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Is Peace at Hand?

Noam Chomsky

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Nicaragua must tolerate the infantile antics and vulgar abuse that are a Washington specialty, in a manner that no other state would endure — surely not the U.S. or its allies.

The attack against Nicaragua and the programs of state terror to suppress democracy and social reform in the client states reflect an elite consensus. That is why they are not discussed in any minimally serious way. The media will not expose what they know to be true, and Congress will not constrain the terrorist commanders as long as they seem to be succeeding in their tasks. The fate of the Central American accords lies in the hands of the domestic enemy of the state, the citizens in “enemy territory” at home. As so often in the past, dissent, protest, pressures of a wide variety that escape elite control can modify the calculus of costs of planners, and offer a slight hope that Washington can be compelled to permit at least some steps towards “justice, freedom and democracy” within its domains.

compliance of the doves, who loyally evade this unwelcome issue. Washington has also attempted in other ways to elicit a hostile Nicaraguan response that might be utilized by the State Department Office of Public Diplomacy in its struggles in “enemy territory” at home. The Reagan administration sent Secretary of Education William Bennett, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and assorted contra supporters (David Horowitz, Ronald Radosh, etc.) to Nicaragua, where they delivered inflammatory public addresses denouncing the Sandinistas and praising the U.S. proxy army attacking Nicaragua, prominently reported in the press (with approval, in *La Prensa*). But unfortunately, these efforts elicited no reaction that could be exploited for propaganda purposes.

We might, incidentally, ask what would happen if a Libyan official or Qaddafi enthusiast were to arrive in Tel Aviv to deliver a public address praising Abu Nidal. Or suppose a Japanese cabinet minister had landed in Washington in 1942 (when the national territory was not under attack or even threat — in fact, it had not been threatened since the War of 1812) to deliver diatribes about American racism and injustice and to call for the forceful overthrow of the government by the “freedom fighters” then liberating the Philippines and other Western colonies. We need not speculate, since as distinct from totalitarian Nicaragua, Israel and the United States would never tolerate any such act for one instant. In fact, the U.S. has barred even anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan legislators who are opposed to contra aid, mothers tortured by Duarte’s security services who were invited by NOW to speak in New England towns, a delegate from the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission to a UN session on disarmament and development that the U.S. boycotted, among many others — for example, the Canadian publisher of several of my books, still barred from our sacred soil because he opposed U.S. aggression in Indochina. All such matters are off the agenda, and in our extraordinary imperial arrogance, we take for granted that

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violation of their essential provisions by the U.S. client states; the fact that “Soviet aid to Managua” was a major achievement of the Reagan administration, which blocked aid from elsewhere while launching an attack on Nicaragua, and that the Guatemala agreement also does not provide for reductions in U.S. aid to its client states; that others, besides the beleaguered and helpless United States, have “legitimate security concerns,” among them Nicaragua and the victims of U.S. aid in the terror states; that Managua has long offered to exclude foreign advisers and negotiate verifiable security guarantees, efforts successfully blocked by Washington; that if Nicaragua poses “security concerns” for the United States, then Luxembourg poses security concerns for the Soviet Union, and Denmark, a member of a hostile military alliance, poses far greater concerns, so that the USSR is entitled, by our principles, to organize terrorist forces to attack and overthrow their governments unless they agree to disarm and offer verifiable guarantees that they will no longer threaten the Soviet Union. In short, the very model of a well-behaved dove, as designed by the Office of Public Diplomacy.⁴⁴

As always, it is the duty of the liberal doves to set the limits of thinkable thought. This has always been the essence of the American system of indoctrination, brilliantly effective among the educated classes, though “enemy territory” remains out of control, a continuing problem.

Putting irrelevant fact aside, the operative question today is whether Washington can convert the “key issues” it designates into a justification for expanding the war against Nicaragua. The problem that arose after Nicaragua’s offer to negotiate with the CIA civilian front can surely be overcome by U.S. propaganda and military operations. As we have seen, the latter were immediately escalated in accord with the dedication of the terrorist superpower to the unlawful use of force, with the

⁴⁴ James Chace, NYT, Nov. 9, 1987.

others should comply,” since Nicaragua had already complied with the accords. A second reads: “Popular power cannot be discussed after 26 years of [the people’s] struggle,” a familiar Sandinista slogan. The third, not entirely readable, apparently calls for closing of La Prensa. Not precisely what the Times is laboring to convey.⁴³

It would be an error to describe such media subservience as totalitarianism in the Stalinist or Nazi style. In totalitarian states, those who serve power have the excuse of fear. Here we see, rather, a form of voluntary servitude, a remarkable and pervasive feature of the intellectual culture.

For its first commentary on the initial three-month phase of the accords, the Times selected James Chace, a noted dove. Accordingly, he expressed pleasure with the progress on all fronts, even Nicaragua, where President Ortega “has agreed to negotiate indirectly with the contras,” thus indicating that at last “the Sandinistas seem determined to fulfill the main provisions” of the agreement, as defined by Washington. But “there is still, of course, a long way to go” in consummating the accords, because “the Sandinistas have not yet declared a general amnesty or lifted the state of emergency.” Apart from continued Sandinista obstruction, Chace sees no problems during the three-month period, though as a dove, he opposes renewed contra aid and criticizes the Reagan administration for remaining “suspicious and hostile,” while conceding that it has good grounds, since “the Guatemala agreement does not provide for reductions in Soviet aid to Managua” so that “America’s legitimate security concerns” are not addressed. Among the topics unmentioned are: U.S. actions to undermine the accords; the

⁴³ Peter Ford reports from Managua that “the tens of thousands of Sandinista supporters in Revolution square offered no response when the President announced...talks with the contra leadership,” and other steps highly touted here were “met with a baffled silence,” though his defiant challenge to “aggression against the Nicaraguan people” received “enthusiastic applause”; CSM, Nov. 9, 1987.

On August 7, 1987, the Central American Presidents signed a peace agreement in Guatemala City which, if implemented, could have a significant impact in the region.¹ The agreement does not address the causes of the violence and suffering that plague these long-term U.S. dependencies, but it might restrict U.S. intervention, a prerequisite to any constructive change. The circumstances of the accords should be carefully studied by those who hope to influence state policy, but I will defer this crucial topic, keeping here to the prospects for implementation of the accords.

