

By Diana Johnstone

**E**MERGING FROM HIS LONG SUMMER HOLIDAY, Mikhail Gorbachov made an important speech at an October 1 public rally in Murmansk. The Soviet leader proposed nothing less than to reverse the growing militarization of the northern seas in favor of joint international peaceful economic development.

Located inside the Arctic Circle, Murmansk is the home port of the Soviet North Fleet, including the Soviet strategic nuclear submarines. Under the Reagan administration, the U.S. Navy has adopted the so-called "maritime strategy" of preparing to bottle the Soviet fleet into Murmansk and even attack the heavily armed Kola Peninsula from the sea in case of East-West conflict.

The U.S. is already deploying hundreds of sea-based nuclear cruise missiles in the northern seas, and Manfred Wörner, West German defense minister and probably the next NATO secretary general, calls for replacing the NATO land-based missiles with sea-based missiles to keep Soviet territory "vulnerable." U.S. secret nuclear submarine tracking operations have led to dangerous collisions close to Soviet shores.

Gorbachov alluded to this situation by mentioning that the northern seas were not only "the kitchen of good and bad weather" for the northern hemisphere, but also a region affected "by the icy winds of the Pentagon's polar strategy. A gigantic nuclear potential has been concentrated on board submarines and surface vessels," he said. "It acts on the political climate in the whole world and is capable in turn of exploding in case of a military-political accident in some other part of the world."

Gorbachov invited all of the region's countries to discuss security problems with a view to a "drastic reduction of the level of military confrontation in the region." He proposed that NATO and the Warsaw Pact begin consultations about scaling down military activity, limiting naval and air forces and extending confidence-building measures to the Baltic, North, Norwegian and Greenland Seas. Beyond that, he suggested that both sides work toward banning military activity in major international shipping lanes.

One can imagine that the U.S. admirals who have boasted that "the Norwegian Sea is ours and we intend to keep it that way" will only take Gorbachov's speech as a sign that the U.S. has got the Russian bear on the run and should keep up the pressure. However, there are important forces and trends pointing in Gorbachov's direction.

**An order hard to refuse:** The U.S. "maritime strategy" in the north depends on the active cooperation of Norway and other northern allies. As the "Soviet threat" to Scandinavia steadily loses credibility thanks to Gorbachov, Norway's circle of NATO enthusiasts is likely to be increasingly isolated. Moreover, Gorbachov has something to offer in exchange for sterile militarization; peaceful economic development.

Stressing the Soviet Union's interest in developing Arctic resources, Gorbachov suggested a joint northern European energy program for the difficult extraction of the Arctic's "truly inexhaustible" energy reserves. The USSR was ready to invite Canada and Norway to set up joint companies for petroleum and gas prospecting on the great north-



If Gorbachov achieves detente in the North Atlantic, what will all those U.S. ships do?

## East-West conflict moves from northern seas to southern gulf

ern continental shelf, he said.

Gorbachov proposed holding a conference of Arctic states in Murmansk next year as well as a joint global plan for protection of the northern environment. Finally, "the shortest sea lane linking Europe to the Far East and the Pacific goes by way of the Arctic," Gorbachov said. "We could open up the great northern sea lane to foreign ships preceded by our icebreakers depending on the normalization of international relations."

This constructive approach is not likely to fall on deaf ears in Scandinavia.

As for the U.S., the "maritime strategy" has been under heavy attack from the defense policy establishment and is unlikely to survive a new administration in Washington. It was championed by John F. Lehman Jr., who resigned last February as secretary of the Navy. The strategy's only acknowledged virtue was to wrest naval appropriations from a Congress demanding anti-Soviet strategic rationales for military expenditures. Now that the appropriations for the "600-ship Navy" have been duly wrested, more attention is being paid to the chorus of experts who have denounced the strategy as absurd and suicidal.

