

Is there really a Central America deal?

by Gretchen Small

Soviet leader Yuri Andropov's spring 1983 proposal, in West Germany's *Der Spiegel* weekly, for a superpower deal giving the United States "freedom of action" in Central America in return for Soviet hegemony over the Eurasian land mass, is the basis of current pre-summit U.S.-Soviet negotiations on "regional matters."

Senior U.S. and Soviet officials met privately in London Oct. 22-23 to discuss Central America, the third such U.S.-Soviet meeting on the area in the past 18 months. The U.S. team was represented by Project Democracy influential Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs. The Soviet team was headed by Yuri Popov, chief of the Latin America department of the foreign ministry.

As in all such meetings, the contents of discussions were secret. Since the London talks, however, signals that the Andropov accord is in play have abounded in Central America. Nicaragua's gyrations over whether and how it will participate in the Central American peace talks are the clearest indication.

Swapping appearances

On Oct. 29, ultra-hardliners had carried the day at a Sandinista high command meeting. The final declaration stated that, "no way, nowhere, through no intermediary, at no time," would the Sandinistas talk with the Contras.

Ortega then flew off to Moscow, to participate in the Revolution's 70th anniversary celebrations. Hardly had he returned on Nov. 5, than he announced that he had just driven his jeep over to personally request that Cardinal Miguel Obando mediate talks with the Contras!

U.S. media credited Moscow's desires for a deal with Washington for the reversal. "This about-face must have been painful personally and a matter of intense political infighting. . . . Superpower pressure from Washington and Moscow must have had something to do with Mr. Ortega's decision," the *Baltimore Sun* wrote in a Nov. 9 editorial. The December summit between President Reagan and Soviet party chief Mikhail Gorbachov "will probably include talks about Afghanistan and Nicaragua. The possibilities for a deal have

long been bruited," the *Sun* wrote.

Then, Ortega traveled to Washington, his first-ever visit as President. While Ortega spoke before the Organization of American States, Nicaraguan officials let it be known that they were willing to slip in quiet talks with U.S. officials.

Then came Washington's side of the deal. The Contras were close to the negotiations with the Soviets from the outset. While in London, Abrams held at least one meeting with Contra leader Adolfo Calero, and the two appeared together on BBC's "Newsnight" show.

On Nov. 9, Secretary of State George Shultz told the OAS that the administration will not request new military aid for the Contras until after the new year. President Reagan announced that when "serious" cease-fire negotiations are under way between the Sandinistas and the Contras, the United States will talk with Sandinista representatives, in the context of regional peace talks.

Widely touted as a major reversal of U.S. policy, the summit was again credited for the shift.

Keep your eye on El Salvador

The situation in El Salvador provides a useful standard from which to assess the diplomatic promises given over Central America. The Soviet-allied Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) delivered one message in the past month: It is they, the insurgents, who will determine when the lights go on in the country, and when the trucks run.

El Salvador's government had reopened negotiations with the FMLN, as part of a regional peace accord adopted by the five Central American Presidents in August. The accord was put together by the four Western-allied governments in the region, in an effort to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Nicaragua and the insurgents, by creating a broader regional framework from which to deal. Central America's presidents had little expectation that peace could be restored through negotiations, but sought to head off the generalized civil war which otherwise seems inevitable.

FMLN representatives agreed to negotiate—as long as the government discussed how to transfer power to their hands. Before they would even discuss a cease-fire, for example, the FMLN demanded that the government recognize FMLN rule in areas of the country they claimed as "theirs."

When the government refused, the FMLN answered with a demonstration of power. On Nov. 2, the rebels announced that any vehicle—bus, truck, or private car—traveling on the nation's highways would be considered a military target, and attacked accordingly. It was the seventh FMLN transport stoppage this year, and the most successful. Shortages of goods developed in stores and markets, as all cross-country public transportation halted. To keep the country running, the military had to organize convoys, protected by air and ground surveillance.

The FMLN lifted its threat on Nov. 6, issuing a communiqué gloating over this "glorious demonstration of the power

of our forces.” As that announcement went out, FMLN squads blew up 15 power transmission lines, cutting electricity to 30% of the country, and halting television and radio transmissions for several hours.