In approaching this question, we must bear in mind that we live in the Age of Orwell, in which every term has two meanings: its literal meaning, largely irrelevant in practice, and the operative meaning, devised in the interests of established power. Accordingly, there are two versions of the accords to consider: the actual text, and the radically different Washington version.

We therefore face two questions: (1) Can the accords be implemented in terms of their actual content? (2) Can they be implemented according to the Washington version? The first of these questions is only an academic exercise, but it is illuminating to consider it nonetheless.

The Irrelevant Facts

Keeping to the actual substance of the accords, there is no possibility that they can be implemented, as a review of the initial three-month period clearly demonstrates.

The accords identify one factor as “an indispensable element to achieving a stable and lasting peace in the region,” namely, termination of any form of aid “to irregular forces or insurgent movements” on the part of “regional or extraregional” gov-

¹ For discussion of the background, and references not cited here, see my *Culture of Terrorism* (South End, 1988).

ernments. As a corollary, the Central American governments agree to deny their territory to any such groups. This demand is directed at the United States and the client states it has used for the attack against Nicaragua by what contra lobbyists candidly describe in internal documents as a “proxy force,” organized, trained, supplied and controlled by the CIA.

This central feature of the accords is redundant, since such actions are barred by a higher authority: by international law and treaty, hence by the supreme law of the land under the U.S. Constitution, which we are enjoined to celebrate this year. The fact was underscored by the World Court in June 1986 as it condemned the United States for its “unlawful use of force” against Nicaragua and called upon it to desist from these crimes. Congress responded by voting \$100 million of aid and freeing the CIA to direct the attack and to use its own funds on an unknown scale. The U.S. vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law and voted against a General Assembly resolution to the same effect, joined by Israel and El Salvador. On Nov. 12, 1987, the General Assembly again called for “full and immediate compliance” with the World Court decision. This time only Israel joined with the U.S. in opposing adherence to international law, another blow to the Central American accords, unreported by the national press as usual.

The media had dismissed the World Court as a “hostile forum” whose decisions are irrelevant, while liberal advocates of world order explained that the U.S. must disregard the Court decision. With this reaction, U.S. elites clearly articulate their self-image: the United States is a lawless terrorist state, which stands above the law and is entitled to undertake violence, as it chooses, in support of its objectives. The reaction to the “indispensable element” of the Central America accords merely reiterated that conviction.

To ensure that the accords would be undermined, the U.S. at once directed its proxy forces to escalate military actions,

ment, in obedience to Washington’s longstanding attempts to undermine authentic human rights organizations.

The New York Times review of the progress of the accords after the “historic deadline” of November 7⁴¹ conforms precisely to the dictates of the Office of Public Diplomacy. In the survey article of November 8 by James LeMoyné, the behavior of the United States is unmentioned and nothing is said about its client states. The article focuses on one issue: the Sandinista decision to enter negotiations with the CIA civilian front, with Cardinal Obando – their most prominent antagonist – as intermediary; a remarkable choice, since only a neutral party is considered an appropriate “intermediary” apart from the Orwellian world established by reigning power, and a hazardous move, since Obando can be expected to blame the Sandinistas if the negotiations collapse, as elsewhere. This decision, LeMoyné explains, is a great victory for the United States, because its creation thus gains the status of “a legitimate belligerent force.” The implication, drawn explicitly by administration officials the same day, is that “we’ve learned from this...that pressure works, and that we must keep that pressure on.”⁴² The truth of the matter is that pressure works to keep the media in line, though this victory is only a shade less difficult than the glorious conquest of Grenada.

Accompanying LeMoyné’s agitprop is a photograph of a rally in Managua with this caption: “Nicaraguans cheering President Daniel Ortega Saavedra as he announced that his Sandinista Government would agree to indirect negotiations with the contras on a cease-fire.” The reader is to understand, then, that the people of Nicaragua are overjoyed over this contra victory, in accord with Times doctrine. In the forefront of the photo is a cheering woman wearing an FSLN (Sandinista) T-shirt. There are three signs visible. One states that “the

⁴¹ James Clarity, NYT, Nov. 1.

⁴² Pamela Constable, BG, Nov. 8, 1987.

The Nicaraguan amnesty was extended after the accords, including about 1000 prisoners, but few National Guardsmen. The press, following Washington directives, speaks of eight to ten thousand “political prisoners,” but Americas Watch, in a detailed review, demonstrates that the figures are largely fabricated, and that these are not “political prisoners” in the sense used in the West; its February 1987 report lists *two* political prisoners in this sense, one since released. Reviewing the records of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and its own investigations, Americas Watch estimated that apart from common criminals (including 600 members of the army and police sentenced for crimes against the population, a possibility unimaginable in the terror states), the prisons contained about 2200 National Guardsmen and 1500 people charged with security-related crimes. The report is worth reading for its critical assessment of these matters, but that is the real world, not the Orwellian world of Washington and its minions.

In the latter world, along with numerous other fantasies, Robert Leiken states that “figures on Nicaraguan political prisoners...range from a low of 4,300 (Americas Watch and the Nicaraguan government)” to the much higher claims that he has relayed.⁴⁰ Putting aside the interesting reading of the Americas Watch report, note the none-too-subtle juxtaposition of Americas Watch and the Nicaraguan govern-

⁴⁰ New Republic, Dec. 14. Among other examples, we might note Leiken’s triumphant claim that “the *contras* released their Sandinista prisoners,” referring to the release of 80 “Nicaraguan prisoners of war” on September 18, also hailed by the Free Press, which reported happily that most chose to stay in Costa Rica. In Central America, however, “the speculation is that they may be disaffected *contras* or *contras* who would rather be inside Costa Rica by November 7” (Central America Report, Guatemala City, Sept. 26); “The symbolism of the gesture was tainted somewhat after several of the prisoners admitted to being *contras* and others said they had been denounced as Sandinista infiltrators in the *contra* ranks and were arrested” (Mesoamerica, San Jose, Costa Rica), Oct. 1987.

also increasing the regular supply flights that are required to keep them in the field. These had passed the level of one a day in the preceding months in support of the “spring offensive,” designed to achieve sufficient levels of terror and disruption to impress Congress. The proxy army followed Washington orders to attack “soft targets” such as farm cooperatives and health clinics instead of “trying to duke it out with the Sandinistas directly,” as explained by General John Galvin, commander of the U.S. Southern Command, who added that with these tactics, aimed at civilians lacking means of defense against armed terrorist bands, prospects for the *contras* should improve. The State Department officially authorized such attacks, with the support of media doves. There are other terrorist states, but to my knowledge, the United States is alone today in *officially* endorsing international terrorism. We see here another illustration of the self-image of U.S. elites: in a terrorist culture, all that counts is the success of violence. Accordingly, debate in Congress and the media focused on the question of whether the violence could succeed, with “doves” arguing that the proxy army was inept and hawks replying that it must be given more time and aid to prove itself as a successful terrorist force — putting euphemisms aside.

