

**The Iran-Contra Affair and the Cold War:
A “Neat Idea” and the Reagan Doctrine**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the Iran-Contra affair and the Reagan Doctrine. It moves beyond the trappings of political theater wrought by Oliver North's "neat idea" of diverting residual funds from arms-for-hostages deals with Iran into the coffers of the Contras. It traces the formation of the Reagan Doctrine and examines the doctrine's application in Nicaragua, thereby exploring the covert operations producing Iran-Contra. Drawing upon declassified documents, I argue that Iran-Contra was not foreign policy gone awry, but rather the Reagan Doctrine fundamentally in action. The Reagan administration recast containment in confronting the Soviet Union and evaded constraints on executive power to engage the Third World with the Reagan Doctrine, a global counter-revolutionary campaign. The administration privatized foreign policy, used off-the-books covert operations in Iran and Nicaragua, and violated laws to rollback communism. Those within the administration who committed themselves absolutely to defeating the Soviet Union resorted to extralegal methods in achieving their aims. In the process, operations in Iran and Nicaragua intersected and created Iran-Contra, a product of the Reagan Doctrine in harmony with Reagan's policies.

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Introduction

Day 23 of the Joint Hearings on the Iran-Contra Investigation commenced at 9:00 a.m. in room 325 of the Russell Senate Office Building on July 7, 1987. Its most highly anticipated witness, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North, a former National Security Council staffer, commenced his testimony. During opening questioning by John W. Nields, the chief counsel for the House Committee, North professed to the committee, “I came here to tell you the truth, the good, the bad and the ugly.”¹ North’s declaration about the Iran-Contra affair proved duplicitous—yet, he remained candid in many respects. On the diversion of residual funds from arms sales to Iran into the coffers of the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries, he unequivocally expressed his approval of and encouragement for the covert operations responsible. “I saw that idea of using the Ayatollah Khomeini’s money to support the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters as a good one,” he proclaimed resolutely, “I think it was a neat idea and I came back and I advocated that and we did it.” His unapologetic defense of his actions during six days of questioning and political grandstanding from Congress and their council prominently displayed the underbelly of American foreign policy during the Ronald Reagan administration for all to see.²

Only later did the truth about Oliver North’s activities surface in reports from the Tower Commission, Iran-Contra Congressional Hearings, and the Office of the Independent Council. In sum, these final reports concluded several basic facts about Iran-

¹ United States. Congress., *Testimony of Oliver L. North (Questioning by Counsels)*: Joint Hearings before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran and the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, Vol. 100-7, Part 1, 100th Congress, 1st Sess, July 7, 8, 9, and 10, 1987 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 109.

Contra, which reveal the nature of the Reagan administration's foreign policy. The scandal known as the Iran-Contra affair birthed from two interconnected covert operations in Nicaragua and Iran orchestrated out of the White House by the National Security Council, with help from the Central Intelligence Agency and private third parties. In Nicaragua, President Reagan committed unwavering support for counter-revolutionary forces, known as the Contras, against the Sandinista government. Congress passed the Boland Amendments, however, ending monetary assistance for the Contras' mission of overthrowing the Sandinistas, but the White House continued supporting their operations. In Iran, President Reagan authorized selling arms to Iran in an arms-for-hostage deal to have American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon released. In return for arm shipments, the Iranians pressured Hezbollah for the release of American hostages. These two operations intersected when residual funds from Iranian arms transactions were diverted into the coffers of the Contras to support their war against the Nicaraguan government. Along with funds from the Iranian arm sales, the Reagan administration supplied the Contras with monetary support from third party countries and private donors. The covert actions in Iran and Nicaragua violated an arms embargo against Iran and the Arms Export Control Act, as well as the Boland amendment against providing funds to the Contras.³

³ See Lawrence E. Walsh, *Final Report of the Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra Matters*. U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, August 4, 1993. Vol. I: *Investigations and Prosecutions*; Vol. II: *Indictments, Plea Agreements, Interim Reports to the Congress, and Administrative Matters*; Vol. III: *Comments and Materials Submitted by Individuals and Their Attorneys Responding to Volume I of the Final Report* (Washington, D.C, 1993); U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, with Supplemental, Minority, and Additional Views*. 100th Congress, 1st Sess., 1987. Senate Report 100-216, November (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1987); John Tower, Brent Scowcroft, and Edmund S. Muskie, *The Tower Commission Report: The Full Text of the President's Special Review Board* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987).

The Iran-Contra affair erupted into what White House Communications Director Pat Buchanan described as "full-blown Watergate-style hearings in both Houses."⁴ It grabbed the attention of those inside the Beltway and living in Middle America after a plane carrying arms for the Contras was shot down in Nicaragua and a story on the Iranian arms sales published in a Lebanese newspaper. Looming large over the Reagan administration, the scandal had the potential to ruin Reagan's presidency. The scheme of converting profits from arms-for-hostages deals with Iran into aid for the Nicaraguan Contras resulted in Congressional hearings, independent investigations, and subsequent criminal charges and convictions for numerous participants. As the scandal unfolded in the halls of Congress and the American media, the world indeed became aware of the Reagan administration's problematic covert operations. And despite the ruckus surrounding the president's involvement, North's late night disposal of documents, and the illegality of American policies, Reagan escaped unscathed, while several participants won appeals against their convictions and those remaining under indictment received last minute presidential pardons during George H.W. Bush's administration. Iran-Contra fostered a media circus and shocked the American public profoundly but has since dwindled in the American public consciousness.⁵

Several days after Bush's Christmas Eve pardons, a *New York Times* op-ed opined, "It's a worthy wish, but pardons are an unworthy way of sweeping suspected subversion of law under an already lumpy rug. One day and one way, the truth will out;

⁴ Memo, Pat Buchanan to Donald T. Reagan, December 19, 1986, ID # 484001, CO071, WHORM: Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library (Hereafter RRL).

⁵ U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, Chap. 17-18; For criminal charges and pardons, see Walsh, *Final Report of the Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra Matters*, xiv-xv.

these pardons can only prolong the wait.”⁶ The truth of Iran-Contra, however, is endlessly complicated and convoluted, resting upon a large tapestry of American policy during the Reagan era. As such, the Iran-Contra affair is more than a political scandal that engulfed President Reagan’s administration. The event is an important chapter of the late global Cold War, a period in which Washington and Moscow sought to remake the world in their image while defending national interests with objectives of control and improvement in the Third World. It encapsulates the Reagan administration’s strategy to “rollback” the Soviet Union’s influence with the Reagan Doctrine, a global counter-revolutionary strategy that provided covert and overt assistance to nationalist resistance movements and anti-communist guerrillas in the Third World. The Reagan Doctrine manifested across the world, including operations in Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia, but support for the Contras in Nicaragua is at the heart of the Iran-Contra affair.⁷

An assessment of Iran-Contra must move beyond the trappings of political theater wrought by North's "neat idea" of diverting funds from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini into the war chest of the Nicaraguan Contras. The Iran-Contra scandal is well known, for contemporary journalists and pundits routinely covered how it transpired. Participants and scholars offered varying accounts thereafter. Shifting away from shocking cover-ups and conspiracies, the strategic underpinnings and covert operations of Iran-Contra concern this study. Why it happened and what it reveals about the Reagan

⁶ “The Best Case for the Pardons,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1992, sec. Opinion, A14, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/29/opinion/the-best-case-for-the-pardons.html>.

⁷ Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War’s Last Chapter* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994), 3, 52–53; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4–5.

administration's foreign policy is paramount to understanding the Reagan Doctrine. Iran-Contra's operations were intrinsic to the Reagan Doctrine, a strategy which brought conflicts in diverse regional theaters to the fore in a pivotal moment of the late Cold War.

An analysis of the affair illustrates Reagan's strategy in real time application. This study therefore posits that Iran-Contra was not national security gone awry, but rather the Reagan Doctrine fundamentally in action. The Reagan administration recast containment in confronting the Soviet Union and evaded constraints on executive power to engage the Third World with the Reagan Doctrine, a global extralegal counter-revolutionary campaign in the name of democracy. The administration privatized foreign policy, used off-the-books covert operations in Iran and Nicaragua, and violated laws to rollback communism. Reaganites, the die-hard supporters of this policy, committed themselves absolutely to defeating the Soviet Union and resorted to extralegal methods in achieving their aims. In the process, clandestine operations in Iran and Nicaragua intersected, resulting in the Iran-Contra affair, a product of the Reagan Doctrine in harmony with Reagan's policies.

Unfortunately, the public spectacle over the scandalous nature of the covert operations overshadows the significance of the event within the historiography of American foreign relations. Descriptive reconstructions as well as memoirs and first person accounts of those involved in the operations, hearings, and investigations dominate the literature on Iran-Contra. In the wake of the scandal, for instance, Theodore Draper produced a substantive descriptive treatment, in which he seeks "to reconstruct the events as fully and authentically as possible." Using over 50,000 pages of documents available at the time, Draper offers a detailed account of the harrowing operations, cover-

ups, and ensuing political theater. More recently, Malcolm Byrne, the most prominent scholar of Iran-Contra, authored a well-researched and thorough narrative, which stands as the new standard-bearer for understanding the affair. Yet, Byrne overwhelmingly describes the inner workings of Iran-Contra, but offers only a few pages of analysis on Reagan's policy. Byrne and Draper's literature detailing the Reagan administration's exploits in Iran, Nicaragua, and the halls of Congress in Washington are together the authoritative narratives. This study owes much to their efforts.⁸

Ample work on Iran-Contra is either written by or about people involved in the affair. In their memoirs and diaries, Reagan and H.W. Bush both maintain the narrative that the NSC acted without the president's knowledge. The affair occupies little space in their recounting of eight years in the White House.⁹ Others have offered their insider accounts for the record. George Shultz writes in his autobiography a more in-depth account of his experience during the affair, providing an informative but selective perspective. In the same manner, Lawrence Walsh describes his time as independent counselor in charge of investigating the affair. Other participants write similar treatments of the scandal, including Richard Secord, Elliot Abrams, Michael A. Ledeen, Donald T. Regan, and Casper Weinberger, while some attempt to vindicate themselves, such as Oliver North in his autobiography. This literature illuminates the scandal with gripping

⁸ Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014); Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991); see also, Ann Wroe, *Lives, Lies and the Iran-Contra Affair* (London: New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1991); Jonathan Marshall, *The Iran-Contra Connection: Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); National Security Archive, *The Iran-Contra Affair: The Making of a Scandal, 1983-1988*, ed. Malcolm Byrne and Peter Kornbluh (Washington, D.C.: Alexandria, VA: National Security Archive ; Chadwyck-Healey, 1990).

