

dio station, from Costa Rican stations, and by word of mouth.

These publicity coups came at a time when the Sandinistas already faced a political crisis in the cities. Gambling on the Arias Peace Plan, the government had half-lifted the lid on repression, and the toxic fumes had escaped. *La Prensa*, back in circulation without censorship, was openly ridiculing the regime to undermine its authority. It published an amazing interview with a senior army defector, Major Roger Miranda, who accused President Daniel Ortega of betraying his fellow guerrillas before the revolution. The opposition umbrella group, La Coordinadora Democrática, organized a march on January 10 in which demonstrators openly chanted, "viva la resistencia."

Then came the near total breakdown of Managua in late January when Soviet supplies were delayed. My neighborhood had no water for five days, except for nocturnal trickles. In poor barrios, where residents share taps, the women were getting up at one in the morning to line up for water with buckets. Gas was almost unavailable, except by bribery. Drivers waited in long coiling lines outside gas stations in the hope of buying five gallons. Nobody moved for hours on end because power cuts had put the pumps out of action. Random blackouts shut down factories. Air-conditioned offices without ventilation became furnaces. Tempers were frazzled. In the markets and on buses people openly cursed the government. The city was a tinderbox, yet the Sandinistas had no reliable way of stifling unrest other than raw force.

The day was nearing when they would either have to risk losing control or use police repression in the streets of Managua, which could be televised and seen all over the world. The U.S. Congress spared them that dilemma.

On February 3, Congress voted down new aid for the contras. The momentum of months sputtered out within days. Once they saw that the United States had abandoned the contras, many Nicaraguans concluded that Sandinismo would be their future after all. They came down off the fence where they had been sitting, waiting, wondering whether to risk throwing in their lot with the opposition.

Many Americans find this impossible to understand. They have swallowed the cliché that Nicaraguans are anti-American nationalists. In fact the reverse is true. Nicaraguans on the whole are exceedingly pro-American, or *gringista* as they say, and many see El Norte as the promised land. They also have a naive faith in American power: they tend to assume that if the United States intervenes its client will ultimate-

ly win, and Nicaraguans like being on the winning side. While liberal commentators in Washington write claptrap about how the contras can never succeed as long as they are identified with the United States, the contras themselves see their interests differently: for six years they have been busy inside Nicaragua trying to reassure people that Reagan stands with them. The perception that he does not is fatal.

The Congress was put in a delicate situation by the Arias Peace Plan. It would have made for unpopular diplomacy if the United States had renewed military aid to the contras two weeks after the Central American presidents

had signed a joint peace accord in San Jose. Why they signed it is no mystery. Oscar Arias overrated his own powers of persuasion. The more cynical presidents of Honduras and El Salvador got caught in the public relations trap of peace summitry. All had doubts whether a divided Washington would ever give the contras the wherewithal to win. Arias in particular concluded that accommodation with the Sandinistas would be a more stable option than an interminable war on the border. The accord gave doubting Democrats all the cover they needed to back away from the policy. Perhaps a few even believed that the Sandinistas would

fulfill their promises to "democratize."

If so, their credulity is unpardonable. As Sen. Ernest Hollings aptly put it: "There's no education in the second kick of a mule." In 1979 the Ortegas led a faction known as the "Terceristas" that formed a tactical alliance with business leaders and centrist parties. It involved a Machiavellian campaign of distortion to present the Sandinista Front as a disparate movement with a few Communists on the fringe, but mostly made up of nationalists and social democrats. After seizing power the Ortegas continued to make all the right noises, even as a secret party document, the September 1979 "analy-

## KRIS KRISTOFFERSON IN SAPOA

by Sheldon Kelly

You are entering Sapoa, Nicaragua. Dust devils whip across the rutted road; ragged, listless campesinos stare from unpainted shacks, spotted incongruously with new FSLN government posters. Several sway-backed horses stand in the shade of a fly-ridden *tienda*. On one of them is a barefoot old man in a straw hat, slumped motionless. Then you see the church, as sparkling white as bridal cloth. Looking closer, you see the paint is fresh, and covers the boarded-up entrance; the drippings form a nebula on the bare earth; more is dabbed thinly onto a pile of rocks near a scraggly tree. The tree is the church's focal point and is encased in the brightly colored Sandinista posters. You are now minutes from the customs complex where leaders of the country's Marxist and Resistance armies will discuss peace for the first time ever—and where Kris Kristofferson, the movie star, awaits the momentous opening of the Sandinista-Contra Peace Talks.