CIA-directed supply flights into Nicaragua doubled by mid-September according to the Los Angeles Times, while Nicaraguan sources that have been accurate in the past, though ignored, alleged that violations of Nicaraguan airspace rose from 70 in September to 110 in October, most of them supply flights, particularly in areas where the government had declared a unilateral cease-fire.² Before the OAS, President Ortega reported 140 supply flights during the three-month initial phase of the accords, an estimate dismissed as far too low by *contra* commander Adolfo Calero, who said that

² AP, Nov. 1, 1987.

“his radar is not working very well.”³ A review of the major media reveals only a few phrases alluding to these matters,⁴ a highly illuminating fact. Of these few references, some reveal editorial adjustments in a further service to state violence; thus the New York Times, which suppressed this crucial issue throughout the three-month period, did cite the statements by Ortega and Calero on Nov. 12, but where they each spoke of supply flights, the Times news report downgraded the reference to “surveillance flights,” still a violation of international law and the agreements, but a much less serious one, and thus less unacceptable in the newspaper of record.⁵

“Western military analysts say the contras have been stashing tons of newly airdropped weapons lately while trying to avoid heavy combat,” the Los Angeles Times reported in October. “Meanwhile, they have stepped up attacks on easy government targets like the La Patriota farm cooperative...where several militiamen, an elderly woman and her year-old grandson died in a pre-dawn shelling.”⁶ To select virtually at random from the many cases deemed unworthy of notice, on Nov. 21, 150 contras attacked two villages in the southern province of Rio San Juan with 88mm mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, killing six children and six adults and injuring 30 others, wire services reported, citing Nicaraguan radio. Even cooperatives of religious pacifists who

³ AP, Nov. 11, 1987.

⁴ Marjorie Miller, Los Angeles Times, Sept. 14, 1987; AP, Nov. 6, 1987; Mesoamerica, Oct. 1987; Peter Ford, Christian Science Monitor, Nov. 2.

⁵ Neil Lewis, NYT, Nov. 12, 1987. See AP and Pamela Constable, BG, same day, stating the facts correctly. Constable also cites the World Court condemnation of the U.S. for unlawful use of force and violation of treaties in the following sanitized version: the Court “found that the Sandinista government’s doctrines did not constitute an international threat and did not justify US military intervention.”

⁶ Richard Boudreaux and Marjorie Miller, LAT, Oct. 5.

eight ministers of 13 Latin American nations including the five Central American countries. In their November 8 report, they agreed that Nicaragua’s amnesty may legitimately remain conditional on termination of aid to the contras and use of foreign territory to attack Nicaragua. A senior Latin American diplomat commented: “Nicaragua does not have to implement amnesty until Honduras kicks out the contras and the Americans stop helping them.” Rephrasing the facts in official Times Newspeak: under the provisions of the accords, “no country in the region would be permitted to assist the contras once the Sandinistas establish full political freedom” (Stephen Kinzer).³⁸

The accords charge the Verification Commission with the responsibility “to verify and monitor the commitments contained in this document.” But this is unacceptable to Washington, because the Commission is less subject to U.S. influence than the Central American client states, who therefore must be assigned the role of monitors. For the same reason, a Contadora agreement was completely unacceptable to Washington, whereas a Central American agreement could barely be tolerated. The more fanatic contra lobbyists go so far as to inform us that the devious Ortega “tipped his hand” at the OAS when he said that “it is up to the International Verification and Monitoring Commission...to determine who is complying with the Guatemala accords,” exactly as the text says, instead of the Central American presidents, as Washington would prefer given its power over them (Robert Leiken); note how brazenly Ortega defies Washington orders. More subtle apologists report that “the decision” over “the accord’s fate” lies in the hands of “the two superpowers” and their respective clients, thus adopting the framework of cold war confrontation demanded by Washington (James LeMoyné).³⁹

³⁸ Reuters, NYT, Nov. 9; Kinzer, NYT, Nov. 18, 1987.

³⁹ Leiken, New Republic, Dec. 14, 1987; LeMoyné, NYT, Nov. 29, 1987.

lies in the hands of the Somozist-run FDN headed by Adolfo Calero, who “is a creation of the USG and so he is the horse we chose to ride,” though he is surrounded by people who are “liars and greed- and power-motivated” for whom the war is “a business” as they hope for the marines to restore them to the power they lost.³⁷ Washington, with the docile media in tow, focuses on the issue of negotiations with its creation as part of the effort to establish the fiction that the proxy army is an indigenous guerrilla force, comparable to the guerrillas in El Salvador who were driven to the hills by U.S.-backed state terror, have always fought within their country, receive little if any military aid from abroad, have nothing like the extraordinary intelligence and support system provided by the terrorist superpower, and face a military force far more powerful than the army of Nicaragua. Notice further that negotiation of a ceasefire with authentic guerrilla forces is hardly likely to succeed, as the show negotiations in El Salvador and Guatemala illustrate, and in the case of Washington’s proxies, the U.S. can readily disrupt any progress. The issue, then, is marginal, as compared with such crucial matters as Washington’s unlawful use of force and state terror in the client states. But naturally Washington will seek to restrict attention to this issue, and commentary here has obeyed, including the doves.