⁹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); George H. W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

narratives, but it is riddled with half-truths and self-interest, in addition to a virtual absence of historical analysis.¹⁰

Iran-Contra is often found at the intersection of studies on the Cold War and Latin America. William LeoGrande's *Our Own Backyard* and Robert Kagan's *The Twilight Struggle* are the most erudite treatments of the Reagan administration's counter-revolutionary policy in Central America. Iran-Contra nonetheless dwells within brief space in LeoGrande's opus, and Kagan focuses only on the impact of Iran-Contra on U.S. policy.¹¹ Whereas many international Cold War histories mention Iran-Contra in passing, the scholarship on Nicaragua, the Sandinistas, the ramifications of the Reagan administration's policy toward Central America, including Iran-Contra's part, are boundless.¹² Studies on the Iranian and Israeli side of the story, on the other hand, are less

¹⁰See, Elliott Abrams, *Undue Process a Story of How Political Differences Are Turned into Crimes* (New York: Toronto: New York: Free Press, 1992); For a superior investigation of North, see Ben Bradlee JR., *Guts and Glory: The Rise and Fall of Oliver North* (New York: D.I. Fine, 1988); Duane R. Clarridge and Digby Diehl, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Scribner, 2002); William S. Cohen, *Men of Zeal: A Candid Inside Story of the Iran-Contra Hearings* (New York: Viking, 1988); Edwin Meese, *With Reagan: The inside Story* (Washington : Regnery Gateway; National Book Network, 1992); Constantine Christopher. Menges, *Inside the National Security Council: The True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Michael A. Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft: An Insider's Account of the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: Scribner, 1988); Oliver North, *Under Fire: An American Story* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers ; Zondervan, 1992); George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph My Years As Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner, 1993); Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1990); Richard V. Secord and Jay. Wurts, *Honored and Betrayed: Irangate, Covert Affairs, and the Secret War in Laos* (New York: Wiley, 1992).

¹¹ For his conclusion on the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua, see William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 580–590; Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 465–632.

¹² See Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 374; Hal Brands, *Latin America's Long Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 216; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993); Cynthia Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the Reagan Administration, and Central America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).; for Central America, see Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua 1981-1987* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), Glenn. Garvin, *Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA & the Contras* (Washington: Brassey's Book Orders, 1992); Peter Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention: Reagan's Wars against the Sandinistas* (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1987); Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and*

prevalent and limited.¹³ Together, literature on Central American and, in a lesser capacity, Iran are fruitful for understanding Iran-Contra in general and the Reagan Doctrine's impact on the regions in particular. What follows builds upon this scholarship on Iran-Contra and the Reagan Doctrine to show the operational aspects of the Reagan Doctrine, which are best exemplified by the Iran-Contra affair.

The aim of this study is to properly historicize Iran-Contra. Memoirs and personal narratives alone are insufficient for this process. Rather, analyzing Iran-Contra within the larger framework of the late Cold War and American foreign policy relies upon the work of scholars and newly available archival material. Those examining the Iran-Contra affair have either crafted detailed historical reconstructions or marginalized it within larger studies of American foreign policy toward Central America or Iran. Works to date abiding by these two methods prove limited in scope and analysis, as none address Iran-Contra as the Reagan Doctrine in practice. Descriptive reconstructions are narrow in scope, for the focus is on the gripping narrative of the cover-up and scandal. These lack an in-depth analysis of the policy dynamics. Historians treating the affair as a side note miss opportunities for developing its historical significance as it applies to how Reagan's foreign policy operated, failing to calibrate their study to define it as such. Without an adequate study of the Iran-Contra Affair vis-à-vis the Reagan Doctrine, the absence

Nicaragua, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002); R. Pardo-Maurer, *The Contras, 1980-1989: A Special Kind of Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Timothy C. Brown, *The Real Contra War: Highlander Peasant Resistance in Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Christopher Dickey, *With the Contras: A Reporter in the Wilds of Nicaragua* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

¹³ Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Press, 2012), 175–206; Ronen Bergman, *The Secret War with Iran: The 30-Year Clandestine Struggle Against the World's Most Dangerous Terrorist Power* (New York: The Free Press, 2007), 110–130; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

suggests that it was an outlier rather than the Reagan Doctrine proper. Although despite this trend, not all scholars misdiagnose Iran-Contra.

Writing in the twilight of the Reagan administration in 1988, Christopher Layne contended that the affair was Reagan's action to own, diagnosing the ideological underpinnings of Reagan's policy as the disease. "The Iran-Contra case was not an aberration in the administration's record," Layne argues, "It was a scandal waiting to happen from the beginning, because the Reagan Doctrine's underlying ideological ethos led its adherents to believe they had a monopoly on defining the 'true' national interest." In other words, the Cold War that the U.S. waged against the Soviet Union—democracy versus communism—had to be won at all costs, including an evasion of political and legal restraints to ensure victory. Reagan's cabinet maintained a dedication to winning the Cold War, which informed the application of the Reagan Doctrine.¹⁴ Independent Counselor Lawrence Walsh reached a similar conclusion from his investigation. "The Iran/Contra affair was not an aberrational scheme carried out by a 'cabal of zealots' on the National Security Council staff," he argues, "it was the produce of two foreign policy directives by President Reagan which skirted the law and which were executed by the NSC staff with the knowledge and support of high officials."¹⁵ As the operational aspects are crucial to understanding Reagan's policy in the late Cold War, the study that follows launches from the assessments above in its assertion that ideology as well as the application of the Reagan Doctrine is embodied in the Iran-Contra affair.

¹⁴ Christopher Layne, "Requiem for the Reagan Doctrine," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1988): 10.

¹⁵ Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 562.

Iran-Contra is a synecdoche for the Ronald Reagan administration piloting a global extralegal counter-revolutionary campaign in the name of democracy. This study therefore moves beyond the trappings of political theater in positing that Iran-Contra transpired as the Reagan Doctrine in practice. In four chapters, it analyzes the Reagan Doctrine and Iran-Contra to reveal the gritty operational aspects of Reagan's strategy. Chapter one begins the study with an autopsy of the Reagan Doctrine. It examines the doctrine's strategic and ideological origins to provide the foundation of Reagan's strategy for rolling back the Soviet Union in the Third World during the late Cold War. Chapter two focuses on the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua, beginning a concise overview of Iran-Contra by exploring the origins of the Contra program and the political conflicts over its operation. Chapter three examines the Reagan administration's covert mechanisms for supporting the Contras, including the off-the-books network that facilitated operational and monetary assistance. It spotlights the third-party solicitations and third-country quid pro quos, as well as the Iran initiative that intersected with the Contra program to create the affair.

Chapter four concludes this study by assembling the international and domestic actors, operations, policies, and events of the previous chapters to connect the Reagan Doctrine and Iran-Contra with Reagan's foreign policy and the Cold War more broadly. It illuminates what Iran-Contra reveals about the Reagan Doctrine. It shows the Reagan administration conducted a counter-revolutionary campaign in the Third World as a component of a grand strategy aggressively confronting the Soviet Union. The strategy's application by any means necessary produced Iran-Contra, as the administration's end

goal of winning the Cold War mandated unwavering commitment to the Reagan Doctrine.

Iran-Contra holds a unique status among well-known covert operations in regards to the resources available for examining the affair. It remained in the media spotlight for several years. As a result, journalists wrote daily articles covering the spectacle. Congressional hearings and the Office of Independent Council investigation also produced copious amounts of documents. Over the preceding years, however, the Reagan Presidential Library has opened its material related to the affair and Reagan's foreign policy more broadly. These documents, in addition to those released from the National Security Archive's declassification efforts, offer a fresh perspective into the affair and the administration's policymaking. While many sources remain unavailable for national security restrictions, this study utilizes an array of available documents from the above mentioned resources in its examination of Iran-Contra and the Reagan Doctrine. This approach complements contributions of historians, journalists, the Independent Counsel Investigation, and Congress. It extends the historical record of Iran-Contra, Reagan's foreign policy, and the interconnected global narrative of the late Cold War.

Chapter 1

The Reagan Doctrine: “We Must Not Break Faith”

At 3:11 p.m. on May 17, 1981, 70 year old President Ronald Reagan took the stage at the University of Notre Dame to deliver the commencement address for the graduating class. Although hundreds of students wore white arm bands and mortarboards as a sign of protest against Reagan’s policies, most of the crowd cheered the president. Reagan had decided against using the platform as an opportunity to deliver a speech focused solely on his vision for policy, but he did not miss a chance to espouse his rigid views on communism. He offered the graduates an inspirational speech focused on America’s positive future. "The years ahead are great ones for this country, for the cause of freedom and the spread of civilization," he celebrated. Then, with much conviction, he forecasted an American victory in the Cold War: "The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism [...] it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written."¹⁶ Reagan’s declaration in front of the Notre Dame class of ’81 encapsulates his administration’s mission during its two terms in the White House. His conviction translated into his administration’s foreign policy.

The doctrine with which the Reagan administration pursued the West’s transcendence of communism is the focus of this chapter. Reagan publicly called for a democratic revolution and enunciated a strategy which encouraged anti-Communist guerrillas and nationalist resistance movement to combat Soviet influence within their respective

¹⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame, May 17, 1981,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald W. Reagan, 1981, January 20 to December 31, 1981* 434 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1982), 431–35; Howell Raines Times, “Reagan Is Welcomed on Notre Dame Trip, First Since Shooting,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/18/us/reagan-is-welcomed-on-notre-dame-trip-first-since-shooting.html>.

countries. This chapter charts the creation and enunciation of Reagan's counter-revolutionary campaign in the Third World by exploring its formation with attention to the policymaking and philosophy producing Reagan's strategy toward the Soviet Union. The Reagan Doctrine's ideological, strategic, and rhetorical components are examined, thereby showing the underpinnings of the doctrine, a strategy which ultimately produced the Iran-Contra affair.

Hardline conservatives—or Reaganites—accompanying Reagan into the White House, as well as conservatives writ large, perceived a retreat of U.S. global power in the rise of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Cuban troops in Angola, and the Iranian Revolution. They also understood these events to be major failures of the Jimmy Carter administration and victories for the Soviet Union. Reaganites adhered to a particular brand of American political brand of conservatism, which "came together in a specially cohesive and potent way" during Reagan's two terms. It entailed a belief in market-driven capitalism, fervent patriotism, superpower supremacy, and rugged individualism. Reagan also provided a "noble cause" assessment of the Vietnam War, a view that soldiers in Vietnam "acted with a raw courage that by any measure qualified as noble" despite the mission. It resonated for Americans seeking to "exorcise the Vietnam ghost," including Vietnam veterans staffed on the NSC, notably Oliver North, Robert McFarlane, and John Poindexter. But Reagan's support was not confined solely to Republicans.¹⁷

¹⁷ Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 1–5; Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song*, 17, 372, 247, 253; Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War: 1985-1991* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2015), 34-42; For a longer view of Reagan's help in forming the new right, see Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), chps 10-13; Vietnam Ghost quoted from Gen. T.R. Milton, USAF (RET.), "The

In the wake of Vietnam, Democrats disenchanted with the leftist shift of the party moved toward neoconservatism, a hybrid of New Deal liberalism infused with a belief in supreme U.S. power and internationalism. Associates of Democratic Senators Hubert Humphrey and Henry "Scoop" Jackson, who espoused liberal social views and strident anti-Communism, formed the neoconservative movement, a group well received in the new Reagan administration. Reagan's campaign formed a coalition between conservative Republicans and neoconservatives in 1980. Reagan himself contacted future United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. He requested she join his foreign policy team. Southern Democrats, meanwhile, remained hardened Cold Warriors and natural allies of Reagan. A Cold Warrior movement coalesced around the election of Reagan in 1980.¹⁸

With this coalition, Reagan intended a righting of the wrongs from the previous four years. To accomplish this feat, the Reagan administration supported anti-Communist resistance movements in the Third World as part of a strategy to repeal the influence of the Soviet Union. The anti-Communist strategy that became known as the Reagan Doctrine developed out of policies toward Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and, most significantly, Nicaragua. The doctrine countered the Soviet Union's Brezhnev Doctrine, which held the USSR intervened to sustain communism in any country where forces threatened its survival. It fundamentally consists of two components. One, the policies with which the administration pursued the rollback of communism in the Third World. Two, the rhetoric used to formulate the doctrine, as it was articulated by William Casey,

Lessons of Vietnam," *Air Force Magazine*, March 1983.

