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## ABC NIGHTLINE

7 June 1983

KOPPEL: As we've noted, this latest episode in the conflict between the United States and Nicaragua began yesterday when Nicaragua ordered those three U.S. diplomats expelled and accused them of aspiring to assassinating high level Nicaraguan officials. Nightline correspondent Jack Smith brings us up to date on what happened today.

SMITH: The day's events began as the three U.S. diplomats expelled for allegedly trying to poison Nicaraguan officials arrived back in Washington at mid afternoon. Embassy Second Secretary \*Arnelo Rodriguez, accused by the Nicaraguans of directing the alleged plot. Counselor Linda \*Pfeifer, who was supposed to have trained Nicaraguan conspirators and political officer David \*Greeg, who the Nicaraguans claim was CIA station chief in Managua. Over at the State Department, U.S. officials continue to reject the Nicaraguan charge as absurd, and this they responded. Nicaragua's new ambassador here, Antonio \*Juaquen was summoned to the State Department at 3:00 and ordered to close all of Nicaragua's six consulates in the United States. The Nicaraguan consulate in New York must shut down tomorrow, so must the consulates in San Francisco, Miami, New Orleans, Los Angeles and Houston. The consuls must leave immediately, their staffs by Friday, a total of 21 diplomats for the three U.S. diplomats Nicaragua expelled yesterday. Early this evening the Nicaraguans began to react. In New York, Nicaragua's U.S. ambassador told a news conference relations with the U.S. had deteriorated to the point where war in Central America was a possibility. JAVIER CHAMORRO (Nicaraguan Amb to UN): We believe that the greatest efforts must be made to avoid confrontation. For our part we believe that the current policy of the North American administration bringing Central America in inaudible) to the possibility of war.

SMITH: As all of this was happening today, the House Foreign Affairs dealt a blow to administration policy in Central America. The action is not expected to survive the full House and Senate, but by 20 to 14, the committee voted to deny funds for the administration's covert operation that keeps as many as 7,000 guerrillas inside Nicaragua fighting the Sandinista government there. The administration says the guerrillas are stopping communist arms from entering El Salvador. The committee majority today disagreed. REP. GERRY STUDDS (D-Mass.): It has nothing whatever to do with interdiction of arms, and they are actively seeking to trigger a civil war in which thousands of innocent people seem certain to die. REP. HENRY HYDE (R-Ill.): Why do we keep making the hemisphere safe for Russians and communism? We do it again, and again in the name of enlightened foreign policy. It boggles the mind. SMITH: With Central America heating up at home and abroad, the administration's new ambassador at large to the region, Richard Stone, tonight is in Central America. He arrives in Nicaragua Friday for the first talks the U.S. has had with the Nicaraguan government in nearly two years, but at a time when relations seem almost beyond repair. This is Jack Smith for Nightline in Washington.

KOPPEL: With us now live from Capitol Hill is Republican Congressman Gerald Solomon of New York, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He voted today against cutting of funds for covert aid to rebels in Nicaragua, saying the alternative might mean direct military involvement. And from our bureau in Miami, Wayne Smith who was chief of the U.S. Introspection in Havana from 1979 to 1982, and resigned because he disagreed with Reagan administration policy in Latin America. Ambassador Smith, it was that policy that caused you to resign about a year ago. What we seem to have now is much more of the same. Are you concerned by what seems to be an almost unstoppable

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downward spiral now? SMITH: Yes, it seems to me that we are left, virtually, without a position in Nicaragua and if the expulsions reflect the deterioration in relations between the United States and Nicaragua, the secret war certainly will solve nothing. It will not get rid of the Sandinista government, it has not interdicted any arms, and certainly it will not pressure the Sandinistas to hold elections, quite the opposite. So it seems to me that we are left the result of the secret war will be to leave us without any influence in Nicaragua with no control over the course of events.

KOPPEL: Congressman Solomon, I know that you are in favor of continuing covert assistance to those contras who are fighting against the Nicaraguan government, but are you in favor of the kind of action that was taken by the State Department today, and if so, why? SOLOMON: Absolutely, Ted. First of all the trumped up charges were obviously planned to discredit Special Envoy Senator Stone's expected visit on Friday to Nicaragua, and this of course has been the action that the Nicaraguan government has taken all along during their four year history. Secondly, you know, the Reagan administration did not close down the Nicaraguan Washington embassy, and no personnel was expelled. So we still have a dialogue going on between the two countries as we should. The State Department did order six consulate offices closed since they exist as a courtesy, and the extension of special courtesy is no longer warranted. When you consider the treatment and the outrageous lies leveled against our embassy personnel in Nicaragua.