As for amnesty, as we have seen, El Salvador acted at once to violate this directive in the most blatant fashion, as Guatemala had already done when the military declared amnesty for itself. Nicaragua had an amnesty decree that approximates the stated conditions of the accord, apart from the state of siege, which Nicaragua has announced will remain in force until the U.S. war is brought to a halt, a position that we would accept as legitimate in the case of any client state, or the United States itself if it were under attack or threat. It was also accepted as legitimate by the Verification Commission made up of the for-

³⁷ Harper’s, October 1987; memo released at the Iran-contra hearings.

refuse to bear arms are destroyed by the U.S. terrorist forces.⁷ In a November report on human rights abuses in Nicaragua, barely noted in the 42nd paragraph of a report on contra successes in the New York Times, Americas Watch described the contras as an “outlaw force” whose continuing abuse of human rights means that “we see no way for compliance with the Arias plan’s requirement for respect for human rights other than the dissolution of the contras and an end to all aid for them by the United States, Honduras and all others” — the “indispensable element” for peace and an obligation under the irrelevant rule of law.⁸

The U.S. also launched further war games in Honduras, Operation “Blazing Trail 1987,” barely noted in the media. Nicaragua’s protest described them as the “biggest-ever military maneuvers in Honduran territory,” adding that “we can’t see this in any way as a contribution to peace” — something of an understatement.⁹

Shortly after the accords were signed, the CIA offered \$3000-a-month bribes to 14 Miskito Indian leaders to induce them to maintain the military conflict. The spokesman for the Indian opposition described this as “a last-ditch U.S. attempt to undercut their plan to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Sandinistas,” UPI reported, adding that U.S. intelligence officials “have stressed what they call the strategic importance of retaining Indian participation in the war to help gain international support,” the usual cynical exploitation of indigenous peoples. U.S. government officials quoted in the Mexican press report that the CIA salaries come from a secret account “for political projects,” unrelated to the \$100 million in con-

⁷ AP, Nov. 21, 1987; Witness for Peace, Civilian Victims of the U.S. Contra War, February-July 1987, p. 5.

⁸ AP, BG, Nov. 6; editorial WP, Nov. 6; Lindsey Gruson, NYT, Nov. 5, 1987.

⁹ BG, Nov. 20, 1987.

gressional funding.¹⁰ The going rate is considerably higher for the wealthy businessmen who serve as CIA democrats-for-hire, for example, Alfonso Robelo, who receives \$10,000 monthly tax-free, or Arturo Cruz, whose secret \$7000-a-month subsidy was transferred from the CIA to Oliver North's account for fear that Congress would expose his illegal lobbying and the fraud he perpetrated as a paid U.S. agent in connection with the campaign to disrupt the unwanted Nicaraguan elections of 1984 — elections that did not take place according to the media, which regularly contrast the “elected presidents” of the U.S. client states with the Nicaraguan dictator Ortega, who was not “elected” according to official doctrine.

Undersecretary of State Elliott Abrams conducted a news conference by radio in the Central American capitals on Oct. 22, unreported in the national press, at which he announced that the United States will “never accept a Soviet satellite in Central America” — meaning a country that is not a loyal U.S. satellite — and that “We’re going to continue the aid to the resistance,” to be sure, in violation of the “indispensable element” for peace. The Reagan administration announced its intention to seek congressional backing for its war, and Congress obliged by providing “humanitarian” aid — meaning, any form of aid that the government chooses to send — in direct violation of the accords. Secretary of State George Shultz informed the OAS that the U.S. would persist in the unlawful use of force by its “resistance fighters” until a “free Nicaragua” is established by Washington standards, thus consigning the accords to oblivion, along with international law. This announcement was noted in a 140-word item in the Times stressing Washington’s intent to give the accords “every chance,” while a headline in the lib-

¹⁰ Brian Barger, UPI, Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 22, 1987. Excelsior (Mexico City), Oct. 22, 1987.

ily predictable from the start. Since Washington is determined to undermine the agreements, any respect in which Nicaragua adheres to them is off the agenda. We are permitted to discuss some element of the accords only if Washington’s interpretation differs from Nicaragua’s, so that Nicaragua is in violation — by definition. The task of the media, then, is to conduct a parody of the sciences. In the sciences, one confronts some puzzling facts and attempts to devise principles that will explain them. In ideological warfare, one begins with Higher Truths dictated from above. The task is to select the facts, or to invent them, in such a way as to render the required conclusions not too transparently absurd — at least for properly disciplined minds.

Accordingly the media, and respectable opinion generally, quickly reduced the Central American agreements to “two key points,” as Stephen Kinzer explained: (1) Will Nicaragua agree to negotiate with the contras — that is, with the civilian directorate established by the CIA as a classic Communist-style front? (2) Will Nicaragua offer an amnesty to what are called “political prisoners,” including National Guardsmen arrested — but not killed, as is the norm elsewhere under such circumstances — after they had taken part in the slaughter of some 40,000 people?

The accords say nothing about these matters, but that is further irrelevant fact. Specifically, the accords do not call for discussions with CIA-created front organizations. That the contra directorate is exactly that has long been known, and has recently been documented in detail in a monograph by Edgar Chamorro, who was selected by the CIA to serve as spokesman for the front created as part of the disinformation campaign designed by the State Department for “enemy territory” at home (Packaging the Contras, Institute for Media Analysis). Robert Owen, Oliver North’s liaison with the contras, described the civilian front as “a name only,” “a creation of the United States government (USG) to garner support from Congress”; power

client states, as of course to itself, still Nicaragua can hardly relax its guard as long as the U.S. persists in its outspoken commitment to overthrow the government by violence. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Times does not report such matters as CIA-run supply flights to the proxy army, the attempts to bribe Miskito Indian leaders, or Operation “Blazing Trail 1987” and other U.S. measures to ensure that Nicaragua will be compelled to maintain a state of permanent mobilization against the threat of outright U.S. invasion. In the West, threatening military maneuvers are regarded as tantamount to aggression, justifying a pre-emptive strike in response. Thus when Arab armies deployed in May 1967, the Israeli attack in response was considered quite legitimate: how can Israel be expected to sustain a mobilization for more than a few days? Israel was not an impoverished country under attack by a terrorist superpower, but when the U.S. carries out regular military maneuvers on Nicaragua’s borders along with overflights, naval operations nearby, even the deployment of 50,000 troops designed to draw the army away from population defense so as to facilitate the attack against “soft targets” by U.S.-run terrorists, there is not a word of protest in elite circles — apart from protest over Nicaragua’s unconscionable attempt to arm itself in self-defense. These facts too provide us with some insight into our political culture.

