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MORTON KONDRACKE: Well, down in Central America there's this country called Nicaragua, and it was ruled for a long time by a dictator named Somoza and his father and uncle, I think, before him. And they -- the Somozas got overthrown during the Carter Administration by a group called the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas are left-wing, they're revolutionary, they may be communist. They keep depriving their countrymen of liberty. They keep buying weapons from the Soviet Union. They are allied with Castro.

The question is, should the United States try to overthrow the government of Nicaragua? If we could pull it off without getting caught, would you be in favor of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua? That's the question this hour.

/ Second question. If we try to overthrow the government of Nicaragua and we get caught, are you still in favor of trying?

Phil Taubman of the New York Times is here. Cord Meyer, syndicated columnist, former CIA official.

Phil Taubman, what is going on in Honduras and Nicaragua? What are we doing?

PHIL TAUBMAN: The best that can be made out is that what started out as a fairly limited operation run by the CIA has expanded, and it's not clear whether the expansion has been inadvertent or intentional. The original plan, which was approved by President Reagan just about a year ago, called for a number of steps, including trying to identify and support political leaders who could provide an alternative to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and secondly to provide assistance for

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the formation and operation of paramilitary forces in the Central American region.

The original goal was to use those paramilitary forces to interdict supply lines that the Administration said were flowing through Honduras and Nicaragua, carrying Cuban and Soviet weapons to guerrillas in El Salvador.

What appears to have happened in the ensuing 12 months is that in trying to practically put together a paramilitary group on the ground there, the Administration has embraced a group composed partially of former National Guardsmen from Nicaragua whose intent is clearly to overthrow the government. And so the question is, does the Reagan Administration now, directly or indirectly, support an attempt to overthrow the government, or is the group that they're working with taking the aid provided by Washington and using it in ways that go beyond the original intent of our government?

KONDRACKE: Okay. Now, there are a number of forces and groups in Honduras that are anti-Sandinista. Right?

TAUBMAN: Right.

KONDRACKE: Okay. One of them is former National Guardsmen under Somoza. Right?

TAUBMAN: Correct. Although that would oversimplify the situation. It started out -- the group that we're talking about is called the Democratic -- the Nicaraguan Democratic Force or Front, and that group started out in 1980 under another name. It was called the September 15th Legion. And at the time it was formed, it was composed almost entirely of former National Guard officers, albeit younger officers, not those who were identified exclusively with the repression and the National Guard. But in the last year or two they've tried to broaden their base. And I think, in talking to them, they've succeeded in moving beyond the nucleus of former National Guardsmen to have a little broader spectrum of opinion.

KONDRACKE: Well, what are they doing, in fact? Are they conducting raids into Nicaragua?

TAUBMAN: They're conducting raids inside Nicaragua. They would argue, and it's very hard to tell whether this is propaganda or reality, that they have moved into a new phase of operation where they've been able to abandon the training camps that they used in Honduras and move their operations almost entirely into Nicaragua.

KONDRACKE: Do you know whether there are any Americans

accompanying them into Nicaragua?

TAUBMAN: I don't know one way or the other, although everybody I've talked to said that there are not Americans that directly involved.

KONDRACKE: Okay.

Cord Meyer, you know a lot about Nicaragua, as well as knowing a lot about the CIA. And let me just ask you the normative question. Is this something that the United States should be doing?

CORD MEYER: Well, if it should be doing it, it should not be doing it this way, in my opinion. I've been struck by Mr. Taubman's writing on this subject in The Times. As a matter of fact, in early November I read that article of his in which he had his interview with a high ranking national security official of our government, in which this official spelled out the fact that we were, quote, conducting secret operations.

KONDRACKE: Some secret, huh?

MEYER: Well, I mean, the Administration has invented a new art form. It's overt covert action. And my problem with this is that you can conduct so-called covert action. Sometimes it becomes very widely known, as I think perhaps we are doing in the case of the Afghan guerrillas. But there you have a case where there's about 100 percent support in this country for our doing such a thing, in view of the situation there.

But in the case of Central America, we have a far different situation. We have a very wide spectrum of difference of opinion, and there isn't any overwhelming consensus. And under those circumstances, it seems to me it becomes extraordinarily difficult to conduct a secret operation that is no longer secret, because the opponents begin to call -- blow the whistle on it, as you have coming up in the Senate, Senator Dodd's resolution.

