

# The Contra Conclave

## 'Freedom Fighters' Gather in Washington

By Sidney Blumenthal  
Washington Post Staff Writer

"I always feel elated," said Adolfo Calero, the Nicaraguan contra leader, "to be in the company of fellow freedom fighters and fellow Americans."

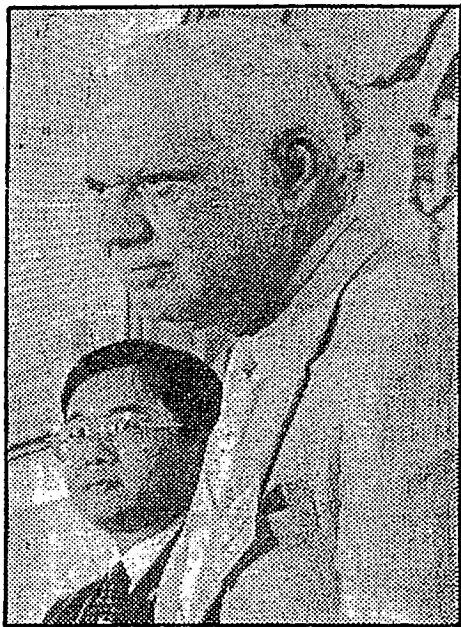
### *Fellow Americans?*

Calero's unbridled enthusiasm, which apparently inspired him to declare a change of citizenship, was greeted with polite applause by the several hundred members of the conservative American Security Council assembled yesterday at the Capital Hilton for their annual meeting.

Few there exhibited his expansive mood, though many wore "I'm a Contra Too" buttons above their name tags. After all, Calero and the contras recently have been voted \$100 million in aid by the House of Representatives, an award the council's members had avidly desired. "But that's *only* \$100 million," cautioned Col. Samuel Dickens, the council staffer who introduced Calero.

The morning's event was billed as a "Contra Summit," a public meeting of "freedom fighters" from Nicaragua, Cambodia, Ethiopia,

See ASC, B3, Col. 1



BY JOHN McDONNELL—THE WASHINGTON POST

**Souksomboun Sayasithsena of Laos, left, and Adolfo Calero at yesterday's ASC meeting.**

# Summit

ASC, From B1

Laos, Afghanistan and Angola—all living the Reagan Doctrine of armed struggle against Soviet-backed regimes. “Just think,” said Dickens, “they’re fighting Cuban military forces, *Cuban military forces!*”

At the head table, the freedom fighters resembled a Third World lineup of funeral directors, all attired in black or dark blue suits and wearing grim expressions of determination, evinced mostly through scruffy whiskers. Calero, however, looked as if he had just ambled in from the set of “Miami Vice.” He was medium cool, tanned and relaxed, dressed in cheerful pastels and Italian loafers. “We are about to begin a new ball game,” he announced.

He had what leaders from less fortunate movements want: \$100 million. Yonas Deressa, a spokesman for the Ethiopian Democratic Resistance, addressed a plea from the platform to President Reagan: “For six years we have waited for the Reagan Doctrine to apply to Ethiopia . . . Please, apply your doctrine also to Ethiopia!”

After his speech, Deressa conferred with John Blumer, a council staffer, who advised: “Instead of ‘We Are the World,’ we need ‘We Are the Free World.’”

“What we need now,” Calero told the crowd, “are shoulder-fire missiles [Stingers], which have been tested by our freedom fighters in Afghanistan.” Where the Ethiopians envy the contras, the contras envy the Afghans.

Still, Calero declared, “We may not be very far from the liberation of Nicaragua . . . It will definitely not take American troops.” But he added one condition: “If this help [\$100 million] comes.”

As the summit concluded and council members dispersed to various conference rooms for smaller seminars on the Reagan Doctrine, the freedom fighters gathered in the hotel corridor to exchange business cards.

One conspicuous figure in an elegant orange turban loomed over the others. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, an invited guest from the International Sikh Organization, made the case for U.S. aid to Sikh liberation. “Of course Sikhs should qualify under the Reagan Doctrine,” he said. “They are fighting for freedom and liberty. India is completely in the Soviet bloc.” Asked about the assassination of Indira Gandhi, he said, “She asked for it.”



Just as there are fashions in clothes, there seem to be fashions in ideology. Last winter, there was a militant intoxication with Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan rebel leader, whose moment reached its zenith at the National Conservative Political Action Conference here in January. Some youthful conservatives sported jungle fatigues and toy machine guns.

The Contra Summit yesterday reflected a less urgent mood, possibly because of its sponsor—the American Security Council. For dues-paying members, the annual event makes

them feel like Washington insiders. Wayne Gregory, a 31-year-old Chicago banking consultant, typical of the group’s younger members, said he likes the council because “it lets you touch things, like Washington. You go home feeling you’ve had hands on, made a difference. I did something.”

Many of the members believe that belonging to the official-sounding council befits their status. They are stolid businessmen, often pillars in their communities. What they find attractive about the council is that it gives them “the facts,” something they aren’t sure they’re really getting elsewhere. “You’re building up an internal data base,” said Gregory. “You’re coming up a learning curve.”

Gene Robens, a business consultant from Newport Beach, Calif., said, “I’m not critical of the press . . . But they don’t know the facts. If we give up, quit maintaining a strong national defense, we’ll end up like Afghanistan.”



The ASC began in Chicago in 1955 as the Mid-American Research Library, funded largely by Sears Roebuck & Co. Its mission was to provide information about the “loyalty” of personnel in corporations that had government contracts. The man charged with cross-indexing the files was John Fisher, a former FBI agent and Sears security director, who now runs the organization from an 850-acre estate in Boston, Va.

In the late 1970s, the ASC created the Coalition for Peace Through Strength, which campaigned for a vastly expanded defense budget. Ronald Reagan became a member. Since 1982, according to Common Cause, the ASC has received at least \$500,000 in contributions from defense contractors.

The ASC also runs a political action committee that distributes money to candidates. To qualify, a candidate must lend his or her name and prestige by joining the coalition.

“We like to feel we helped make possible the Reagan Doctrine,” Fisher said.

Throughout the day, Fisher made periodic appearances on the platform, presenting a plaque to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and a mounted white alabaster eagle to Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole. Mementos to 160 members of the House and Senate, who happen to be members of the Coalition for Peace Through Strength, were presented at the Cannon House Office Building.

Members of the council—or the coalition, or another affiliate, the U.S. Congressional Advisory Board—could purchase their own mementos near the registration table.

A business card holder embossed with an official-looking American eagle and the words “U.S. Congressional Advisory Board” costs \$6. A plastic license plate frame, similarly adorned with the seal and name, costs \$5.

Gold-plated coasters: \$25.

A pen: \$6.50.

“The one item we didn’t get in was the auto emblem,” said L.M. Collins, a consultant to the ASC on these specialty products. “We could have sold 300 of them. Everybody’s been asking for an emblem. They’re \$15—a lifetime thing. We’ll do a mailing.”