Hours before the first words of peace were ventured publicly by Sandinista or contra, Kristofferson had been ushered into the tin-roofed pavillion reserved ostensibly for the working press. He sat on top of a long wooden table like a wrinkled, 100-percent-cotton centerpiece, a California statement. His presence startled me. I had just crossed the plains of Costa Rica's hot, desolate northern Guanacaste, was interrogated humorlessly at a Sandinista checkpoint, then escorted through Sapoa. How did he get here, so sweatless and comfortable?

A reporter looked up angrily from his Tandy 200 when I asked him. The movie star had arrived from

Managua in an air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz bus, he said. Why? I asked. He didn't know, didn't care. "He came with these . . . these others." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, lit a cigarette, then returned to his empty screen.

The star's entourage included a light-stepping Cape Cod group calling itself Veterans for Peace, at least one Harvard professor, many young women apparently preoccupied with looking round the dry, empty terrain, then putting notes in prettily covered little journals, and another California notable, Brian Willson. Willson, you may remember, had sacrificed his legs to an on-coming munitions train in Concord, California last summer.

The group mingled, held forth in the fashion of indignant victors of a game known only to themselves. Meanwhile, Kristofferson remained perched on the table-top a few feet away from the speaker's dais and mounted TV cameras. His long, trademark hair and funny, narrow little eyes could be seen from almost anywhere in the cordoned-off area. Around him scores of journalists, thrust into the maw of Hollywood by Sandinista planners, sat, stood, walked, or segued, as it were, from the touring North Americans.

A TASS reporter, a Cuban TV crew, and a host of sullen-faced men and women in Sandinista uniforms with press badges drifted through Kristofferson's court. An American with permed hair, fashionably dressed in khaki pants with many pockets, knit shirt and boat shoes, leaned close to the star's ear, talking in low tones as his eyes darted around the assemblage. The star smiled and smiled, seemingly following the directional beam of the frizzy man's eyes.

"I shouldn't say this because I'm a

black and these folks probably support black causes," Pete, a young network cameraman, said. "But Kristofferson and this whole damned bunch being here makes me want to vomit." Pete's statement was a bellwether. Hank, a beefy middle-aged cameraman for another network, stood up from his nearby seat. "This crap is spooky," he said. "It's like déjà vu. These were the people wearing Ho Chi Minh buttons when I came home from Vietnam."

A network reporter and producer joined our small, voluble group. "Are you going to get a statement from Kristofferson?" I asked, looking at the star a scant few feet away. The reporter turned to cast a glance, then answered loudly: "F--- him!" The producer wrapped his hands around his chin and stared as if studying a carry-out menu. "Frankly, I'd like to ask him something," he said. "F--- him!" the reporter repeated. "No f----- way will I do it!" The actor looked back at me with seeming ingenuousness, his locks lifting like a gray veil in the wind.

"This may be our finest hour," Hank said. He looked away. A braless, barefoot young woman wearing a slogan-imprinted T-shirt had begun jogging in place on the hot sidewalk outside. Nearby, Willson, standing on prosthesis, was gesticulating to a small rapt audience. "This better be a f----- movie," Hank said. "I'm losing it."

By early afternoon, shortly before General Humberto Ortega mounted the dais to announce the contra-crushing cease-fire, Kristofferson and the rest were escorted away by Sandinista personnel. Their reasons for being there seemed concluded, as all sideshows eventually are. □

*Sheldon Kelly is a staff writer for Reader's Digest.*

sis of the situation and tasks," outlined puppet pluralism to neutralize international opinion. "Humberto [Ortega] is brilliant," says Arturo Cruz, Jr., a former Sandinista who now advises the contras. "He's resurrecting the whole Tercerista project of tactical compromise."

