

cc Stephen Rosenfall, W&P Post

Senator David F. Durenberger  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C.

4/22/84

Dear Senator Durenberger,

This letter is prompted by Charles Babcock's story in today's Post.

Please excuse the appearance of this letter. I am aging, unwell and cannot sit squarely before the typewriter.

Based on personal experience as a Latin American expert in World War II and personal observations of a long life I believe that our "troubles" in Central America, as reported in all the media, lack an overview and an evaluation of all the possible consequences of what we do and do not do.

It is a basic and serious error to believe, pretend or act as though anything this country does (or is done in its name) has consequences that are limited to El Salvador or Nicaragua. All peoples and governments are influenced, most of all in Latin America.

Prior to the organizational meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco the western hemisphere nations had their own meeting in Chapultepec, Mexico. In preparation for the Chapultepec meeting a lengthy and detailed paper on the Argentine dictatorship, which was clearly fascist and pro-Nazi, was prepared for Nelson Rockefeller's use. He was then an undersecretary or assistant secretary of State. I was in charge of the economic section of that study. Rockefeller decided not to use this study and not to oppose the admission of the Argentine dictatorship.

After nothing was done to compel Rockefeller to adhere to policy at Chapultepec it was decided to update this study and use it at San Francisco to bar the Argentine dictatorship from the UN. I was placed in charge of the military section and began work on it before giving the entire project any thought. After thinking about it I decided that this was bad policy, would be hurtful to our interests, that I could not in good conscience be part of it, and I asked to be relieved of my responsibilities and I was. What I saw and then thought was obvious is what happened. The United States was charged with "Yanqui Imperialism" throughout Latin America, and not only by the Communists.

Rockefeller's error was in supporting any government that was antiCommunist. He could have supported Hitler on this basis. State's subsequent error was in trying to undo what could not be undone. It was also an affront to those who followed our policy at Chapultepec. All we did was worsen a bad mistake.

At about the same time captured German and Italian records were crossing my desk. Among these was the letter to Mussolini from his ambassador in Nicaragua.

in which he reported Samoza's personal request that Mussolini write him about Mussolini's way, which Samoza wanted to follow. To the best of my knowledge, this self-description by that Samoza is still suppressed by the State Department. He, too, was as anti-Communist as Hitler or Mussolini. Thereafter the Samoza's were supported by the United States. This was no more than consistent with the fixing of their murderous dictatorship on Nicaragua by the United States.

In turn, this is consistent with a sad and long history of United States support for just about every right-wing dictatorship in Latin America, all proclaiming themselves as anti-Communist. And they all earned popular hatred, domestically and to a large degree internationally.

Although this United States policy was ideally suited to exploitation by the Communists, without that exploitation, the incredibly impoverished peoples of Latin America knew that the United States made possible and in some instances was responsible for their suffering and the denial of their natural and legitimate aspirations.

But policy did not change when efforts were made to overthrow these dictatorships. We fixed another dictatorship on Guatemala by overthrowing its elected government, which we called Communist when it wasn't. (In this we had the help of the Dominican dictator, Trujillo.) Efforts to ruin the Cuban economy under Castro gave him no alternative to turning to the USSR. After the end of the Dominican dictatorship and a democratic election the United States again intervened on the side of the military which abrogated the results of that election - in the name of anti-Communism. Now in Nicaragua and El Salvador the United States pursues the same counterproductive policies, the policies which so drastically limit the options of those who ended these dictatorships.

In school in the 1920s I was taught that Sandino was a "bandit." To most Nicaraguans he was more like their George Washington.

What the United States really needs most from these countries is not submission to United States policy but their friendship. The only way we can get their friendship is to earn it, by leaving them alone and by providing needed economic help without strings attached. It may take some time for them to go their own ways, but if we try to make them go our way, we drive them the opposite way. None of these peoples want to be dominated by any others, the United States, the USSR or Cuba. But the more we try to dominate them and to ruin their economies in that effort the more certain it becomes that they'll turn for help where they can get it, especially to the USSR and to Cuba.

The inevitable consequence of United States policy is to guarantee one extreme or the other throughout Latin America. It turns much of the rest of the world against us. In each country in which we intervene we create popular support for the regimes we do not like.