Let us put aside any further discussion of the irrelevant facts and turn to the world of illusion constructed by Washington. That is, we now turn to the Orwellian version of the accords — the operative version, given the realities of power.

The Operative Illusions

According to the U.S. version, the sole question is whether the accords will be implemented by Nicaragua — according to the standards set by Washington. These standards were read-

eral Boston Globe reported approvingly that the U.S. is “easing stance.”¹¹

While the media and Congress took note of Washington’s plans for the future, the actual steps taken to undermine the central elements of the peace agreements passed in virtual silence, in accord with the principle that the United States is entitled to employ violence as it chooses. The same basic principle explains the elite consensus, including the most outspoken doves, that Nicaragua must not be permitted to obtain aircraft to defend its territory. The pretense of liberal Congressmen and others that such aircraft would be a threat to the United States may be dismissed with no comment. The real intent is obvious: the terrorist superpower must be free to penetrate Nicaraguan airspace at will for surveillance and coordination of the attacks on “soft targets” by its proxy forces, and to provide them with arms and supplies.

These crucial facts suffice to demonstrate that in terms of their irrelevant substance, the accords were dead before the ink was dry, with the full support of congressional liberals and elite opinion generally.

Note that as tacitly conceded on all sides, the proxy forces bear no resemblance to guerrillas. Rather, they are, by the standards of the region, a well-equipped mercenary army maintained by overwhelming U.S. power; their supporters insist that they would collapse if this unlawful aid and control were to be withdrawn. The contrast to authentic guerrillas, as in El Salvador, is dramatic, but suppressed, in the interest of maintaining the Washington fiction of a “symmetry” between Nicaragua and El Salvador. There is indeed a symmetry, though not the one put forth by Washington and its Free Press. In both countries, there is a terrorist army attacking “soft targets” and slaughtering civilians, and in both countries,

¹¹ AP, Nov. 10; Pamela Constable, BG, Nov. 11; AP, NYT, Nov. 11, 1987, p. 14.

it is organized and maintained by the United States: the army of El Salvador, and the proxy army attacking Nicaragua from foreign bases. The symmetry reaches to fine details. In El Salvador too, the U.S. mercenary forces attack cooperatives, killing, raping and abducting members, as Americas Watch has reported.¹²

Let us turn now to a secondary matter, the response of the countries of the region. Honduras announced at once that it would not observe the accords. The government refused to concede the existence of contra camps within the country, and announced that no verification would be permitted until Nicaragua satisfies Washington of its compliance, by whatever standards the terrorist superpower chooses to impose. Honduras refused to form even a token National Commission of Reconciliation. After domestic protest, it finally did so two days before the deadline, on November 3, but, as President Azcona explained, the Commission “will not do anything” and will only serve to “fulfill a requirement.”¹³ Hence with regard to internal problems too, the accords are dead as far as Honduras is concerned.

The accords call for establishment of “justice, freedom and democracy” in the states of the region, and these are serious problems in Honduras. The country is under effective military rule behind a thin civilian facade, and as the U.S. moved to convert it into a military base in the 1980s, human rights violations substantially increased. Hundreds of thousands of peasants are starving to death in the south while the country exports food. Thousands have been forcefully expelled by the contras from the areas where the government denies their existence. The head of the Christian Democratic Party reports that “there is institutional torture, there are more than 150 disappeared peo-

¹² The Civilian Toll 1986–1987, Americas Watch, Aug. 30, 1987; Americas Watch Petition to U.S. Trade Representative, May 29, 1987.

¹³ AP, Nov. 4, 1987; Mesoamerica, Nov. 1987.

are principally directed at Nicaragua and will affect Nicaragua more than any of the other nations that signed the accord” — which is certainly true, under the conditions of obedience dictated by Washington, though this was presumably not the point intended by James LeMoyne. As he explained further, the Sandinistas are “in a somewhat exposed position” because they, and they alone, “are under close scrutiny for their efforts to carry out the Central American peace treaty” — as dictated by Washington, whose orders are naturally binding.³⁵ Times correspondent Stephen Kinzer informed us that the peace accord “requires Nicaragua to permit full press and political freedom” while requiring “other countries in the region to stop supporting” the contras; a half-truth that amounts to a lie, since the accord also requires the other states to permit full press and political freedom, which is inconceivable as long as the security forces are not dismantled and the U.S. remains in command.

I do not mean to suggest that Kinzer is incapable of outright falsehoods, for example, his statement in the same column that the Nicaraguan government refused to allow the “Roman Catholic radio station to broadcast news.” This is one of his favorite tales, repeated in several other columns and by LeMoyne as well,³⁶ along with the claim that the Ministry of Interior refused to comment on the matter (Oct. 20). AP reported the same day the statement of the Interior Ministry that “Radio Catolica may broadcast news, but must apply for the legally required permission for the program and register the name of its director, the broadcast time and other information” — not exactly a decisive proof that this is a totalitarian dungeon.

These and other commentators surely understand that even if Nicaragua is willing to overlook the fact that by orders from Washington, the terms of the accord are inapplicable to the U.S.

³⁵ NYT, Nov. 10, 1987.

³⁶ LeMoyne, Nov. 5, 1987.

ficient state terror. In all three countries, the military remain firmly in command, serving the interests of U.S. investors, the local oligarchy, and in El Salvador, the new elites who are riding Duarte's coattails for their share in corruption and robbery. In short, "democracy," American-style.

The rule of the military in the U.S.-backed terror states is illustrated by their complete immunity from prosecution for crimes that merit comparison to Pol Pot. All of this is acceptable, even described as "democracy," in the terrorist superpower that has directed and supported the necessary purge of the societies. Honduras differs primarily in that the repression has been less bloody, or to be more accurate, more indirect: starvation and slow, cruel death rather than torture, rape, murder and mutilation. I put aside Costa Rica, also now dependent on U.S. aid for survival, though a serious inquiry into the provisions of the accord for "justice, freedom and democracy" and access by "all ideological groups" to the media (a virtual monopoly of the ultra-right) would reveal that their terms are far from realized here, despite much sanctimonious rhetoric.