It seems probable that a combination of the peace movements of northern Europe, Gorbachov's proposals and simple military common sense may work to deprive the U.S. Navy of much of its vast and foolhardy mission in the Arctic seas. But it is unthinkable that an institution providing so many people with a good living should be left with nothing to do. New missions must be found for the U.S. Navy, if only for the sake of the militarized American economy. Luckily, as the wicked gleam of the Evil Empire fades in the Gorbachovian light of reason, a new Evil Enemy has appeared on the northern shores of the Arab-Persian Gulf.

Whatever else the U.S. is doing in the

Gulf—and the whole world is wondering—it is establishing a new role for the Navy that may turn out to be just as ambitious and foolhardy as the northern "maritime strategy." Yet it marks a return to the traditional role of the Navy as imperialism's roving patrol force. It was apparently only the "Vietnam syndrome" of the '70s that obliged the admirals to dream up a strategy aimed directly at Soviet land power rather than at the usual targets of naval "power projection" in the Third World. Thanks to the hate images developed around Muammar Khadafy and the Ayatollah Khomeini, the West may be able to return to its traditions, despite Gorbachov's failure to play bad guy.

It is noteworthy that opponents of the maritime strategy have never argued that the U.S. Navy should drop such foolishness and sail home. Rather, the idea has been that pretending to win World War III in Murmansk has distracted the admirals from their proper task elsewhere. Thus leading defense establishment figure Robert W. Komer has pointed out that the U.S. "sees Third World conflict affecting U.S. interests as much more likely to occur than overt Warsaw Pact aggression against NATO."

Thus while a clear choice may be emerging between militarization and peaceful development in northern Europe, the picture is by no means so bright globally.

**Looming questions:** The Gulf provides a timely alternative to fixation on Soviet nuclear submarines. But the big question puzzling the world is, just what is the Navy doing there? The short answer of most regional observers is "trying to pick a fight." The long-term answer is not so easy. The usual reasons given do not make sense.

The top official pretext is to "protect international shipping," especially oil tankers, but everyone knows the U.S. is there to provide cover for Iraq attacks on Iranian oil ship-

ments by stopping Iran from retaliating. The next reason given is to keep Soviet influence from overwhelming the Gulf. But this could more cheaply be achieved by accepting the Soviet offer to withdraw all foreign warships, including their own—three, compared to a couple of dozen U.S. ships.

Another reason cited is to get the Arab Gulf states to grant the U.S. basing rights, but this does not seem to be working, and the way the U.S. is blustering into a delicate situation seems to make the Arabs more reluctant than ever to deepen their alliance. Or it is said that the Bechtel branch of the government represented by Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger want to make up for the damage done to U.S. credibility in the Arab world by the Iran-contra arms caper. This is a pitifully short-range motive.

If there is any serious long-range thinking behind the Gulf expedition, then it must be related to the promotion of "out of area" missions in NATO. What is special about the Gulf expedition is its use to bully the U.S.' allies, both NATO members and Japan, into joining in. The U.S. administration claims to be in the Gulf in order to protect "the West's oil" from the Iranians. This is absurd, because it is in fact Iran's oil that is being threatened by the Iraqis, who want to prevent Iran from selling it to the West. But the story convinces American public opinion, which can then be turned against the "ungrateful allies." This, more than the Mullahs, always scares Europeans—especially when the U.S. trade deficit is likely to give an extra boost to any pretext for protectionism.

In any case, the combination of "our oil" to be protected plus the supposed danger of Islamic fanaticism is the best combination of frights to justify pulling "the West" together in military operations that are called for neither by international treaty nor by the democratic process prevailing in the various allied countries.

**Going along:** Getting the British and French to tag along was the easiest, given the colonialist past of those two nations. Italy was more difficult, as Christian Democratic Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, reputedly the wildest statesman in Western Europe, stubbornly defended Italian national interests against the stampede. But the Italian defense ministry got its way and sent a token contribution to the Gulf. Protest demonstrations got underway in Italy on September 17.

Of the major NATO allies, West Germany has been able to hide behind its constitution banning overseas military operations outside the NATO defense area. But the Germans are taking their place—primarily on land—in the military division of labor.

