

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
7/17/88

Mr. Kathryn Graham
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Mrs. Graham,

I hope you will find the time to read and give some thought to my enclosed letter to Ben Bradlee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold Weisberg".

Harold Weisberg

Mr. Ben Bradlee
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7/16/88

Dear Ben,

This past Wednesday, after reading what clearly was exclusively in our local papers, because by traditional news concepts this was important I phoned your foreign desk. I explained my reason for calling and was referred to John Goshko. First I read him what I quote below and then I gave him the background included in this story:

"Mr. (Ambassador) Melton, on Friday (the 8th), the day the delegation arrived, told the group before they entered bullet-proof American-made vans that would take them to Managua's largest hotel that 'the people here are amazingly friendly, when you figure we're here to overthrow their government.'"

Mr. Goshko had no questions, really made no comment until I asked him if he'd like me to mail the paper to him. Instead of saying he didn't want it, which was then apparent and soon became quite obvious, he said merely, "we're aware."

Do you ^{know} of any other official United States statement that our purpose and intent in Nicaragua is "to overthrow their government?"

Is suppression of this kind of information - in a society that can function properly only if well and accurately informed - your concept of good journalism or consistent with the great tradition so often boasted about?

Nicaragua expelled Ambassador Melton who then and later before the Senate intelligence committee professed ignorance of the reason and denied there was any reason, and this was not news?

Our State Department, lousy with sources for you and Goshko, took to TV to denounce Nicaragua's action as outrageous and this still was not news - to you (pl)?

Then we announced that we were expelling their ambassador, by force, if necessary, and this still was not news?

Not even, after those Iran/Contra hearings in particular, the executive branch was knowingly deceiving the Congress and the people? (I knew from past experience that official perjury is not news to the Post, so I don't go into that.)

So, your foreign desk and Goshko both knew that our ambassador had stated to four Members of Congress, carefully selected by the White House, their staffs, at least one "official" of the State Department and the lone reporter who had been permitted to accompany the delegation, that it is our policy to overthrow a government we recognize and that doing this was his purpose in being there, and this was not news?

There ^{is} more, some certain some reasonable conjecture from these two pages in the local papers, more that in my reporting day would have been regarded as news by honest papers intending decent and fair reporting.

This whole thing was keyed to what apparently the Post would like, ~~XXXXX~~ renewed aid to the Contras to bleed that long-suffering country even more and this is clear in the story. Whether the White House, which arranged the whole thing, intended no reporters to be present I do not know but only the local papers were permitted. This could have been done by Mrs. Byron on her own but in any event, the policy of these papers is well known and they support all such official violence. The managing editor, Mike Powell, former big-city newsman, sent himself. He took only a photographer. I don't know that Melton did or did not know that anyone from the press was present but I'm inclined to think he didn't and that this had been the plan.

"This latest trip (Mrs. Byron's sixth) was not part of ^{her} ~~the~~ work of the House Armed Services committee," the papers report, "but was, instead, a special delegation backed by the White House, Mr. Donovan said. Funding for part of the trip came from the National Forum Foundation." And just before this, "Mike Donovan, a State Department official who accompanied the group on the Nicaragua trip, said: 'Mrs. Byron has experience that the co-sponsors (parents in original, (of the resolution) don't have. She's been here before.'"

Her own account of one of those earlier trips is reported, "On the plane ride to Nicaragua she told stories of past trips, including one to Honduras where she went into the country and walked with Contra troops along ~~the~~ jungle trails and across the border into northern Nicaragua."

Then and now it apparently was more important to propagandize for this Reagan policy than to worry about whether a woman Member of Congress might tread on a mine or be hurt in some other way, perhaps killed.

This junket they did segregate the two women members and only the men and staffs, including embassy, went to Nandaimé, where violence was expectable. But how nice it would have been for the Reagan/Post policy if an American had been injured, not so?

This White House delegation sent to support the resolution before the Congress, with no journalistic interest in whether tax money was used for any part of it, like an airplane, had time for virtually nothing else except a few of the stock people trooped out. They left on Friday and were back on Sunday.

These delegations in whom we are to place such credence, as indicated often enough by the Post and some in Congress and, of course, the White House, which contrives it all, what about them? This, of course, ^{is} not news:

"One political officer (at the embassy) said they take turns handling the dignitaries, who usually come on week~~ends~~s. Jan Hartman, a press attache who arrived only two months ago from assignment in Samalia, said: 'I've been here two months

3
and all the itineraries are the same. They visit the cardinal, visit opposition businessmen, visit La Prensa."

