

PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR SOL M. LINOWITZ

FORUM: What do you perceive are the roots of revolution in Central America?

LINOWITZ: Well, in the first place, we have to recognize that the major causes of the unrest and instability are domestic and internal; and even where there are external forces present, as is true in Central America, the root of the problem still remains the fact that over the years people have had to live with deprivation, with hunger, or with poverty and have been growing increasingly dissatisfied, discontented, and determined that they are going to have a better life. This results in pressure which finds form in what we call revolution; people taking into their own hands the decision that they are going to have a better life, that they are going to improve the lot of their children and their families. Sometimes in order to achieve their goals, they turn to more radical ideologies or what are called revolutionary techniques. But, underlying all of this is the discontent of the people.

FORUM: Many Americans agree that the 1979 Sandinista Revolution was backed by a broad spectrum of Nicaraguans. The Reagan Administration, however, has accused the Sandinista government of purging moderate elements in the government, shifting the revolution to the left and aligning internationally with the Soviet Union. To what extent is this accusation true?

LINOWITZ: There is probably a significant measure of truth to that. I have heard some Nicaraguans say that the Sandinistas "betrayed the revolution," which means that they had articulated those things which I think the majority of the people of Nicaragua wanted, but in the course of getting there, veered in the path — an act which lost many of the people who had been party to the original declaration of revolution. And I think that it is true that in doing so, they veered toward Cuba, and looked with a more friendly eye to the Soviet Union. As a result, in many respects, Nicaragua has become a Marxist-Leninist state by ideology.

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FORUM: What threat does this situation pose for Nicaragua's neighbors?

LINOWITZ: If a Marxist-Leninist state or any other revolutionary state confines itself to the way it sets up its domestic governmental operations and does not undertake to export its own revolution — does not threaten its neighbors, does not say, "We are going to view our revolution as one without borders and therefore we have as much authority in your country as we have in our own to sow the seeds of revolution"—but instead focuses internally, then it cannot be said to be the kind of a threat to its neighbors that calls for some kind of action of opposition. Nobody says that any neighbor has a right to say what government you choose; that is, as long as it doesn't threaten them. We have a hard time learning that in this country, but the fact is that you have to look at a government of that kind and ask yourself, "What is it that it has undertaken to do?" In the case of Nicaragua, to get now into specifics, it clearly has been involved in supplying arms to El Salvador; it clearly has undertaken in other places to extend its influence and its authority. That is something which does cause concern. But you cannot say that by definition every state which subscribes to Marxist-Leninist ideology will necessarily become a danger to its neighbors. Romania is an example of a state which professes a belief in socialist ideology and yet does not constitute a threat, as such, to its neighbors.

FORUM: What would you say the Reagan Administration's goals are in Nicaragua?

LINOWITZ: I have trouble with that question because I so often have to distinguish what they say from what they do. I accept that the Reagan Administration is concerned about the shipment of arms from Nicaragua to the opposition forces in El Salvador and wants to stop that. I therefore believe that supplying help to Honduras and El Salvador for the purpose of interdicting the arms flow is perfectly appropriate and perfectly consistent with the professed objective. As to aiding the Contras, that is a different story. The United States, through its leadership, asserts that we are not encouraging or supporting the overthrow of the government in Nicaragua. When pressed as to what we are doing, the assertion is that we are really supporting people who feel that their land and their country has been taken away from them and who assert the right to claim it. We say that we should not turn our backs on them if these are freedom-loving people who feel that they have been deprived of their freedom. That is the professed objective. The problem arises when you say, "But these people acknowledge that what they want is to trade power, knock over the existing government

and assert control. Are we party to that?" Then we have a problem — can we support them in part of their aspirations and not be party to their further aspirations for overthrow? And that's where I think the issue really gets complicated.

FORUM: Should the United States support and arm the Contras for the purpose of putting pressure on the Nicaraguans to stop arms shipments to El Salvador?

LINOWITZ: If you can differentiate between the pressures that are being exerted. If you can say the Contras are being armed only so they can put pressure on Managua to stop shipping arms, that doesn't sound inconsistent with what we say we're up to. The problem is how to say to the Contras, "apply only pressure which will result only in the interdiction of supplies going to El Salvador." The fact is that pressure applied, whether it comes from the North or from the South, is going to weaken the government of Nicaragua. I don't see how you can channel it into a single pressure objective. And that, again, is where the problem arises; if we support the Contras we are risking that we will be seen as, and indeed will be, party to supporting them in all that they are undertaking to do.