KOPPEL: Are you, are you reading something now or are you telling me what's on your own mind? SOLOMON: I'm telling you exactly what's on my mown mine (sic) and exactly what I said in the committee meeting this afternoon.

KOPPEL: But you seem to be looking down at notes, forgive me if you're not. SOLOMON: No I'm not, but my eyes are bothered by these lights here Ted, it's 11:30 at night here in Wasington.

KOPPEL: Okay fine. SOLOMON: And lastly I think that you will find that those consulate offices probably would have been closed anyway because I think you're going to see information made in the not to distant future which indicated that these consulate offices which were meant to deal with consulate affairs with problems with Nicaraguan citizens of the United States and promoting trade in this country. I think you're going to find that you also had considerable intelligence activities going on.

KOPPEL: Well I spoke with a with a senior government official this evening who curiously enough told me exactly the same thing. But what's so surprising about that? Isn't that what all embassy and consular officials do? SOLOMON: Well if they do it they do it in violation of U.S. law, and certainly we're not going to stand for it. But the fact is we have retaliated, certainly, I don't think these consulate offices should be existing here. If it's going to promote trade, you know the United States citizens buy over \$100 million in goods from Nicaragua and when our people are treated that way, why should we give them the special courtesies that many other countries don't even have. They don't have consulate offices spread throughout this country.

KOPPEL: Ambassador Smith, what happens, well first of all let me ask you, do you think this is prelude to a breaking off of diplomatic relations, and if not, what do we have left in terms of diplomatic relations with Nicaragua? SMITH: Not necessarily an immediate prelude. I do think that the expulsions on both sides were unfortunate. When these things get started, one side retaliates, then the other side then retaliates again, and it could very well lead in time to a complete rupture in

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relations. But the fact is that the expulsion, as I said, simply reflects the state of our present relations, which had deteriorated badly, there is now a high state of tensions between the two countries, and the unfortunate thing is that we are left with no way of influencing the situation. This was all very unnecessary, and I would invite you to go back and look at the statement issued by the State Department on I believe it was April 1 or 2 of 1981 in which we stated that we had no evidence, had had no evidence for some weeks, of a continuing flow of arms that the other forms of assistance, propaganda and so forth seem to have been suspended. But, we cut off economic assistance and started our secret war, at least we did begin the confrontational approach at that time. That was the beginning of it, and we are now reaching the denouement, the logical denouement. The secret war was futile to begin with.

KOPPEL: Excuse me. We're going to have to take a break for a moment, but when we come back I'd like to talk about what options, then, are left open to the United States.

KOPPEL: Joining us again now from Capitol Hill Congressman Gerald Solomon of New York and from Miami, Wayne Smith, former chief of the U.S. \*Introspection in Havana. Congressman Solomon, you were upset with your own committee today for voting against covert aid. Why? SOLOMAN: Well, I was, Ted, but let me correct a statement that was made by former Ambassador Smith when he said that there was no evidence on Nicaraguan intervention in other countries. Mr. Smith, even the Democrats, the most liberal Democrats who oppose any kind of aid against Nicaragua disagree with you, and that's why in the bill that was reported today out of our Foreign Affairs Committee changed the covert operation aid over to overt operation aid, so I'm afraid you're in the vast minority. SMITH: Well, you're misquoting me. That's not what I said. Now if you'll go back and read.... SOLOMAN: Let me, if I could just answer Ted's question.

KOPPEL: Well, I'll tell you what. Since you've rephrased my question to answer Ambassador Smith, let's give him a chance to answer yours. SOLOMAN: All right. Fine.

KOPPEL: Go ahead, Ambassador. SMITH: I did not say that Nicaragua has not given any assistance. What I said was that at our behest they appeared to have suspended that assistance back in 1981, and we acknowledged as much. The Reagan administration in its statement of April 1, 1981, stated that the flow seemed to have been suspended. We went right....

KOPPEL: You're not maintaining.... You're not maintaining now, Ambassador, are you, that there is no assistance from Nicaragua to El Salvador, are you? SMITH: No, I'm not saying that at all. Of course there has been some. I'm not saying that at all, and I will go further and say that the Reagan administration's way of addressing the problem certainly has not solved it.

