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Little Support Is Found in Latin Mission

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — After a week of closed-door meetings with Latin American leaders over the explosive politico-military situation in El Salvador — and with a few more meetings to go — the United States' special envoy, former Deputy CIA Director Vernon Walters, has not emerged with much to show or tell.

Nor, probably, could he be expected to do so.

The issue that the Reagan administration has decided to make one of its first major foreign policy tests — drawing a line in the sand of El Salvador's Fonseca Bay over the indirect, arms-supplying support by the Soviet Union and Cuba of Salvadoran insurrectionists — is really its first reconnaissance mission into a controversial territory inherited from Jimmy Carter.

In no other area of the globe has there been a greater advertised turnaround of U.S. foreign policy than between the vociferous, anti-military, human rights stand of the Carter administration and the pragmatic anti-communist containment policy of the new Republican administration.

Justified or not, the turnaround means that Reagan's aides are not merely consulting in the region but are also compiling an inventory of the differences that divided the Carter administration from many governments that have traditionally supported the United States reflexively.

Understandably, special envoy Walters — whose mission is no different than the highly publicized visit of diplomat Lawrence Eagleburger to Europe, where Reagan has also been trying to gather support — has had far less to say than Eagleburger.

He has been far less photographed, far less pursued. But a new Latin American alignment, less stereotyped and less straightforward in its goals, is emerging from Walters' tour.

The Reagan mood of skepticism about El Salvador is echoed in many Latin American capitals. Walters has traveled to Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. In most cases, he has come across countries that think differently — and live differently — than Carter administration policies would argue.

In Mexico, Walters met a relatively concerted wave of mistrust over U.S. motives in El Salvador — a relatively traditional policy.

In Venezuela, he did not. The government of Luis Campins Herrera is far more conservative than its predecessor, and Venezuela — one of the staunchest democratic states on a militarized continent — shares a U.S. concern with the radicalization of Central American strife.

Brazil thinks differently. The most populous South American nation — and the one where Walters, a former Army attache in Brazil, has the most friends — is confronted these days with a variety of complex social, economic and political problems.

The country is attempting to solve them through non-military means — an attitude not sufficiently applauded by Carter. It is doubtful that Brazil can easily go along with the Reagan line on what is wrong in El Salvador. Even more doubtful is the idea that Brazil's government wants to. In the notorious, militarized Sout-

hern Cone, Walters had doubtless found his best audience. The government of Argentina has for years been arguing the anti-terrorist line that Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. has now taken up.

The government of Chile has done likewise, and has undoubtedly been bolstered by the Reagan administration's recent unilateral decision to lift economic sanctions levied in the wake of the assassination of Orlando Letelier in Washington in 1976.

In short, Walters, as a U.S. envoy, has encountered a paradox. It is similar to that ascribed to Louis XVI: "He has remembered nothing, and forgotten nothing." Latin American governments, which were always diverse, are reacting in diverse ways to the first Reagan initiative in this region.

The Walters mission will not be the last in which Ronald Reagan's government will have to convince a diverse population of the universality of its point of view.