KONDRACKE: Which provides what?

MEYER: Which provides, if it's passed, that there shall be no aid, directly or indirectly, given to any paramilitary or irregular force in the whole of Central America for the next two years. In effect, it's a kind of Clark Amendment. And if that should pass, the Administration will end up as the Ford Administration ended up in Angola. And it seems to me that having started down this track, this would...

KONDRACKE: Well, what would be wrong with that? I mean

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are you arguing two different things? So if Congress passes that law, all they'll do is stop us from doing something that you think is a lousy idea anyway.

MEYER: But I'm looking ahead. I'm saying we can't foresee the future. And I'm saying things might very well develop over time in Nicaragua, because the unpopularity of the Sandinista regime, the opposition of the Catholic Church to it, and the fact that most of the Nicaraguans are Catholics and respect Archbishop Orando (?), there's a great deal of opposition building. And under those circumstances, you might have, over time, a spontaneous buildup of real opposition forces inside the country that have nothing to do with the Somozistas. In that event, you'd want to be able to help them, I would think.

KONDRACKE: ...I was talking to a very high-ranking official of the United States Government yesterday who did not confirm or deny any of this stuff, but he said -- and I told him I was going to do this radio program -- "Ask your listeners whether -- not just whether they favor covert action and covert action against Nicaragua, but if it could be kept secret, if we could pull this off, overthrowing the Sandinista government secretly, would they be in favor of doing it?" So this is a kind of a poll on that subject. I mean his contention was that the Vietnam syndrome, "Oh, for gosh sakes, don't do this" kind of thing, is now gone, that the American people want their government to conduct covert operations and to overthrow unfriendly regimes. And as long as it can be done skillfully and quietly.

966-TALK is the number. I would like to know what listeners think about that subject.

But now I want to ask Phil Taubman about this point that Cord raises, about this business of overt covert action. I mean I don't even want you to hint at who your source is. But why do high-ranking officials talk about things like this?

TAUBMAN: That's a good question. There has been a phenomenon of late -- I don't think it's necessarily exclusively the province of this Administration. But it seems to be increasingly difficult for government, our government to keep some of these operations secret.

I think in this particular case, if you go back to the first stories that were published about planning for covert activity, which came out in the Washington Post and the New York Times and elsewhere almost a year ago, I think that at that point there may have been an attempt to try to frighten the Nicaraguans by leaking some of this information to show them that we meant business and that we were going to be operating down there

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secretly. So I think originally there may have been a little bit of a spin on it to try to use it as a kind of weapon to push them toward negotiation.

KONDRACKE: Okay. I just want to ask you one other press question, ask both of you this. You know the famous Bay of Pigs legend. It is that the New York Times discovered that the Bay of Pigs operation was in planning. The New York -- President Kennedy, I guess, called up the publisher of the New York Times and the Washington Bureau chief and said, "Please don't publish those stories." The New York Times did not. Then the operation took place, it was a disaster. And, by legend, John Kennedy then told someone from the New York Times, "Gee, if you'd only printed that story, you'd have saved the -- you'd have prevented the operation from happening, and the disaster."

Now, what is the current ethic? If you had discovered plans -- which you didn't. I mean in this case. But if you had discovered plans for a full-scale assault on the Nicaraguan government that the CIA was into up to its boots, would you -- what is now the current ethic in the press about publishing such a thing?

TAUBMAN: I think the ethic has changed.

Let me just correct slightly your recapitulation of the Bay of Pigs situation. The story was ultimately printed in the paper. But what happened is that at the urging of President Kennedy, the headline was reduced in size, I think, from an original four-column headline to a one-column headline. And some of the operational details that were contained in the story were taken out. But there actually was a story in the paper. It was just not as clear and sharp as it could have been.

I think the ethic has changed. I think that The Times's policy, though it's not stated, the unwritten policy, at least in my experience, is to take each case as they come. And if the Administration wants to make an appeal to the publisher or the editors to withhold the story, The Times will hear them out and then make its own decision. And each one would differ.

I've been involved in several where stories were not published immediately, where they were held. But I think the tendency at this point is to publish rather than to withhold.

