canal. Hence the outcomes of these popular wars of national liberation are of substantial interest to the United States.

Unfortunately discussions of this interest, in both the Executive and Legislative Branches of the U.S. Government, have been unenlightening. Sad to say, these discussions have betrayed no really concerted intention, never mind plans, by the U.S. Government to break the Soviet Union's newly gained and locally contested holds on these strategic crossroads of the world. Worse yet, opinion among the public and in the Congress has been badly distracted from the true substance of these conflicts.

A major reason for this distraction is that the

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debate has fastened on basically only one among the many instruments of policy available to the United States: covert action. This focus, in turn, is the consequence of a broad disposition in the U.S. Government to embrace covert action not only as a "safe" option—something between diplomacy and sending in the Marines—but in effect as a substitute for policy itself, while thus avoiding or deferring a clear policy choice.

Experience provides some sharp lessons in this respect. Covert action, when it has been successful, has not been an option chosen *in lieu of* diplomatic or military efforts. Rather, covert action makes sense only as a *calculated addition* to diplomatic and economic efforts—and only if it is *backed by the will to use overt military force if need be.* What is argued below is that in two of the three major armed struggles in the world today—Angola and Afghanistan—the United States' employment of covert action has cloaked the unwillingness or inability by American decisionmakers to formulate a self-consistent policy: that is, the thoughtful thread connecting between what we as a nation want and what we do. And this process is being repeated with respect to the immediate arena of Nicaragua today.

The Case of Angola

In 1974, the United States' response to the Soviet-Cuban intervention into the Angolan civil war in behalf of the communist-dominated MPLA of Agostinho Neto was to ask the Central Intelligence Agency to supply some arms and advisers to the other two factions in the conflict, primarily Holden Roberto's FNLA and, to a lesser extent, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA. This aid was on a scale vastly inferior to that invested by the Soviet Union and its surrogates. The conflict was decided, at least for a decade, by some 20,000 Cuban troops in Angola, as well as by the passage of the Clark Amendment in the U.S. Senate that prohibited the expenditure of covert funds for actions in Angola.

The Clark Amendment did not prohibit the expenditure of *overt* funds for the non-communist Angolans. Yet, neither the Ford Administration nor its successors have tried to argue before Congress that, because the victory of Jonas Savimbi over the Soviet coalition is both in the United States' interest and morally preferable to its alternative, a certain amount of funds, and perhaps a treaty, ought to back the United States' resolve to take *whatever* political, economic or military measures might be necessary for Savimbi to succeed. Congress never rejected such an argument because it was never made. Instead, the Congress was, and continues to be, faced simply with the question: shall the United States support covert action in Angola?

By the time the Clark Amendment came to a vote, the United States, through the CIA, had already been active in Angola for some months. The forces supported by us, badly outmatched, were in retreat. At that point, President Ford wanted authority to undertake more in Angola, but he was unwilling to state his case openly. This reticence implied that the Administration was unsure about both the effectiveness and the moral legitimacy of the requested authority for additional measures. Senator Clark charged that the covert action had failed and that continuing it might lead to deeper involvement in a moral and material quagmire. The Administration did not respond with a logical and comprehensive brief of U.S. interests at stake in Angola and what would be required to safeguard those interests. Hence Angola was abandoned. It should be noted, however, that inasmuch as Jonas Savimbi has done very well on his own since then, the issue is not merely historical.

Response to Afghanistan

A very different situation elsewhere illuminates the same problem. Soon after the Soviet Army drove into Afghanistan in December 1979, Senator Birch Bayh, then Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, revealed publicly that the United States was supplying covert assistance to the Mujahedeen, the freedom-fighters resisting the Soviet occupation. There was no outcry then from the American public against this U.S. assistance, nor has there been since. Quite the contrary: four years later, 67 Senators are cosponsoring a resolution which declares that the U.S. Government should give effective material assistance to the Afghan freedom-fighters—and that it is wrong to give them enough to fight and die, but not enough to prevail. It is worth noting that this resolution was not inspired by "hawks" within the Executive Branch, but rather by a Vietnam veteran working through the office of liberal Democratic Senator Paul Tsongas.

