

Senator Dave Durenberger
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

2/11/85

Dear Senator,

That you found time, with all there is at the beginning of a session and with your new responsibilities, for a further exchange of views, is gratifying and I thank you for it. In the month since you wrote I've thought of your letter often (I have three daily hours of therapy which gives me thinking time like I've ~~never~~ never had in my three score and ten plus!) and, on occasion, in connection with developments here and abroad. We want the same thing but we disagree on how it can come to pass.

During the presidential campaign, which I regard as disgraceful on both sides, with both sides failing the people, I've come to believe more and more that our founding fathers are the greatest group of political thinkers the world has known. I've gotten out an old copy of The Federalist Papers ~~have~~ ^{and} have begun to reread them. Aside from the great and profound political thought even some of the phrasing is felicitous and appropriate today in general and in our exchange in particular. I do hope that if your busy life allows any time for more than current reading you will do as I have done, reread this great work. I think you'll draw strength and wisdom and will perceive current topicality and applicability.

U.S. Nicaraguan policy inevitably involves those enormously abused words, "national security." Any and all U.S. policy inevitably also involved the traditional beliefs that made us great and free. Wherein does our real security need lie? What is our traditional applicable belief?

After much thought I've become convinced that externally the most important and most valuable and dependable national security interest we have is in the regard of others and their friendships, not bought but earned. Other peoples, whose governments come and go. They see, understand and evaluate as we do not when they consider our international policies and practises. With our relative sudden great wealth and strength we've come to consider little besides objectives and we've come to believe that what we want is right and how we get it is of no consequence. And almost daily there is evidence that the rest of the world does not agree with this. All the while we disregard what history tells us to expect.

You want to keep pressure on the Sandanistas, ostensibly to get them to first change their system and then see things more our way. I believe that this very pressure is, in your own terms, self-defeating and the one way certain not to achieve your (and my) objectives. Inevitably also it is the one way certain not to end the repressions to which you refer. History, particularly recent history, is absolutely clear on this. At the same time, most Nicaraguans remember their past while experiencing this pressure, suffering considerably at the same time, and to them almost anything is preferable to their past, for which they properly hold us responsible. They and dozens of our countries had and today have murderous governments for which the U.S. is directly responsible.

While we keep pressure on Nicaragua, what do we do about the many much more repressive Latin American dictatorships? No pressure there. How about South Africa and that incredible domestic tyranny? South Korea, which adds to all its terrible abuses assaults on Americans, including Members of Congress? And, of course, too many other governments. The whole world sees that we do nothing ~~to~~ about any of these terrible dictatorships, knows that our policies established and protects them, sees us helping them along with the mild rhetoric served up for domestic consumption, and abominates our policies.

What it boils down to is the economic systems involved. And to anti-Communist lip-service. Any tyrant who says he is anti-Communist is certain of U.S. support, no matter how great his repressions - even his murders of Americans, and I cite Chile as illustrative. The only real standard of our policy in these other countries is their economic systems and as long as they permit the means of production to be for personal profit there is no abuse of any nature or magnitude that offends the U.S. government and warrants any "pressure" from any, regardless of party.

None of our neighboring countries was ever rich and each of those in which we established or tolerated dictatorships was robbed blind. Today they lack the capital for meaningful development - more so when we destroy their basic facilities, as in destroying the Nicaraguan petroleum operation. Earlier, before the advent of these dictatorships, the few in those lands who were wealthy exported their wealth, and just about all of Latin America knows this. So there still was no capital, except when we moved in and took over and we, too, bled them. Bolivia would not be as impoverished had not the owners of the tin mines taken all the great wealth they provided abroad, themselves with it for high living. These people have no love for or faith in the Anacondas and United "ruits, based on long and painful experience.

I do not pretend that I have any solution to any of their problems but history provides answers to ours, both ways. How countries like Nicaragua can expect to be able to finance themselves I do not know after our Samozas bankrupted them. But the one thing that is certain is that they will seek help wherever they can get it. They are not going to roll over and permit another Samoza and they'll find, most of them, any alternative preferable. If this means no or less private ownership of the major means of production - and has U.S. policy permitted them any real alternative? they'll take that road. and we will have driven them to it.

Are we that unhappy with Yugoslavia, where we couldn't influence Tito when he went his own way, with popular support? Can we regard the Yugoslavs worse off today than before Tito? You can see no changes in Red China, where we could not assert the kind of pressure we apply to the small and weak, like Nicaragua?

There is no way we can undo our serious mistakes in Nicaragua, where our policy, in accord with basic American belief, should have been to leave them alone and try to be their friends. What would have happened without our immediate intercession we cannot know but I think it is obvious that we did not and now cannot succeed in the policy we followed and that the alternative of only leaving them alone, could not have been worse in selfish U.S. interest and might very well have served our interests better. Their interests we certainly have not served, save that any foreign pressure of any kind in any land tends to lead most people to support their governments. In Latin America, there is no land that would not prefer our friendship and what that can mean but there also is none that rids itself of a dictatorship only to accept our domination.

We've not learned from history, we pursue blindly the same self-defeating policies and our governments never understand that any policy based on fear and hatred is at its best self-defeating. Meanwhile, it is coming close to bankrupting us and whatever may be the attitude or policy of any supposedly friendly country, it is alienating the people of the world. If we pursue our present policies we will follow them to our own ruin and we will have done nothing to serve our national security and much to undermine it. I would much prefer for the rest of the world not to be able to see Afghanistan, Nicaragua and South Korea as much alike and us behaving as the USSR behaves.

I do not pretend to have answers but from what I've lived through and observed I am certain that policy must change, little as the prospect of this appears likely, that pressure will not succeed and never has, and that most of all we need friendships and they can be had only by being earned. Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg
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DAVE DJURENBERGER
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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 10, 1985

Mr. Harold Weisberg
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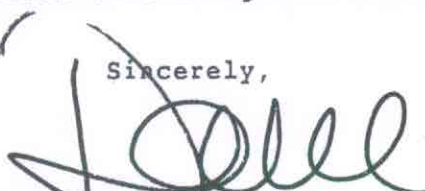
Dear Harold:

Just a brief note to thank you for your kind words concerning my opposition to continuing covert funding for the rebels in Nicaragua.

As I stated in The Washington Post interview, we must find some means other than covert assistance to keep up our pressure on the Sandinistas. Recent articles in The Washington Post, the Christian Science Monitor, and The Economist indicate that the repression has increased in Nicaragua since the November 4th elections. The State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs reports that there are 1,400 political prisoners in Nicaragua's jails. (The State Department properly distinguishes these people from the thousands of former members of Somoza's National Guard who are also imprisoned.) I think it is important that we in the United States recognize that a totalitarian system is gradually being erected by the Sandinistas.

So long as the word "intelligence" and "CIA" are associated with the Nicaraguan rebels, the issue will remain shifted from what it should be -- Sandinista repression -- to what the Sandinistas want it to be -- an American "secret war." Covert assistance to the rebels thus benefits neither the anti-Sandinista forces nor the CIA. I will therefore oppose further covert assistance, even though I continue to support many of those who have taken up arms against a regime that ignores the very promises that brought it victory five years ago.

Sincerely,



Dave Durenberger
United States Senator

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