KONDRACKE: Cord?

MEYER: Well, I think that, given the world that we live in, the dangers that exist, and the necessity for good intelligence if we can possibly get it and keep it, make it necessary for everyone who is an American citizen to think about

the question of national security, whether he's a journalist or whatever his profession, when he comes into that domain and is touching material that was supposedly secret for good and sufficient reasons.

And it does strike me that editors should be more careful in their review of what journalists produce, not with an attempt to censor, but to keep in mind that a great deal more can be involved than they imagine. I mean, for example, when one particular columnist revealed the fact that the United States was able to monitor the conversation in Moscow between the automobiles of the Politburo members and their headquarters, he destroyed with one blow a vastly important and a very significant realm of information that was never recovered. And it just seems to me that every now and then people should keep that possibility in mind when they are making these judgments which, I agree with Mr. Taubman, are difficult and have to be made case-by-case.

KONDRACKE: If you found out that we could monitor the -- or that we had the men's room at the Kremlin bugged, would you reveal it?

TAUBMAN: I'd have to examine all the factors. But I think that when it comes to sources and methods, as they say in the intelligence business, particularly in terms of electronic interception of communications, we will go out of our way to try to protect what the government considers to be absolutely vital sources of foreign intelligence information.

KONDRACKE: Frank, you're on WRC.

FRANK: I'd like to comment on two things that I think's been very much overblown in the U.S. press. Number one is this idea that the Sandinistas are becoming increasingly unpopular. Now, if you've talked to anybody who's been to Nicaragua and who has mixed with people in the countryside and workers and poor people in the cities, you'll find that the Sandinistas continue to be outstandingly popular. Okay?

KONDRACKE: Let me stop you right there. There is one good way for them to test their popularity, and that is to have the election that they promised.

FRANK: Well, I think that that's a very kind of an easy solution...

KONDRACKE: Yeah, it sure is.

FRANK: ...for liberals in the United States to mouth as being the all solution, the solution for every problem that Nicaragua has. But I don't think that that's necessarily so.

But I think that's a separate issue. We can discuss that at some length.

But I think that the second point that's been very much overblown in the U.S. press is this idea that people are being deprived of their rights in a massive way in Nicaragua.

Now, I think the best example to look at is the fact that the former National Guardsmen that worked for Somoza, that tortured and killed people, those that were captured in Nicaragua were not massively slaughtered, there were no massive recriminations against them. Instead, most of them are in prison. But the fact is that they are treated very well and they are even allowed conjugal visits in prison.

This is the kind of thing, I think, that totally contradicts this massive mistaken outcry in the United States about the Sandinistas depriving people of their rights.

KONDRACKE: You know, but even the Catholic Church and the Socialist International and people who really wished the Sandinistas well have gotten turned off, progressively think that they are diminishing liberty in the country.

FRANK: There are divisions within the church. There's no question about that. There always are in almost any society.

Now, you know, the Socialist International, well, they were against Somoza, of course, but they never did massively support taking up arms in Nicaragua. And that's, I think, one of the weaknesses of Social Democrats around the world, is that they like to talk about changing things, but when it comes down to the nitty-gritty about what are you going to do when somebody is sticking a tank in your neighborhood and blowing up your houses, then they're a little bit weaker, in my opinion.

KONDRACKE: Okay. Cord Meyer.

MEYER: Well, I wonder what you think about the way in which the Sandinistas have treated the Miskito Indians and their families on the northern frontier up there.

FRANK: Well, I think that that's been very much distorted also. I think...

MEYER: You do? Because I've spoken to the leader of that group, and he spelled out to me pretty clearly what had happened. And then there were photographs which showed the actual destruction of the village, which the U.S. Government did make available to people in the Congress. So you have the actual photographs of massive destruction.

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I don't quite see how you answer that.

FRANK: I think the jury is still out on the question of the Miskitos. The Sandinistas admit that they had to do some pretty quick relocation of them, number one, because of the violence along that border with Honduras and, number two, because a number of those Miskito people, it's been shown pretty conclusively, I think, have been put on the CIA payroll because they have been made dissidents and they are working -- and I think the leader that you're talking about -- I'm trying to remember the man's name now -- it's been pretty well documented that that guy's been getting money from the CIA and has been working with former Somozista National Guardsmen. And, in fact, of course, they have also been training in Miami in training camps that have been organized by the Alpha 66 organization of the Cubans, who also have ties to the CIA.