Gen. Abdul Gutierrez, head of the national electrical company, called the attack “the worst span of sabotage” since the civil war began. It was the insurgents’ answer to a 15-day unilateral cease-fire declared by the government to begin Nov. 7. FMLN commanders announced that “the order has been given to attack, if the government’s troops enter zones controlled by our commandos.”

Flanking the enemy

The FMLN has gained such military advantage, in large part because of the United States’s insistence that the Salvadoran government channel all wealth produced in the country into foreign debt payments. The economy has collapsed. Fifty percent of El Salvador’s population is unemployed. Real income levels have dropped by between one-half and two-thirds since 1979. Inflation is at least 40% annually—and the FMLN has had a field day recruiting.

Without an economic strategy, the United States may soon find itself locked into Moscow’s box: either to accept the establishment of a new Nicaragua in El Salvador, or intervene directly to shore up a government hated because it has “turned people into a rabble” on U. S. orders.

The Soviets, of course, have no intention of carrying out the terms of the Andropov deal. Central America is the Soviet monkey-trap for the United States, the bait that is to pull U.S. troops out of Europe and the Gulf for a fight closer to home.

Just how Moscow plans to “respect” U.S. intervention to stop Soviet-backed insurgencies in Central America is foreshadowed in El Salvador. An editorial in the November 1986 issue of *América Latina*, the monthly publication of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences’ Latin America Institute, stated that, if the Reagan administration seeks to “democratize” the Nicaraguan regime, it can only do so by attempting to overthrow the Sandinistas. This will lead to a nationwide Vietnam.

“It is worth remembering the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which pulled the U. S. into the Vietnam adventure. Won’t the same thing happen in Central America? The logic of the route adopted leads precisely to this. *Then, the war will extend beyond the limits of Nicaragua.* A lasting guerrilla force will be deployed in the jungle, in a territory which is equal to that of South Vietnam and with a population that is more or less equivalent [emphasis added].”

In May 1987, *América Latina* reviewed the situation in El Salvador, concluding that the Reagan administration’s “democratization” program has eliminated any political maneuvering room for the Duarte government. The crisis in El Salvador “makes very likely Philip Berryman’s forecast that: ‘The final role of Duarte in history could be that of inviting the U.S. to invade El Salvador, to “save a democracy” of his own making.’ ”

Nov. 8-9 Referendum

25 million Italians cast protest vote

by Liliana Celani

The lowest-ever voter turnout characterized the referendum on nuclear power and judicial issues which took place in Italy on Nov. 8 and 9. Only 65.2% of the voters went to the polls, compared to the 87.7% who voted in 1974 at the first big referendum on divorce, and the 77.9% who voted on the cost-of-living escalator in 1985. Moreover, 4 million of the voters who did go to the polls wrote only insults and angry words on the ballot, indicating a wave of rage toward the parties and government institutions, which has much more to do with their impotence in the face of the financial crash than with nuclear energy and the court system.

One week before the vote on the referendum, the government of Christian Democrat Giovanni Goria discussed doubling the budget cuts foreseen by the Italian “Gramm-Rudman bill,” the so-called “Finanziaria 1988,” as the only measure to deal with the financial crash. Despite the fact that almost all the Italian parties called for a “yes” vote on the referendum (the only exception being the Liberal and Republican parties, which together make up approximately 5% of the vote), many voters went to the polls to express their protest by voting contrary to what their party had asked them to do—either because they oppose the anti-nuclear and anti-industrial policy of the Greenies, or because they dislike the austerity economic policy of all the other parties.

The “yes” to abrogating existing laws on nuclear power and justice did win, but the “no” to abrogating nuclear power was much higher than expected (20% on Italian nuclear power plants and 27.8% on exporting nuclear power abroad, the highest counts, interestingly enough, in the municipalities which have nuclear power plants, such as Trino Vercellese, 33.9%, and Caorso, 30%). There, people have a less hysterical view of nuclear power; they have been living with it for many years.

The only ones campaigning for nuclear power in this referendum were the Schiller Institute and the Patriots for Italy, which put out a pro-nuclear power poster in major Italian cities drawing the attention of many citizens (who asked for copies, since it was the only optimistic poster) and, amazingly, even of the press. The weekly *L’Espresso* ran a picture of the poster, all by itself on the electoral board, and