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New noises in the Caribbean

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Suddenly, it seems that everybody who has a stake in Central America is anxious to talk to everybody else.

The Mexican foreign minister is hopscotching all over the Caribbean, apparently finding willing ears for his message of conciliation. The guerrillas in El Salvador are making noises about getting together with the government to work out some kind of power-sharing deal.

Sandinistas in Nicaragua are saying they wouldn't mind sitting down with Americans to straighten out differences. Why, the Reagan administration even sent a former CIA honcho last weekend to chat with Fidel Castro!

It all sounds too upbeat to be true—and, sad to say, it probably is. Let's remember that so far, folks are just talking about talking—no one has actually sat down at the conference table.

And it may be quite a while, if ever, before that happens. First, a lot of mutual suspicions must be cleared away. Suppose, just to cite one example, the U.S. does enter into negotiations with Castro. How can we be sure the bearded wonder won't just use the talks to distract us while he continues to pour arms into Central American guerrilla movements?

Still, there have been more surprising breakthroughs in the history of diplomacy. Who would have dreamed back in 1968, for instance, that Richard Nixon would soon broker an opening to China?

So, it certainly makes sense for the Reagan team to explore every path toward peace. There's nothing to lose and everything to gain.

One crucial point, though. Let's make darned sure that other Latin American nations get into the act, especially Mexico.

So far, the Mexicans keep insisting they just want to be "communicators" in Central America, not "mediators." But we don't need somebody to hold our coats and carry our messages. We need some full-fledged partners—ones with stature and clout in Latin America—to help build a structure for peace.