FORUM: The Reagan Administration might argue that, since we have begun to support the Contras, the Sandinistas' negotiating stance has softened quite a bit. They have come forth with new proposals and they have become much more agreeable to cutting off their aid to the Salvadoran rebels. In light of this claim, how can you argue that the Reagan Administration policy is not working, at least to the extent that it is reducing this aid?

LINOWITZ: It's your definition of the word "working" that has to be looked at. Working toward what aim? You are right in saying working at reducing their aid to the Salvadorans, and that's the objective that we are accomplishing. I see no reason why the administration can't claim that the tough policy we have followed has resulted in this success, and if that is the credit they want to claim, I think it is proper and not unreasonable for them to claim it. But the question is, what is it that we are trying to do in all of Central America? Our objective should be to try to get the countries there to move into negotiations — to support the Contadora countries as they move toward settlement of the conflicts in Central America, a process in which they have taken the lead — in trying to evolve a basis for peaceful negotiations. If we are strengthening El Salvador's position, for example, in order that El Salvador can more

effectively negotiate, and if we are pressing the Nicaraguans for the establishment of free, fair elections with international supervision, then we have laudable and, I think, very important objectives. But we have to be clear that that is what we are seeking and our aid must be designed to further those objectives.

FORUM: If the United States does not use the arming of the Contras as a means of pressuring the Sandinistas, what pressure can the United States put on the Sandinistas or what aid can the United States give to entice the Sandinistas to soften their negotiating position?

LINOWITZ: Let me step back and say some things that ought to be said. One, we've got to stop acting as though the problems of Central America are the problems of the United States alone. They are regional problems for which the United States cannot undertake on its own to prescribe solutions. Two, if it is a regional problem it has to be dealt with regionally and cooperatively. That means that we must support the Contadora countries and ask the question, "What can we do to make the Contadora countries more effective in seeking to resolve these issues?" Your questions ask what the United States can do to pressure or entice. The question should be what can we do *together* in order to advance towards a solution? And that leads me to the third point, which is that we've got to understand that in whatever we undertake to do in conjunction with these other countries in the region, we are not dealing with a military problem that happens to have a political dimension, but with a basically political problem that has a military dimension. And we're not going to solve the problems through military means. The underlying problems I talked about earlier — the economic, political, social conditions and so forth — need an approach which goes far beyond the military. That means, fourth, that in what we undertake we've got to be consistent, we've got to be clear, and we've got to make sure that our actions and our words jibe. We can't say that we are supporting the Contadora countries and then go off on our own and take action without regard to their wishes. We can't say that we stand for self-determination and the right of each country to govern itself as it chooses and yet undertake to prescribe the choice. In short we've got to have a context within which we make our support available. That context must be regional, and it must be designed to further the longer range objectives which go beyond the military.

FORUM: According to the *New York Times* even some members of the Contadora group have privately expressed little hope for a negotiated

solution to the problems in Central America. What steps can the United States take to promote or to increase the likelihood of successful negotiations working with the Contadora countries?

LINOWITZ: The most important thing we can do is to make it unequivocally clear that we really support the Contadora group. We have not done that. We have paid lip service, but have embarked on our own programs which seem to undercut the efforts of the Contadora group representatives. We have had our own representatives go down there and try to pursue discussion and negotiations, not always in concert with Contadora countries. In short, what we have to do is to make it unmistakably clear to the Contadora countries and to the other countries in the area that we are working in conjunction with the Contadora group, are fully supportive of their efforts and are ready to participate in furthering them. Absent that, the Contadora countries won't be able to make real progress, and in my talks with representatives, presidents and so forth of several of those countries, that's what they have told me. Second, we can't expect that we're going to be able to be credible and to have an impact in terms of moving where we say we want to move in Latin America when we engage in operations such as Grenada. We profess our commitment to non-intervention and respect for the sovereign rights of countries in the region, and yet this action is widely seen as one that gives a lie to that professed commitment. Regardless of whether or not there was justification for our position, there is no question that people will now say that we have in mind the overthrow of the government of Nicaragua, which we are seen as more apt to do now, following Grenada, than before. This ties into what I was saying earlier, that if our words and our actions mesh, if we indicate our commitment, and if we support the Contadora group, then I think the chances for progress are far greater than they otherwise will be. We've got to show these countries that we believe in them, that we welcome their initiative, that we feel that they ought to find a basis for peaceful resolution and that we are fully prepared to cooperate.

FORUM: Turning to Grenada for a minute, why did the United States invade Grenada in your opinion?

