

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM-FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George P. Shultz

SUBJECT: News Coverage of Central America

At the entertainment following the State Dinner for President Blanco, you indicated to Otto J. Reich, Coordinator of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, your concern regarding the uneven coverage of news from Central America. As an example, you mentioned a CBS News piece from Nicaragua several months ago which showed film purchased from a Cuban crew showing only farm machinery being unloaded from a Soviet freighter which we knew was also carrying weapons.

To illustrate what the Office of Public Diplomacy has been doing to help improve the quality of information the American people are receiving, Ambassador Reich has asked me to relay to you one example of a related news piece. Recently, the CBS Evening News showed a two-part documentary entitled "Behind Rebel Lines" (from El Salvador). We understand from Ambassador Thomas Pickering that both you and Vice President Bush were upset about this film, and with good reason.

Immediately upon viewing the documentary, Ambassador Reich asked for a tape because it was obvious that it was unbalanced and conveyed a deceptive image favorable to the guerrillas and distorting of U.S. and El Salvadoran Government goals and tactics in the conflict.

Ambassador Reich spent nearly one hour with CBS News' diplomatic correspondent privately reviewing the film (and four other pieces of CBS news items on Central American which had been shown over a period of several days before the March 25 El Salvadoran elections). The correspondent took copious notes of Ambassador Reich's analysis and objections about the news pieces which he subsequently passed to network executives. Shortly thereafter, Ambassador Reich was referred to the Washington Bureau Chief for CBS News who was interested in following up on this story. Ambassador Reich has since spent about two hours with him and the CBS executive is arranging for a "screening" of the "Behind Rebel Lines" documentary where Ambassador Reich will, privately and confidentially, explain to those responsible for producing it the reasons for our

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objections. He explained that this was not an effort to embarrass anyone but simply to try to point out flaws in the information the American people are receiving. So far, everyone at CBS has been very cordial and cooperative with Ambassador Reich.

This is one example of what the Office of Public Diplomacy has been doing. It has been repeated dozens of times over the past few months. It is a very slow and arduous effort to try to show to the networks that they are not illustrating to the American people an accurate picture of what is happening in Central America. We are attempting to build the kinds of relationships with the news media that will enable us to dispel the disinformation and misinformation which has been so prevalent in coverage while at the same time aggressively expressing our policy objectives.

With regard to the documentary in question, I will let you know of the outcome of the CBS News inquiry as soon as Mr. Reich has completed his work.

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