How necessary are those bullet-proof vans paid for with tax dollars when there is not enough money to feed the large percentage of children who live in poverty, take a few of the homeless off the streets, educate those who haven't the money? Mrs. Byron followed her at-home practise on the streets of Nicaragua, early-morning jogging. I'm sure you'll agree this didn't require a bullet-proof van.

More on how our tax money is spent - there are about 50 ~~XXXX~~ codels a year, so many they have this code word for Congressional delegations, all of whom see and talk to the same people - all partisans, all on one side.

This is not to suggest that Mrs. Byron didn't learn anything at all. She is quite clear in telling us that the paving has deteriorated.

Everyone was well aware that this delegation would be photographed and the pictures given prominence there. They were told by the embassy and they nonetheless not only ~~when~~ ^{went} by gave every appearance of participating in the demonstration, including by gestures.

So, with the lusty collaboration of another of these codel weekend warriors the Reagan administration, with the support of the Post, has continued still another propaganda strategem for getting more of our money spent bleeding other people even more in a war that cannot be ~~won~~ except by the participation of American armed forces.

When I was young I learned from Alice in Wonderland that up is down and I learned a little more about governments and the press from George Orwell. Now at 75 I am learning ~~for~~ ^{from} the Post you edit that the glorious freedom of the press we have is so that major papers can become an arm of errant government.

Your Post is the most influential single voice in our national capital and it is what is read by most of the Congress and the government. And you give them propaganda and suppress fact even when the issue is critical, as this one has become, even when there is international damage to us, the people who once were so concerned about the concerns of mankind.

As so many editors learned too late in Hitler's day, if you play with fire you get burned. Sooner or later.

If this is your concept of the responsibilities of the American press, or Mrs. Graham's, you are entitled to your belief. Ditto if you think this is how free, democratic society, representative society, works and preserves itself.

In retrospect I think I'd have done our country, our system, our concept of freedom, decency, morality and ethics, more good - nay, perhaps some good - if instead I'd phoned the Nicaraguan embassy.

How proud you could have been if Tunnerman appeared before the press and waved

this story around and said he didn't see it in the Washington Post but in a jerkwater rag published in a rural community.

I'm not proud because I still believe in what I believed when I began reporting and writing in the 1920s.

If you are proud of this demonstration of the journalism of the great newspaper you edit I'd like to hear it.

Or if you think Goshko and others were even honest.

Or, of course, if you want to say that none of this was newsworthy, *but Or still defend* printing, without indication of the existence of anything else, what was clearly untruthfulness by the administration, if not mendacity and abuse of the country.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg

7/17/88

Mr. Richard Harwood
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Dick,

Enclosed is a copy of my letter to Ben Bradlee.

Let us see if you really are what your title says you are.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold".

Harold Weisberg

The Washington Post

1150 15TH STREET, N. W.

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20071

(202) 334-6000

BENJAMIN C. BRADLEE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
(202) 334-7510

July 27, 1988

Mr. Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Harold:

Thanks for your letter, I guess.

As usual, you foul your observations with such hostility and such overstatement as to be counter-productive.

But I have come to expect that from you and try to find the germs of truth.

Sincerely,

Ben Bradlee

Mr. Ben Bradlee
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7/29/88

Dear Ben,

If by "hostility" you refer to my unhidden disappointment over the Post's imposition of policy on traditional standards of what is news and its suppression of information important to the functioning of representative society, I won't dispute your use of this word. I do remind you, however, that, given the Post's treatment of me in the past, that this use may be inappropriate.

You say that I overstated and that you "try to find the germs of truth." Not that I think you want help in this quest, I'll see if I can help you.

