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PROGRAM Braden & Buchanan

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SUBJECT Interview Dr. Rositzke/CIA Involvement in Nicaragua

PAT BUCHANAN: Charles Krauthammer of The New Republic, senior editor, sitting in for Tom Braden.

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BUCHANAN: We're going to talk this hour about Nicaragua, the mining of the harbor, the reaction to it, official reaction to the Central Intelligence Agency's apparent involvement, that they ran a mother ship from which some expert frogmen laid these acoustical mines in the harbors of Nicaragua, three harbors. And these mines come up and make a horrendous noise on hitting the hull of a ship. They haven't sunk any yet.

Let's now, though, with Dr. Harry Rositzke, who's the author of Managing Moscow. It's a new book that's out. Its subtitle is The Expert Analysis and the True Nature of the Long-term Soviet Threat. But we want to talk with him now about an article he wrote in the Washington Post that the CIA really ought to be out of this operation. Maybe the Pentagon should do it, if we do it.

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BUCHANAN: Why not, given the size of the operation, why not have the CIA do it?

HARRY ROSITZKE: Well, the reason that the CIA was given this kind of a job, a so-called covert action job in the old days, was so they could handle it in such a way that there would be no direct involvement of the President, that nobody could say, "Ah-ha. This is an official job." And that so-called plausible denial operated for a while. With the Bay of Pigs, that was

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broken. For a while it looked like Angola. And now here in Nicaragua, that reason for CIA doing it no longer exists.

BUCHANAN: Well, can't we -- where was the problem here, Harry Rositzke? Was it not in the fact that we've got to inform these two committees of Congress, and members of these committees don't want any part of our involvement, so therefore they leak it to their friends at the Washington Post and the New York Times?

ROSITZKE: I doubt if that's the main reason, Pat. I think the answer is that when you have a large-scale operation in an area that has all the world's attention, including hundreds of journalists, that the actual facts cannot be kept quiet. And as long as somebody persists in, for example, interviewing the Contras, going up to the border and finding out what they can, they find that it is a CIA job.

And since, so far as I'm concerned, CIA is supposed to be a secret intelligence organization, if an operation gets to this level and it's this kind of noise, then I think the Pentagon ought to do it and leave the civilians out of it.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But you aren't talking now about all CIA operations. I understand that you were the Chief of Soviet Operations Division at CIA. So you must have had some involvement in operations behind the Iron Curtain.

ROSITZKE: Well, we had scores of operations in Eastern Europe, within the Soviet Union itself.

BUCHANAN: Right. Well, Dr. Rositzke, on that line, I recall the famous incident, the betrayal -- I guess Philby betrayed them. But didn't you all drop 300 guys into Albania?

ROSITZKE: No, no, no. In the early '50s, there were, I think, probably several score of Albanians, for the most part, brought into Albania by boat. Now, that was a paramilitary affair. The CIA had to do it, since the President wanted it done, because nobody else could speak Albanian, nobody was in touch with the Albanians.

BUCHANAN: Well, didn't you fund the Ukrainian war of resistance all the way up till around 1950?

ROSITZKE: We were in touch with the Ukrainian resistance up to '53.

My point here is that operating in the Soviet Union is a pretty tough job, and therefore you have to have some people with some experience in what we called the denied area operations. But if we're talking about, for example, giving assistance to

Holdin Roberto in Angola or to the Contras in Nicaragua, it doesn't take any particular expertise. It might even take an interpreter or two. But otherwise, all we're doing in the Third World, now we're talking about, is giving them some arms and some training. And there is no reason at all why the Special Forces and the Rangers, and so on, can't do that.

KRAUTHAMMER: But the CIA did a pretty good job in Guatemala in '54 and in Iran in toppling Mossadegh.

ROSITZKE: That was a very small-scale operation, Guatemala, and it went pretty well.

BUCHANAN: But that was bigger than the mining.

ROSITZKE: I beg pardon?