So I think that this whole case about the Miskitos being slaughtered and that there's kind of genocide supposedly taking place is very weak. And anybody who cares to examine the evidence out there will find that it is very weak.

KONDRACKE: Well, the only thing I would say to you -- we've got to pause for a message -- is that if you have any contact with the Sandinistas at all, just please have them have an election. And if they have an election and they win the election, then it seems to me that they will be on a wholly different footing from the one that they're on now.

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KONDRACKE: Ray, you're on WRC.

RAY: I have three questions. First it was that if the CIA, if they are in Nicaragua, is the President aware of it and is he controlling what they do? And the second part of that question is that all I hear about is the CIA in an operation like this. And I'd like to know, is there possibly some other secret organization that the U.S. has that we, the public, don't know about that could be involved in these things, and the CIA is just taking the heat for them?

KONDRACKE: The answer to the second question is I never heard of one. Cord's never heard of one.

Phil, have you ever heard of one?

TAUBMAN: I've never heard of one, although there may be support provided by the Green Berets, for example. But no secret organization.

MEYER: Under existing law, I don't think it's possible for the President to authorize such activity.

KONDRACKE: By any of them.

MEYER: By any other organization.

KONDRACKE: Okay. And what about the President? Did the President authorize this operation?

TAUBMAN: The President approved the operation, and it was approved by the National Security Council. As to whether he keeps an eye on it week-to-week or month-to-month, I rather doubt it. Although I'm sure that the White House is kept informed on some kind of regular basis about what's happening.

KONDRACKE: Politically, do you think that this is hot enough that it could cause the kind of controversy that could really damage an Administration? I'm amazed at how little uproar there's been.

MEYER: Well, I can't predict how events are going to transpire. A great deal depends on how the Administration handles this hot potato from here on in.

KONDRACKE: Do you think -- let me just ask the question that I asked all the listeners, and I ask it again. Do you think that the public opinion is at the stage now where most American people would support an operation of this kind if it could be pulled off skillfully?

MEYER: Well, the question's moot, isn't it?

KONDRACKE: Because it has...

MEYER: In other words, it's already not secret. It's already in the open. So what you're really asking is if we could go back to the time when it was still secret.

KONDRACKE: Okay. All right. Now that it's out in the open, would you guess that most of the American people would support an operation of this kind, even knowing that it's out in the open, even knowing that it's not been pulled off secretly?

MEYER: I think there's going to be a good deal of reservation about it. I think the problem is the one that Mr. Taubman raised, and that is the presence of the Somozista colonels in this operation do raise a lot of questions for a lot of people who are very much against the Sandinistas.

KONDRACKE: Okay. I've got to interrupt you.

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KONDRACKE: Our subject this hour is covert operations against Nicaragua and other adversaraies. Are you for them? Are you against them?

You're on WRC.

MAN: Morton, I tend to think that I'm against covert operations. I'm against more open operations. I think half the battle is lost in the revelation of the activities, which may in some cases be perfectly justified. You end up with such nasty things as the Clark Amendment, which I think was a disaster of the first magnitude.

KONDRACKE: The Clark Amendment was that which prohibited American operations in Angola, or was it just covert operations?

MAN: Well, all operations aiding subversive groups, basically, or groups that are opposed to the ruling authority down there. Of course, the civil war goes on down there despite our withdrawal.

KONDRACKE: And the Clark Amendment has never been repealed. Right?

MAN: No. Unfortunately not.

What I'm afraid of is that we are missing the overall responsibility of the United States to assert its power in an area which is definitely under American influence. Assert its power meaning that you do't allow things like Grenada to go on. You don't allow things like Cuban and Soviet presence in Nicaragua without reacting in some meaningful way.

You remember in Grenada they had a guy who was a little eccentric who was ruling the place that was overthrown? You know, hey, bring in democracy. But it didn't happen. These guys are under Cuban influence now, and you don't hear a complaint from anywhere.