<http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1983/March%201983/0383vietnam.aspx>.

¹⁸ Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s*, 35–40; For the rise of neoconservatism from the Reagan administration into the George W. Bush administration, see James Mann, *The Rise of The Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004); see also, Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: the biography of a movement* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

Reagan, Shultz, and other officials within the administration as well as political commentators, such as Charles Krauthammer. The doctrine is a trademark of Reagan's foreign policy during his two terms.¹⁹

The Reagan Doctrine's origin is peculiar. As Chester Pach notes, "It was discovered rather than proclaimed." Political commentator Charles Krauthammer, in fact, identified the Reagan Doctrine in an article he wrote for *Time* in April 1985. Reagan later mentioned the doctrine only once by its name during remarks at the National Defense University on October 25, 1988. He announced to the audience at Fort McNair, "Around the world, in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and yes, Central America, the United States stands today with those who would fight for freedom [...] This stand is at the core of what some have called the Reagan doctrine."²⁰ Unable to take credit for the title, the president's reference to his eponymous doctrine highlighted that it was someone from outside of the White House naming the administration's policy. It nevertheless had originated from Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union and Third World countries where officials determined the Soviets had gained influence. The ideology, however, developed much earlier when the Cold War was beginning to rage. In the years afterward, the policies that followed reinvigorated a confrontation supposedly in *détente*.

¹⁹ Reagan, *An American Life*, 266–268; H. W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), 214–221; James Scott refers to the Reagan Doctrine as a "key strategy," while Robert Tucker views it as "distinctive," see James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 1996), 3, and Robert W. Tucker, "Reagan's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1988), 14; For the Brezhnev Doctrine, see Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 66–69;.

²⁰ Chester Pach, "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 75–76; Charles Krauthammer, "Essay: The Reagan Doctrine," *Time*, April 1, 1985, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,964873,00.html>; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the National Defense University on Signing the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, October 25, 1988," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald W. Reagan, 1988-1989, Book II --July 2, 1988 to January 19, 1989* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1991), 1381–84.

The international and domestic developments of the Cold War in the years preceding Reagan's ascent to the White House made the Reagan Doctrine possible. The concept of rollback began in the 1950s with James Burnham's conservative criticisms of containment, in which he claimed the policy held defeatist ideology. Burnham argued the U.S. could win the Cold War by helping Eastern Europe liberate itself. In the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles advocated rollback. Despite not having capitalized on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the administration carried out a form of rollback to an extent with covert action in Guatemala and Iran. These two rollback operations provided successful models for such operations. Policies first set forth by Burnham and executed by previous administrations influenced hardline Reagan officials. Except they viewed them through the lens of the Cold War in 1980, reinforcing their beliefs that containment was defeatist and détente had allowed the Soviets to make inroads into the Third World. Thus, Reagan's cabinet formulated "a guide for U.S. policy when containment failed." Aware of the restraints that America's war in Vietnam imposed, the administration sought the use of national liberation movements and anti-Communist guerrillas in the eradication of Soviet-supported regimes.²¹

If earlier versions of containment proved unable to stop the Soviet Union's encroachment, then, the Reagan Doctrine offered a reconfigured approach toward

²¹ James Scott also refers to the Reagan Doctrine as "a remedy to the problem of Soviet expansionism." See Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 14–19; for Burnham's criticisms, see James Burnham, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (New York: J. Day Press, 1950) and *Containment or Liberation: An Inquiry into the Aims of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: J. Day Press, 1953); for operations in Guatemala and Iran, see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2008).

winning the Cold War. Chester Pach describes it as “an updated version of the oldest forms of containment,” precisely because it was built upon the previous covert actions of the Eisenhower and Truman administrations. The former enacted covert action in toppling Soviet-orientated regimes and the latter utilized psychological warfare and covert action toward the Eastern Bloc.²² Reagan advocated a solution of facing Soviet advances and defeating them during his campaign in 1980, denouncing “the vast and expanding colonial empire of the Soviet Union” and declaring “there will be no more abandonment of friends by the U.S. of Am[erica].”²³ Reagan’s campaign rhetoric presented his foreign policy approach clearly. He proposed the U.S. would combat Soviet imperialism and remain unwavering in its support for allies in the process. His administration began with a determination to put into practice the promises he made on the campaign trail.

With relevant documents from the Reagan era now declassified, it is clear that the Reagan Doctrine developed organically rather than a chief architect of the policy presiding over its formulation and implementation. Whereas the heritage of rollback derived from the conservative critique of containment in the 1950s, the Reagan Doctrine’s intellectual origins, as Ted Carpenter suggests, can be located in the works of Laurence W. Beilenson. A friend of Reagan, Beilenson supported using guerrilla warfare against the Soviets, a suggestion that influenced Reagan’s thinking.²⁴ Two Reagan

²² Pach, “The Reagan Doctrine,” 78; see also Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

²³ *Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*, ed. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: Free Press, 2001), 477, 479.

²⁴ Ted Carpenter, “U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The Reagan Doctrine and Its Pitfalls,” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, no. 74 (1986): note 1; for Beilenson's views, see Laurence W. Beilenson, *Power*

officials also promoted policies resembling the Reagan Doctrine prior to serving in the administration. CIA National Intelligence Officer for Latin America Constantine Menges advocated supporting "democratic insurgencies" in 1968, later claiming he provided Reagan a proposal of such in 1981. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Fred Iklé had likewise advocated an identical policy toward Africa in 1978. Notwithstanding the contributions of these two officials, one official in particular articulated and implemented the strategy after the election.²⁵

Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, a former member of the Office of Strategic Services and Reagan's campaign manager in 1980, deserves a bulk of the credit for outlining and supporting what became the Reagan Doctrine. Casey, an ardent anti-Communist, "played the role of a visionary behind the Reagan Doctrine's low-intensity warfare."²⁶ He championed an aggressive stance from the advent of the Reagan administration. Reaganites and the president were acutely receptive to his hardline propositions. Newly appointed United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick also received Casey's view with a warm embrace. As a faithful ally, she helped Casey magnetize and gratify Reagan and Reaganites alike. Her own theories toward waging the Cold War resonated deeply with the president and hardline conservatives within the administration.²⁷

through Subversion (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1972); Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 255.

²⁵ Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 19–20; see also Constantine Menges, *Democratic Revolutionary Insurgency as an Alternative Strategy* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1968) and Menges, *The Twilight Struggle: The Soviet Union v. The United States Today* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1990).

²⁶ Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 105–106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106; According to Lagon, Reagan listened to Kirkpatrick's input attentively. Kirkpatrick was also a close friend of Casey, sharing his devout anti-communism and hardline approach.

Kirkpatrick formulated a principle regarding the differences between authoritarian and totalitarian governments. It functioned as a theoretical influence on the Reagan Doctrine's application. Writing for *Commentary* in 1979, she articulated a distinction between the governing systems. Her article, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," suggests that authoritarian governments are oppressive but inclined to support American policies. Whereas totalitarian governments are Marxist-Leninist and opposed to America's geopolitical interests. Authoritarians can be nudged toward democracy, while totalitarians are unable to reform. She also criticized President Carter for the fall of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua and the Shah in Iran. She accused the Carter administration, abetted by a liberal-leaning press, of forcing unfamiliar democratic practices too hastily on unprepared autocratic societies. This put the faltering regimes in a vulnerable position for a Communist takeover. Reagan concurred with Kirkpatrick's criticism. It persuaded him against considering human rights violations to ensure right-wing authoritarians remained allies, thus bolstering his global anti-Communist strategy.²⁸ Achieving the rollback of the Soviet Union's geopolitical advances superseded concerns of human rights. The theory informed the White House's willingness to disregard human rights abuses perpetrated by anti-communist allies and counter-revolutionary resistance forces supported by the administration. It certainly buttressed the hardline stance William Casey pushed within the administration.²⁹

²⁸ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Articles Dictatorships Double Standards," *Commentary*, November 1979, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/dictatorships-double-standards/>.

²⁹ In January 1981, The White House changed concerns of U.S. policy away from human rights and onto what it termed international terrorism, or Soviet-supported aggression, see "Excerpts From Haig's Remarks at First News Conference as Secretary of State," *New York Times*, January 29, 1981; for Haig's view on Reagan's policy during his tenure as Secretary, see Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: MacMillan, 1984).

Casey, an adherent of Kirkpatrick's thesis on dictators, sought to cause havoc for the Soviets. In January 1981, he began his crusade for rollback when he charged the USSR with overextension of its empire. Soviet involvement in the Third World placed them in a vulnerable situation, Casey argued to Reagan, offering the U.S. a chance for a mighty offensive. In a meeting of top officials on January 30, 1981, Casey proposed a hostile policy toward the Soviets. Reagan agreed with the strategy wholeheartedly. His good versus evil apocalyptic view of the Cold War as well as a general antipathy for communism and Soviet foreign policy guided his thinking.³⁰ During a NSC meeting a week later, Reagan proposed the U.S. "could reverse the situation" in Angola. Casey concurred on U.S. involvement in Angola, stating that rollback in Angola would harm the Cubans and thus deserved careful consideration. Reagan targeted Central America as a launch pad for the rollback. "El Salvador is a good starting point," he suggested, "A victory there could set an example." He advised his cabinet that accepting defeat in Central America was not an option. The president's resolve toward pushing back on Soviet advances remained firm. "For too many years, we have been telling adversaries what we can't do," he exclaimed, "It's time we make them start wondering what we will do." Reagan set the tone—aggressive, triumphant, and resolute—and the Reagan Doctrine unfurled.³¹

³⁰ Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), xviii, 5–7, Schweizer's sources are interviews with administration officials. To this author's knowledge, a memo from the Jan. 30 meeting is not available; Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 280–296.

³¹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "Caribbean Basin; Poland," February 6, 1981, Folder "NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] (1) (2)," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL; Richard Pipes stated in an interview with Mark Lagon that "Reagan set the tone." see, Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 111 and 120, note 33.

Two National Security Decision Directives codified the Reagan Doctrine. Reagan first approved NSDD 32 in May 1982, followed by NSDD 75 in January 1983. The accompanying rhetoric from Reagan and his administration enunciated the policy for fighting the Soviets in a global Cold War. The process began when National Security Advisor William P. Clark asked the NSC to formulate a national security strategy for the administration. As a result, Reagan approved National Security Study Directive 1-82 on February 5, 1982. It directed an interagency review group comprised of staff from the NSC, State Department, CIA, DOD, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide a study to guide Reagan's policy. Following the production of the interagency National Security Study, the NSC met twice for a discussion on the findings. The results fundamentally changed the direction of U.S. foreign policy, principally recharging efforts in the Third World via the Reagan Doctrine.³²

Gathering on April 16, 1982, the NSC overviewed the first five sections of the interagency study and reached a general consensus. A second and final meeting in the Cabinet Room on April 27, 1982, dealt with the remaining four sections. In particular, security assistance to countries in need of American support concerned officials. Casey suggested providing those countries under Soviet threat with light weapons and communications gear. After the cabinet reviewed these suggestions and others, it reached a final consensus. Reagan boasted the administration had "a far more coherent policy than Congress."³³ Based on the study's findings, he approved NSDD 32 on May 20,

³² National Security Study Directive Number 1-82, "U.S. National Security Strategy," February 5, 1982, Box 91277, Folder "NSSD 1-82 [US National Security Strategy] (1)-(8)," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: National Security Study Directives (NSSD): Records, 1981-1987, RRL; Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 107.