BUCHANAN: The operation in Guatemala was at least scores of guys, or hundreds. It was bigger than the mining, wasn't it?

ROSITZKE: Oh, yeah, it was. As you may recall, there was already an organized and trained several battalions of Guatemalan troops under Colonel Armas in neighboring Honduras. And actually, if you look at the story -- it has been done up pretty well since -- it was really a psychological warfare operation in which radios were telling, mainly, the population in Guatemala City and the army, saying "An invasion is coming. You better get rid of this guy."

KRAUTHAMMER: Dr. Rositzke, as I understand it, then, your criterion for deciding what should be CIA and what should be Pentagon is a matter of scale. Is that right?

ROSITZKE: I would say any large operation is out. Any small operation probably could be done by either the Pentagon or CIA.

KRAUTHAMMER: Now, wouldn't one of the arguments for not having the Pentagon involved in something like this is that even though it is hard to deny CIA involvement if that is reported in the press, it becomes doubly hard if it's the Pentagon; and it does tie the President and the country much more closely into an operation?

ROSITZKE: Well, if you have, for example, Marines in full battle equipment training these people, let us say now, in Honduras, then obviously the American hand is pretty clear.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, but in Honduras we're not transgressing any principles of international law. In mining harbors,

there is at least a question about whether we're involved in an act of war. And it's a conservative senator who's charged the Administration with having conducted an act of war.

ROSITZKE: Now you're getting on to the mining business. That is, I gather, even in our own history, a rather unique operation. I think it's probably one of the most stupidly planned and clumsily carried out operations I know. And even without the political and the legal and the moral factors involved, it obviously isn't designed to achieve its end, which is to interdict the movement of supplies from Nicaragua to Salvador.

I, personally, cannot understand why anybody thought that was a worthwhile activity.

BUCHANAN: Well, look, if the Contras -- Harry Rositzke, if you arm, train, equip 10,000 or 15,000 guys and they go in, I gather than when they attack a barracks or blow up a radio station, that's not clearly designed, either, strictly to interdict supplies going from Nicaragua to El Salvador. I mean I think it's a given that the United States is arming an organization, which organization, whether we agree or not, has as its objective the dumping over -- waging war until they dump over the Sandinista regime. And I think the mining is part and parcel of that operation.

ROSITZKE: Pat, we're hitting, I think, one of the key questions about the present policy. There isn't any question the Contras are in this to regain power in Managua. We have not officially admitted that. We say we're putting stress on the Sandinista government to make them come to some kind of a negotiating table to our satisfaction.

I think what we've done here is started a straight large-scale subversion, since it's against an established government, which has gotten beyond control because the Contras are going to do what they want to do whether we agree or not. And therefore, to that extent, it really is out of our control.

KRAUTHAMMER: Let me ask you, Dr. Rositzke, as an experienced man in these matters, do you think there's any chance that the Contras can achieve either their objective, which is overthrow, or the American objective, which is to interdict supplies that go into El Salvador?

ROSITZKE: I think the first is absolutely and totally unrealistic. We're acting as though there were no real army in Nicaragua. We know that they're equally well-equipped, they're fairly large, they have Cuban support, Cuban instruction. And I think what they've really done now is given up any notion of

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taking over the government, but simply getting on a consistent plan of economic sabotage. And I do not think that that can, in effect, get the government out of power.

KRAUTHAMMER: What do you think is an alternative policy that might advance our interests and moderate the government in Nicaragua?

ROSITZKE: Well, I have my own formula, which I don't think really has been tried yet. It would have been a formula that we would have applied, perhaps, in other instances of this sort.

There is no reason why we cannot sit down and have absolutely honest, straightforward, back-and-forth negotiations with the government in Managua -- we've not had that yet. We've had a few people stop in and pass a few words -- and actually get down to pros and cons: What do they want from us? We know what they want -- what we want from them. Sit down and see if it can be worked out.