KOPPEL: All right. Now let's get back to my original question. Why are you upset, Congressman, that the.... First of all you think that the whole House is going to uphold this? SOLOMAN: I certainly do not, and I'm glad to hear former Ambassador Smith correct his statement, because.... SMITH: I'm correcting yours. SOLOMAN: ...there's a lot of classified information here which would prove him wrong, but let me just say this. I think the congressional blockage of covert activities in Central America, which is stemming the flow of arms and weapons and manpower into El Salvador and Honduras, I think is selling the United States of America down the drain, and I

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think it is aiding and abetting the spread of international communism, not only throughout Central America but throughout the entire Western Hemisphere. The bill that was reported today converts all of the aid that we are presently giving from covert to overt, and I maintain that direct overt aid would lead the United States of America into direct war, even possibly using U.S. military men, manpower, and I think that's absolutely wrong. What's the other alternative? The other alternative to either against covert or overt aid is no involvement whatsoever, and I can tell you that if that happens you're going to see Guatemala, Costa Rica, Columbia, Panama, all of the Central American countries fall, and then two things might happen. One, our entire national security would be severely under direct possible attack with possible ballistic missiles sitting 400 miles off our shore, and let the American taxpayer think about this. Even if we weren't directly involved with possible national security problems, what would happen to the millions, the millions of refugees and illegal aliens coming into this country, and who would pay that cost, and what would be the result of American working people losing their jobs because of the inflow of millions of more people like we had with the Haitians, like we had with the Cubans? This country won't stand for that, and we're not going to jeopardize it. We're going to defeat that bill in the House of Representatives, not even to speak of the Senate.

KOPPEL: Well, now, Congressman, you've certainly painted a dire enough picture. I mean what with the ballistic missiles and the huge additional unemployment, and you think that can be stopped by covert assistance? SOLOMAN: I think that covert assistance, when you have arms and weapons coming across the border into Honduras or into El Salvador, I think that when you can blow a bridge, not the United States, but the rebels, the insurgents, when they can blow a bridge, when they can dynamite a road, when they can sabotage an airplane, which is bringing weapons into El Salvador, it's a heck of a lot cheaper than it is going into an overt war that possibly would effect U.S. military personnel.

KOPPEL: Ambassador Smith, you see those as the options? SMITH: No, certainly not. If the secret war were the answer, then we should see some improvement in the situation after almost two years. Rather than that we see that the situation is deteriorating. First of all, the secret war obviously was not begun to interdict arms, but the administration cannot point to a single rifle or a single bullet that has been interdicted as a result of this operation. As a matter of fact, according to various members of the administration, when they want to emphasize the flow they say that it has increased, and what's the secret war for. I certainly is gonna get rid of the Sandinistas. I would say that the Reagan administration's policies in Central America are leading to exactly the kind of situation that the congressman has just outlined. They're leading us to a foreign policy disaster of the first magnitude.

KOPPEL: All right, Congressman, we have just a few seconds left for this segment. Summarize your response, if you will. SOLOMAN: I would say... I would say this, that certainly the other eight countries that agreed to the San Jose agreement, who signed that pact, to the other four countries, Mexico, Columbia, Panama, who signed the \*Contadero pact, these countries think the Reagan administration are going in the right direction. SMITH: No, they do not. SOLOMAN: Even the countries that don't, that don't share our political views, and yet the Nicaraguans refused to sit down and negotiate at all. SMITH: (Inaudible).

KOPPEL: I'll tell you what. Gentlemen, let me just interrupt for a second because I'm not sure on what basis, Congressman, you suggest that the countries that participated in the \*Contadero conference approve of our policy. Where, where did

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they say that? SOLOMAN: They want them to sit down on a multi-lateral basis and negotiate, but the Nicaraguans don't want to do that. They want to negotiate bilaterally with Honduras.

KOPPEL: I understand that. Where did they, where did they enunciate their approval of U.S. covert activities in Central America? SOLOMAN: They did not. They, they stated their approval of multi-lateral negotiations between the Organization of American States. That's what the San Jose pact was all about. That's what the \*Contadero pact was all about, and the Nicaraguans refused to cooperate in either of those two areas.

KOPPEL: All right, gentlemen, a lot more to talk about, and I wish we could, but I'm afraid we're out of time on this segment. Thank you both very much indeed.