Last August 1, the day after Saudi guards massacred 400 Iranian pilgrims in circumstances that remain controversial, the Bonn Interior Ministry announced it was lending a top anti-terrorist specialist, Gen. Ulrich Wegener, to the Saudi Arabian government.

One paradox of the Gulf adventure is that the more the U.S. bungles the operation, the more the NATO allies may feel they have to get involved, to keep the Americans from wrecking everything. A richer paradox, with interesting long-term implications, is that the more the USSR promotes disarmament in northern Europe, the more the European allies are freed to shift forces southward for the wars in the Third World. □



# INSHORT

Joel Bleifuss

## La Prensa reopens, history is made

On October 1 the Nicaraguan government, meeting the free-press requirement of the regional peace plan, allowed the pro-contra newspaper *La Prensa* back on the newsstands. The mainstream media in the U.S. ballyhooed the event, but strangely overlooked a link between *La Prensa's* owners, the Chamorra family, and the contras. The Nicaraguan Resistance of Washington, D.C., describes itself as at "war against the Sandinista regime" and says that "the fronts of war are unified under the command" of a six-person directorate. One of the six people is Pedro Joaquin Chamorra. A spokeswoman at contra headquarters in Washington told *In These Times* that Pedro, in addition to directing the war, is now co-editor of *La Prensa*. In lifting the ban on *La Prensa*, Nicaragua has undoubtedly become the first nation in history that has allowed the enemy it is at war with to publish its own daily newspaper.

## La Prensa's endowment

*La Prensa* will never want for money. The *Texas Observer* reports that Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (R-TX) has promised to help the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) ensure that *La Prensa* remains solvent. The NED is a business/labor organization that Congress has mandated to promote democracy abroad. According to former CIA agent John Stockwell, the NED is also an ancillary organ of the CIA.

## Remember Allende?

Some folks do, no thanks to the institutional ignorance served up by the media of record. For example, read any *New York Times* news story about Chile and you come away with the impression that Chilean despot Augusto Pinochet led the September 1973 coup that overthrew Salvador Allende. Not a mention is made that this coup against a democratically elected government was orchestrated in Washington. Can it be that nobody at the *New York Times* has heard of the 1975 Church Commission Report? This report, named after the late Sen. Frank Church (D-ID) who headed the post-Watergate congressional investigation into CIA and FBI misdeeds, sets the record straight. Regarding the coup in Chile, it says: "Besides funding political parties the [CIA] approved large amounts to sustain opposition media and thus to maintain a hard-hitting propaganda campaign. The CIA spent \$1.5 million in support of *El Mercurio*, the country's largest newspaper and the most important channel for anti-Allende propaganda. According to CIA documents, these efforts played a significant role in setting the stage for the military coup of Sept. 11, 1973."

## Well, it worked in Chile

Do you read the op-ed foreign policy pieces in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or whatever regional journal of record? Do you ever wonder where on earth they find so many jackdaws eager to expound authoritarian principles? Well, a General Accounting Office (GAO) report released a couple of weeks ago has a partial answer. In June 1983 the White House established the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean—known by the mysterious acronym S/LPD. According to the GAO, this office was set up to engage in "prohibited covert propaganda activities designed to influence the media and the public to support the administration's Latin American policies." The GAO unearthed a "confidential eyes only" memorandum on the subject of "white propaganda operations" from the S/LPD's Johnathan Miller to Pat Buchanan, President Reagan's then-director of communications. Miller described five such operations. One was a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece on Soviet military support to Nicaragua written by Rice University professor of history and S/LPD consultant Lt. Col. John Guilmartin. The professor's polemical prose included this tidbit: "The media have focused on the icing—the MiGs—and missed the fact that a Soviet-style offensive arms cake has been baked beneath our noses." Or at least he may have written that. Miller has said S/LPD staff worked "extensively" on this piece, although he told Buchanan, "Officially, this office had no role in its preparation." Other examples of "white propaganda" listed by Miller were two pro-contra articles—one published by the *New York Times* and the other by the *Washington Post*. S/LPD staffers ghost-wrote these pieces for contra leaders Alfonso Robelo, Adolfo Calero and Arturo Cruz. Mil-



On strike: A Guatemalan textile worker visits with his wife and newborn son.