LINOWITZ: It was stated that we did it for several reasons. One, the safety of our citizens there. We had over a thousand people in Grenada, most of them at that medical school. Two, in order to avoid further chaos in the region. Three, in order to reestablish law and order and democratic institutions. And that we did it because these Eastern Caribbean countries, the six of them, asked us to do it and we acceded to their urgent request. That's the announced purpose as stated by the President and by the

Secretary of State. My own concern, and I'm deeply troubled by this, is that as a member of the OAS, committed to the Rio Treaty, we had an obligation not to become involved in an intervention of this kind. We should have resorted to the OAS and tried to bring the matter before the Inter-American body charged with that responsibility. Even though the countries of the East Caribbean Group may not be adherents to the Rio Treaty, we *are*, and when we joined the expedition we were, in effect, calling into question the seriousness of our commitment to the Rio Treaty and to the OAS.

FORUM: The OAS has been pretty quiet about the conflict in Central America and so far about the invasion of Grenada. Why isn't it taking more action?

LINOWITZ: That's a very good question. I wish it were more active and I think it should be more active. I think the experience, however, has been that the OAS does not leap to the front in taking the leadership. The Secretary General of the OAS sees his role as far more circumscribed than the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the Council of the OAS has never been as forceful in taking hold of issues and moving with them. There have been one or two incidents in the past where the Council has worked effectively and has made a real effort, but that is the exception to the rule. I served, as you know, for three years as the ambassador to the Organization of American States, where one of my great frustrations was that the OAS was not doing more and taking greater leadership. The underlying answer to your question, however, is that any international organization, the OAS or the United Nations, is only as strong as the commitment of its members. An international body assumes leadership and becomes a real force if the states which make it up want it to be. The United States, among others, has never seen the OAS as the important force it ought to be in the region. And what we have done in the case of Grenada indicates again that we don't resort to the OAS when issues come up, we give it the back of the hand and proceed on our own course. Or, as in the case of the Dominican Republic, we go to it after we have taken our action. That may be what we're doing this time; and to the extent that the strongest, the most powerful and the most important nation in the hemisphere does not regard the OAS as serious, it will not be regarded as serious by the other countries.

FORUM: To turn briefly to U.S. aid policies, what impact does U.S. military aid and presence in countries like Honduras and Costa Rica have on the internal political situations in those countries?

LINOWITZ: It's hard to generalize, but when you get any country which becomes beholden to the United States, or any other larger power, for military, economic and other aid, that donor country does begin to have an impact on the nation and the policies it follows. It's a problem of which any recipient country has to be watchful. There is the attitude of not wanting to antagonize, fearing that if you don't behave in the way the benefactor wants you to, your aid will be cut off. It could, therefore, be a development which affects the independence of the country and is something that has to be guarded against, but it is a calculated risk.

FORUM: What effect, if any, does the increased military aid in Central America have on the political power of the militaries in the region, specifically Honduras and El Salvador?

LINOWITZ: The difficulty with that question is that so much depends on the particular country. The reason that it is such a complicated question is that a military which gets aid from a country like the United States, and wants to have political authority, is strengthened in its goal because it is working in such close conjunction with a country like the United States. But so much depends on what the military aspires to, whether it wants to play that kind of role and whether the military becomes so important in the life of the country that it moves toward political dominance as well as military dominance. Now in some of those countries down there the military, just by being there, has been the important political force. In others, the government becomes militarized because the military intervention becomes greater. So, in general, I would say that the strengthening of the military position in a particular country by the United States is apt to increase the political strength of the military and to give it more clout than it had before.

FORUM: Some people, particularly people in the current administration, argue that while the United States in a perfect world would love to go by all these international laws and treaties, the world isn't perfect. We're competing with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union does not respect the territorial rights of its neighbors. How can we compete effectively against the Soviet Union if we give them the advantage of not having to play fair?

LINOWITZ: If we had been failing in the world because we believe in principles of respecting sovereignty of other countries, non-intervention and self-determination, then that question would be relevant and appropriate. I think it is not because that condition does not exist; we have been

succeeding in the world and we have been succeeding precisely because, in contrast to the Soviet Union, we stand for the rights of other countries. We respect sovereignty and we acknowledge non-intervention. Those are the hallmarks of American foreign policy and to say that in order to be successful in the world we have to emulate the Soviet Union and communist policy is a profession of bankruptcy that I don't accept and that I see as a very significant indication of lack of faith on the part of those who are saying it.

