

Chemical weapons become lethal bargaining chips

Funny thing about bargaining chips — you get a couple of them together, add a pinch of rhetoric, a dash of charts and graphs, an ounce of reality, and a generous helping of contrived paranoia and you get the need for another.

A lot of the time, all the production of bargaining chips does is waste money as in the case of nuclear weapons, space weapons research, etc. But now the United States seems to be moving toward resumed production of chemical weapons — binary nerve gas which leaves its victims blistered, blinded and twitching until they die by being asphyxiated in their own fluid.

The folks at the Pentagon, in their collective acquisitive wisdom, have decided that we need binary nerve gas as a bargaining chip — the MX

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missile, Star Wars, etc., being insufficient. Last week, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger pushed a plan through a NATO defense ministers' meeting that clears the path for the United States to openly produce chemical weapons for the first time since 1969.

In regard to chemical weapons, Secretary Weinberger notes that "... everybody is against their use." That is an understatement in parts of the world, such as Europe, where the collective consciousness retains

the horror of chemical warfare. In World War I, over one million casualties and 78,000 deaths were the result of gas warfare. In the same time frame, the Soviet Union suffered an additional 50,000 deaths. During World War II, where in the concentration camp of Auschwitz alone, two and a half million people were killed with gas.

The use of chemical weapons continued when American forces dropped Agent Orange on the Viet Cong. It continued after the American pullout when Vietnamese forces killed over 20,000 Hmong, a native tribe living in central Laos who fought with U.S. forces during the Vietnam War. It continues today in Afghanistan, where Soviet forces employ a more sophisticated gas that causes a massive internal

hemorrhage in its Moslem rebel victims.

Weinberger claims that resumed production of lethal gas is necessary because verification of Soviet stores of same is virtually impossible. Somehow, it is argued, the American manufacture of more nerve gas will present a deterrent to the Soviets, forcing them to confront their own production and use of chemical weaponry in a such a way that they will cease its production.

Nothing new here. The same form of argument has been given for every recent weapons' program — "By building weapon 'X' they will soberly consider the possibility of not building weapon 'Y.'" So far this strategy hasn't been successful. When we do succeed in bringing the Soviets to the bargaining table, as

when they have offered a moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons, we refuse their compromise by exploding yet another bomb in Nevada.

It is difficult for us as Americans to know what our defense establishment really wants when they send out conflicting signals like so much noise on a shortwave frequency. It is difficult for us to conceive of a sensible response to the current use of chemical weapons. Willingness to negotiate in the true sense of the word combined with a reluctance to satisfy ourselves by stacking up bargaining chips so high we can't see over them are steps in the right direction.

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Contras only alternative for Nicaraguan democracy

There is more than one way to skin a cat, and there is more than one way to look at a foreign political situation.

The stacks of literature on the Nicaraguan situation show two distinct viewpoints, neither of which is without exaggeration and a lopsided representation of the issue. These semantical games only serve to cloud an already complicated issue, making choosing sides in the issue difficult, if not impossible.

The U.S. government has always taken a shaky position on the Nicaraguan issue in the past. Doing its best to protect U.S. interests at all costs, over and over again, our government has supported anyone who would not take aid from the Soviets or Cubans. Anyone who would do, more or less, whatever we wanted them to do, as evidenced by our support of past rulers like Somoza, Diaz, and company, with no regard to their domestic policies.

The United States did not try to select the beneficiaries of its support on the basis of the freedom they give their citizens or their lack of corruption, only on whether U.S. interests were protected. Concerned observers of the situation hear the words pouring out from Washington about "freedom fighters," or Marxist human rights violations. This prompts many respectable, educated groups and individuals to speak out about gross human rights violations by the U.S.-supported "Contras," while others trumpet the tremendous educational and economic reforms of the Sandinistas.

The fight for American interests as foreign policy is unethical. It denies the Nicaraguan people their right to have a part in political decisions that concern their future. It totally disregards the Nicaraguan people in general.

On the other hand, a U.S. policy of total laissez-faire in the region will not work well for the Nicaraguan people on a long-term basis. That policy assumes that if the United States will just leave the Nicaraguans alone, everyone else will. If there is another revolution, the Nicaraguans will be able to control it themselves and the Soviets and Cubans will not interfere. This is ludicrous. The Soviet Union always has an uncanny way of becoming involved in political revolutions and manipulating them so that a country's own leadership ceases to be of that particular country's choice, and

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instead is determined by the Soviets. A policy of self-determination also assumes that the government that the Nicaraguans choose will be a good form of government for them in the long run. A government that will work honestly with no oppression for the Nicaraguan people to build their country back up to stability.

Advocates of the Sandinista government are interested in letting the Nicaraguans decide what they want. They say that America should abandon its interests in the region in order to let the region settle down from its years of revolution and stabilize under whatever form of government happens to take power, Marxist, Capitalist, pro- or anti-American. The Nicaraguan people should be able to elect whoever they want, and if they don't like the government that does take power, they can always revolt against it. The problem with this is that the Sandinista government is communist, and that automatically rules out free elections. There will be a choice for the Nicaraguan people — the choice between one communist or another.

