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Lugar backs Shultz's purge of conservatives

By Roger Fontaine
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Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., the incoming chief of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, threw his weight yesterday behind the changes at the State Department being made by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, characterizing them as "non-ideological."

"I have confidence in the changes he's making," Sen. Lugar said.

Sen. Lugar's comments came as controversy escalated over whether Mr. Shultz had undertaken a mission to clean house of the staunch conservatives he found at the department when he replaced Alexander Haig in 1982. Many of those being replaced were personal choices of the White House staff.

As that struggle continues, rumors of more removals and replacements circulated yesterday while senior State Department officials also insisted that the housecleaning was "non-ideological."

Supporting that view, in addition to Sen. Lugar, was Majority Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee. Both Republicans talked with Mr. Shultz about the changes yesterday.

"I think Shultz is consolidating his position as the foreign policy spokesman for the president," Sen. Baker said. He added that the effort appeared to be successful.

"There is an awful lot of stuff in the mill," commented one State Department official who asked to remain anonymous.

One common consequence the changes appear to have in common is to put Mr. Shultz more firmly in control of the government's foreign policy establishment.

The bulk of the reported changes so far have been in the Western Hemisphere. From 12 to 15 moves are being planned in the next few months. In Central America, the U.S. ambassadors to Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras are to be removed. All will be replaced by foreign service officers.

In South America, according to State Department sources, new ambassadors soon will be chosen for Bolivia, Chile and Colombia. In the coming months, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Dominican Republic

are slated for ambassadorial changes.

But the situation remains fluid, and what seemed definite may yet be reversed. For example, late yesterday, rumors circulated that the decision to replace the politically appointed ambassador to Colombia, Lewis Tambs, had been reversed and that he has been asked to stay.

The Washington Times could not confirm that change, however, but one State Department source said it might be a product of growing White House resentment over how the announcements were handled.

Meanwhile, further rumors circulated that another politically appointed ambassador — John Gavin in Mexico — is to be replaced by the special envoy to Central America, Harry Shlaudeman.

Yet other reports involve Gen. Paul Gorman, head of the Southern Command headquarters in Panama, and one of the principal architects of the Reagan administration's regional policy. One administration source was certain that Gen. Gorman would be replaced in a few months, but other well placed sources dispute that.

He and other individuals insist that while all the removals may not be political appointees, and that others are due for rotation, the one consistent pattern is the removal of those who have taken a hard line with the Sandinista regime and have been strongly supportive of the Nicaraguan resistance forces known as "Contras."

Some opposed to the changes believe the issue is settled, but others are more optimistic that the tide can be turned. All agree, however, that the chances for a significant roll-back depend on former National Security Adviser William P. Clark playing a major role.

Thomas D. Brandt also contributed to this article.