³³ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "NSSD 1-82," April 16, 1982, Folder "NSC 00045 04/16/1982 [Strategic]," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL;

1982. It contained eleven diplomatic, economic, informational, political, and military objectives for U.S. national security policy toward the Soviet Union. The foundation of the Reagan Doctrine is imbedded in objectives three and four. The U.S. sought "to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence through the world" and "neutralize the efforts of the USSR to increase its influence through its use of diplomacy, arms transfers, economic pressure, political action, propaganda, and disinformation." NSDD 32 instituted rollback as American policy. Next, Reagan supplied additional rhetorical flare for the aggressive anti-Communist agenda.³⁴

Policymakers formulated and codified the Reagan Doctrine as a strategy, but speeches contained its philosophical components. With respect to declaration, the Reagan speechwriters were an integral part. Dana Rohrabacher, a senior speechwriter for Reagan, maintains "the speechwriters played a key role" in the Reagan Doctrine. Nearly three weeks after the signing off NSDD 32, for example, Reagan delivered his Westminster address, a roaring call to arms for a global campaign for democracy written by Anthony Dolan.³⁵ Reagan later wrote, "What eventually flowed from it became known as the Reagan Doctrine."³⁶ In the speech, Reagan touted the exceptionalism of free enterprise and liberal democracy to the British Parliament. He criticized the Soviet Union for being totalitarian, stating Soviet-backed regimes oppressed the peoples of the Third World who yearned to be free. "We must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy," he

Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "NSSD 1-82," April 27, 1982, Folder "NSC 00047 04/27/1982 [NSDD 1-82]," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL.

³⁴ National Security Decision Directive Number 32, "U.S. National Security Strategy," May 20, 1982, RAC Box 1, Folder "NSDD 32 [U.S. National Security Strategy] (1)-(4)," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD): Records, 1981-1987, RRL.

³⁵ Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 108–109; Rohrabacher is quoted from an interview with Lagon, see 119, note 23.

³⁶ Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speeches* (Simon and Schuster, 2004), 107–108.

demanded, announcing America would “contribute as a nation to the global campaign for democracy now gathering force.” The president put it simply and directly, “What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term--the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people.” Here, his declaration of the Reagan Doctrine unveiled the administration’s strategy of dogged devotion to rollback, not only as a rallying cry for the West but as a warning to the Soviet Union.³⁷

On August 21, 1982, the president approved NSSD 11-82, another study of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. It instructed a review of the Soviet threat to U.S. interests to produce a finding on what political, economic, military, and ideological offensives the U.S. could employ, in addition to an internal and external assessment of Soviet strengths and vulnerabilities.³⁸ Historian Richard Pipes, who was on leave from Harvard University to be the Director of East European and Soviet Affairs of the NSC, drafted the review for the administration. Pipes considered containment “an old fashioned concept,” and thus wanted a hardline, drastic change in U.S. policy.³⁹ His study provided the foundation for NSDD 75. Once it obtained approval, National Security Advisor Clark

³⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament, June 8, 1982,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1982, Book 1, January 1 - July 2, 1982* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983), 742–48.

³⁸ National Security Study Directive Number 11-82, “U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Union,” August 21, 1982, Box 91278, Folder “NSSD 11-82 US Policy Toward the Soviet Union (1)-(8),” Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: National Security Study Directives (NSSD): Records, 1981-1987, RRL.

³⁹ Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (Yale University Press, 2003), 198–202.

received the draft on December 6 for consideration. It furthered a codification of rollback and explicated the strategic rationale for the Reagan Doctrine.⁴⁰

Pipes' study, a culmination of his work at the NSC, offered three tracks for U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. It singled out the Third World as a theater of conflict in the Cold War where the U.S. needed a rollback of Soviet influence. It recommended that the U.S. should "compete effectively on a sustained basis with the Soviet Union in the international arena" and "undertake a coordinated, long-term effort to reduce the threat that the Soviet system poses to our interests." It also suggested that when beneficial the Reagan administration maintain a dialogue and negotiate with the Soviets. Soviet policy in the Third World concerned Pipes, who argued the Soviets achieved their aims by supporting insurgent Communist groups, although the Soviet empire suffered financial loss from its activities. He argued that "U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union must therefore address both the requirement to contain and reverse Soviet expansion." Cheering the rhetorical component of rollback, he proposed the U.S. "should state openly—as the President did in the British parliament—our belief that people in Communist countries have the right to democratic systems." He advised the U.S. seek an undermining and deterring of Soviet alliances in the Third World to reverse Soviet gains of the previous decade: "The U.S. must where possible erode the advances of Soviet influence in the developing world made during the 1970s." The response to NSSD 11-82 presented the Reagan administration with the strategy it genuinely sought—abandoning

⁴⁰ James Graham Wilson and Adam M. Howard, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 2016), Document 249.

older forms of containment to reengage the Third World with a doctrine for rolling back the Soviet Union's influence.⁴¹

On December 16, 1981, an NSC meeting convened for the purpose of reaching a consensus on Pipes' review for the production of an NSDD. Prior to the gathering, the State Department prepared its own study of Soviet policies at the request of National Security Advisor Clark. Pipes believed the study was insufficient. "I find the paper utterly disappointing in almost every respect and quite useless for purposes of policy guidance," he wrote in a memo to Clark. Pipes held that the State Department delivered a wrong analysis on the Soviet Union's concerns about its international dynamics. Moreover, in his opinion, the study adhered to "tired old arguments about a combination of containment and cooperation with the Soviet Union." He claimed most of it "could easily have been produced under President Carter." In short, the study countered his review of U.S. policy objectives, and he recommended the NSC send it back to the State Department. At the NSC meeting, Pipes recommendations passed scrutiny, except for some strong language regarding economic policy, which created mild disagreements within the administration. Ultimately, Reagan and the cabinet agreed on Pipes' recommendations, with Reagan declaring the meeting "cleared the air a little." After two years, Reagan's strategy for confronting the Soviet Union and, in particular, the Reagan Doctrine had a defining document containing the rationale and directives.⁴²

⁴¹ "Response to NSSD 11-82: U.S. Relations with the USSR," December 6, 1982, Historical Collection on Ronald Reagan, Intelligence, and the End of the Cold War, Central Intelligence Agency's Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room., <http://www.foia.cia.gov/>, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/17/19821206.pdf.

⁴² Wilson and Howard, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, Document 252; Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," December 16, 1982, Folder "NSC 00070 12/16/1982 [U.S. -Soviet Policy] (1)(2)," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL.

Reagan signed NSDD 75 on January 17, 1983, codifying the Reagan Doctrine. It maintained most of Pipes' language, making clear the objectives for U.S. policy toward the Third World moving forward. It provided a directive for aiding those countries that resisted the Soviet Union and supported U.S. interests. What is more, it declared U.S. policy toward the Third World include "security assistance and foreign military sales, as well as readiness to use U.S. military forces where necessary to protect vital interests and support endangered allies and friends." Reagan's strategy targeted the Third World to crumble the Soviet empire, and this directive ensured an unwavering approach toward that objective. The Reagan Doctrine had yet received a moniker in the public arena, but its philosophy emerged in speeches preceding Krauthammer's article, which informed the world of the contents of NSDD 75. Reagan delivered three speeches alluding to the Reagan Doctrine in the year following approval of NSDD 75, but two years later the doctrine became significantly manifest in the administration's rhetoric.⁴³

In 1983, Reagan injected the Reagan Doctrine into three speeches. Eight days following his sign off on NSDD 75, Reagan delivered the 1983 State of the Union Address. During his speech, he acknowledged the Reagan Doctrine while declaring the U.S. and its allies applied the power of "common democratic values [...] as a cornerstone of a comprehensive strategy for peace with freedom." He referenced his Westminster speech and the West's campaign for democracy, which he proposed the U.S. would pursue dynamically.⁴⁴ In March, he delivered what is known as the "evil empire" speech,

⁴³ National Security Decision Directive Number 75, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," January 17, 1983, RAC Box 4, Folder "NSDD 75 [U.S. Relations with the USSR] (1)-(4)," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD): Records, 1981-1987, RRL.

⁴⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1983," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1983, Book 1, January 1 - July 1, 1983* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1984), 102-10.

which Anthony Dolan authored but whom insisted the president “toughened” the language, in Orlando, Florida, to the National Association of Evangelicals. Reagan explicitly declared the Soviet Union was “the focus of evil in the modern world.” He called upon those in the West to not “ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire,” defining the global Cold War between democracy and communism as “the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”⁴⁵ Thus Reagan moralized rollback of the Soviet empire, conflating a spiritual struggle with a geopolitical conflict. This aligned with his Manichaeic worldview. It allowed the rollback of the Soviet Union’s periphery to be understood as a “good” policy of the Cold War, a necessary action for ensuring victory. Seven months later, he was unmistakable in his declarations for America’s strategy to foster and carry out a global counter-revolution.

Speaking at the 10th anniversary dinner for the Heritage Foundation in October 1983, Reagan captured the essence of both his commencement speech at Notre Dame and address to the British Parliament at Westminster by boasting of a Western-inspired revolution that was “writing the last sad pages of a bizarre chapter in human history known as communism.” The “democratic revolution” in the Third World thus deserved attention and support. Under his leadership, the U.S. had the “moral energy and spiritual stamina” to confront the Soviets with “a creed, a cause, a vision of a future time when all peoples have the right to self-government and personal freedom.” This objective, therefore, required a policy that pursued more than a focus solely on preventing Soviet expansionism. Rather, U.S. policy “must go on the offensive with a forward strategy for

⁴⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1983, Book 1, January 1 - July 1, 1983* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1984), 359–64; Cannon, *President Reagan*, 317.

freedom.” This offensive strategy is the Reagan Doctrine in principle—a counter-revolutionary campaign for democracy underpinned by a moral right and political mission. This marked an unmistakable revelation about the Reagan administrations goals regarding Soviet influence in the Third World, in that Reagan intended the “forward strategy” to abandon containing the Soviet Union in the regions and work instead to facilitate a democratic revolution.⁴⁶

The Reagan Doctrine’s title, nonetheless, languished in obscurity until Charles Krauthammer’s April 1985 article in *Time*. In what James Scott argues launched “the most concerted administration effort to enunciate a clear strategy,” Casey, Reagan, and Shultz oratorically defined and detailed the Reagan Doctrine in early 1985. Krauthammer imbibed the proclamations of Reagan and Shultz to produce his declaration of the new and improved American foreign policy for counter-revolution. Yet, Casey started the explicit enunciations of strategy while speaking in New York in front of the Union League Club in January. There, he described the decades of the 1980s as one of “freedom fighters resisting communist regimes” and asserted that America should support their cause unwaveringly. In the weeks that followed, Reagan and Shultz expounded on the Reagan Doctrine. First, the doctrine emerged in Reagan’s State of the Union Address and, then, in what stands to be the most articulate expression of the strategy, Shultz’s speech at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. The administration provided more than enough verbal clues for Krauthammer to find and use.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation, October 3, 1983,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1983, Book 2, July 2 to December 31, 1983* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1984), 1403–1408.

