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Kissinger Backs Covert Tactics

Suggests Communist Regimes Can Be Altered

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WASHINGTON—Henry A. Kissinger, whose appointment as head of a bipartisan presidential commission on Central America has stirred predictable outcries from both left and right, has publicly endorsed U.S.-supported covert operations in Nicaragua and has hinted that military aid to El Salvador might have to be expanded.

In a joint interview with Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan (D-N.Y.) in the spring issue of Public Opinion magazine, the former secretary of state said that the need for military aid should be gauged by what is necessary to do the job, not by what Congress might allow.

Regarding Nicaragua, he said: "It escapes me why we have to . . . assert that any Communist government that has established itself can never be changed." He added, however, that the present semipublic procedure for clearing U.S. covert activities through Congress threatens the loss of public support; he suggested instead an "overt American military presence on the Honduran border" if that is necessary to block arms shipments to anti-government guerrillas in El Salvador.

"I am sympathetic to the covert operations if we can still conduct them the way their name implies," Kissinger said. "But if covert operations have to be justified in a public debate, they stop being covert and we will wind up losing public support."

On aid to El Salvador, he said: "I can understand senators voting against aid to El Salvador. I would disagree with them, but I can understand it. I can also understand supporting an increase in aid. I cannot understand the rationale for cutting it."

He concluded that the Administration has not yet faced up to what is needed to prevail in El Salvador,

The Administration's program, he said, "strikes me as having been set by its estimate of the maximum Congress will appropriate, not a strategic or political assessment." The bottom line of the former secretary's observations was vintage Kissinger:

"If we cannot manage Central America, it will be impossible to convince threatened nations in the Persian Gulf and other places that we know how to manage the global equilibrium. We will face a series of upheavals that will absorb so much of our energies that we will be deflected from our previous policies."

'Dagger Pointed at Antarctica'

So, as he steps into his new role as head of the presidential commission on Central America, Kissinger seems virtually certain to study Latin American policy in terms of global politics and not to succumb to a regional parochialism of the sort he ridiculed as secretary of state under Presidents Gerald R. Ford and Richard M. Nixon and, earlier, as White House national security adviser under Nixon.

His jesting description of the Latin American region as "a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica" is Kissinger's most memorable reference to hemispheric policies during his White House years.

In the Public Opinion interview, Moynihan, who has subsequently criticized Reagan policies on Central America, pretty much agreed with Kissinger's assessment that Congress should either let the Administration do the job in El Salvador or get out altogether.

"A case can be made for doing nothing, and a case can even be made for doing more than the President asks, but no case can be made for doing 45% of what he asks," Moynihan said.

That may be the last sign of bipartisan agreement on any of these questions until Kissinger's commission submits its report Dec. 1—if, indeed, any bipartisanship is achievable then.

Since the interview, the question of Central America policy has become inflamed with partisanship and Kissinger is hardly likely to calm those passions. He is reviled on the right for having negotiated with the Soviets and having started the process that led to the Panama Canal treaties and denounced on the left for a wide range of transgres-

sions, including the charge that he engineered the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende.

The archconservative Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who heads the Foreign Relations subcommittee on Latin America, said Tuesday that he intends to bring Kissinger before the subcommittee for a test of ideological purity—although Kissinger's appointment needs no Senate confirmation.

"There may be someone across this broad land farther down on my list of preferences for such a position than Henry Kissinger, but I can't think of him," Helms said.

Liberals Dislike Him, Too

Liberal Democrats, many motivated by the traumatic memory of Vietnam and its associations with the Nixon Administration, have also raised a chorus of disapproval.

"Dr. Kissinger has few rivals in terms of diplomatic experience or expertise," said Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.), an outspoken opponent of present policies in Central America. "But that experience has made him a symbol for a foreign policy many would rather forget than repeat."

Rep. Howard Wolpe (D-Mich.), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and another outspoken critic of the Administration's Central America policy, said at a news conference Tuesday that the appointment of the presidential commission was "not to try to take a second look at policy. Rather, it is clear the whole purpose is to mobilize public support for a failed policy."

He said the commission is "an effort to co-opt, finesse, divert attention" from the failure of U.S. policy in Central America. "The appointment of Mr. Kissinger is going to raise grave second thoughts" on the part of some members of Congress, he said.