The U.S. interests in the region are important and should not be disregarded. However, the Nicaraguan people are still the most important consideration. They have lived through one political fiasco after another, and they don't need another. The Nicaraguans need leaders who will stand up for them, not exploit them; leaders who will lead them to their continued freedom. This seems to be a fantasy when viewed against the backdrop of constant unrest in that area spurred on by the manipulations of the Soviet Union and the United States.

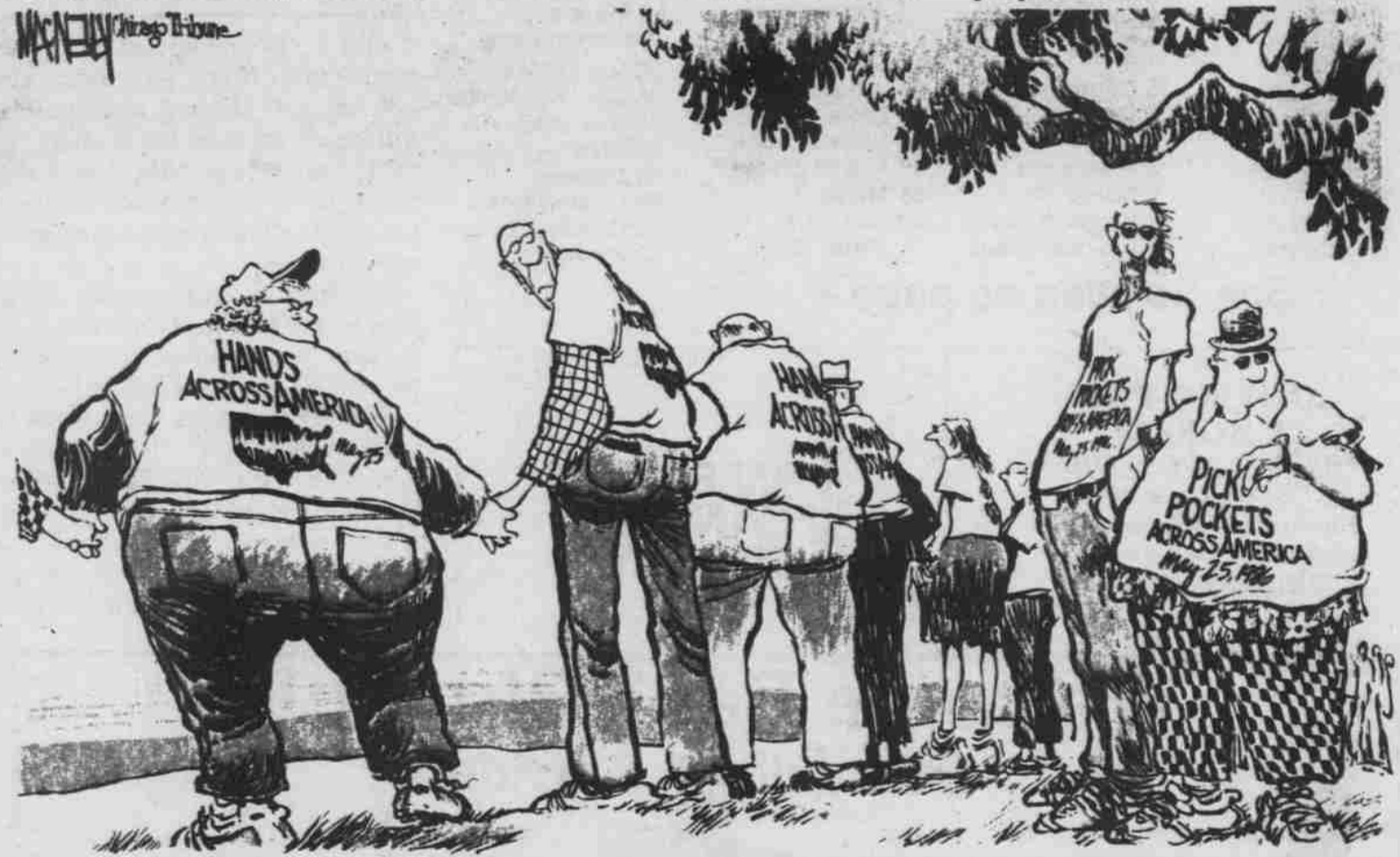
The decision on who to support is not cut and dried. It is a decision to be made on the basis of whether the United States or the Soviet Union is more reliable and which is likely to produce better living conditions for future Nicaraguans. Our government has chosen the better of two fairly poor options.

The Contras are called the "democratic resistance" because they are fighting for Church-mediated negotiations with the Marxist Sandinistas.

Their fight is for free elections and the removal of the grip that the communists have on the Nicaraguan government. On a long-term basis, this freedom for the Nicaraguan people is exactly what they need. The Contras don't want total control of the government, only a share in

a democratic society. Democracy would allow the people to decide exactly what they want. This is better than the governmental domination that the Sandinistas are implementing along with their educational and economic reforms. The point is to support democracy

and resist the Soviets' effort to use the Nicaraguan unrest as an excuse to gain control of another puppet nation. The Contras are the only alternative. If support is not given to them, the United States stands to lose and so do the Nicaraguan people.



"HANDS ACROSS AMERICA' HAS DEFINITELY RAISED MY CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT HUNGER. WHEN'S LUNCH?"