Formation of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America

April 1983: The President addressed a joint session of Congress and spoke to the American people about what is at stake in Central America. He asked for bipartisan cooperation in pursuing our basic goals for the region:

"First. In response to decades of inequity and indifference, we will support democracy, reform, and human freedom. This means using our assistance, our powers of persuasion, and our legitimate 'leverage' to bolster humane democratic systems where they already exist and to help countries on their way to that goal complete the process as quickly as human institutions can be changed....

Second. In response to the challenge of world recession and, in the case of El Salvador, to the unrelenting campaign of economic sabotage by the guerrillas, we will support economic development. By a margin of two-to-one, our aid is economic now, not military....

Third. In response to the military challenge from Cuba and Nicaragua—to their deliberate use of force to spread tyranny—we will support the security of the region's threatened nations. We do not view security assistance as an end in itself but as a shield for democratization, economic development, and diplomacy. No amount of reform will bring peace so long as guerrillas believe they will win by force....

Fourth. We will support dialogue and negotiations—both among the countries of the region and within each country... The United States will work toward a political solution in Central America which will serve the interests of the democratic process."


February 1984: As he was preparing to submit to Congress the proposed legislation on Central America, President Reagan reflected on his reasons for establishing a bipartisan Commission: "Shortly after that speech [April 1983], the late Senator Jackson called for the appointment of a bipartisan commission to chart a long-term course for democracy, economic improvement and peace in Central America. It was against this background that I established the National Bipartisan Commis-
sion on Central America. Its mission was to recommend a long-term policy appropriate to the economic, social, political and military challenges to the region. The distinguished Americans who served on the Commission have performed a great service to all Americans. The twelve commissioners—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—concluded that “Central America is both vital and vulnerable, and that whatever other crises may arise to claim the nation’s attention, the United States cannot afford to turn away from that threatened region.”

Central America Democracy, Peace and Development Initiative

“The Jackson Plan”

February 1984: The legislation was presented to Congress. As the President said, “Our proposed legislation... is based on the Commission’s analysis and embodies its recommendations. The legislation does not offer a quick fix to the crisis in Central America. There is none. Our plan offers a comprehensive program to support democratic development, improve human rights and bring peace to this troubled region so close to home. The approach is right. It includes a mix of developmental, political, diplomatic and security initiatives, equitably and humanely pursued. We either do them all, or we jeopardize the chance for real progress in the region.”

Legislation Highlights

Economic Assistance

Recognizing that economic deterioration aggravates social and political unrest, the President has requested an additional $400 million for this year (FY 1984) for emergency stabilization to set the stage for long-term development.

Over the next five years, the proposed legislation calls for a total of roughly $8 billion which would be used for such things as:

- balance of payments support to finance import of critical goods
- food assistance
- housing construction
- increased support for education, including teacher corps, training, and scholarships
- major funding to develop commercial agriculture, including assistance to broaden ownership patterns and increase availability of credit
- increased funding for activities in Central America by the private National Endowment for Democracy
- funds to strengthen administration of justice in the region as the surest way to safeguard individual liberties and human rights
• support for the Central America Common Market and its companion Central America Bank for Economic Integration to revitalize intra-regional trade and restore economic production and employment.

• $2 billion in credits to purchase U.S. goods, which would stimulate U.S. jobs, agricultural exports, etc.

The crucial importance of social and economic factors is reflected in the President's proposed budget figures. In FY-1985 alone, the proposed levels for economic assistance are almost seven times the levels for military aid. The total FY-1984 Supplemental/FY 1985 program for the region is 75% economic, as opposed to 25% military assistance.

Military Assistance

As Assistant Secretary of State Langhorne Motley testified when presenting this proposed legislation to Congress: "Peace is essential to economic and humanitarian progress in Central America. Without security, the best economic programs and the wisest diplomacy will be unable to stop the opponents of democracy."

In light of this fact, the President is proposing that Congress approve:

For El Salvador:  $178.7 million in FY 1984 supplemental assistance and $132.5 million for 1985. Mr. Motley further testified that, "This program would be concentrated in FY 1984 in order to break the military stalemate and provide as soon as possible a firmer basis for economic recovery and democratic reconciliation in El Salvador."

The bipartisan Commission recommended significantly increased levels of military aid to El Salvador and warned against providing "too little to wage the war successfully."

For the rest of Central America: The President has proposed approximately $80 million in FY 1984 supplemental military assistance and $123.4 million for FY 1985. The bulk of this would go to Honduras, a democracy that still faces frequent violations of its territory by Honduran and Salvadoran guerrillas. Honduras also faces a direct military threat from Nicaragua, which has built up armed forces at least five times larger than Somoza's National Guard and has received some $250 million in military assistance from the Soviet bloc since 1979.

Central American Development Organization (CADO)

The bipartisan Commission recommended creation of a Central American Development Organization to give multilateral form and substance to economic development efforts. In line with this recommendation, the President's proposed legislation sets forth principles to guide the negotiations for establishing this new institution in conjunction with the Central American countries and other donors.
Conclusion

Are we asking too much? The economic aid the President has requested for Central America represents less than 15 percent of our total foreign economic aid budget for FY 1985.

Those who advocate less military assistance should be reminded that there is no reduction in arms, training, and other support flowing to the other side, a side that rejects democracy and pluralism and chooses violence as its means to power.

The President summed up the critical state of affairs as he spoke about the proposed legislation: "This initiative serves the interests of the United States and of the Western Hemisphere. The beleaguered people in Central America want our help. Our enemies—extremists of the left and the right—would be delighted if we refused to give it. And if we don't help now we will surely pay dearly in the future.

With the support of the Congress, we will not let down all those in Central America who yearn for democracy and peace. And in so doing, we will not let ourselves down."