In any case, the Arias Plan and the subsequent Sapoa agreement never made a settlement contingent on a separation of the army and the party. It must be remembered that the Sandinista Front began as a military organization, and only turned itself into a political party after the revolution. Militarism is the essence of Sandinismo. "Their best cadres are in the army," says Virgilio Godoy, former minister of labor and now head of the Independent Liberal party. In El Salvador the FMLN have flatly rejected any peace that leaves the structure of the Salvadoran state intact. They have demanded power sharing and a fusion of the opposed military forces.

The contras have been negotiating terms that amount to a graceful surrender. At times even the grace is missing. "What we are discussing is how the mercenary forces, who are already defeated, can lay down their weapons," said Daniel Ortega recently. "They should be grateful that we are not offering them the guillotine or the firing squad." As I write this piece the talks have stalled. The contras have begun to define their concept of acceptable democratization, but so late in the day as to give the impression that they are merely obstructing. They are threatening to return to war. That will be difficult. Nicaraguans have seen Adolfo Calero and Humberto Ortega standing side by side on television singing the national anthem. This gives legitimacy to the contras but at the same time it smacks of *personalismo*. Nicaraguan history is full of unlikely alliances, of deals cut across ideological lines, of co-option. The perception of betrayal undoubtedly saps the militancy of the contra base. There has already been a mutiny by some field commanders.

If the war is lost, it was lost in Washington. Those who believe that the United States defeated the Tet Offensive in 1968, but didn't realize it and lost the will to fight, may see a parallel in Nicaragua. In the field the contras did better than almost anybody, including the Sandinistas, ever expected. With hindsight they could have done even better. Too many contra leaders saw their force as the spearhead for direct U.S. intervention. As a result they retained the structure of a conventional army, fighting in large units with long supply routes. In the end it was the semi-autonomous field commanders,

many of whom were renegade Sandinistas, who took the initiative and adapted to the imperatives of guerrilla warfare. There was never enough emphasis on political organization, particularly creating an urban front for insurrection. The leaders were always

guan supplies. In 1983 they went into a nose dive when the Sandinistas temporarily suspended supply flights across the Gulf of Fonseca, after the U.S. invasion of Grenada sent a shock wave through Managua. Moreover, the contras are necessarily more dependent

## Only a fanatic can still maintain that poor Nicaraguans live better now than during the last years of Somoza.

jockeying for advantage against each other in a game of what Nicaraguans call "politica electorera," instead of planning hellfire and revolution. "We're one-third turtles, one-third rabbits, and one-third hogs," said a contra official candidly in a moment of despair.

Even so, the motley coalition has held together, and advanced. The problem has been selling their success in the U.S. I discount the polls that indicate a majority opposes the Administration's Nicaragua policy. They are soft numbers reflecting an instinctive isolationism. More serious is the opinion among the American clerisy that the contras can't fight. It's said they do not hold territory. But no guerrilla insurgency in Latin America holds territory in the strict sense. There's not a square foot of El Salvador that the army cannot occupy, yet the rebel FMLN is causing havoc nevertheless. Textbook doctrine holds that so long as guerrillas are not losing, they are ultimately winning. Congress, eager for instant results, has turned this on its head. Because the contras are not seizing towns and developing a visible system of dual power, they are said to be losing. The contras themselves are partly to blame, for setting unreasonable expectations and failing to define a strategy of prolonged popular war.

They have also suffered unfair criticism in the U.S. for their dependence on outside support. It is a myth that other insurgencies in Central America are self-sufficient. The Sandinistas themselves had sanctuary in Costa Rica, and got arms from Venezuela, Panama, and of course Cuba. In El Salvador the rebels are relatively self-sufficient, but even they need Nicara-

on hard supplies than the FMLN because they have been fighting a regime that extends social control more deeply than most. I have watched Salvadoran guerrillas on shopping trips buying sacks of beans and sugar in village stores. Until recently this would have been impossible in Nicaragua because the government kept a tight rein on the distribution system. Incidentally, the Salvadorans pay for their groceries with money extorted from farmers, passengers on buses, or hostage families. Imagine the uproar if the contras tried that. They have to try to conduct a guerrilla war that satisfies the sensibilities of a refined democracy, which is impossible.