KONDRACKE: Okay. Let me just turn your attention to a little more difficult case, that of Salvador Allende in Chile, who was, after all, elected. And if my memory serves me correctly, twice the United States tried to intervene to prevent his ever coming to power. And now if you read Sy Hersh's piece in The Atlantic Monthly, it now appears that all the protestation that the United States had nothing to do with the coup that led to his overthrow is not quite correct.

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Now, would you be in favor, as a matter of American policy, of trying to destabilize and overthrow a democratically elected government that we didn't like?

MAN: I've always felt a little nervous about the Chilean case because Allende was elected. He had a minor -- he had a majority, certainly not a plurality. But he did have a majority.

KONDRACKE: Wait a minute. He had a plurality but not a majority.

MAN: A plurality is 51 percent.

KONDRACKE: No, that's a majority. Anyway, go ahead.

MAN: And the -- he had not -- even though some of his underlings were getting a little heavy out in the field, he had not done anything that was really could be said to have been anti-democratic.

I didn't like the guy, necessarily, but he did run a democratic regime down there. And, yes, I don't think the United States should be in the position of overthrowing democratic regimes, whether we like them or not.

On the other hand, where do we go when a regime comes to power under democracy and then shuts everybody out? Then do we react, and is it too late? I don't know. It's a tough question.

But I think in the case of Chile, we should not have been involved in destabilizing operations, because they certainly had not reached the point where the Sandinistas have, of inviting in the Cubans and the Soviets.

In the second place, South America is slightly different from the Caribbean, in that I think we -- you know, that's a little further away. And the Peruvians had Russian advisers in, and some of the others, and it hasn't caused too many waves.

But Nicaragua's really critical. And I think the presence of Cuban forces in that country is completely unacceptable.

KONDRACKE: How many Cubans are there in Nicaragua?

MAN: I don't care if there's 200. There's enough...

MEYER: Over 2000.

MAN: Yeah. There's enough to create a power balance

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situation which must be rectified. And I think we should let the Nicaraguans know full well that while we may not like their regime, we certainly -- we won't be as anxious to get involved in their internal affairs if they get those foreigners out of there.

KONDRACKE: Okay.

Cord Meyer and Phil Taubman -- Phil Taubman with the New York Times. Cord Meyer is former CIA official, the station chief in London, and also is now a syndicated columnist.

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KONDRACKE: We're talking about covert operation. What should the United States do, what shouldn't it do in the way of interfering in other countries? And the specific case that we've been talking about is Nicaragua. But I do want to turn to the Chile example.

Seymour Hersh, ace investigative reporter, has got an article in The Atlantic Monthly which alleges that the United States was more heavily involved in the overthrow of Allende than officials such as Henry Kissinger have previously been willing to admit. And he suggests that the United States was involved in the murder of the chief of staff of the Chilean Army, who was something of a democrat, General Schneider.

Now, Cord Meyer, you know lots about this case. Tell us what you think about it.

MEYER: Well, I know a bit about it because I was with the agency at the time. And, of course, you have to remember that all of this is now part of the public record because of the Church Committee investigation. And they did publish an extensive report on the sequence of events in Chile, which with some of the judgments I don't agree, but I think all the facts are there and they're accurately there. And what that report shows is that President Kennedy, back in '62, began covert operations in Chile by supporting the Christian Democrats under Frei in order to prevent Allende, who was the leader of a coalition, a popular front of Socialist and Communist Parties. And Kennedy started it. Johnson continued it, through the election of 1964, where there was substantial covert financial support for the Christian Democrats from the United States, authorized and directed by the President. And Frei won that election handily over Allende, I think with 56 percent of the votes.

So from '64 to '70, Frei was President of Chile -- I mean of Chile. In the spring of '70, it became apparent that the Christian Democrats were to some extent moving to the left and to

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some extent splitting. There was a conservative opposition party, the Nationalists. And President Nixon and Kissinger wrestled with the problem of what to do. In other words, there was an election coming up in September of 1970. Allende was leading a very strong, well-organized popular front, with the Communists playing a key role in it. And there was a great deal of concern as to what would happen if the Communists, through that popular front, took power in Chile and turned it to their purposes.

I don't agree quite with the previous speaker on this. There was a real danger of a great many different kinds of things happening that people could see down the road, military and political.