⁴⁷ Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 22–23.

Reagan addressed Congress and the nation on February 6, 1985. Buried in his speech toward the end, he described the Reagan Doctrine and why it was necessary. “We cannot play innocents abroad in a world that’s not innocent,” he noted, “Nor can we be passive when freedom is under siege.” His call to a higher purpose for U.S. involvement in the Third World appealed to earlier proclamations of a global democratic revolution and America’s role in the world. He declared that the U.S. “must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.” An explicit demand for the employment of the Reagan Doctrine, which was underway. Several weeks later, Shultz pushed the policy further, explicating it for those at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco.⁴⁸

Prior to Shultz’s February 22 speech, he shared the contents with Reagan, Casey, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, and National Security Advisor Robert “Bud” McFarlane. Reagan “approved wholeheartedly” and Casey suggested that Shultz change none of the wording. In San Francisco, Shultz spoke of the democratic revolution taking place throughout the world and America’s tradition of supporting democracy. He claimed national liberation movements provided cover for Soviet-backed aggression to turn countries Communist, resigning their fate to communism with the Brezhnev Doctrine. He covered the target areas of the Third World under Soviet aggression, such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. Then, he described the “new phenomenon” of “popular insurgencies against communist domination” as “not an American creation.”

⁴⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 6, 1985,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1985, Book 1, January 1 - June 28, 1985* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 130–36.

They were, however, part of a broader wave of democracy that included movements in South Africa, Chile, South Korea, and the Philippines. The U.S. had "a moral responsibility" to assist them in their struggle, albeit case by case. He defined a "prudent strategy" for the U.S. toward helping the democratic revolution, which included support for human rights and democracy with economic and security aid for friendly governments as well as "the forces of freedom in communist totalitarian countries." American morals buttressed this policy, compelling the administration to conduct the counter-revolutionary campaign. He had clearly defined and detailed a policy which the administration had codified years prior. He published an article in *Foreign Affairs* further elaborating on his speech. Only a moniker for the strategy remained concealed.⁴⁹

In April 1985, Krauthammer's article "The Reagan Doctrine" appeared in *Time*. It announced the Reagan Doctrine as the anti-Brezhnev Doctrine and a new approach for rolling back the Soviet empire. In his article, Krauthammer claimed that Reagan "is the master of the new idea" by formulating the Reagan Doctrine, which he recognized from Reagan's State of the Union Address. For Krauthammer, the doctrine was rooted in "justice, necessity and democratic tradition," but he viewed it in narrow terms, as he understood it as a strictly anti-Communist policy. The Reagan administration, however, as evident in Shultz's speech, wedded support for anti-Communist insurgencies to what it perceived as a global wave of democratic revolution. Krauthammer, moreover, asserted the Reagan Doctrine signaled "an end to inaction" of U.S. support for anti-Communist

⁴⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph My Years As Secretary of State*, 525–526; George P. Shultz, "New Realities and New Ways of Thinking," *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 705–21; George P. Shultz, "America and the Struggle for Freedom," Address before the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, CA, February 22, 1985," in *Issues on My Mind: Strategies for the Future* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2013), 226–41.

democratic forces. At bottom, he announced a new era in America foreign policy via the Reagan Doctrine that posed “a challenge to the peripheral acquisitions of empire” to repeal communism and install democracy. Krauthammer’s article resonated with the Reagan administration immediately. The policies crafted years earlier now had a name, catching the White House’s attention.⁵⁰ After reading Krauthammer’s article, Oliver North sent a memo on Nicaragua to Robert McFarlane with a copy of it attached. North suggested Krauthammer’s work sent “a very clear statement” about the efforts of the Reagan administration in the Third World. He noted the Reagan administration had made progress since *Time* was printing articles on the policy.⁵¹

In speeches throughout the remainder of Reagan’s time in office, including the 1986 State of the Union Address and at a Town Hall in California, he mentioned unwavering support for the doctrine. In his words, the administration continued seeking “a forward strategy for world freedom.” His message to Congress on democracy and regional security in 1986 avowed assistance for the “global revolution” of democracy. “We did not create this historical phenomenon,” he asserted, “But we must not fail to respond to it.” And with the Reagan administration’s policies in the Third World, the U.S. responded and carried out attempts at rolling back Communist influence and Soviet-leaning states. The periphery of the global politics moved into the center of the Cold War.⁵²

⁵⁰ Krauthammer, “Essay”; Pach, “The Reagan Doctrine,” 76–78.

⁵¹ Memo, Oliver C. North to Robert C. McFarlane, “Using the March 1 San Jose Declaration to Support the Vote on the Funding for the Nicaraguan Resistance,” April 1, 1985, DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1978–1990, Digital National Security Archive (Hereafter DNSA).

⁵² Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 23–24; Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4, 1986,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1986, Book 1, January 1 - June 27, 1986* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 125–30; Ronald Reagan, “Message to the Congress on Freedom, Regional Security, and Global Peace, March 14, 1986,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1986, Book 1 - January 1 to June 27, 1986* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 341–49; Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Soviet-United States Relations at the Town Hall of California Meeting in Los

The Reagan Doctrine is intrinsically NSDD 75 and the accompanying rhetoric that enunciated the moral principles of U.S. support for anti-Communist insurgencies in the Third World against the Soviet Union. Reagan and Shultz advocated this policy as a component of a broader global revolution of democracy. In practice, it was a counter-revolution policy applied in specific areas of the Third World: Central America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and South Africa. The U.S. provided covert and overt assistance to insurgent groups in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. As Shultz had advised in his San Francisco speech, the Reagan administration provided aid on a case by case basis to the anti-Communist guerrillas and resistance groups.

In Afghanistan, the Reagan administration assumed and expanded an assistance program which began under the Carter administration to the mujahedeen, aiding their efforts to overthrow the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and its leader Babrak Karmal. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 for the purposes of propping up Marxist government; in response, an indigenous movement resentful of Soviet occupation—the mujahedeen—formed with the intention of ending it. The CIA handled the covert operations carefully, for American assistance provided the weapons used against Soviet soldiers. Whereas aid in 1981-82 ranged between \$30-40 million, it reached \$350 million in 1988 with bipartisan support in the Congress. The administration incorporated the program into NSDD 75 and expanded it further with NSDD 166, which defined the U.S. goal as "the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of its independent status." With an increase in military aid, the U.S. provided

Angeles, August 26, 1987," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1987, Book 2, July 4 to December 31, 1987* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1989), 977–82.

the mujahedeen with Stinger ground-to-air missiles to shoot down Soviet Hind helicopters, changing the nature of the war to the advantage of the insurgents. The brutality and cost of the war continued unabated. The Soviet Union eventually withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1988.⁵³

U.S. involvement in Angola was less bipartisan, even arousing conflict within the administration over how to properly support the anti-Communist insurgents. Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker pursued his “constructive engagement.” This policy pursued apartheid reform in South Africa as a mechanism for fostering reconciliation between countries in the region and independence for Namibia. It also sought the removal of Cuban troops and Soviet advisors from Angola, where they propped up a Marxist government against an onslaught from the National Union for Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), who used Namibia to carry out attacks in the Angolan Civil War. William Casey and other Reaganites in the administration disavowed this strategy for negotiating with Cuban forces and its pressure on South Africa, a staunch anti-Communist ally. Casey and his cadre of hardliners actively worked for the repeal of the 1976 Clark amendment, which occurred in 1985. It allowed assistance to flow freely to UNITA as a method for forcing diplomacy. The administration codified their objectives of forcing Cuban withdrawal and applying pressure via UNITA in its NSDDs 212, 272, and 274. In the end, however, Crocker’s strategy proved fruitful as Cubans,

⁵³ National Security Decision Directive Number 75, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," January 17, 1983, RAC Box 4, Folder "NSDD 75 [U.S. Relations with the USSR] (1)-(4)," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD): Records, 1981-1987, RRL; National Security Decision Directive Number 166, "U.S. Policy, Programs and Strategy in Afghanistan," March 27, 1985, DNSA collection: CIA Covert Operations: From Carter to Obama, 1977-2010, DNSA; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 47–81; Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 55–59; see also, John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) 467-492.

Angolans, South Africans, and America arrived at an agreement in 1988 for a withdrawal of Cuban troops and Namibia's independence.⁵⁴

The application of the Reagan Doctrine in Cambodia proceeded in a rather limited fashion. The U.S. provided the alliance of non-Communist groups with assistance in their war against the People's Republic of Kampuchea, a government backed by Vietnam that toppled the Khmer Rouge. Since Vietnam aligned itself with the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration transferred non-lethal aid to the non-Communist forces while China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand provided far more assistance, especially arms. The U.S. upped its monetary assistance to Thailand as compensation for its aid to the rebels. America also followed the lead of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on diplomacy. NSDD 158, signed on January 9, 1985, codified the administration's policy of assisting from behind, citing "an outcome acceptable to ASEAN—as long as it includes a strong non-communist role—is likely to be acceptable to us." A month later U.S. non-lethal assistance increased to \$15 million, a result of Congress expanding aid in the wake of Reagan's State of the Union and requests from ASEAN and the resistance. By 1987, the economic, political, and human costs accelerated; as a result, Vietnam acquiesced to talks and started withdrawing troops. The process for peace accords took several years, but it was finalized in 1991.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 115–151; National Security Decision Directive Number 212, "United States Policy Toward Angola," February 10, 1986, DNSA collection: Presidential Directives on National Security, Part I: From Truman to Clinton, DNSA; National Security Decision Directive Number 272, "United States Objectives in Southern Africa," May 7, 1987, *Ibid.*; National Security Decision Directive Number 274, "United States Policy Toward Angola," May 7, 1987, *Ibid.*; See also, Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 86–11; Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*, 66-70; National Security Decision Directive Number 158, "United States Policy in Southeast Asia," January 9, 1985, DNSA collection: Presidential directives on national security. Part II. From Truman to George W. Bush., DNSA; see also,

This study now turns to examine the Nicaraguan case in particular. The Reagan Doctrine is unique in its Central American application for several reasons. The Reagan administration's campaign for the overthrow of the Sandinista government is a testament to the unwavering support the president openly declared and privately demanded. The White House's struggle with Congress over implementing Reagan's counter-revolutionary policy in Central America created a barrier for the administration's broader goals and provided impetus to take the operations underground. Moreover, the specter of Vietnam haunted executive power. "Here we go again," Reagan complained to his cabinet during a National Security Meeting on aid to the Contras, referencing the problems his Republican predecessors Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford had in dealing with Democrats in Congress.⁵⁶ While conducting a clandestine enterprise to keep the Contra movement alive, the Reagan administration's program famously intersected with its covert action in Iran to create the Iran-Contra affair. The Reagan Doctrine vis-à-vis Nicaragua thus becomes a poignant exemplifier of American foreign policy during the Reagan administration.

Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), Chp 5.

⁵⁶ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "Aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance, March 20, 1986," Folder "NSC 00129A 03/20/1986 [Contra Aid]," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL.

Chapter 2

The Reagan Doctrine and the Contras: “We can win this one.”