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The only opposition to the resolution has come essentially from the CIA and the Department of State. These agencies do not dispute the Mujahedeen's claims that, although they are winning most of the battles, the Soviets are winning the war by exacting a three-to-one ratio of casualties from the resistance and by depopulating the countryside (thus "draining the pond in which the resistance swims"). Nevertheless the agencies argue that any substantial increase in material assistance to the Afghan resistance, e.g., the provision of effective anti-aircraft weapons, would be harmful because the Soviets, frustrated, would turn on Pakistan. Besides, the argument runs, a heavier flow of arms into Afghanistan would make it more difficult for the Pakistanis to sustain their denial to the Soviets that they are taking sides in the Afghan war. The United States would then be forced to protect Pakistan against Soviet reprisals. Hence the Afghan freedom-fighters should not be provided with the extent of covert assistance that could incite an overt Soviet move, which we could only counter with a massive, overt commitment.

This argument is abjectly flawed. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, they stopped at the Khyber Pass—not so much out of modesty or fear of the Pakistani Army, but because they believed that an impingement upon Pakistan would risk war with the United States. Moreover, the Soviets are under no illusion whatever about the fact that such aid as reaches the Afghan resistance comes via the two million Afghans now on the Pakistani side of the border. No doubt the Pakistani Government derives some comfort from its argument that it is wholly uninvolved in military assistance to the Afghans. But it knows very well that its security lies in the tacit understanding that it is protected by the United States.

Yet, if the United States is not willing to commit itself to the ultimate protection of Pakistan against a Soviet invasion, why consider *any* assistance at all to the Afghans? If the goal of such assistance is not the eventual end to the Soviet occupation—if instead it is assumed that the Soviet strategy of attrition will ultimately succeed—then why not spare the Afghan people a protracted blood-letting? In that case, Afghanistan's smoother transformation into a Soviet Socialist Republic would at least leave millions of Afghans alive to fight again another day.

But could it be that the real purpose behind the nourishing of the Afghan resistance does not turn so much on the good of the Afghans themselves? Could there be a "larger Western interest" in keeping some 150,000 Soviet troops "bogged down" for a decade or so? No, not only would such cynicism be contrary to the very values that we project to the world, but it would mask arrant naivete. The West would gain little by providing one-tenth of the Soviet ground forces with live-fire training exercises every year.

All this aside, one looks in vain for a substantive basis to the arguments concerning Afghanistan that have so far emanated from the Executive Branch. Occasionally, a high official will admit to this paucity of fundamental policy, but he will then try to turn the question (and the onus) around: would Congress be ready to accept the possible (overt) consequences of a stepped-up (covert) assistance to the Afghan freedom-fighters? The implication therefore is that, on the assumption that the nation as a whole is not prepared to face up to the risks of purposeful policy, the Government is relieved of the task of formulating it. Whether that assumption is valid or not in the specific case (and the U.S. public response to the U.S. move in Grenada certainly does not bear it out), the leadership of a democracy hardly is exercising its mandate by an *anticipatory* deference to the mood of a public that it is supposed to lead. Meanwhile, what is the purpose of covert action—beyond perhaps "harrassing" or "inconveniencing" the outposts of expanding Soviet power?

It should be stressed that very rarely is the argument for limiting covert action to quiet failures and inconsequential successes made as clearly and honestly as it has been represented above. Sadly, the very way U.S. foreign policy is formulated militates against such clarity. A variety of officials within the White House, the Department of State and the Department of Defense, not to mention their respective allies in the Congress, carry into the policymaking process their own preferences and phobias, perhaps not so much concerning overall policy as about individual measures to be taken. The overall course of the United States' actions, then, is the *resultant* (in the geometric sense) of innumerable pushes and pulls over specific policy measures and actions. This way of doing business, of course, is the antithesis of policy.

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Precisely for this reason, covert action tends to be used as a convenient substitute for policy—or, rather, as a vehicle forced to carry the full, surrogate burden of commitments that the U.S. Government has been unable or unwilling to formulate. It lends itself to the postponement of hard questions about policy. Hence, not by design but by the logic of the situation, covert action can become the medium for institutionalizing indecisiveness and accepting defeat.

Nicaragua: The Stakes of Conflict

Let us now turn to our immediate case: the civil war between Nicaragua's Sandinista government and its democratic opponents, the so-called Contras. Should the United States help the Contras, for what purpose and to what extent?

