

RONALD REAGAN'S LATIN AMERICAN POLICY*

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Ronald Reagan's election as President created quite a stir in the arena of foreign relations. Liberals believed that disaster had struck while conservatives thought their day had truly arrived. Latin Americans shared this dichotomy - revolutionaries believed they were in for tough treatment and rightists in places like El Salvador eagerly anticipated new arms shipments from the United States.

Reagan's appointment of Alexander Haig as Secretary of State and Jean Kirkpatrick as UN Ambassador, together with a general house cleaning of foreign service personnel assigned to Central and South America, clearly signalled a reversal of Jimmy Carter's human rights-accented diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere. Kirkpatrick became the intellectual high priestess urging U.S. support for right wing dictatorships and tough action toward countries such as Nicaragua. American power was to be reasserted in the hemisphere; Cold War politics were resurrected.

Despite the rhetoric, however, Reagan's policies - with the significant exception of human rights - were not terribly different than President Carter's. More importantly, the Reagan - Haig - Kirkpatrick team had strongly re-emphasized age-old U.S. policies toward Latin America. At best it was "old wine in new bottles" which, if continued long enough, could easily turn to vinegar for the Washington wine merchants.

*Synopsis provided by Professor Fischer.