FORUM: If that is the case, how can the United States reconcile its commitment to non-intervention with its commitment to democracy and its opposition to Marxism and Communism. For example, how can the United States act towards Nicaragua, a country whose policies it opposes, without intervening in its internal affairs?

LINOWITZ: I think your point ought to be in terms of "the way we ought to act." That is to say, we can make clear that there are certain countries whose policies we don't respect and with whom we don't work warmly and helpfully without, at the same time, intervening in their internal affairs. In my judgment, if a country establishes a government that we don't like, but which does not threaten its neighbors, does not become a danger to the security of the hemisphere or the area, then as much as we may dislike it, we have no right to walk into that country and say, "Change your government, we don't like the way its running." We may cut off aid, we may do all kinds of things diplomatically, but there is nothing in any international organizational code or in any agreement or treaty which says that we can arrogate to ourselves the right to walk into a country and tell it the kind of government to have. So the answer is that non-intervention is consistent with our dissatisfaction or displeasure, indeed, our opposition, to a peaceful country which happens to have a government we don't like.

FORUM: If we take the case of El Salvador, the United States, basically the U.S. Congress, has tried to make U.S. aid dependent on improvements in the human rights situation there. To what extent has the United States been successful in making aid dependent on improved human rights?

LINOWITZ: We still see the death squads operating dramatically and depressingly in El Salvador. We know that there have been calls by the United States government a number of times now for more effective action by the military and the government of El Salvador against these death squads and they have not been successful. I think what we have to do is

keep pressuring as much as possible on this particular point. I would not want to tie it too closely though, to what we do in the form of aid. I think that what we have to do is try and make clear how important the death squads and human rights aspects are to us, that our policies will be affected by what they do and don't do in this area. But I personally don't like the use of our aid for that purpose. If you really need to supply economic aid and military aid to a country there should be good reasons which have to do with a number of vital considerations which lead you to continue that policy. But I see nothing wrong with saying that if you fail to abide by certain restrictions in those aid packages, then we will enforce them. That I think is clearly consistent.

FORUM: If we can shift quickly back to the internal situation in Nicaragua, you said earlier that, generally speaking, the United States should not intervene internally to change the domestic policies of a country such as Nicaragua. Still, Americans like to see democracy or at least moderation internally. What can the United States do, short of military intervention, to promote moderation and hopefully to promote democracy?

LINOWITZ: First, you said "short of military intervention." I think that the one way not to do it is by military intervention; I think that that is wholly ineffective. I think that the only effective ways to promote moderation are: (1) by example and, (2) by encouraging it through our policies toward that country. I've forgotten who it was years ago who said that our policies in Latin America ought to be a handshake for dictatorship, an *abrazo* for democracy. In other words, work more closely, more cooperatively, more generously with democracies than we do with countries that are not. Try to be helpful to their institutions that are democratic, i.e., labor unions and other organizations that are trying to build democratic institutions in those countries. Try to do what we can to encourage other countries that are democracies and that have democratic institutions to help their neighbors to move in the same direction. In short, prove that it is beneficial to the people of the country to have a democratic rather than a non-democratic government; encourage the people of the country to press for that, to seek it, to express themselves. But do not undertake to act as though you can export democracy into a country, nor undertake to prescribe how that country should govern itself. Offer encouragement in every way possible and the promise of a closer working relationship if it turns into a democratic government.

FORUM: In that regard the Reagan Administration has acted in Central America partly out of fear (or at least out of a stated fear) that the revolution

will spread to Mexico or to Panama. What actions or what policies can the United States now take with those countries to try to head off the very problems leading to revolution which you described in your answer to the first question?

LINOWITZ: In the first place, we ought to stay out of those countries and not try to "head off" by getting in there and trying to tell them what they ought to do. These are sovereign countries with their own objectives, their own way of life, their own manner of governing. I'm saying that it's not up to us to stand up and tell them how they ought to govern themselves. I think that I've been saying that consistently. What we can do is to offer economic help; to the extent that it would be useful, we ought to do that. To the extent that we could work with them in regional arrangements, Contadora and others, indicating our cooperative attitude and spirit and desire to achieve mutual objectives, we can do that. Basically, however, it's a matter of recognizing that each country has a right to self-determination, that we may not always like the actions they take on issues or the decisions they make with respect to a particular event, any more than they may like ours. But we have to treat them with mutual respect, have to understand that they are going to fulfill their own destiny in their own ways, and remember what Benito Juarez, the Mexican patriot once said, that, "respect for the rights of others is peace."