On Friday, July 8, our then ambassador to Nicaragua, Melton, whether or not he knew that any reporter was present, as I believe he didn't, told four Members of Congress and some of their staffs as well as some of his own and at least two "officials" of the State Department, "we're here to overthrow their government." The reporter present was the managing editor of our local papers. He published a long and detailed account of his trip and what he saw and heard the morning of Wednesday, July 13. I read this before being driven to Washington for a regular cardiovascular examination, stopped off en route at a newsstand and got all the copies of the paper it had and, after my return home, phoned the foreign desk of the Post and read this direct quotation to the person who answered the phone. I was referred to John Goshko at State, read it to him, paraphrased part of the rest of this first-person account to him and offered to send him one of the copies of the papers I'd bought. He didn't want a copy and responded only "we're aware." This is fact and I separate it from opinion: that there is an enormous and well-recognized difference under international law and usage between what is common knowledge and is denied officially and what is stated officially. This administration, under a variety of false claims, denies that it intended to overthrow this government, which it does not like, but the fact is that now our own ambassador stated without any ifs or buts that it is our policy to overthrow that government. Under what I was taught are traditional news standards some 60 years ago I believe that the ambassador's undenied statement is legitimate news. *And important.*

The Nicaraguan government expelled him for, in effect, implementing the policy he stated, about four days later. The Post reported that restricting itself to what our government stated and then, when he appeared before the Senate intelligence committee Goshko, as I recall, reported his appearance and the chairman's statement that the ambassador had testified that he hadn't done anything to violate accepted standards and hadn't the foggiest notion of what the Nicaraguans were talking about. This is, obviously, untrue and the Post knew it was not true, not only because everybody knows what this administration's policy is and has been but because it also knew, Goshko in particular and your foreign desk in general, that the ambassador had stated quite clearly that our policy is to overthrow that government. The Post published only the official line and, and I hope you will not consider this "vituperation," suppressed the proof that our government was lying to the legislature, the press and the people of this country and the world.

I believe, and I hope you would not disagree, that if some of the Members of Congress knew that Ambassador Melton said that we are in Nicaragua to overthrow their government, it would be considerably more difficult for the administration to get any further help for the Contras and I think it is obvious that the editorial policy of the Post supports the Contras.

This particular "Congressional" delegation was not there on behalf of any committee of the Congress and was, in fact, a White House delegation. Ostensibly

they were to observe "human rights" in Nicaragua and for this the White House had them leave sometime Friday and leave the Nicaragua airport at 1 p.m. Sunday. If it did nothing else, do you believe this was enough time for anything that can decently be considered any kind of inquiry? This delegation was flown in military aircraft and some or all the other expenses were met by the National Forum Foundation, whatever that may be and wherever it gets its money.

According to Embassy press office Jan Hartman there were about 50 such "codels" last year. Do you think that it takes 50 such weekend warrior inquiries a year for the Congress to know what the "human rights" situation is in Nicaragua? Particularly when, according to Hartman, they all do the same thing, see opposition business leaders, La Prensa and the cardinal?

Do you think this is a proper way to spend taxpayers money or to use the military and its equipment? Assuming that military aircraft were used by the White House on all these delegations, and I don't know where else it could have gotten such a considerable sum of funding, do you think it is not newsworthy that when the military can't get all the money it wants for "defense" and there are so many other needs not met that military planes should fly about 150,000 miles a year, with all the other attendant costs? Aside from the unhidden purposes, to persuade Members to support administration policies and acts that violate law, national and international, and all our diplomatic obligations, including to the hemisphere and the UN? Not even a teensy-weensy "germ" in this and so much more like it?

Do you recall any reporting of 50 such junkets a year with some if not all the considerable costs coming, whether or not legally and properly, for tax moneys? Or can you be at all suspicious, experienced journalist that you are, that there are so many Members and their staffs, all paid by tax money, and others on the government payroll involved in so many ways, involved in this White House lobbying operation?

This delegation was transported by the embassy in bullet-proof vans, so necessary that the jogger Mrs. Byron followed her usual practise by jogging in Managua. Mrs. Byron, according to either the embassy or a State official, was included in this delegation because of her considerable prior experience. In her own words this included being transported to Contra bases in Honduras, which continues to deny officialy that they exist, whence she crossed the border into Nicaragua with a Contra contingent. Is it reasonable to wonder whether those sponsoring this junket worried about her stepping on a mine of which there are so many in Nicaragua? Or how, if she did, this would or could have influenced Congressional and popular support for the Reagan campaign against Nicaragua?