But the decision, in effect, Nixon made was to back neither of the two opposition par -- of the two parties running against Allende, but rather to engage in a general propaganda campaign, in the hope that this would be sufficient. When the actual election results came out, it was apparent that Allende had won by one percent of the vote, with 36.5 percent, I think. And it was at that point, and prior to the decision by the Chilean Assembly as to which of the two front-runners should be elected, that Nixon demanded and ordered Helms, who was Director of the CIA, to take all possible means to -- even if it means another military coup -- to try to prevent Allende from being elected by the Chilean parliament. And it was in that period of time -- from September to October 24th, I think it was -- that the CIA was directed to take this kind of action. And in the course of that action, it was under orders to contact various military people, which it did.

One general they contacted was somebody named Joah (?), I think his name was, who turned out to be quite irresponsible and impossible to deal with, and who was dropped, as the Church Committee report indicates. But he later was the man who kidnapped General Schneider. And the Church Committee reaches the conclusion that there was no direct influence of the agency or involvement of the agency in that action. Although you can very well argue that having stirred up this kind of thing, there was some implied responsibility.

And then, as you remember, Allende served in office until '73. And then he was ousted by a coup mounted by the Navy and the Army, without any knowledge and participation on the part of the United States.

KONDRACKE: The United States did what during that period? It did try to destabilize Chile, though.

MEYER: It attempted to, primarily through economic

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put pressure on the Allende government, and also to continue to support the moderate center.

KONDRACKE: But are you saying that we had, that the CIA had no direct contact with the people who then engaged in the coup?

MEYER: That's what I'm saying. And that's what I believe. That's what the Church Committee concluded after having....

[Technical difficulties]

MAN: ...I wanted to voice my disapproval of any kind of covert action on the part of the CIA. I think that the CIA ought to restrict its activities completely to the area of intelligence. Because any kind of history of the CIA reveals that in most of the actions where they've been involved, the government that they have replaced the people with, in most cases, have been worse than the governments that they overthrew.

And the red flag that American conservatives and others have about communist governments is what drove Castro into the communist bloc. He made overtures to the American government when he first came to power.

KONDRACKE: Well, Cord Meyer is shaking his head at that.

MEYER: I don't believe that you can say that Castro was driven into the arms of the communists by what the United States did. In fact, the actual sequence of events is rather the opposite. He came up here looking here -- he came up here, remember, and saw -- I think it was Nixon, who was Vice President at the time, and he had a rather unsatisfactory meeting up here. But I remember one of his financial advisers later saying very clearly that Castro passed the word to his entire group, "Don't make any deals with these Americans. We want to keep, you know, arm's-length from them." In other words, he was not looking for help and he wasn't turned down.

MAN: Well, that's not the understanding I have.

MEYER: You'd better go back over that, then, a little bit.

MAN: ...so I don't know the -- I wasn't alive -- you know, I wasn't alive to the facts at the time. But that's not the understanding I have. And I do know -- I remember hearing news reports about the Nicaraguan making overtures to the U.S. Government, and the kind of rebuff that they have been getting

from the Reagan Administration.

And if the CIA were to overthrow the Sandinistan government, is there any guaranty that the government who comes to power after that is going to be anything other than the kind of right-wing repressive regime that Somoza was and the kind of puppet and servant slaveholders, basically, that multinational corporations like the International Fruit Company are?

So that's really where I come down on this issue. And I think that all of the CIA agents in the world ought to be thrown into a movie theater and forced to watch movies like "On Company Business" and the work of Costa Gavras, because maybe some of them will begin to recognize what kind of real harm they're doing in the world.

KONDRACKE: I have a feeling that they would cheer at the wrong spots.

Go ahead, Cord. You wanted to say...

MEYER: Well, I think we haven't really talked about what ought to be done in Nicaragua. You know, what is it possible to do? I think you really picked a very important point off, and that is that the Sandinistas did commit themselves to elections, free elections, back in a letter to the OAS in July 1979. And I think that the kind of policy around which you could really generate a great deal of support, both in this country and in Central America and in Latin America, would be a coordinated attempt on the part of democratic countries to bring the maximum possible pressure to bear for the holding of such free elections under OAS auspices. And I've always thought that this was the best course in this situation. And that if the Sandinistas refused to do that, then, over the time, I think a very effective economic blockade and pressure could be organized jointly. And I think that is the way we should have gone, and it's still, it seems to me, the best way to go.