The area between the Rio Grande and the Panama Canal clearly is the one global region the control of which by the Soviet Union would prove most menacing to the United States. The astuteness of the Kissinger Commission's Report and the documents captured in the invasion of Grenada were not really needed to reveal the fact that the Soviets are making a concerted effort to push their power and influence into the region. The victory of the Sandinistas, long-time disciplined members of the Nicaraguan Communist Party and international communist organizations, was managed directly from Havana. The Soviets and their Cuban allies took this victory as a sign that nearby countries were ripe for similar campaigns.

The Sandinistas are now receiving Soviet arms at the rate of 15,000 tons per year—the same rate at which Cuba was being supplied in the 1970s. Nicaragua today is host to specialists from throughout the Soviet Union's international coalition. East Germans are setting up systems for internal security and population control. The PLO is training Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Guatemalans and Costa Ricans in the specialities perfected in Israeli marketplaces, airports and Olympic quarters. Vietnamese soldiers bring the lessons and the spoils of their victory over the United States to instruct Central American recruits in long-range patrolling. The Cubans train the conventional armed forces and supervise every ministry. Libyans and Bulgarians carry out special logistics and construction. The Soviets direct the enterprise and reap the geopolitical benefits.

The division of labor in Nicaragua is the same that has been instituted everywhere the Soviets have taken hold—from tiny Grenada to Ethiopia and Angola. In Central America, however, the potential geopolitical harvest is great, indeed. If the Soviet sphere of influence were to advance to Mexico's southern border, Mexican elites would be less likely to expose themselves to danger by opposing this great new anti-Gringo force, and more likely to ally themselves with it. At least this seems to be the Soviet Union's expectation.

There is no need here to describe how a hostile southern border would hamstring the United States in its ability to exercise its global commitments. Because Cuba is now a well-defended base for Soviet submarines and aircraft, in any future war our logistic support of overseas commitments already is certain to be incomparably more difficult than it was in the worst days of World War II. If, in addition, the United States were to face a hostile southern border, the resupply of overseas allies would become prohibitively difficult. Moreover, in those circumstances, our overseas commitments would simply drop down in our list of priorities.

Nor need we dwell here on the scenario of a twilight struggle against Latin terrorists in an American Southwest swollen by refugees, and on the social consequences of such a struggle. Let us simply note the conclusion of the Kissinger Commission to the effect that relatively little stands in the way of the Soviet drive to isolate the United States in its own hemisphere—and that Nicaragua is the continental spearhead of that drive.

The Evolution of Covert Action Against Nicaragua

Given the clarity and seriousness of the Central American problem, it is remarkable not only that the United States lacks an agreed-upon policy for dealing with it, but also that policymakers are not debating alternative policies and their consequences. Instead they are debating covert action. Let us see how this preoccupation developed.

The Carter Administration openly welcomed the Sandinistas' seizure of power in Managua in 1979 and channeled to the new regime more aid in a year than the United States had given to the previous government in a decade. Clearly the Carter Administration officials believed

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either that the Marxist Sandinistas were men of good will who would not lend themselves to the role of Soviet surrogates, or that they could be bribed or charmed away from any inclination toward such a role, or that the unarmed non-Marxists in the governing junta might somehow restrain their armed comrades. Within several months, however, the Carter Administration had to admit that its hopes were not well founded. It had to recognize that the Sandinistas were instituting classic communist measures to control the population, such as people's courts, rationing and a pervasive secret police, and that Nicaraguan society was being rapidly militarized with the help of the Soviet Bloc. The suppression of the few Trotskyites in the country suggested to those even slightly acquainted with the workings of the communist world that the Sandinista regime was going to be an orthodox disciple of Moscow to a fault.

The Carter Administration did not instantly abandon all its illusions in the face of facts. For FY 1980, for example, it obtained from the Congress an additional $75 million in aid, ostensibly for the private sector in Nicaragua. Yet, at the same time, in December 1979 President Carter reported to the Congress that he had begun a covert action program against Nicaragua.