The mining of Nicaraguan harbors and the destruction of its energy deposits are worse than illegal and immoral. They are counterproductive. They also are merely the symptoms. The disease is bad policy.

In making these long-suffering people suffer even more we lose the real requirement of our real national security, their friendship.

We also preclude the emergence of any genuinely democratic systems.

The only possibility of non-Communist societies and governments in Latin America lies in permitting the opportunity for democracy to develop and emerge. The most certain means of preventing this is to drive these countries to seek the help they so urgently need as a result of our acts and policies from the USSR and Cuba.

The more the world is polarized the more it becomes essential to adopt and pursue policies that can succeed. Genuine anti-Communism requires a viable alternative, which dictatorships of the right are not and cannot be. It also requires people in intelligence who understand this and do not make it impossible.

Today's CIA is the clone of those who embraced all who said they were anti-Communist, those who so often were the disciples of Hitler and Mussolini or held similar beliefs. They are the dedicated wrong, sincere and genuine, without doubt, but quite wrong, as in the Guatemala overthrow, which created a new and repressive dictatorship.

The world is not as simple as they see it. How simple? Another story from the past.

When the CIA was first created democratic elements in the Paraguayan army made an unsuccessful effort to rid the country of the Morinigo dictatorship, with the successor to which the country is still saddled. There were two major parties, liberal and conservative, each known by a color, colorado, or red, and blanco, or white. The CIA turned out a report referring to the Colorado party as red. It actually was the conservative party. The whites were not red, either, but they were the possibility of an alternative to red or military dictatorship.

Change will not come easily or rapidly. It has no chance of coming at all without the formulation and pursuit of a realistic policy that makes it possible, and this possibility is remote as long as the kinds of minds responsible for the present catastrophic situation have any influence on policy or the "intelligence"

on which policy is based.

What this really means is that the Congress will have to be better informed and have sources of information outside the intelligence agencies.

My personal experience tells me that those who do not support wrong or bad policy have little chance of surviving, especially if they are proven to have been right.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg  
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# Reagan Assailed As Untrustworthy

## O'Neill Criticizes Foreign Policy

From News Services

House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) yesterday called President Reagan "untrustworthy" in foreign policy dealings with Democrats and said that in this year's campaign Reagan would have to answer for the deaths of U.S. Marines in Lebanon.

O'Neill's bitter attack on the president's integrity was his response to recent calls by the administration for an end to political squabbling over foreign policy.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) launched another attack on Reagan's foreign policy, saying U.S. military personnel in Central America are involved daily in situations that appear to be "in flagrant violation" of the War Powers Resolution.

O'Neill, asked in a radio interview if congressional Democrats were willing to work with Reagan on a bipartisan foreign policy, replied: "How do you have a foreign policy with a group of people who won't level with you?"

"As far as foreign policy is concerned, the president of the United States has been untrustworthy," he said on Mutual Broadcasting System's "Reporters' Roundup."

"We've tried to be bipartisan along the line," O'Neill said, noting that he had supported Reagan on sending Marines to Lebanon and had also mustered about 160 House Democrats. But, he said, "the Marines were there for a diplomatic purpose" and the administration "changed the purpose without notifying us."

O'Neill said Reagan accused him of "wanting to surrender" for calling for the withdrawal of all Marines from Lebanon, but "he had already agreed to bring them out."

The speaker said that the administration had not warned the Democrats in advance of the Grenada invasion and that the Democrats got resistance and evasion from administration officials when they sought information on the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, which he called "an act of terrorism."

On the question of foreign policy as a political issue this year, O'Neill said: "Yes, on Lebanon. Who is responsible for the death of those Marines over there? The president of the United States."

The speaker added: "The truth is that the policy of President Reagan as regards Lebanon was a disaster and he's responsible for the failure. There's no question that it will be an issue."

Kennedy's charge came in a letter to Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, released by the senator's of-

nice. The letter sought clarification of the current and future U.S. combat role in Central America.

"I look forward . . . to your assurances that the administration is not unilaterally taking America into war in Central America," the senator told Weinberger.

Pentagon officials said Weinberger, who is in California, had not received the letter.