KONDRACKE: We'll be right back.

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KONDRACKE: You're on WRC.

MAN: I just want to make a comment here. This question of whether we should or shouldn't have covert action I think was first answered in 1775 when the Congress established the Committee on Secret Correspondence. Every Administration since then has had secret funds and has been engaged in some kinds of confidential operations in international relations.

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KONDRACKE: How about overthrowing other governments?

MAN: I think that's a decision that our elected representatives are elected to make when the national interest requires it.

Let's recall that both the Church Committee in the Senate and the Pike Committee in the House concluded that in all important respects these operations, all CIA operations were carried out at the direction of the White House. And now you'd have to add with the concurrence of these two committees of the Congress that provide oversight and also the appropriation funds.

So I think for us to deny ourselves or our leaders that option, when all other governments have been for generations exercising that kind of authority, will be a very shortsighted unilateral disarmament.

And what I find appalling is that the journalists that we've been listening to claim the right, unilaterally, to sabotage by revealing decisions made on the highest level.

KONDRACKE: Sir. Sir. It was not Phil Taubman who provided that information. It was high-ranking officials of the U.S. Government.

MAN: I know that happens. And I'm not accusing Phil Talbert [sic] of such. But I do recall a number of cases where journalists have revealed information of the greatest sensitivity. Take the Glomar Explorer, for example, involving a tremendously heavy investment. It might have been extremely useful in future operations. That whole operation was sent down the drain because one journalist decided to blow it.

KONDRACKE: Well...

MAN: There've been a number of other such incidences.

KONDRACKE: Okay.

I've got just one question to ask Phil Taubman, and Cord Meyer too. It occurs to me that the American press, in particular, maybe the Western press, doesn't pay attention enough to what the KGB does in the world, and other communist services, to the extent that it can find out. For example, the Bulgarian involvement in the Pope's assassination. If the United States came anywhere near that, that would be front-page news. You'd have investigations and congressional hearings and all that kind of stuff, you know. And here there's fairly solid evidence that the Bulgarians -- that means the KGB, presumably; that means our beloved Yuri Andropov -- tried to kill the Pope.

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Why isn't the world up in arms about that?

TAUBMAN: I think that there is a lot of concern about that. I know that we're working on it very assiduously trying to find out what happened. But what you're talking about is really a factor of the availability of information. And journalists operating within the United States have access to extraordinary amounts of information, partially because of our open society, partially because of the tradition of the press here. And to go after the story, just practically speaking, of the Bulgarian and KGB involvement in the assassination of the Pope poses, you know, extraordinary difficulties to journalists.

So I think there's interest, there's an effort to get at the story, but it's much more difficult to break through in that kind of area than it is over here.

KONDRACKE: Cord?

MEYER: Well, two points. One, I think Mr. Taubman is absolutely right. There is an asymmetry between the United States and Russia that's very great; a chasm, really. On the one hand, you have everything controlled, everything kept secret, everything held under wraps. In the other you have one of the freest societies in the world. And it certainly has its impact on everything we do and everything they do. It's a big advantage, in one sense, to them.

The other point is that I do -- I am a little critical, myself, of the Western press and our own press. For example, the other day, the day before yesterday, I think it was, there was this testimony on the Hill by the KGB defector from Japan in the context of the release of a good deal of material that had been submitted in the form of evidence to the House Intelligence Committee.

KONDRACKE: This was an open hearing?

MEYER: Open hearing. And I found very little coverage of that.

KONDRACKE: What'd he say?

MEYER: Well, he spelled out very specifically the scale of the Soviet KGB active measures in Japan, of which he was a leading officer. So he knew the detail, and he spelled it out in rather extraordinary detail, and very interestingly, I thought.

KONDRACKE: I didn't even...

MEYER: This never even -- this got a very small...

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KONDRACKE: How do you account for that?

TAUBMAN: Well, I can only account for, you know, the group that I work with. And there's just a certain amount of manpower available on a given day.

And I think you'd have to understand in the case that we're talking about here that though this man may well be privy to all kinds of information, some of that background of the way he's been handled in this country raises questions about his credibility. He's had an agent for many months and has had a book contract.

KONDRACKE: We're out of time.