It is important to note why President Carter acted as he did. His decision was *not* aimed at combating the Sandinistas' attempts to destabilize neighboring countries, because at that time those efforts had not yet begun. The Carter Administration, in its early response to the Sandinista regime, demonstrated its willingness to countenance the establishment of a government in Managua professing a strong Marxist orientation. Yet, by the summer and fall of 1979 even the Carter Administration recognized that the United States could not abide the prospect of Nicaragua ruled on the Soviet model and allied with the Soviet Union—precisely because such a regime would inevitably make war upon its neighbors. Therefore, it decided to take steps to alter the Nicaraguan Government's totalitarianism and/or its alliance with the Soviet Union.

Although the Carter Administration did not settle on a particular strategy for effecting these changes—and while it continued to do its best to stay on friendly terms with the Sandinistas, hoping for the best—it began political efforts aimed at propping up the opposition in Nicaragua and to create the infrastructure for paramilitary action. At its inception, then, covert action was a mechanism that enabled a new policy option to arise as the Administration's illusions disintegrated.

By 1980 the Sandinistas were bearing out President Carter's worst fears by enabling their longtime allies, the Salvadoran communists, to mount a serious military challenge to their government. Moreover the Sandinistas' repression drove thousands of Nicaraguans to seek help. Hence by 1980 both dissident Nicaraguans and Nicaragua's neighbors were asking for U.S. assistance against the Sandinistas. Stories soon began to appear in the press about Americans and Argentinians aiding the counterrevolutionaries—the "Contras."

Choices for the Reagan Administration

The Reagan Administration inherited its predecessor's problems and its program of help to the Contras, both of which had grown. By late 1981 the new Administration's judgment with respect both to the problem and to the solution was summed up by Thomas Enders, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs: Do unto Nicaragua what Nicaragua is trying to do to El Salvador. The Reagan Administration's aims were the same as those of the Carter Administration: to foster pluralism in Nicaragua both for its own sake and as the surest safeguard against the Sandinistas' proclivity for fomenting regional conflict. By this time, however, there was no more room for hope that the Sandinistas might be bribed away from their objectives or that they would allow themselves to be influenced by their more moderate supporters.

The Sandinistas had dispelled whatever doubts might have remained about their intentions. Their army (25,000 regulars, 50,000 militia) was on its way to becoming larger than those of the rest of Central America combined. The command, control and logistical structure for the war in El Salvador was operating openly in Managua. The democratic allies who had given the Sandinistas the veneer of pluralism during the revolution had been cast off. Every vestige of independent social activity, from the church to private business, had been restricted and harassed. Thousands of Miskito Indians, their villages burned, had been massacred for refusing to move into concentration camps, and the remainder took to the swamps to fight back.

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Meanwhile, the Contras had swollen to a few thousand men in Honduras and Costa Rica. In late 1981 the Contras began to give serious battle to the Sandinista militia.

Logically, by that time any remaining foundation for the Carter Administration's original policy toward the Sandinistas had crumbled. Nonetheless, powerful groups in the Executive and Legislative Branches began to oppose strenuously and publicly any support of the Contras. By and large they did not challenge the assessment of the nature of the regime in Managua and of its dangerous implications. Nevertheless, they charged, and have continued to charge, that U.S. support of the Contras is fundamentally wrong because it forecloses the option of negotiations. The Administration has countered by claiming that support of covert action is essential if there is to be any hope of negotiations.

Covert Action and "Negotiations"

Paradoxically, the U.S. policy argument has thus centered on whether the "forceful option" would or would not help achieve the goals of the original "friendly option." Not surprisingly, the argument has been unenlightening. Perhaps the most confusing part of the debate has been the stress on "negotiations" with the Sandinistas. Nearly everyone seems to favor them, but few specify the objectives that negotiations might achieve and the incentives involved. Let us see why.

The Sandinistas view themselves as the local chapter of a worldwide communist coalition led by the Soviet Union, which helped them into power, sustains them and holds out to them the wherewithal for the achievement of their regional ambitions. No one seriously suggests that there exists a set of words that, if presented to the Sandinistas, would convince them to put at risk their membership in the Soviet coalition or their control over their people. No advocate of negotiations suggests that the Sandinista leaders would take any set of earthly goods in exchange for assured control of the Nicaraguan people and visible progress in their regional offensive.