The conclusion, then, is that in the U.S. client states of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, there is no possibility that the accords will be implemented. The Guatemalan Central America Report observes that "of the five Central American countries, the Nicaraguans have by far done the most to meet the requirements of the Guatemala Plan, and in some cases have made conciliatory gestures not indicated in the plan," citing examples.³⁴ Here, no one discusses the matter, because all of this is off the agenda according to Washington orders, along with the even more serious U.S. actions to undermine the accords. From the first days after the accords were signed, the media assured us that whatever may appear in the irrelevant text, "there is no doubt that [the treaty's] main provisions

³⁴ CAR, 16 October, 1987.

ple, there are assassinations and exiles, and capital punishment is legal, as can be seen by assassinations carried out by the state." Thousands of peasants, unemployed people, and common criminals have been imprisoned for years without trial. Much of the state terror is traceable to a CIA-trained elite battalion, a standard pattern. The leader of a peasant organization, one of 14 suspected "subversives" arrested by the police in October, stated that he was tortured to force him to confess links to guerrillas. Police and soldiers arrested, tortured and killed students and peasants in a series of October actions. Ramon Custodio, president of the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America and of the Honduran Human Rights Commission, stated in late October that killings by the security forces are becoming "more blatant," citing the murder of a trade union leader, unarmed young men, and 30 criminals, and adding that "political prisoners are not given the chance to be taken alive." As the first three-month phase of the accords ended, he stated at an international press conference (reported in the Mexican press) that the human rights situation had become worse in Honduras since 1985: "Before there was talk of disappearances and torture; now they simply kill...." including army deserters, who are killed when captured. He added that the human rights situations "have deteriorated" in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras since the accords were signed, so that "the little hope there is that human rights will improve in the region is steadily decreasing."¹⁴

Such continuing atrocities, and the refusal of the government to undertake the steps required by the accords, pass without comment in the Free Press, which also fails to note that the accords stress the need to overcome "profound divisions" within each society and that the mechanisms proposed

¹⁴ Donn Downey, Toronto Globe and Mail, Oct. 28; Manuel Torres Calderon, Excelsior (Mexico City), Oct. 7; COHA's Washington Report on the Hemisphere, Oct. 28; Latinamerica Press (Peru), Oct. 29; Excelsior, Nov. 4, 1987.

are aimed at establishing “justice” as well as *meaningful* democracy, not merely empty forms designed to ensure the funding of repression by a compliant Congress that pretends not to see.

In the terror states, Guatemala and El Salvador, the question of compliance with the accords can scarcely be raised, and no one is raising it. Consider freedom of the press. We hear a great deal about La Prensa, including many fabrications, for example, that this is the journal that courageously opposed Somoza; in fact, when the owners made clear their commitment to the old order of privilege and exploitation, the editor left with 80% of the staff to form El Nuevo Diario, which can fairly claim to be the successor to La Prensa, if a newspaper is defined in terms of its editor and staff, not its owners and plant. La Prensa was suspended by the government the day after the U.S. effectively declared war on Nicaragua, in the terms used by elated Reagan administration officials as the Democrat-controlled House passed the contra aid bill. La Prensa was funded by the terrorist superpower attacking Nicaragua, and the journal supported this attack. The fact that it had been allowed to publish at all has few if any precedents. Now it is publishing again, still supporting the war against Nicaragua while the superpower conducting the war provides it with “essential” funding according to its director, contra supporter Jaime Chamorro; again, an unprecedented phenomenon. We should also bear in mind the unreported fact that in much of Nicaragua, radio and television are dominated by the United States and its client states, demonizing the Sandinistas in the manner that has been so effective at home and inducing people in areas where this is the prime “information” source to “dread the Sandinistas as if they were the devil incarnate,” as Joe Eldridge reports in a study of Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras.¹⁵ One should not underesti-

¹⁵ Latinamerica press, Nov. 19, 1987.

that half the population “think that nothing has changed” under Duarte, 18% think that the situation has deteriorated, and a rousing 10% agree with the U.S. media that “there is a process of democracy and freedom in the country at present.” On a visit to Holland in October 1987, Duarte was criticized for human rights abuses while officials privately expressed unhappiness about the visit, taken at his initiative.³² In Latin America, the reaction is harsher. On a trip to Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, Duarte was bitterly denounced by Christian Democratic leaders and others and refused permission to address the General Assembly in Uruguay, while in Argentina half the delegates left the chamber as he spoke and in Brazil, fewer than 10% of the members attended and he was greeted with angry demonstrations and accusations of being a genocidal murderer. In the Free Press, one will find little mention of how our hero is perceived in countries that have had some experience with U.S.-backed killers.

In the second of the terror states, the situation is hardly different. Americas Watch reports 25 new “disappearances” and kidnappings in August 1987, in addition to 74 killings reported in the press, an unknown number being political assassinations. The Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, based in Mexico for obvious reasons, reported 572 extrajudicial executions and 142 “disappearances” from mid-January to March 1987. Other sources estimate about 50 political assassinations a month in 1987. Nineth de Garcia, Guatemala’s leading human rights activist, reported in late November, for the benefit of the Canadian reader, that “the level of political kidnapping and murder is on the increase” since the accords were signed.³³ As in El Salvador and Honduras, the poor are press-ganged into military service while the rich are exempt, and general poverty and misery mount while the wealthy enjoy the benefits of ef-

³² CSM, Oct. 20, 1987.

³³ Guatemala City; Globe and Mail, Nov. 25, 1987.

more difficult to enforce. As for the incidental release of hundreds of political prisoners, the chief of staff of Costa Rica's Foreign Ministry, Luis Solis, observed that the amnesty would put them at the mercy of the death squads, who are "probably hiring people to go out and shoot at the ones who are going to be released," quite secure that they will be protected for their crimes. The Washington Post notes in passing that "90 percent of the approximately 1,000 political prisoners in El Salvador had been in custody for more than four years without a trial," and that many fear their release to the mercy of the death squads.³¹ The Guatemalan military had declared a similar amnesty, for themselves, as they permitted a civilian government to operate under their control so as to obtain U.S. funds to rescue the country from the economic chaos they had created while conducting mass slaughter with enthusiastic U.S. support.