The application of the Reagan Doctrine had a greater significance in Nicaragua. It provided a test case for the Reagan administration’s strategy for confronting the Soviet Union. In 1981, UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick claimed, "Central America is the most important place in the world for the United States today."⁵⁷ The Reagan administration’s aim of exerting regional hegemony, as well as its devotion to the execution of the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua, underscored her assertion. The covert methods in which the Reagan administration facilitated the Contra program generated widespread rejection of the doctrine. The secret Contra war summoned fears of a protracted insurgency, and in practice violated law and crossed ethical boundaries. Congressional and public opposition failed, however, in deterring Reagan from returning repeatedly to Congress seeking aid for the Contras. For the Reaganites, the Contra program offered an opportunity for revitalizing America’s role in the global Cold War. It also tested the resolve of the administration in implementing the president’s foreign policy.

This chapter traces the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua from its genesis through public and political battles over Contra aid until its conclusion. It overviews the political maneuverings resulting in the Reagan administration’s clandestine efforts to support the Contra program. And it explores the origin of the Contra program vis-à-vis the Reagan Doctrine. The public and political operations employed by the administration to sustain

⁵⁷ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 2nd ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 271.

the Contras are examined, a chapter on the covert follows next. In this chapter, the doggedness of the Reagan Doctrine's application against congressional resistance is shown, highlighting the impact of Reagan's strategy on domestic institutions. It elucidates the legislative struggles leading to the administration's decision to take Contra support underground and off-the-books, a fatal decision for the policy and those under assault from the Contras themselves.

The Reagan administration assumed the White House with a plan for confronting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional had taken power during the Carter presidency in a July 1979 overthrow of the Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza dictatorship. In the aftermath, the Carter administration had pursued a paradoxical policy toward the Sandinistas. It attempted to moderate the leftist regime while also undermining it. In the fall of 1979, Carter signed an intelligence finding that provided assistance to "democratic elements." In turn, Carter struggled with Congress over aid for the Sandinistas, finally receiving approval in September 1980 after he certified the Sandinistas were not exporting a revolution to El Salvador. Although, hardline conservatives in the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency believed that the Sandinistas had shipped arms with the help of Cuba to the Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador. In the timespan it took Carter to get aid approved for Nicaragua, the Sandinistas had established economic, military, and political ties with the Socialist Bloc for economic equilibrium and the country's stability. The Soviets, however, initially adopted a cautious approach, sending aid through its surrogate, Cuba. The East Germans, on the other hand, took an active role in establishing their own contacts to aid the Sandinistas. Soviet Bloc Military aid reached a crescendo in 1984 at \$250 million;

economic aid peaked at \$253 million in 1982. Soviet Bloc assistance for the Sandinistas became a fulcrum for the Reagan administration's counter-revolutionary campaign.⁵⁸

Cuba's support for the Sandinistas provided a crucial motivating factor for Reagan's policy toward Nicaragua. The Reagan administration sought eradication of Soviet influence and Cuban forces with counter-revolutionary paramilitary action. Reagan often inflated the numbers of Cuban forces within Nicaragua. Cuban advisers, however, assisted with military affairs as instructors, with more than 1,000 advisers at the height of Cuban involvement aiding the Sandinistas armed forces. Fidel Castro reduced their numbers in May 1985 "to minimize grist for the U.S. propaganda mill." Cuban aid workers had actually outnumbered military advisers, but their numbers likewise reduced by the fall of 1985. Speaking to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in October 1985, Castro stated that he "cut the number of Cubans there to the minimum." Castro's measure restricted Cuban "cooperation to only the really indispensable areas," he claimed, "Like medicine, military affairs and security." He suggested that by that point Cuba accomplished its mission. The country had "helped prepare thousands of cadres" to safeguard Nicaragua. If the U.S. did launch a full-on military assault, the Cuban forces stationed there were willingly to engage in combat. The Contra war did not transform

⁵⁸ *Our Own Backyard*, 18–32; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 225–242; Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 343; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 154; John Coatsworth, "The Cold War in Central America, 1975-1991," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler, vol. 3. Endings (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 211; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 27.

into a military invasion, but Reagan's intentions from the outset invited valid fears of invasion at worst and extreme burden from economic and covert action at best.⁵⁹

It was after Reagan's election that the civil war in El Salvador escalated. U.S. policy toward Central America changed drastically. From San Salvador to Guatemala City, the neighborhoods of rightist oligarchs celebrated Reagan's victory in November 1980 with firecrackers, mariachis, and automatic rifles. The FMLN, meanwhile, seized the opportunity to launch a "final offensive" against the Salvadoran government with the aid of the Sandinistas. With evidence that the Sandinistas supplied arms to the Salvadorans, coupled with concerns that the Salvadoran army would lose on the battlefield, Carter suspended aid for Nicaragua and resumed military assistance for El Salvador through Section 506(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act, which allowed him to bypass Congress. As William LeoGrande argues, "The final days of the Carter administration set the stage for the entrance of Ronald Reagan." Carter's policies during the end of his term meshed well with the incoming Reaganites, whose hardline anti-Communist ethos informed their desire to achieve a foreign policy victory in El Salvador while rolling back the Sandinistas. "This is one you can win," Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Reagan during an NSC meeting early in the administration.⁶⁰ Moreover, the newly formed counter-revolutionary Contras entered the conflict. The Contras became the primary

⁵⁹ Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washing, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 320–321; For Castro and Shevardnadze's conversation, see "Memorandum of Conversation between Fidel Castro and Eduard Shevardnadze," October 28, 1985, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Consejo de Estado (Cuban Council of State). Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by Piero Gleijeses and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 44. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118022>.

⁶⁰ Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York, N.Y: Times Books, 1984), 212; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 57–71, 80–81; Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 224–228.

benefactors of the Reagan Doctrine's assistance in their war against the Sandinistas. They were the bulwark against a potential Marxist revolution throughout the region.

The Contras began forming in Honduras during the last year of the Carter administration, during which they received assistance from the Honduran and Argentine armed forces. Former members of Somoza's National Guard—whom the DIA described as “terrorists”—and anti-Sandinista forces comprised the loose knit group. On March 9, 1981, Reagan signed a presidential finding authorized the CIA's assistance for the counter-revolutionaries as part of a broader plan to help El Salvador. In August 1981, the Contras met at the insistence of American, Argentine, and Honduran intelligence officers to formally unite under one banner. The Contras became officially known as the Nicaraguan Democratic Forces upon signing a short document in a house rented for them in Guatemala City. The Contras then moved their headquarters into Tegucigalpa and became the beneficiaries of an agreement between Argentina, Honduras, and the U.S. to provide money, supplies, and territory to “change the government of Nicaragua.” CIA Latin American Chief Duane R. “Dewey” Clarridge, Honduran colonel Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, and Argentine Colonel Mario Davico finalized the deal. The pact initiated a U.S.-backed insurgency that was nearly the undoing of the Reagan Presidency.⁶¹

Assistance for and mobilization of the Contras commenced the formal application of the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. In February 1981, Casey provided Reagan with a plan to stop “Marxist and Cuban-sponsored terrorism, insurgency, and subversion [...] in Central America.” The cabinet discussed Casey's proposal at an NSC meeting on

⁶¹ Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy*, 56; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 114–118; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 29.

February 27, and Reagan signed a finding based on the proposal on March 7, effectively beginning the U.S.-supported roll back of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.⁶² This allowed the CIA to provide \$19.5 million in covert aid to support anti-Sandinista forces within Nicaragua, as well as begin assisting the Contras. The CIA contacted anti-Sandinista and Cuban exile groups in south Florida to encourage participation in the operation. The U.S. also facilitated paramilitary training from Green Berets for the Contras at camps in Florida, California, and Texas. The Reagan administration's staunch support emboldened the counter-revolutionaries. "Thank God we finally have a President in the White House with balls," one Contra gloated to a journalist. The White House spared no expense in training its brazen counter-revolutionaries for a covert war against the Sandinistas.⁶³

With the counter-revolutionary campaign underway, the Reagan administration acted to codify it in November and December. In November 1981, prior to the president signing NSDD 17, the administration debated over what policy to enact for rolling back the Sandinistas. The NSDD authorized a strategy toward Central America that remained throughout Reagan's two terms. It included counter-revolutionary actions against the Sandinistas, aid for allies, increased military and CIA personnel in the region, and a public propaganda campaign aimed at the public and Democrats in Congress to nurture support for the administration. At a November 10, 1981, NSC meeting, Casey and UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick argued over where to apply the most force—El Salvador or

⁶² Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "El Salvador and Saudi F-15s," February 27, 1981, Folder "NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] (1)-(4)," Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL; Presidential Finding, "Scope: Central America," March 9, 1981, DNSA collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA; Central Intelligence Agency, Draft Finding to Counter Cuban Activities in Central America, "Scope: Central America," February 27, 1981, DNSA collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA.

⁶³ Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, 19–20.

Nicaragua—while Reagan considered what actions to take. Casey argued for Nicaragua while Kirkpatrick suggested El Salvador was the primary target. Reagan worried the campaign would cultivate accusations of “another Vietnam,” but remained hardline in his views, asking if the ports could be mined. “I don’t want to back down,” he told the room, “I don’t want to accept defeat.” In response, an interagency group drafted proposals for the next NSC meeting on November 16. The options ranged from direct military engagement with Cuba to paramilitary military action against the Sandinistas. After hearing the proposals, the administration decided on covert paramilitary actions.⁶⁴

On November 17, Reagan signed NSDD 17 based on the options presented and discussed at an NSC meeting the day before, codifying the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. It listed eleven directives for the administration’s policy toward Central America and Cuba. Most notably, it directed “military training for indigenous units and leaders both in and out of country” and “support for democratic forces in Nicaragua.”⁶⁵ Planning papers attached onto the NSDD, which the administration withheld from congressional oversight, authorized \$19 million for a CIA-backed paramilitary 500-person group for the purpose of attacking infrastructure and interdicting Soviet arms. Although this was presented as a Contra enterprise, the directive allowed the CIA to “take unilateral paramilitary action,” if needed “against special Cuban targets.”⁶⁶ The

⁶⁴ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, “Strategy Toward Cuba and Central America,” November 10, 1981, Folder “NSC 00026 11/16/1981 [Strategy Toward Cuba and Central America, Proposed US Peacekeeping Force in Chad, Military Assistance] (1)(2),” Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL; Memo, Richard V. Allen to George H.W. Bush [et Al.], “NSC Meeting -- November 16, 1981,” DNSA collection: DNSA collection: CIA Covert Operations: From Carter to Obama, 1977-2010, DNSA; Cannon, *President Reagan*, 354–356; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 143–146; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 159–160.

⁶⁵ National Security Decision Directive Number 17, “Cuba and Central America,” January 4, 1982, DNSA collection: Presidential Directives on National Security, Part I: From Truman to Clinton, DNSA.