Kennedy said there are "serious questions about whether U.S. military personnel in El Salvador and Honduras are being intentionally and systematically introduced into situations involving direct combat or other hostilities"—a situation that he said would require Reagan to report the incidents to Congress within 48 hours, as required by the War Powers Resolution.

The War Powers Resolution requires a report to Congress if American troops are introduced "into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances."

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# Covert War in Central America Troubles a Hill GOP Overseer

By Charles R. Babcock  
Washington Post Staff Writer

During the summer of 1975, David F. Durenberger, an executive for a St. Paul, Minn., company that did considerable business selling paints and plastics in Central America, received a letter from his 12-year-old son, who was spending part of the summer in El Salvador.

"He talked about the disparity between rich and poor, about a 250-pound cop with a machine gun," Durenberger recalled. "It's so obvious when you go through those countries. You'll see something, their version of a modern shopping center, and go off the edge of the parking lot and there's a ravine and people living on the side of a hill with no running water."

Durenberger, a Republican from Minnesota who was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1978 to complete the unexpired term of Democrat Hubert H. Humphrey, said his business experience in Central America during the 1970s made him a strong supporter of long-range economic aid as a solution to that region's turmoil.

But as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Durenberger has had to grapple for more than two years with troubling short-term proposals: the Reagan administration's covert war against the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

The recent exposure of the CIA's direct involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors has undercut congressional support for funding the secret war and raised new questions about the performance of the two congressional intelligence committees that were established to oversee the activities of the CIA.

Thus Durenberger finds himself being questioned about a secret war that isn't secret anymore. It is clear from a series of recent interviews that the moderate Republican has become increasingly frustrated by the administration's policy in Central America.

After opposing it earlier, he voted for funding the covert war for the first time last fall, but is trying to get Congress involved more directly in determining the policy. He mentions the "discomfort" he feels when Republican colleagues challenge his patriotism and that of others who ask questions about administration proposals.

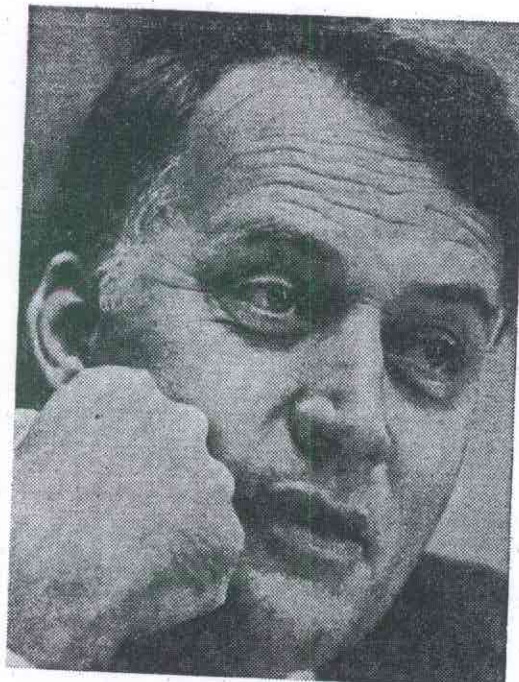
Durenberger said President Reagan believes he can easily rally public support for his Central-American policies.

"He says, 'All I've got to do is go on television. I don't worry about the American public, because I know if I go on television and tell them, like I did on Grenada, remember how I went and turned the whole thing around?' So if push comes to shove in Central America he'll just

go on television with his charts and pictures and have them eating out of his hand."

Dealing with the moral and pragmatic questions of attempting to oversee a secret war is more difficult from Durenberger's perspective. "When you put your objectives in the hands of someone else with a very different set of objectives and then hand him a rifle, you're just asking for it," he said.

Durenberger criticized U.N. Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick's statements that the United States should not unilaterally abide by international law while rivals flaunt it. "That's an eye for an eye. That's the Israeli way, the Libyan way, the Iranian way . . . The ends justify the means. That's a whole philosophy that America has disowned throughout our history," he said.



By James K.W. Atherton—The Washington Post  
Durenberger: "... looks like I've been on all sides of this thing."

He doesn't feel, though, that the administration is using the same "eye-for-an-eye" rationale in the covert war against Nicaragua.