Could the Reagan Administration have crafted the policy more skillfully? It quickly fell prey to partisan politics. "The contras became the favorite god-child of the far right in this country, and that was the kiss of death," says a State Department official who enthusiastically supports the resistance. Could anything have been done to bring the Democrats on board? Perhaps. Some officials now concede that they moved too quickly, though delay also entailed risks. The original nucleus of the contras might have dispersed, leaving the Administration with little to work with. The Sandinistas would have had longer to build an army and indoctrinate Nicaragua's youth. "The apparatus of control would have made it much harder to get an uprising going," said one of the architects of the policy. "But politically it would have made more sense to have waited. It would have been much easier to sell the idea in Washington if there'd already been rioting in

the streets, like Haiti or the Philippines. And they would have rioted."

By using the military option immediately the Administration gave the Sandinistas a pretext for totalitarian mischief, and undercut its own attempts to portray the regime as illegitimate. Worse, the dependence on officers from Somoza's National Guard was a gift to the Sandinista office of Agitation and Propaganda (DAP). The CIA compounded this with its stubborn preference for men without revolutionary vision, Adolfo Calero in particular. Oliver North continued the CIA approach during the Boland affair, using "el private supply network" (as the contras call it) to channel money to the dependable troglodytes, cutting out the ex-Sandinistas who brought appeal, flair, and revolutionary praxis to the movement. Arturo Cruz, Jr., who wrote a biting critique of the contra strategy that enraged Oliver North and led to a rift between them, says that "the boys really blew it; they used Calero as their foreman in Nicaragua but they didn't understand that his face was so big it hid the faces of the young peasants in the field."

The post-mortems span the spectrum. Some still insist that the Sandinistas could have been co-opted, forgetting that Jimmy Carter tried it. The Sandinistas received \$118 million in U.S. aid after July 1979 (more than Somoza got in a quarter century), their debt was rescheduled on the softest of terms, and the rules of the Inter-American Development Bank were bent to allow them loans. Yet they gobbled up Nicaragua without flinching. The revolution was not for sale, said Tomas Borge. Perhaps it could have been ignored. A plausible case can be made that the collapse of Central America would not have significantly affected the U.S., provided Washington kept out of it altogether. Mexico has its own separate rhythm, and a gaggle of bankrupt Albanians on the isthmus would threaten nobody but their own people.

Instead, the U.S. chose the worst option. It intervened, but not decisively. It made a commitment without following through. It suffered opprobrium in the world forum for the exercise of imperial power, without putting that power to much effect. At the end of the day, the region is more or less back to square one, and attention is shifting again to the misfortunes of El Salvador, where the political center is collapsing. Gov. Dukakis says it's "the worst fiasco of my lifetime." I believe he truly doesn't understand how close the contras came to paralyzing Nicaragua. Those Democrats who do have an inkling can't easily admit it. To do so would be to admit that in cutting contra aid their party snatched an American defeat from the jaws of victory. □





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# THE NATION'S PULSE



## THE OTHER DUKE

by Gregory A. Fossedal

*Palo Alto, California*

They say this state is a trend-setter, and with its relatively issueless campaigns of 1986 and early 1988, California once again seems to be setting the tone. For with the Reagan prosperity now in its sixth year, and the leaders of both parties agreed on the merits of another U.S.-Soviet détente—"negotiating from strength again," as the *National Interest* puts it—there isn't exactly a burning national dispute about anything. Just remember, that debate started right here.

At the front of this unrevolutionary revolution, symbolizing the laid-back non-contentiousness of California's *politique sans souci*, is Republican Governor George Deukmejian. Quiet, unassuming, and satisfied to remain such, Deukmejian calls to mind Warren Harding's passionate pleas for non-passion, a return to post-Reagan-Revolutionary normalcy. He is, as one GOP activist told me, "something of a Clark Kent without the pizzazz." All he has done is to help the people he governs, a state roughly the economic size of Britain or Japan, to restore near-full employment, with pretty decent government services, low inflation, a sober respect for environmental quality, and a balanced budget—all, moreover, without taking credit for working any sort of "California Miracle." If it takes equanimity and social tranquility to achieve these things, Deukmejian seems to say, Gary Cooper-like, well then, far be it from me to disturb the peace.