⁶⁶ Patrick E. Tyler and Bob Woodward, “U.S. Approves Covert Plan In Nicaragua; U.S. Plans Covert Operations To Disrupt Nicaraguan Economy,” *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1982; According to Lou

presidential finding Reagan signed on December 1, which the administration presented to the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, narrowed the scope of the text into one paragraph excluding the details of the intended covert actions. Casey presented the finding to the Senate and House Intelligence Committees. He told the committee members, "Nobody was talking about overthrowing anybody." Covert actions would only interdict arms and produce limited "attacks against the Cuban presence and Cuban/Sandinista support infrastructure." The Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua consisted of paramilitary action accompanied by obfuscation, a staple of its application.⁶⁷

With the support of the CIA, the Contras wreaked havoc upon Nicaragua, although it quickly became public knowledge and hindered the Reagan Doctrine's application. On March 14, 1982, the Contras alongside CIA operatives blew up two bridges in northern Nicaragua, thus beginning a well-funded onslaught. The early cross border raids turned into coordinated massive attacks on infrastructure, targeted killings of educational and government personnel, and destruction of crops. Attempting to sustain legislative and civic support, Reagan signed NSDD 37 on May 28, 1982, forming an interagency group, headed by NSC staff member Oliver North, to lobby Congress and the public. The State Department attempted a diplomatic effort with the Sandinistas, but hardline Reaganites within the administration foiled initiatives. The press, meanwhile, printed articles about Reagan's cover war against the Sandinistas, raising the ire of Congress. It led to legislative action restricting the Reagan Doctrine's exploits in Central America, a

Cannon, it is highly likely Bill Casey leaked the documents to Bob Woodward, or rather, the White House believed he had done so, see Cannon, *The Role of a Lifetime*, 357.

⁶⁷ Presidential Finding, "Scope: Central America," December 1, 1981, DNSA collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA; Joseph E. Persico, *Casey: From the OSS to the CIA* (New York: Viking, 1990), 275; Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, 23.

watershed in the Reagan administration clandestine strategy to continue the Contra campaign.⁶⁸

The administration faced congressional opposition to its overt-covert war in Nicaragua. Congress questioned Reagan's assertion that his goal was only stopping the export of revolution rather than overthrowing the Sandinistas. As members debated the merits of Reagan's policy, conservative Senators maintained Reagan's narrative of the Sandinista's exporting revolution to help the president's cause. Nevertheless, in April 1983, the CIA received a financial constraint from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, whose annex to the 1983 Intelligence Authorization Act restricted the CIA from using U.S. funds to topple the Sandinistas but allowed the agents to interdict arms. By December, Congressman Tom Harkin sought a complete restriction on the Contra program. House Intelligence Committee chairman, Edward Boland, on the other hand, offered the April annex as a compromise, introducing an amendment to the Defense Appropriations bills for 1983. With a bipartisan consensus and an acquiescence from the Reagan administration who viewed it as a lesser evil, Boland I passed by a 411-0 vote. It prohibited U.S. funding "for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras." The

⁶⁸ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 235, 241–242; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 161–162; Defense Intelligence Agency, "Weekly Intelligence Summary: Insurgent Activity Increases in Nicaragua," July 16, 1982, DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA; National Security Decision Directive Number 37, "National Security Decision Directive on Cuba and Central America," May 28, 1981, National Security Decision Directives, 1981-1989, RRL, RRL.
<https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD37.pdf>; National Security Decision Directive Number 37A, "National Security Decision Directive on Cuba and Central America," May 28, 1982, National Security Decision Directives, 1981-1989, RRL.
<https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD37A.pdf>.

problematic language left open support for the Contras as a mechanism for interdicting arms flowing into El Salvador. The CIA and NSC exploited it to their advantage.⁶⁹

While the Reagan administration conceded and compromised on support for Boland's amendment to keep the program mildly alive, Reagan signed NSDD 59 in October formally committing to paramilitary action. He remained devoted to the strategy despite legislative roadblocks. In July 1983, the president expanded the scope of the Reagan Doctrine with NSDD 100 to increase "diplomatic and security efforts in the region." Hardliners considered diplomacy irrational and continued obstructing the State Department's efforts, thus resigning the U.S. to pursue militant action rather than negotiation. The administration exerted an intensified effort as the Congress remained troubled over the policy, even requiring the administration present a new presidential finding. The finding, signed in September 1983, changed the objective into supporting the Contras for the purpose of forcing the Sandinistas into agreeing to hold elections. All the while, the Contras carried out operations in Nicaragua with CIA agent and contractor assistance. The administration still privately believed in a military victory, a Special Interagency Working Group (SIG) determined the U.S. "objective should be to bring the Nicaragua situation to a head in 1984." In January 1984, Reagan and his advisors agreed that the "covert action program should proceed with stepped up intensity." As a result, the CIA mined Nicaraguan harbors, ending the Reagan Doctrine's last vestiges of congressional support for funding.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy*, 116–117; Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, 55; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 32–33.

⁷⁰ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 25; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 166–167; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate

By mining the country's harbors, the CIA implemented the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua with intensity in the early months of 1984, which infuriated Congress and resulted in the enactment of the Boland II amendment, ending legislative authorization for Reagan's Contra assistance. The decision to mine the harbors originated early in the administration. Members of the Restricted Interagency Group (RIG), notably Langhorne Motley, Oliver North, and Dewey Clarridge, put it into action. Their plan received Reagan and the NSC's approval. North anticipated the mining would disrupt shipping and put severe economic strain on the Sandinistas. From January until April, U.S. Special Forces and Unilaterally Controlled Latino Assets (UCLA) used seventy-five mines for attacks on Nicaragua ports. To bolster the effectiveness of the Contras and hide Agency involvement, the CIA instructed the Contras to take credit while the Agency obscured U.S. involvement to Congress. Unfortunately for the Reaganites, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed the operation to the world on April 6, 1984. Senator Barry Goldwater, an ardent anti-Communist and Reagan supporter, informed Casey that he was "pissed off" at the subversion of Congress. The gung-ho hardline attitude of the NSC and Reagan's anti-Communist predilections engendered a politically hostile situation in Congress and destructive counter-revolution in Nicaragua, as well as guided the administration into further clandestine and extralegal avenues in sustaining the Reagan Doctrine.⁷¹

Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 33–36; Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph My Years As Secretary of State*, 305; Presidential finding, "CIA Covert Operations in Nicaragua, September 19, 1983, DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA; National Security Decision Directive Number 59, "Cuba and Central America," October 5, 1982, National Security Decision Directives, 1981-1989, RRL, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD59.pdf>; National Security Decision Directive Number 100, "Cuba and Central America," July 28, 1983, National Security Decision Directives, 1981-1989, RRL, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD100.pdf>.

⁷¹ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 330–334; Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy*, 194–195; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select

The Reaganites' outright dishonesty about clandestine activities and obfuscation regarding policy infuriated Congress. As a consequence, Congress implemented Boland II as a means for ending assistance for paramilitary action against Nicaragua and stop the covert war. Yet, it failed in halting the Reagan Doctrine. Reagan asked for \$21 million in new Contra aid, but it was a fantasy in the aftermath of the mining fiasco. The House and Senate had passed resolutions condemning the mining. Boland held another motion on Contra aid, which passed with a 241-177 vote on May 25, 1984, effectively ending it. Senate Republicans dropped the \$21 million from an urgent supplemental appropriate bill, creating a shortfall as the CIA had spent the previous year's \$24 million appropriation. The administration then looked to the FY 1985 intelligence authorization bill as a means for Contra aid. Senate Republicans attached a \$28 million rider with the catch it could not be used to overthrow the Sandinistas, but the House refused to compromise as they had the year earlier. Congress adopted Boland II to the 1985 omnibus appropriation bill, which also contained funding for housing, anticrime, and job programs. Reagan signed it on October 12, 1985, for political expediency, as it was an election year. The bill cut off funding for the Contra, but it allowed for a \$14 million appropriation to be used after March 1985, if Reagan requested it and the Congress provided a joint resolution. Boland noted, "The compromise provision clearly ends U.S. support for war in Nicaragua." Low on funds and legislatively blocked from

Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 36-37; David Rogers, "U.S. Role in Mining Nicaraguan Harbors Reportedly Larger than First Thought," *Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1984; Memo, Oliver L. North and Constantine Menges to Robert C. McFarlane, "Special Activities in Nicaragua, March 2, 1984, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA; Letter, Barry Goldwater to William J. Casey, April 9, 1984, DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA.

implementing the Reagan Doctrine, the administration sought alternative means for sustaining the Contra campaign and restoring aid.⁷²

The Reagan administration lost the legislative front of its battle to fund its counter-revolutionary campaign in Central America with the passing of Boland II. In response, the White House employed political, public, and clandestine operations to persuade Congress to restore aid, cultivate support from citizens, and continue the Reagan Doctrine, respectively. As a dual track strategy, the president's rhetoric and congressional lobbying constituted the political and public face. Meanwhile, North's underground private network and the NSC's third party funding scheme covertly provided operational and monetary support for the Contras. The parallel tracks ultimately failed, as North's covert effort undermined the administration's public and legislative strategy. An in-depth inquiry into the legislative wrangling and divisive politics accompanying the fight to restore aid in the Congress is beyond this study. Before turning to North's clandestine network, however, a broad assessment of Reagan's actions on the public front bears useful in understanding the dual tracks of Reagan's strategy.⁷³

Although Reagan signed into law Boland II as a political concession during an election cycle, he vowed to return "again and again and again to support the Nicaraguan Resistance." His landslide victory in the November 1984 election propelled his mandate for restoring aid. He instructed the NSC in January 1985 to make every effort "to reverse

⁷² Cynthia Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the Reagan Administration, and Central America*, 2nd edition (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 176, 178–179; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 337–338; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 339–340, 343–346; Law, Public Law 98-473 [H.J.Res. 648]; Continuing Appropriations, 1985--Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 [Including Section 8066(a), Boland Amendment Two], DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA.

⁷³ For more on Reagan's legislative struggle, see Arnson, *Crossroads* and LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*.

the course of the Congress and get the funding renewed.” Reagan incorporated the Contras into the campaign for democracy rhetoric of the Reagan Doctrine to bolster the image of the “freedom fighters.” He included them in his 1985 State of the Union speech and, in a dramatic fashion, referenced them as “the moral equal of our Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance.” He made the Contra war into a moral fight, stating “the struggle here is not right versus left; it is right versus wrong.” An aggressive public relations campaign commenced to enhance the image of the Contras, in which the administration wrote op-eds and coordinated interviews with the civilian front of the Contras. Moreover, in the spring of 1985, the Office of Public Diplomacy and the NSC conducted a massive pro-Contra lobbying effort toward Congress, including briefings, conferences, and publications to influence members. Reagan requested \$14 million in non-lethal aid, but lost the vote in the House. In turn, he enacted a full economic embargo against Nicaragua. Shortly after, the Sandinistas provided the White House a gift when Daniel Ortega traveled to Moscow, bringing the realities of the Cold War yet again to the Capitol.⁷⁴

Daniel Ortega's Moscow visit produced red-baiting at a time of tempestuous congressional debate, even though the Sandinistas had visited the Soviet Union in the past without much fanfare in Washington. Reagan and conservative House members capitalized on the trip by suggesting those democrats who voted against a new proposal

⁷⁴ United States. Congress, *Testimony of Oliver L. North (Questioning by Counsels)*, 267; United States. Congress., *Testimony of Robert C. McFarlane, Gaston J. Sigur Jr., and Robert W. Owen* : Joint Hearings before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran and the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, Vol. 100-2, 100th Congress, 1st Sess. (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1987), 43; Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference, March 1, 1985,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1985, Book 1, January 1 - June 28, 1985* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 226–30; Arnsion, *Crossroads*, 190–198.

of \$21 million in nonlethal aid were “soft on communism.” Though many Southern Democrats voted out of political expediency, other Congressmen did so out of general concern for bringing a diplomatic end to the Contra war in an effort to stop the bloodshed. Reagan had also provided a letter to the House democrats disavowing an overthrow of the Sandinistas, committing the administration to a diplomatic objective. Yet, the NSC never intended for it to come to fruition—at the end of the year, North conveyed to U.S. allies in the region that America would “pursue a victory” rather than diplomacy. On June 12, 1985, the bill passed 248 to 184, despite the public’s opposition against Reagan’s Central American policy. At the time, polls found from 53 to 73 percent of Americans opposed an overthrow of the Sandinistas. Speaker of the House Thomas Phillip “Tip” O’Neill regarded the vote as “a sad day for America.” In November, the administration obtained further assistance. The Intelligence Authorization bill authorized funds for the CIA to share intelligence with and provide communications equipment for the Contras. By early 1986, an emboldened Reagan sought further funding to expand the program for paramilitary action, a manifestation of the committed pursuit of the Reagan Doctrine.⁷⁵

Following a January 1986 NSC meeting, Reagan signed a new presidential directive for the Contra program and requested \$100 million in aid. At the NSC meeting on Nicaragua, the council discussed the Contra program. Casey reiterated the “serious threat” to national security that the Sandinistas posed, linking Nicaragua to Cuba and the Soviet Union. He suggested the Sandinistas were a government of revolutionary Marxist-

⁷⁵ Arnsion, *Crossroads*, 198–204; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 426–436; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 64.