This delegation coincided with the scheduled anti-government demonstration in Nandaime. Mrs. Byron and the State and embassy people strongly urged that no employee or official be present. Mrs. Byron spelled ~~it~~ in advance precisely what did happen if any were present and over all these objections Malton said their going would be "fine." He provided ~~to~~ readily identified embassy vehicles and Mrs. Byron and the other woman Member did not go. Exactly what every opponent to this obvious provocation said would happen then followed. Included among those photographed giving what was taken as signs of encouragement and incitation was our local editor, Mike Powell. His oped page piece was picked up by the Times, I'm told. Of course it wasn't news when employees of the embassy, State and the Congress, along with two members, were present and seemed to be participating where violence was expectable if not inspired and in the face of the foregoing and more, all of which the Post saw fit not to report, it did, without indicating it knew the official line was false, give the official mythology considerable attention. Nor was it news that the ambassador saw to it that all these people would be subject to injury where violence was expectable. (I don't know whether any woman staffer was there. Congressman DeLoach's selection of his staffer most prepared for helping him "observe" what is referred to as "human rights" was his woman press officer. (Isn't he the sponsor of a resolution the administration favors?))

Aside from all the harm to and fatalities among Latin Americans from this administration's programs which the Post supports, is it not apparent that there was the possibility of injury to Americans whose salaries are paid from tax money? Was any such risk essential to the performance of any proper duty or responsibility? With some 50 such delegations the year before, was there any real possibility that these people could have added anything to what was known, including by the Congress? Or, as in Mrs. Byron's case, was there something like a quid pro quo for the Members whose presence was paid for from the Treasury? Mrs. Byron, who is opposed for re-election, had the managing editor and a photographer from the only daily papers in the county in which she lives and they have the largest circulation in her district. And how many times did we have to pay for getting her there and back for her to know enough about the situation there? Assuming that she could learn anything new in a day and parts of two days when she saw only the same people she had seen and spoken to repeatedly in the past and who could write or speak to her by phone.

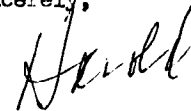
If my intentions were hostile, do you suppose it would not occur to me to get in touch with a journalism review, which I won't and haven't? Have I really overstated anything? Is there nothing at all newsworthy in ^{which} I encapsulate above? Nothing that as an editor you believe ought either in fairness in reporting or in the interest of the Post's reputation ought be known to either the electorate or the legislators when legislation is pending? Nothing that can have anything to do with more killing, more expenditures of tax money, the validity of administration policy and the honesty with which the Congress was addressed both by Melton and the administration? The Post doesn't report when it has reason to believe that, particularly in this enflamed situation, an expelled ambassador, who may have a further career elsewhere, lied to the Congress?

Except when I was overseas in World War II I've seen the Post daily since the early 1930s. I also see other papers and I listen to radio news. So I have an idea of what other editors consider to be news and the Post does not publish. Not uncommonly now this includes what is not supportive of the administration's policies and the Post's. Just today the Baltimore Sun, which is usually smaller than our local papers and has only parts of eight pages of other than local news most days, sometimes less, published the story of this nature that I enclose. I hear much about what Colonel North is up to that the Post does not publish as well as what he was accused of doing in Congressional testimony that I do not recall seeing in the Post. Overup that much?

My work, as I believe I've told you, has not been the pursuit of any whodunit and it has been a large study of how our basic institutions, of which the press is one, functioned or failed to function in time of great crisis and since then. When any of our major institutions fails to function as it should under our system, the system itself is in jeopardy, I believe and what we were taught in school says. This is why I've written you, in the perhaps forlorn hope that you and Mrs. Graham and others would give this some thought. For all its failings, ours is the best system of self-government yet devised by man, but it can't work as it should unless those who have the obligation to make it work do not meet this obligation. I've tried to meet mine by giving a considerable amount of time to reporters, including a number from the Post and many others in all media, even though I knew that they disagree with me. FOIA made me surrogate for the people and everyone has access to my files, with copies. I don't think you will find any Post or any other reporter who will say that I was not open and honest or that I ever misled or was factually wrong.

You don't have to respond and you didn't really respond to my earlier letter. I have only one purpose, to try to get you to give all of this some thought.

Sincerely,



Guatemala spurns tough U.S. anti-Sandinista push

By John M. McClintock
Sun Staff Correspondent

7-29-83

GUATEMALA CITY — The Guatemalan government rejected a proposed U.S. communique on Central America that "amounts to a declaration of war" against Nicaragua, diplomats and politicians here said yesterday.

Guatemalan sources said the document in effect would bind four Central American countries to U.S. policy against Nicaragua, implying an economic boycott, support for the contras and a more vocal line against the Sandinista government.

The proposed communique was to be issued at the end of next Monday's meeting here between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and the foreign ministers of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica.

El Salvador and Honduras, two nations heavily dependent on U.S. aid, have agreed to sign the communique and Costa Rica has rejected it, according to Latin American diplomats in Guatemala.