Meanwhile moralists here ponder the dilemmas of the "moderate center" concocted for their benefit by the State Department Office of Public Diplomacy, which has the task of controlling what high Reagan administration officials describe as "enemy territory," that is, the domestic population.

To appreciate just how extreme was the Salvadoran gesture of contempt for the accords, we can return to the irrelevant facts. The accords call for amnesty decrees "setting out all the steps to guarantee the inviolability of all forms of life and liberty, material goods and the safety of the people to benefit from said decrees" — exactly what is declared unthinkable by the Duarte government as it declares amnesty for the killers and torturers to the admiring applause of the Free Press.

While in the United States, Duarte is lauded for courageously leading El Salvador to "democracy," the reaction at home is different. Public opinion polls conducted by the Central America University in El Salvador in early 1987 reveal

³¹ William Branigin, WP, Nov. 2, 1987.

mate the means available to a terrorist superpower that operates with few domestic constraints.

Let us turn now to freedom of the press in Washington's terror states. In El Salvador there was once an independent press: La Cronica and El Independiente. They were not funded by a superpower attacking El Salvador, and they were not censored. Rather, one paper was closed when army tanks surrounded its offices after a series of attacks including the machine-gunning of a 14-year-old newsboy and bombing and assassination attempts that drove the editor out of the country; the other was closed when the security forces seized the editor and an associate, disembowelled them with machetes, and shot them. Is anyone calling for the reopening of La Cronica and El Independiente? Of course not, for two good and sufficient reasons: (1) Washington has commanded us to focus on La Prensa and Nicaragua, where nothing remotely comparable has happened, and being loyal cowards, we naturally obey; (2) the idea of opening an independent press in El Salvador is absurd. It would be necessary to send in an international army to deter the U.S.-run security forces and prevent the murder of the staff, if such media ever approached the condition that according to U.S. law justifies state control over speech: that is, if they posed a "clear and present danger," namely, to the system of privilege maintained by U.S. violence.

Accordingly, we do not speak of freedom of press in El Salvador. Or in Guatemala, where there has also been no censorship, and no reporting of such trivialities as the slaughter of tens of thousands of people in the past decade. The reason for the oversight is that some 50 journalists were murdered by the security forces, some in spectacular fashion. There is therefore no need for censorship, which we abhor.

Meanwhile U.S. government propaganda relayed by the media as "news" assures us that Duarte "gave the rebels free access to the press" (New York Times Central America correspondent

James LeMoyné)¹⁶; technically true, since no law bars such access, only the workings of the market supplemented by state terror.

The real attitudes of U.S. elites towards freedom of the press are revealed further by the response to events elsewhere during the same period. In the Philippines, the government closed three radio stations and threatened others on October 7, accusing them of “glorifying the enemies of the Government and openly defying the Government of President Aquino by continuously transmitting the propaganda of right-wing rebel groups and other enemies of the state.” This “crackdown on the media” was reported, but without comment, along with the outlawing of the opposition (Communist) party that had been legalized by the Marcos dictatorship, police raids against “suspected communists,” and government authorization of vigilante groups — that is, death squads.¹⁷ There were no calls for organizing a “democratic resistance” to overthrow this “totalitarian” state, though they would be heard quickly enough if Aquino were to undertake measures of social reform and democratization that would threaten the interests of U.S. corporations or the U.S. bases.

The major U.S. client state, which is endlessly lauded as a stellar democracy, provides even more dramatic insight into the real principles that animate those who courageously condemn Nicaraguan “totalitarianism.” Shortly after *La Prensa* was suspended, Israel permanently closed two Jerusalem newspapers on the grounds that “although we offer them freedom of expression...it is forbidden to permit them to exploit this freedom in order to harm the State of Israel.” The closure was upheld by the High Court on the grounds that “It is inconceivable that the State of Israel should allow terrorist organiza-

¹⁶ NYT, Nov. 29, 1987.

¹⁷ AP, NYT, Oct. 8; Keith Richburg, WP, Oct. 8; Clayton Jones, CSM, Nov. 10, 1987.

in a news story, the same day, is the fact that the killers were using sophisticated weapons available only to the “right-wing death squads” — that is, the assassination squads of Duarte’s security forces, as Times editors and correspondents know, but will not say.²⁷ Meanwhile President Duarte, in his usual manner, blamed the left for the assassination, just as he has regularly blamed the victims for their torture and murder by the security forces that he praises for their “valiant services,” from the moment that he took over the role of “bag man” for the military, in the appropriate phrase of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs — or as the media prefer, the role of “centrist-leftist” (James LeMoyné),²⁸ valiantly crusading for democracy and social justice.

Expressing its utter contempt for the Guatemala accords, the Duarte government passed an amnesty lauded by the New York Times as its “most concrete step toward complying with the regional peace accord” since Duarte has now “released almost all political prisoners,” a step contrasted with the refusal of the Sandinistas to comply apart from “tentative” and grudging steps.²⁹ The amnesty, bitterly opposed by human rights groups, labor and the church, eliminated the remote possibility of any punishment for the murderers and torturers who conducted the terror that demolished the popular organizations, destroyed the independent media, wiped out the political opposition, killed thousands of union activists, and effectively traumatized the population in the U.S. crusade to eliminate the threat of democracy and social reform. In Canada’s leading journal, it is described as “an amnesty for the military and the death squads” in an article headlined “Duarte ceasefire designed to fail, diplomats say”³⁰; in Canada the Party Line is

²⁷ Oct. 28, 1987.

²⁸ NYT, Nov. 24, 1987.

²⁹ Lindsey Gruson, James LeMoyné, Elaine Sciolino, Oct. 29; LeMoyné, Nov. 29, 1987.