BUCHANAN: Well, let us suppose that they sit down and tell us all the nice things that we want to hear, but they continue behaving like Fidel Castro does and state by their actions that their intention is to expand their revolution and to dump over the pro-Western, pro-American governments in Central America and make of Central America a permanent and large beachhead for Cuba and the Soviet Union in the hemisphere and to bring the revolution home to the belly of the beast? They don't tell us that, as they never do, but they indicate so by their behavior.

ROSITZKE: Look, those little fellows down there are finding it hard enough to make their own Nicaraguan society go.

BUCHANAN: Well, they're doing a good job of exporting their revolution to El Salvador.

ROSITZKE: They're pretty badly pressed on supplying arms to Salvador.

I think the one concrete thing we want from them --let's not interfere in what they do at home, but cut out actual support to the Salvadorian rebels.

BUCHANAN: Suppose they continue it?

ROSITZKE: If they continue it, then all I can say is that the best way I can find of going against that is within Salvador itself. We're right back where we were in the old days.

BUCHANAN: Well, wait a minute. How can you -- what I'm

getting at is, look, Salvador can only last so long in this war, you know. If the guerrillas don't lose the war, they win it. And as long as the guerrilla war is being sustained by a constant inflow of personnel and weapons from Nicaragua, then it's really a matter of time before El Salvador, one way or the other, collapses.

ROSITZKE: Pat, the evidence isn't all that good on the extent of outside help that the rebels are now getting. They seem to have gotten themselves together with, you know, small arms and ammunition. Probably something is going over the border, except the government doesn't bother to tell us exactly what is going over, and perhaps they don't even know.

But you know as well as I that if we were interested in really simply defending Salvador, there would be ways of getting at border control inside Salvador, of getting any arms that came through, confining the fighting to Salvador, and then giving, obviously, the Salvadorian government the wherewithal it needs to stabilize its own society.

KRAUTHAMMER: Dr. Rositzke, let me switch gears for a second and ask you what you think about the current arrangements for the way the Administration tells Congress about its operations. Do you think that -- as you know, there's been a chorus of complaints from some in Congress, notably Senator Moynihan and Goldwater, that the information about the mining was inadequate. On the other hand, other senators, like [unintelligible], I think, and Biden, have indicated that there was adequate information.

Do you think that we're creating a situation in which these leaks are inevitable and all operations are bound to end up in the New York Times. Or do you think, on the other hand, that there's not enough being told to Congress and that the Administration is, in the words of Senator Church -- that the CIA has become, in the words of Senator Church, a rogue elephant in this operation?

ROSITZKE: Well, there's a real squeeze there. You have two Intelligence Committees now that are supposed to be informed. A couple of years ago, as you know, it was eight, which was almost an impossible matter for security.

I don't fault the Intelligence Committees. I gather they've been really very disciplined in not making leaks themselves. But when an operation actually blows as much as it has, then obviously the whole town and the whole world is in on it.

Now, exactly how much Director Casey told them, the impression I get from the press is he mentioned the mining in a

briefing for some of, I gather, the House committee. Well, I don't know how many people picked it up, how many people thought about it. It looks to me as though the CIA did not adequately tell them, "Look, here's what we're doing. Here are the hazards involved. And before we go on, we'd like to have you know what kind of chances we're taking."

KRAUTHAMMER: Did you tell them more or less in your day?

ROSITZKE: Well, in the old days hardly anybody wanted to hear about it. You know, in the '50s and the '60s, there were -- you know, these were the military committees, mainly. The man in charge would say, "Well, yes, boys. You go ahead, now. You go ahead."

KRAUTHAMMER: Just don't botch it.

ROSITZKE: ...into the Soviet Union which were never cleared by the State Department, but the Congress knew about it.

BUCHANAN: Were we better served by that system?

ROSITZKE: I don't think so. No. Because that would mean that there were almost two independent foreign policies we were carrying out. You remember in the old days when the Director of CIA was the brother of the Secretary of State, that put those two heads together. We don't have anything like that now.

BUCHANAN: Okay, Harry Rositzke. Thanks very much for giving us the time.