## Guatemalan labor: locked in struggle

GUATEMALA CITY—A chain-mail fence separates Guatemalan wives from their worker husbands. The fence keeps them penned in the factory grounds, while a mother dies or a son is born in their households outside. Inside the fence, a rented private police force makes the Guatemalan Lunafil factory yard more like a prison than a plant occupied by its striking workers.

As the workers of the Lunafil thread factory, 15 miles south of Guatemala City, enter their fifth month of occupying the plant, Guatemala's resurgent labor movement watches. Unionists consider this conflict a key test of the possibilities and limits of labor organizing under President Vinicio Cerezo's Christian Democrat government.

Sensing this, virtually all major labor organizations have given the Lunafil workers donations and moral support. The most significant support has come from the Coca-Cola union, STEGAC, whose members have not forgotten both the national and international support for their successful year-long occupation of the Coca-Cola bottling plant in 1984-85.

The Lunafil occupation began June 9 when owners of the thread factory, responding to increased demand, attempted to shift the plant onto 24-hour operation. The union urged the company to hire more workers. Instead, management imposed mandatory 48-hour work weeks, 12-hour work days and Saturday and Sunday work with no overtime pay. The plant occupation began after 95 percent of the factory's 160 union and non-union

workers rejected the new system and management began to fire those who refused to go along with it.

One month into the strike, the plant manager called all workers to a "negotiating" meeting outside the main building. As he announced that the company was refusing to negotiate, was firing all workers and closing the factory, he simultaneously brought in a force of 30 private security guards armed with rifles and grenades to occupy the main plant building. Up to that time the building had served as the workers' sleeping quarters. The workers continued to occupy the factory yard and two small side buildings.

Access to the plant, originally worker-controlled, is now limited. Once a worker leaves the plant compound, he is denied re-entry. So far, about a fourth of the 100 workers who originally occupied the plant have left, most out of economic necessity. Several families of striking workers have faced eviction for defaulting on rent payments.

For those workers who remain inside, strike-imposed living conditions are a hardship. For shelter, workers are confined to the two small receiving rooms near the gate, forcing some workers to sleep out in the open, where they endured the summer rains. Food must be passed over the 12-foot-high fence by union supporters and family members.

Neither Christian Democrat Labor Minister Catalina Soberanis nor Cerezo have responded to appeals from Guatemala's three major labor federations to help settle the Lunafil dispute. What did have an impact on management was an ad in support of the Lunafil workers published in the Guatema-

lan newspapers by the New York chapter of the Labor Committee for Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador. In a response to the ad, owners charged U.S. labor with interfering in Guatemalan affairs. But Lunafil union officials think the ad pushed the company back to the negotiating table for the first time since June.

These negotiations eventually led to a Labor Ministry Conciliation Tribunal recommendation that Lunafil pay the workers severance pay and that the workers leave the plant. The recommendation was accepted by management, but not by the union. What happens next is uncertain. Management may simply try to outlast the workers while the case drags through civil courts.

Lunafil workers are mindful that their union has been a survivor in an area hard hit by repression against labor. The scene of major organizing efforts in the '70s, by 1979 there were 18 unions in the area. But by 1984, that number was reduced to six by a campaign of union decimation in which dozens of trade unionists were killed or disappeared. Today Lunafil is one of the area's three surviving unions.

With international eyes on the Lunafil situation, violence in the plant would damage the democratic image the Cerezo government tries so hard to project. On the other hand, if the workers are forced—either by their difficult living situation, by their families' economic needs or by a lack of support from other unions—to give in, the destruction of one more Guatemalan union could signal doom to all the country's workers.

—Elaine Schneider