What, then, could negotiations be about? Above all, the Sandinistas desire a pledge that the United States will not invade, nor assist Nicaraguans who challenge their control of the country. "We ask only that you respect our sovereignty," they say. In return, they are willing to consider doing anything—so long as it would not compromise their control of the country and their alliance with the Soviets. Specifically, they have broadly hinted that they would exchange the cessation of their support of the war in El Salvador for the United States' cessation of its support of the Contras.

If such an agreement could be worked out, inspectors might well certify that Salvadoran commanders moved out of their villas and command posts in Managua on the way to Cuba, that the arms traffic ceased, and that a number of Salvadoran insurgents trooped back to their Nicaraguan sanctuary. But each of these moves could easily be reversed after a tactical pause because the basic infrastructure of command and professional cadres for the insurgency in El Salvador would still be there, ready for reassembly and reactivation. On the other hand, the Contras are not likely to survive the withdrawal of U.S. aid as a fighting force. Most of the Contras are not professional fighters, but rather ordinary people who will seek out ordinary lives elsewhere once they become convinced of the futility—let alone the betrayal—of the cause of freedom for their country. In short, they will follow the example of the Cuban survivors of the Bay of Pigs before them and disperse into exile.

Negotiations might also guarantee that elections are held in Nicaragua. Elections are also held in East Germany, which helped draw up Nicaragua's laws on elections and on political parties—laws which provide essentially that candidates from non-Sandinista parties must be acceptable to the Sandinistas and may not criticize them.

In sum, those who propose negotiations with the Sandinistas must be willing to provide brutal incentives for the latter to jeopardize the power that they have seized at the cost of many lives in a bitter conflict and to abandon an ideology that forbids the relinquishment of that power. Just as important, advocates of negotiations must provide for the continuation-in-being of those brutal incentives after the agreement is concluded. In innumerable discussions among American policymakers, support for the Contras has been promoted as the violent incentive necessary to bring the Sandinistas to the negotiating table. Yet, such discussions rarely take into account that those concessions that the United States really wants are the ones that the Sandinistas cannot afford to yield,

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while the central concessions the Sandinistas desire would remove our ability to press them for any concessions at all.

Covert Action and "Containment"

It has been suggested that how the Sandinistas rule 2.5 million Nicaraguans is not the affair of the United States—so long as they halt their efforts to destabilize their neighbors. Common sense and experience suggest, however, that a passive containment of a well-entrenched, Soviet-allied Sandinista regime would be futile. In this respect the Kissinger Commission's Report is worth citing at length:

> ...There would be little incentive for the Sandinistas to act responsibly, even over a period of time, and much inducement to escalate their efforts to subvert Nicaragua's neighbors. To contain the export of revolution would require a level of vigilance and sustained effort that would be difficult for Nicaragua's neighbors and even for the United States. A fully militarized and equipped Nicaragua, with excellent intelligence and command and control organizations, would weigh heavily on the neighboring countries of the region.... We would then face the prospect, over time, of the collapse of the other countries of Central America, bringing with it the specter of Marxist domination of the entire region and thus the danger of a larger war.

According to the Commission, only "the involvement of U.S. forces as surrogate policemen" on a repeated basis would prevent the projected domino-pattern. A corollary conclusion must be that mere covert operations cannot aspire to the task.

The Kissinger Commission did not consider the suggestion by Secretary of State Alexander Haig in 1981 that the United States deal with the problem of Central America by "going to the source." That can mean facing the Sandinistas with the choice of ceasing the export of revolution or being invaded by the United States. It can also mean facing Cuba with the same choice. Moreover, since the ultimate "source" of the problem is the Soviet Union, the silence with respect to Secretary Haig's suggestion is understandable.

The Emerging Scenario

The political discussion in the United States has obscured the fact that the military struggle between the Contras and the Sandinistas will be won by one side or the other. In two-sided wars, nothing so harms the interests of third parties as indecisiveness. If the Sandinistas are to win, the United States will have committed a profound mistake in aiding the Contras at all. A victory over the "traitors backed by the colossus to the North" will have the effect of entrenching and emboldening the Sandinista regime, just as Fidel Castro's victory in the Bay of Pigs led to the consolidation of his regime and the emergence of Cuba into the powerful Soviet outpost that it is today. If it is the objective of the United States to prevent the establishment of "another Cuba" on the hemispheric mainland, then there is ample historical precedent for how *not* to pursue that goal.