³⁰ Chris Norton, Toronto Globe & Mail, Nov. 5, 1987.

labor movement, a matter of no interest here. As in the case of freedom of press, concern over labor rights is precisely focused among U.S. elites: Poland and Nicaragua, but not the client states such as El Salvador and Israel, where the “socialist” trade union is in the forefront of the denial of minimal rights to the Palestinian workers who provide cheap labor under abysmal conditions.²⁴

The severe violations of the accords by Duarte’s security forces and the lethal network associated with them pass with little comment in a terrorist culture, where the Free Press assures us that President Duarte “has gone considerably further [than the Sandinistas] in carrying out the letter of the treaty” though perhaps he too is not “particularly committed to its spirit of reconciliation,” since he “is trying to split the leftist rebel alliance” — nothing more (James LeMoyné).²⁵

The official story throughout has been that Duarte represents the “moderate center,” unable to control the “violence by both ultrarightists and by the Marxist guerrillas” (James LeMoyné)²⁶; an accompanying photo shows New York Mayor Koch being greeted by the Defense Minister, General Vides Casanova, who presided over the slaughter of some 60,000 people, in accord with his doctrine that “the armed forces are prepared to kill 200,000–300,000, if that’s what it takes to stop a Communist takeover.” In the irrelevant world of fact, as the Times has occasionally conceded in the small print, the violence has overwhelmingly been traceable to the security forces. A Times editorial noted the Anaya assassination — as a proof of Duarte’s “courage” in “defying” the death squads for which he has long served as a fig leaf. This reaction demonstrates that there are no limits to tolerance of virtuous atrocities. Buried

²⁴ Americas Watch Petition, May 29, 1987. Marty Rosenbluth, International Labour Reports, Yorkshire, England; reprinted in News from Within (West Jerusalem), Oct. 31, 1987.

²⁵ NYT, Nov. 29, 1987.

²⁶ Nov. 4, 1987.

tions which seek to destroy it to set up businesses in its territory, legitimate as they may be”; the government had accused these two Arab newspapers of receiving support from hostile groups. To my knowledge, the only mention of these facts in a daily newspaper was in a letter of mine in the Boston Globe. As La Prensa was reopened, Israel closed a Nazareth political journal, alleging that it supports the PLO, and shut down an Arab-owned news office in Nablus on a similar charge, all “legal” under the state of emergency that has been in force since 1948.¹⁸ None of this was reported here; New York Times correspondent Thomas Friedman chose the day of the closing of the Nablus office to produce one of his regular odes to freedom of expression in Israel.¹⁹ Similarly, the destruction of the independent press in El Salvador never merited an editorial comment in the Times, along with numerous other atrocities, even the assassination of the Archbishop with the apparent complicity of the security forces.

The libertarian passions of U.S. elites are very precisely focused, much as in the case of other commissars, who condemn abuses in U.S. domains while lauding the progress towards freedom in the “peoples’ democracies.”

In other respects as well, the terror states cannot comply with the accords as long as the U.S.-backed security forces remain in command, tolerating the civilian facade as long as it can extort money from the U.S. Congress, much of it a bribe to the wealthy that flows back to U.S. banks. Consider the National Commissions of Reconciliation called for by the accords. In Nicaragua, the Commission, formed in August, is headed by Cardinal Obando, the most vocal and prominent critic of the regime. In El Salvador it is headed by Alvaro Magaña [accented character did not scan — JBE.], the conservative banker who

¹⁸ On the State of Emergency, see Avigdor Feldman, B. Michael, Hadashot, Aug. 14, 1987.

¹⁹ Oct. 26, 1987.

was the U.S. candidate for president in 1982, therefore president, and was virtually limited to the right wing. This does not even approach the level of black humor, which is perhaps why it is passed over in silence, just as the outright refusal of Honduras to appoint even a farcical Commission was not reported in the New York Times for 5 weeks, and its subsequent fate, barely noted.²⁰ In Guatemala, the Archbishop, an outspoken defender of human rights, was not even nominated by the Church, no doubt by prearrangement with the military-run government.

In both of the terror states, the security forces maintain obedience by violence. According to the Church human rights office Tutela Legal, in El Salvador “death squad killings jumped from an average of four to five per month during the first part of this year to around 10 per month in September and October,” higher still in November.²¹ Chris Norton, the only U.S. journalist reporting regularly from El Salvador, observes (abroad) that the real numbers are unknown because most death squad killings “have taken place in rural areas and few of them have been reported.” Amadeo Ramos, one of the founders of the Indian Association ANIS, reports that an Indian settlement was bombed by the army and “the bodies of several Indians were found in a remote area thrown in a ditch” in mid-November.²² To mention a few cases in San Salvador itself, two activists of the Mothers of the Disappeared (CoMadres) were abducted by Treasury police on September 3, two days after the head of the University of El Salvador Employees Union was kidnapped by heavily armed men. In

²⁰ James LeMoyné, Nov. 15, mentioned that Honduras had established a Commission but that it had as yet done nothing.

²¹ Brook Larmer, CSM, Nov. 23, 1987. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs estimates assassinations, abductions, and disappearances at a dozen a month; News and Analysis, Nov. 10, 1987.

²² Latinamerica press (Peru), 19 Nov., 1987. Diego Ribadeneira, BG, Nov. 29, 1987.

another case, which was actually reported here, the president of the Human Rights Commission, Herbert Anaya, was murdered while taking his children to school. A former president, Marianela Garcia Villas, had been killed by security forces on the pretext that she was a guerrilla, and other members had been murdered or “disappeared” by the security forces. Anaya had been arrested and tortured by the Treasury police in May 1986, along with other Commission members. While in prison, they continued their work, compiling a 160-page report of testimony of over 430 political prisoners, who gave details of their torture, in one case, electrical torture by a North American major in uniform. This report, one of the most explicit and comprehensive in existence for any country, was smuggled out of the prison, along with a videotape of testimony, and distributed to the U.S. media, which had no interest in material so lacking in ideological serviceability. After Anaya was released in a prisoner exchange, he was repeatedly denounced by the government and threatened, also informed that he headed a list of Commission workers to be killed. Lacking the protection that might have been afforded by some media visibility here, he was killed, probably by death squads associated with the security forces, as indicated by Archbishop Rivera y Damas in an unreported statement.²³

As in the past, labor activists are a primary target. In violation of congressional legislation, the U.S. Trade Representative rejected an Americas Watch petition to review El Salvador “solely on the grounds that it is appropriate for the Salvadoran armed forces to arrest, interrogate, and imprison trade unionists whom the Department of State considers to be opponents of the Duarte Government” (Americas Watch). The petition cited numerous examples of state terror directed against the

²³ AP, Nov. 15, 1987, reporting the Archbishop’s homily at the Metropolitan Cathedral where he “said the Legal Office [Tutela Legal] had information a death squad was responsible,” citing also other death squad killings.