"They are interdicting, trying to hold the land. Some people are dying. That can be justified as a civil war that would have happened anyway. And theoretically we aren't doing it just to kill people. We are doing it for a political objective, which is to get the Sandinistas to agree to the original goals of their revolution."

Durenberger said he went to the Senate with a background that included training as an Army counterintelligence specialist in the 1950s and training at a Catholic college "totally dedicated to fighting world communism."

But he opposed funding for the covert war at first because he felt that the people of Nicaragua would turn on the Sandinistas without outside help. "I felt the only thing that would keep the people from turning on them was for us to appear to be turning on the revolution and that is, in effect, what happened with the covert action."

He also acknowledges that a review of his record on Central America "looks like I've been on all sides of this thing."

As a newcomer to the Senate in 1979, he was one of the few Republicans to support President Carter's plan to send aid to Nicaragua. And though he opposed the covert funding in the Intelligence Committee's secret votes in the spring of 1982, he supported President Reagan's policies during his own reelection campaign that fall.

A year ago, he said, he was so concerned by the vague objectives of the covert operations that he went to see William P. Clark, then Reagan's national security affairs adviser, and warned the administration that he would propose ending the secret aid. He did so. But when the administration came up with a new "finding" to justify the program last September, Durenberger voted in favor of it for the first time.

He changed his mind, he said, because the program was already well under way. "So the question was really, can you manage it, now that the fat is in the fire. The adversity we are going to suffer in terms of strengthening the peoples' attitude against the *gringos* has already been suffered. We'd already been through the bad side. The question was, can you make anything good out of it and does it have a terminus? We pushed them off a very general 'finding' under which they could do just about anything and never have to prove they were successful."

Durenberger said he visited Costa Rica before agreeing to support the revised covert aid plan and talked with government and church leaders, as well as with Alfonso Robelo, one of the rebel leaders he knew from his days as a businessman in the region.

"I came back with a feeling we couldn't abandon an effort to make the Sandinistas adhere to the original revolution. Everyone supported it and didn't want to replace it with a dictatorship. They said, 'Whatever you're doing, you've got to keep it up.'"

With the bipartisan Kissinger commission working on long-range solutions, he said, "I figured we were on the right track as long as we kept control. And the way to keep control was to approve half as much money as they actually wanted and require them to come back in before they got any more money."

In retrospect, Durenberger said, the Intelligence Committee should have figured the CIA was directly supervising the mining of Nicaraguan harbors.

"All of our questions were always around, 'Are you sure you can control them?' It was, 'CIA, are you able to control this covert activity and all of its many parts, because we don't want it turned back on us. We don't want pictures in Managua of innocent civilians hanging by their thumbs from trees and contras [rebel forces] standing there laughing.'"

Durenberger recalls that most members of the Senate Intelligence Committee missed CIA Director William J. Casey's terse, one-sentence reference to mining Nicaraguan harbors at a secret March 8 meeting because they were too busy "jumping on" Casey and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who earlier had tried to go to the Appropriations Committee for approval of the covert war funding without first getting approval from the Intelligence Committee. "It was literal chaos," Durenberger said. "It was a zoo."

If the committee had been better informed, Durenberger said he is sure members would have asked questions about the mining operation. "We'd have said, 'What ports? What's the traffic load there? What countries do they represent?' If they were only eastern European, we might have let her go."

The problem was not so much the CIA supervision of the mining, he said, but that "the indiscriminate use of mining gives people around the world the opportunity to say Ronald Reagan is crazy. And it gives the Sandinistas the opportunity to stiff us out even further."

He said that if the committee had been asked for its judgment on the mining, "we could have netted out all that information and drawn a bottom line that said, 'If this word gets out or the first country [whose ship is hit] complains, you're doomed. So forget it. Forget it. Go on and do something else.'"

He said he still will support the covert aid package to keep the pressure on Nicaragua in hope that negotiations and long-term economic aid will solve the region's problems.

"It's a question of urgency," he said. "We have to elevate the realities down there from an East-West confrontation and fears of refugees and blind faith in the president. It is as urgent as the deficit. The country just is not aware there is a solution other than pull out, send the troops in, or screw around with covert actions."