The officialdom in Washington seems no better prepared for a victory by the Contras. In briefings of the Congress, Executive Branch officials have evinced trepidation at the prospect of either the imminent victory *or* defeat of the Contras, as if once formed they could stay in place forever or disappear without consequences. Failure to deal forthrightly with the basic goals of the covert operation has engendered innumerable quarrels within and among the Legislative and Executive Branches, most recently over the mining of Nicaragua's harbors.

The emerging scenario of the covert operation itself calls for decisiveness. By early 1984 the Contras commanded almost 20,000 men under three commands: the Miskito Indians in the north, the forces of Eden Pastora in the southwest, and the National Democratic force of Adolfo Calero in the northwest. Apparently the expansion of these forces is limited only by the availability of weapons. The Contras have no difficulty gathering recruits or intelligence: a battalion of Sandinista militiamen even defected to the Contras with their weapons. The Contras' number, out of a Nicaraguan population of 2.5 million, is all the more impressive when compared to the number of communist guerrillas in El Salvador: 8,000 in a population of 5 million.

The Contras now roam more or less freely in the least populated parts of Nicaragua, where they encounter only the Sandinista militia. But they do not now command the logistics to reach, or the heavy weapons to attack, the regular

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Nicaraguan Army in the Managua area. The regime, for its part, has avoided risking the regulars' morale and allegiance by throwing them into the fight. The Sandinistas' strategy generally seems to be to expose themselves as little as possible while convincing the Nicaraguan people that the Contras' international supporters will abandon them. Hence, both sides consider the news about debates in the U.S. Congress more important indicators of the struggle than body-counts. The key political prize in this, as in other insurgencies, is hope. Whichever side can convince first its own fighters, and then the people-at-large, that it will win in the longer run gains a potentially decisive advantage.

The Lessons

And here we come to the overarching lesson explicit in the three case studies of U.S. covert action that we have considered. In a democracy there is no substitute for fully articulated, vigorously defended policy. Good intentions, eloquent declarations, diplomatic skills, covert action, military force—these are *elements* of policy. Yet, they must be understood and practiced together as integrated parts of a success-oriented plan. Such a plan is essential to obtaining agreement from the Congress and the public for any expenditures, sacrifices or risks.

The first step in such a plan is to decide and to define what we want to achieve. In all three of the cases, the victory of the anti-Soviet forces is so preferable to its alternative, both in terms of our interests and from a moral standpoint, that U.S. officials should have no difficulty in espousing it publicly. In a democracy, no action, however covert, ought to be undertaken unless, if need be, it can be confidently defended in public. A successful public defense requires a clear exposition of the ends to be achieved, of the means to be employed and of why those means are likely to be effective. Proponents and opponents of the U.S. involvement in these areas, never mind those who take a neutral stance, ask the same question: Are the measures being urged by the U.S. Administration reasonably likely to bring about the desired results? That question deserves an answer.

Although some aspects of the U.S. involvement in these regions must remain unacknowledged out of respect for the needs of third parties and in order not to identify targets for the enemies, nevertheless the reasoning that guides our involvement must be much more overt and explicit than it has been heretofore. In the case of Central America for example, would it be useful for us to attempt to contain the Sandinista regime or to try to change its nature? Which of the contenders for power in Nicaragua is the legitimate representative of the Nicaraguan people? Is it really possible to prevent the Sandinistas, and the coalition of Soviet auxiliaries of which they are part, from expanding over Central America without defeating them militarily? Can and should the battle be carried by the Contras or, if necessary, by American troops? Does it make sense to will a set of ends without committing means reasonably calculated to achieve them?

As we have applied pressures and our opponents have countered them, and as our efforts have become better known, it has become imperative to explain to ourselves what we have done and what we are ultimately willing to do in order to achieve our objectives. Thus far, the Administration—but not the President—has tended to frame its public position in terms of adherence to restrictions in the scope of covert action. But *any* activity in these areas, small or large, overt or covert, can only be justified by the reasonable expectation of ultimate success. To attempt to justify activities in any other terms invites both substantive failure and popular rejection.

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