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In Central America, Reagan Would Rather Fight Than Listen

Former secretary of state Edmund S. Muskie wondered about it. Gen. David C. Jones, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was "uncomfortable" with it.

Nonetheless, they, and David Rockefeller, too, signed the report of the so-called Linowitz Commission, which says in black and white that the United States should sit down and negotiate with all parties, including Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union, to bring an end to the bloody chaos in Central America.

Negotiation is a bad word at the White House—unless it's about long-term grain sales to the Soviets. It is "not bloody likely," as Eliza Doolittle would say, that anyone in the White House will pay the slightest heed to the recommendations of a distinguished group of U.S. and Latin-American citizens who spent six months studying the economic and human misery in Central America.

From administration noises on the eve of his dramatic speech to a joint session of Congress, it appears that the president would rather fight than switch.

U.N. Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, the "La Pasionara" of our Latin American policy, said on the David Brinkley show that the Soviets and their friends are providing far more aid to their side than we are to ours.

House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.) triumphantly heralded the Brazilian interception of a Libyan plane loaded with arms for Nicaragua as "a gift from God," which means, apparently, that Americans are about to be convinced that if they fail to support President Reagan they can expect a Red invasion of Texas.

Reagan has been hinting that he will not take the rap for "losing" El Salvador. If it goes down, he will lay it on Congress, which is resisting his demands for \$110 million in emergency aid to the country and quibbling over his secret, although televised, CIA operation in Nicaragua.

He knows it is child's play to bully Congress. He has effortlessly shifted the discussion on Nicaragua from whether his course is right to whether it is legal.

Mary McGrory

SENSIBLE

Supposedly, the congressmen who are traveling to the area in history's first instance of a guided tour of a covert operation are going to question the ex-Somoza guardsmen who are leading the expedition as to whether they intend to overthrow the government. If they say yes, it will still be okay, because Reagan insists it is nothing more than a violent civics lesson—he just wants to harass the Sandinistas into "a more democratic form of government."

From the Reagan point of view, the real flaw with the Linowitz Commission, which was co-chaired by Sol Linowitz, negotiator of the Panama Canal treaties, and former Ecuadorean president Galo Plaza, is its premise: "The persistent poverty of two-

thirds of the people of Latin America is the major cause of the Hemisphere's social unrest . . . Poverty, inequality and injustice lead to political protest and polarization."

According to Reagan theology, the source of hemispheric unrest is the Soviet Union. If the Kremlin and its Cuban cat's-paw stopped their arms shipments, the forces of good people—like Roberto D'Aubuisson, the little Salvadoran killer, and President Rios Montt of Guatemala, the born-again peasant-slayer, would bring peace and order to their people.

Elliot L. Richardson, former secretary of defense, chaired the panel on security and lobbied hard for the "many-sided dialogue"—between the governments and opposition movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala; between each of its neighbors; between Cuba and all the countries of Central America; "and between the U.S. and Cuba and the U.S. and Nicaragua respectively; as well as between the U.S. and the Soviet Union."

Muskie told Linowitz that he thought the Soviets would never come to such a

parley because they deny activity in the region.

But the answer of Linowitz and Richardson is that even if they didn't show the other exchanges would produce a hemisphere-wide condemnation of foreign mischief. The United States, of course, would have to take a non-intervention pledge.

"If reciprocal and mutual security is to be fashioned in a region that has often experienced overt and covert U.S. intervention, it would be useful to provide unmistakable assurances that the U.S. will refrain from reverting to these practices," the report said.

The real reason, said Linowitz, for considering the commission's sensible solution is that the present policy is just not working.

"You have to focus on an alternative," he said.

But Reagan has turned a deaf ear to all previous suggestions for negotiations. He would rather stay the course, even, apparently, if it means sending in the Marines to teach Latin America about democracy.