A Western diplomat called the communique "the Reagan administration's last shot" at isolating Nicaragua and resuscitating the contras. The communique was presented to the Guatemalans two days ago by Morris Busby, the special White

House ambassador to Latin America, who has been touring the region in preparation for Mr. Shultz's visit. The sources in Guatemala said.

The proposal was presented as a kind of ultimatum, said Edmond Mulet Lesieur, vice president of the foreign affairs committee of the Guatemalan Congress. "Busby told us if we did not sign the document as written, it would have 'bad consequences' for Guatemala," he said.

Mr. Mulet said he interpreted Mr. Busby's comments as a possible threat to cut U.S. aid Guatemala receives more than \$150 million annually in U.S. aid, of which about \$7 million is for non-lethal purposes.

The proposed communique so incensed Guatemalan Foreign Minister Alfonso Cabrera Hidalgo that he threatened to resign if it was signed, the Guatemalan sources said.

The proposal was later rejected by the Cabinet of President Vinicio Cerezo and by top military leaders, the sources said.

In addition, the Guatemalan Congress approved a non-binding resolution yesterday supporting the government's neutral position.

The Guatemalan Foreign Ministry refused to comment on the proposed communique, but the sources said that the Guatemalans will propose a second communique asking Nicaragua to comply with the stalled

regional peace plan launched almost a year ago by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica.

The proposed U.S. communique apparently violates the spirit of the Arias plan, which calls for non-interference in the affairs of neighboring states. It would for the first time commit all four countries to an active anti-Sandinista policy, the Guatemalan sources said.

The Reagan administration has given the Arias plan lukewarm support while seeking increased aid for the contras, which violates the peace plan, as does military aid to the Sandinistas by the Soviet bloc.

Perhaps as a sign of the hardening of the U.S. approach, El Salvador and Honduras have begun slow to respond to Mr. Arias' call for a meeting of five Central American presidents to mark the Aug. 7 anniversary of the signing of the peace plan. Costa Rica, Guatemala and Nicaragua have said they will attend, Latin American diplomats said.

Mr. Arias said during a visit to El Salvador Wednesday, "The Central Americans must not seek other alternatives, and we ought to decide as Central Americans our own decisions."

Nicaragua's relations with Honduras and El Salvador have distinctly cooled, but Costa Rica and Guatemala have attempted to steer a more neutral course.

Both Guatemala and Costa Rica continue to have limited trade with Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan regime has sent arms to the Salvadoran rebels, though the supplies are thought to have diminished in recent months because the guerrilla force has been reduced to about half its size in 1984 and because of the peace plan's ban on such aid.

Nicaraguan troops struck at contra border camps in Honduras earlier this year, prompting President Reagan to order U.S. troops to man receivers there. Nicaragua also says Honduran planes have bombed its border areas.

Guatemala, which is still fighting a small guerrilla insurgency, has

been wary of arousing the ire of the Sandinistas.

The 1,200 to 1,500 Guatemalan rebels maintain offices in Managua but otherwise receive little support from the Sandinistas, Western analysts say.

The rebels, who numbered about 12,000 in the early 1980s, are thought to get most of their funds and supplies from Cuba and Europe.

The Reagan administration's efforts to keep the contras alive as a fighting force were blocked in February when the House vetoed further military supplies.

The contras since have withdrawn many of their 12,000 troops to Honduras, while attempting to continue cease-fire talks with the Sandinistas. Those talks collapsed in June.

Further complicating matters, the military wing of the contras, headed by Enrique Bernier, has gained control of the rebels' ruling directorate, prompting many leaders of the Southern Front to quit. They cited Mr. Bernier's alleged corruption and ties to the former dictatorship of the late Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

As a result, the Reagan administration is left with little leverage to use in pressuring the Sandinistas to create a more democratic society.

Earlier this month, the Sandinistas expelled the U.S. ambassador and eight other diplomats, closed the Roman Catholic radio station and suspended the opposition newspaper *La Prensa* for 15 days.

The proposed communique "is the [Reagan] administration's last shot before the November elections," said a Western diplomat. "If they could get the four countries to buy into the program, then Nicaragua would be more isolated by its neighbors, the contras would have new allies, and the agenda will have been set for the next president."

The military-dominated Honduran government has become increasingly alarmed by the provocative nature of the contra presence on its territory and the Sandinistas' willingness to go after the rebels.