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# Pardon Me, But Am I That 'Hard-Liner' the Anonymous Sources Are Talking About?

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in a contest for control of U.S. policy toward El Salvador and the Central American region. According to this scenario, the good guys support political solutions, negotiations, regional dialogue, bipartisan consensus, and are deeply concerned about "underlying economic and social problems." "Hard-liners," we are told, oppose these good things: they advocate military solutions, and are dead set against negotiations, regional dialogue and bipartisan consensus-building. Hard-liners prefer political polarization.

In the current scenario, hard-liners are frequently named Clark and Kirkpatrick, though sometimes they are called Casey, Weinberger, Stone or, even, Reagan. Their principal activity is giving bad advice to the president. Because my name is also Kirkpatrick and I hold almost none of the views attributed to that Kirkpatrick, I desire to clarify just what kind of advice I have given in the weeks after the president asked me to visit Central America. I understand that it is not considered sporting to introduce into these Washington games verifiable facts or on-the-record statements of participants; but, then, I am not a thoroughly seasoned player and have not lost the predilections of my regular profession.

Obviously, I speak only for myself. I have not been present in most of the conversations of other participants. However, since I have often been cast by "sources" as the "hardest" and "most militant" of the hard-liners, my role seems relevant to the whole-dramatic production, and the fact that my actual views and recommendations bear almost no relation to those attributed to me undermines, I should suppose, the credibility of this melodrama.

Interested persons might want to know that instead of opposing attention to economic and humanitarian dimensions of Central America's problems, bipartisan participation in policy-making, the Contadora process and the broadest possible participation in Salvador's elections, I have consistently made opposite recommendations. I have advocated greatly expanded humanitarian and economic assist-

ance; bipartisan participation in formulating a new policy; unambiguous support for the Contadora process and regional dialogue; and maximum efforts to secure the broadest possible participation in Salvador's elections.

In my memorandum to the president on returning from Central America I took a very "hard line" on hunger, malnutrition, infant mortality, illiteracy, economic underdevelopment.

"Congress," I wrote, "has not provided the resources or support needed in part, at least, because we have not worked with them to develop a bold, imaginative program which goes beyond preventing Communist victory in the very short run, to produce for the chronically deprived people of the area the reality of present progress and the promise of more to come."

I cited Congressman Mike Barnes' proposed "one-percent solution" to the region's problems (using one percent of the requested defense budget to finance an adequate economic effort). I recommended for inclusion in the speech to the joint session a program "so beneficial to the terribly poor, malnourished people of the region that the American people will be proud to support it . . ." and also recommended the establishment of "a national bipartisan commission [which would] examine how we should apply our talent and

resources to foster health, growth, security and democracy among our neighbors in Central America and the Caribbean. . . ." I further explained to the president that this was an approach I had discussed with Sen. Jackson and other Democrats.

Though current mythology suggests otherwise, new broad, bipartisan initiatives were resisted by the "good guys" themselves. So were efforts by the governments of Central America and the Contadora Four to get under way a process of negotiations for Latins only. President Herrera Campins last week described to the Venezuelan press the message he asked me to deliver to President Reagan: "Don't let your government torpedo our conference."

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Time was I believed a leak was the unauthorized disclosure of confidential information about actual events—such as, for example, conversations within the executive branch. That was before I understood that a leak is the weapon of choice in Washington's unending internal wars—ideally suited to spreading disinformation about fictive events.

Undocumented allegations and anonymous sources link private ambitions to public policy in labyrinthine webs of personal and political relations. Two or three well-placed "sources" working with two or three well-placed journalists can create an issue, shape an interpretation, build or destroy a reputation. From the perspective of political science, it is fascinating. From the perspective of public office, it is frustrating beyond belief.

How do you correct the record when the discussions are all confidential? My interest is

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more than academic or personal. The paper triangle that links symbiotically anonymous and interested bureaucrats and politicians with dependent journalists is as much a threat to an informed public as the "iron triangle" of bureaucrats, politicians and the "Interests" is to honest government.

During the past month or two, much of the U.S. national media have relied on undocumented leaks and unidentified sources to construct a political melodrama in which some bad guys—the "hard-liners"—are pitted against some good guys—the "moderates"—

Reasonable people may feel the chances of success would be enhanced by our presence among the Contadora negotiators; they may think democracy would be better served by sticking with the San Jose approach. But the fact remains that Venezuela, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, et al., have desired an all-Latin conference, and our Central American friends have supported their effort. So have I. Far from believing that "The very mention of negotiations in El Salvador appeared a sign of weakness" (as charged by an anonymous source in *The Post* June 12), against considerable official resistance, I argued from Latin America and in Washington that the United States should pose no obstacles to the Contadora negotiations, should make no demands that we be included, and should, instead, stand aside offering support as appropriate.

On all the above issues there has been a certain amount of disagreement within our government, though the sides are not those popularly perceived. On other important issues there is a clear public record to prove there has been no disagreement at all. No one has proposed sending U.S. troops into combat in Central America, no one has proposed abandoning Central America. No government official has supported a "two-track" approach where one track leads to negotiated power sharing in El Salvador; everyone has supported conversations to ensure elections with broad participation and security for all.

I have also advocated continued military assistance at levels adequate to meet and match guerrilla arms, but then so have all other participants in the executive department's policy dialogue.

Above all, I have argued in print and in person from well before President Reagan invited me to join his government, that the people and governments of Central America, the Caribbean and, indeed, South America are important to the United States; that our security and history bind us to the Americas just as surely as they bind us to Europe; and that it makes no sense at all for us to perceive and protect vital national interests in Europe, the Middle East, the Far East and Africa (where we provide large, continuing amounts of economic and military assistance and in some cases U.S. troops and trainers) while ignoring and neglecting friends and interests on our own borders. I have, moreover, insisted that the fact that the Central American peoples have suffered under dictators in the past is not a reason to consign them to repressive new dictators sponsored by the Soviet Union; it is, instead, a reason to help them escape to freedom.

What do all these views have in common with the struggle between the "hard-liners" and the "good guys"? An interesting question.

The fact is that "hard-liner" has become an all-purpose term of political abuse. In popular political mythology the hard-liner is the missing link between political Neanderthals and modern man. It is shorthand for a mindless, heartless approach to public policy. Along with other abusive terms, "hard-liner" should be eschewed in serious political discussion in favor of more meaningful ways of categorizing political actors—such as, for example, active and passive; innovative and conventional; smart and dumb; effective and ineffective; honest and dishonest; straightforward and devious; generous and ingardly; ambitious and contented; prudent and reckless; political and bureaucratic, and so forth.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that if the "sources" were as good at managing public affairs as they are at managing the news, the world would be better governed; and that if journalists were as suspicious of their favorite anonymous sources as they are of, say, the president, we would be better informed.

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