

MACNEIL-LEHRER REPORT
3 May 1983

MACNEIL: Good evening. The House Intelligence Committee resisting strong Reagan administration pressure today voted to ban U.S. covert military activities in or against Nicaragua. The vote in the 14-man committee was nine Democrats for and five Republicans against the bill which extends the force of the Boland amendment passed by Congress last December. That banned the use of U.S. funds to back efforts to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The administration has since been accused of breaking that law through CIA backing for anti-Sandinista rebels operating from Honduras. The administration says it is only trying to stop Nicaragua from sending arms to rebels in El Salvador. Today's committee action gave the administration an alternative: \$80 million for friendly governments in Central America to stop such arms flow. The bill still has to pass the full House and the Senate. While the committee was deliberating today, Nicaragua claimed that some 1,200 rebels had launched what it called a massive new invasion from Honduras. Tonight: tying the president's hands in Nicaragua. Jim?

LEHRER: Robin, one of the nine Intelligence Committee members who voted to tie those hands was Congressman Norman Mineta, Democrat of California. Congressman Mineta recently visited Central America at the invitation of the administration. Congressman, why did you vote the way you did? MINETA: Well, first of all, the funds that were given to the administration for the covert operation was ostensibly for the interdiction of the arms supply line going from Nicaragua to El Salvador, and in Congress in December, they passed the Boland amendment to prohibit the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government or to provoke war between El Salvador and Honduras, and I just felt that the administration....

LEHRER: Nicaragua--you mean Nicaragua now. MINETA: Between Nicaragua and Honduras. I'm sorry. And I just felt the administration had gone beyond the Boland amendment, and I think the bill today does two things. First of all, it cuts off the covert funding and it says let us look at this whole issue whether or not we want to have assistance to those friendly foreign countries in Central America to interdict on this arms supply line in an open, public policy manner.

LEHRER: So there's no question in your mind that the covert actions going beyond trying to interdict those arms supply lines.... MINETA: In my estimation, I think the administration in this recent trip that I took with our fine colleague Bill Young has, didn't show, at least to me, the, any shred of evidence that they were within their current goals or policies.

LEHRER: Did you see evidence to the contrary, that they were actually involved in trying to overthrow the Sandinista government? MINETA: I think it's there, and again, that's just open to interpretation. I am not convinced that what we were financing there was strictly for interdiction of arms supply, and I think that the administration was beyond the Boland amendment.

LEHRER: What did you see that made you think that? MINETA: Well, first of all they had not been able to show for, at least to satisfy me, that there's been an interdiction of that arms supply line or that there's been one round of ammunition or one pound of high explosives that they've interdicted in the length of time of this covert operation.