Indeed, if Ronald Reagan irritates other politicians by doing impossible things with so little effort, George Deukmejian ought positively to infuriate them.

Politicians of both parties worship at the shrine of a balanced budget, and Deukmejian is the consummate balancer. Handed a \$1.5 billion deficit by the outgoing Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Deukmejian, unlike Reagan, turned it into a surplus—in one year.

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Unlike Michael Dukakis and many governors, he's never signed a major tax hike, though California's Duke did propose one this year. (He then compounded the error by blaming the press for creating a "perception" that it was a tax hike, when in fact even most Republicans were calling it the same.) Unlike Illinois Republican Jim Thompson, he did all this without a lot of anti-Reagan posturing, and without driving his state's economy into the doldrums.

And, unlike a former GOP governor oft-mentioned on the short list for George Bush's running mate, Tennessee's Lamar Alexander, Deukmejian has done something to rebuild his party. Republicans are stronger in both the state legislature and the state's national congressional delegation. The Duke's well-run 1982 race, focused in large part against the kookiness of then-Senate candidate Jerry Brown, probably helped tip the ballot boxes for now-Senator Pete Wilson as well. California was one of the few sources of GOP joy in the fall of the Volcker-Reagan depression. In 1986, the Duke turned his own campaign and that of

many Republicans largely into a referendum against the leftist chief justice of California's supreme court, Rose Bird. (Californians can vote to throw justices off the court after a fixed term.) Bird was crushed, and Deukmejian was easily re-elected, along with several promising first-time legislators. In the national House, meanwhile, Californians lay claim to several leading young turk Reaganites, including Jerry Lewis, Duncan Hunter, David Dreier, and the irrepressible Robert Dornan. Dreier says Deukmejian "was a major help to all of us, both directly in terms of campaign assistance, and indirectly in terms of his own campaigns helping shift votes to the Republican party."

Thus in terms both partisan and non, Deukmejian has established himself as one of the top five or ten politicians in his party. Ask any Reaganite to cite the governor's main accomplishments and the answer isn't long in coming. "Look," says Martin Anderson, a Hoover Institution scholar and Deukmejian intimate, "he balanced the budget. And he didn't raise taxes. That's a lot. And meanwhile he spent

a lot on education. That's more. And you pick up a newspaper and he's rated at better than 80 percent popularity in some polls. Four out of five people think he's doing a good job. That's an awful lot." The four-out-of-five figure is accurate but a little misleading. Four out of five people think "Governor Deukmejian" is performing well, but fewer than four in five can identify who "George Deukmejian" is. Still, in the age of politics with little politics, this is almost a perfect ten; many people who don't even know who Deukmejian is like him.

In addition, Deukmejian has been tough on crime. In fact, he rode the death penalty to several victories throughout his career, from a state legislature race in the 1960s that he almost lost to his 1986 landslide over Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. In helping get Rose Bird kicked off the court in 1986, Deukmejian did something Reagan failed to do in 1987 with Justice Robert Bork: rallied popular support for an active jurisprudence of original intent. Reagan griped about the "politicization" of judicial appointments; Deukmejian capitalized on it. Thus, the California governor has the crime issue in his bones. It's an issue the Republicans might well want to use against the Massachusetts governor, whose dangerous and silly prison furlough programs have come under attack even from Democrats.

By common wisdom, then, George Deukmejian is a rather dull fellow but a terrifically adept politician. My own sense is that both halves of this formulation are a bit wrong.

It's easy to see why some reporters find Deukmejian drab: They've read his speeches. Hearing the Duke deliver them, though, is somewhat more inspiring. His oratorical style is steady but snappy. Republicans and Democrats who saw him debate New York's Mario Cuomo in Washington on the issue of Reaganomics rated the match a rough draw—that's quite an achievement considering Cuomo's