Leninists who functioned as an extension of the Soviet military threat. The potential for diplomacy was over. "With the Sandinista regime totally Marxist-Leninist," Weinberger stated, "There is no possibility of friendly relations." He stressed the need for "a full-scale effort to get the funds for a covert military program." Shultz suggested funding for both overt and covert programs. In response, Reagan instructed his cabinet to move forward with obtaining assistance, specifically lethal aid. After the meeting he signed a new presidential directive allowing the CIA to administer the nonlethal and communications aid. As part of his supposed diplomatic strategy toward Nicaragua, Reagan then requested \$100 million in military aid, which proved an absurd suggestion. "One hundred million dollars was not harassment but full-fledged war," notes Robert Kagan, the former Deputy for Policy to Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams. Hardliners within the White House and Congress again administered red-baiting tactics as pressure on House members but the attacks backfired. The House voted the request down. Reagan was undeterred, holding to his promise and returning repeatedly to fight for the military aid, eventually succeeding.⁷⁶

Reagan finally received a successful vote for military aid to the Contras, but the victory was short lived. The House voted in favor of \$100 million in military and nonlethal aid on June 25, 1986. The Senate passed the House bill in August, and it legally revived the Reagan Doctrine in October 1986 when Reagan signed the continuing appropriation act. Reagan, who had a 67 percent approval rating at the time, had

⁷⁶ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "Review of US Policy in Central America," January 10, 1986, Folder "NSC000128, 10 Jan 1986 [Review of US Policy in Central America," Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files: Records, 1981-1988, RRL; Presidential Finding, "Scope: Nicaragua," January 9, 1986, DNSA Collection: Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990, DNSA; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 415–416, 423–430; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 448–449, 454–457; Arnson, *Crossroads*, 204–210.

continually pressured and courted moderate Democrats while badgering Republicans to toe the line on Contra aid. In a vicious cycle, Reagan's rhetoric regarding the revolutionary fervor of the Sandinistas bordered absurd, but the intensity of the covert Contra war pushed the Sandinistas into relying on Cuba and the Soviet Union. In the end, the Reagan Doctrine survived by eleven votes in the House and six in the Senate, but the celebration shortly subsided. Almost a month from signing into law renewed military for the Contras, Reagan declared in a televised address, "We did not -- repeat -- did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages, nor will we." The dual exposure of the administration's arms-for-hostages deal with Iran and the covert Contra program—which turned into the Iran-Contra affair—doomed the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. As a result of the scandalous revelations, Congress went on the offensive, finally ending assistance and bringing to a close the counter-revolutionary campaign in Central America.⁷⁷

As the media released the details of the Iran-Contra affair, Congress eliminated aid for the Contra program. Notwithstanding the surmounting scandal debilitating Reagan's approval ratings, he engaged in parliamentary wrangling throughout 1987 and 1988 in a bid to sustain the program. In February, a National Security Planning Group convened for a discussion about the administration's policy toward Central America. Reagan still wanted a victory. "In Vietnam we did not intend to win," he told the group, "We intend to win this one." He subsequently issued NSDD 265, which directed the creation of a "public diplomacy" task force to rally support for the administration's

⁷⁷ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 469–475; Arnson, *Crossroads*, 211–214; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 457–462; Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy, November 13, 1986," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1986, Book 2, June 28 to December 31, 1986* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1989), 1546–48.

objective, as well as develop "a comprehensive action plan to gain sustained Congressional support." Neither proved effective in changing the congressional stance on military aid. Reagan persistent efforts to get lethal Contra aid through the Congress met resistance and ultimately a diplomatic roadblock that prevented the Reagan Doctrine's continuance.⁷⁸

During 1987, Reagan pushed for lethal Contra aid but each time received congressional rejection. He eventually obtained nonlethal aid but suffered a diplomatic defeat. In August 1987, the five presidents of Guatemala, Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa signed a peace accord championed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias in Esquipulas, Guatemala. The peace plan produced a diplomatic solution that circumvented the Reagan Doctrine. Reaganites tired subverting the plan to no avail. The administration attempted a \$105 million and then a \$270 million aid package but rescinded both upon congressional resistance. Reagan did, however, manage to push humanitarian aid through the Congress in 1987. In January 1988, Reagan requested lethal aid, but the House voted the proposal down in February, 219-211. By late March, the Nicaraguan government and the Contras had signed a ceasefire, prompting Congress to pass \$45 million in humanitarian and economic aid. In May, Congressmen Henry Hyde and Richard Cheney placed an amendment on the 1989 Intelligence Authorization bill, which removed restrictions on Contra aid to allow the CIA use of contingency funds for lethal purposes. The House voted the amendment down, 214-190, ending Reagan's hopes of paramilitary

⁷⁸ Arnson, *Crossroads*, 220–226; Minutes, National Security Planning Group Meeting, "Central America," February 29, 1987, Folder "NSPG 0145 02/20/1987 [Central America]," Box 91308, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG): Records, 1981-1987, RRL; National Security Decision Directive Number 264, "Central America," February 27, 1987, National Security Decision Directives, 1981-1989, RRL, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD264.pdf>

action in Nicaragua. With George H.W. Bush's victory in 1988 presidential election, the Congress and new Bush administration communally terminated the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua by supporting the peace process. In January 1990, the Nicaraguan government held elections as an end to the civil war. Daniel Ortega peacefully handed over power to Violeta Barrios de Chamorro.⁷⁹

The manner in which the Reagan administration conducted the covert Contra war ultimately undermined its effort. The president's mandate for the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua required a persistence for sustaining the Contras publicly and privately. Reagan's devotion to waging a global Cold War with the Soviet Union, particularly at the periphery of Soviet influence, fostered a resistance in Congress which proved difficult for carrying out the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. Congress passed the Boland amendments to end funding for the Contra's covert war. Yet, the president and his staff remained undeterred by the legislative outcome, resorting to extralegal methods to continue the program. The next chapter turns toward the covert operations responsible for the Iran-Contra affair, a product of the Reagan Doctrine.

⁷⁹ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 510–549, 553–563; Arnson, *Crossroads*, 218–239; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 531–566, 577–596, 633–640, 711–718.

Chapter 3

The Iran-Contra Affair: “Body and Soul”

President Reagan met with members of his cabinet, and former National Security Advisor McFarlane, in the Family Quarters of the White House on December 7, 1985, for deliberation on the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran. During the discussions, Secretary of State Shultz, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, and Chief of Staff Don Regan argued against supplying arms to Iran through Israel, because of its illegality. They maintained the operation violated the Arms Export Control Act. Reagan listened to their objections and, when they finished, stated "I think we ought to go ahead, as far as the hostages are concerned, I just couldn't sleep if we didn't pursue every possibility." Reagan believed the American public would not accept the death of the hostages, even if it meant he stayed within the law. He assumed the weapons would only go into the hands of moderate factions within the country, possibly helping to foment an overthrow of the ayatollah. The president explained he could withstand charges of illegal actions but not the accusation that the "big strong President Reagan passed up a chance to free hostages." He quipped, "They can impeach me if they want, visiting days are Wednesday." Weinberger jested, "You will not be alone." "If we succeed in this, we will all be heroes," Reagan said to the room, "If we don't it will be very difficult." Shultz and Weinberger reiterated their objections. Reagan responded, "Well, let me think about it." And, after receiving the advice of his cabinet, he decided against their council.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Deposition of John M. Poindexter, Saturday, May 2, 1987, Folder "[Tower Board: 12/07/1985 White House Meeting] (1)(2)," Box 5, Series I: Subject Files 1987-1988, Howard H. Baker Jr. Files, RRL; Document 5: Caspar Weinberger, Handwritten Notes of Meeting in White House Family Quarters, December 7, 1985 (National Security Archive) National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 483, Posted September 5, 2014, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB483/>; Walsh and United States, *Final Report on Iran-Contra*, Volume I, Page 329, Note 35.

The Iranian operations went forward as Reagan intended, but attempts at heroism gave way to political and legal difficulty for the administration. The Iran-Contra affair, in addition to diplomatic efforts within Central America, dismantled Reagan's public front of the Contra operation. North's private operational and monetary network was alone enough to bury the Contra aid effort. Nevertheless, when the administration's covert actions in Tehran intersected with its operations 8,000 miles away in Central America, the ensuing scandal revealed a controversial panoply of Reagan's foreign policy initiatives. The exposure of the White House's secret effort of maintaining the counter-revolutionary campaign with funds from arms-for-hostages deals with Iran provided impetus for Congress to reject a persistent Reagan's aid packages. It also handicapped the president's popularity. It produced a Medusan effect on an otherwise "Teflon president," transforming him and the administration into stone as the public watched Democrats in Congress seek answers and accountability.⁸¹

The Esquipulas Peace Agreement ultimately provided the path for an eventual end to the civil war in Nicaragua, removing from Congress any real purpose for protracted paramilitary action. What is more, the clandestine manner in which the Reagan administration pursued the Reagan Doctrine in Central America hastened its collapse. Rather than accept the Boland amendments as a political defeat, the White House actively evaded the limitations imposed by Congress to carry out its counter-revolutionary campaign for democracy in Nicaragua. This chapter unpacks the escapades leading to the Iran-Contra affair. It centers on the application of the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua and

⁸¹ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 217–218; Colorado Congresswoman Pat Schroeder coined the term. See also, Pat Schroeder, "Nothing Stuck to 'Teflon' President," USA Today, June 6, 2004.

its intersection with the White House's arms-for-hostages initiative in Iran. In the process, it narrows the scope in regards to Iran-Contra with a focus less on the legal proceedings and political theater. Rather, it exclusively explores the clandestine operations implemented to sustain the Contra program following congressional restrictions on U.S. funding for the counter-revolutionary campaign. Reagan's covert Contra program is traced with consideration toward the private network, third party funding, and clandestine operations that kept the Contras at war. These operations eventually resulted in the Iran-Contra affair, a product of the Reagan Doctrine and the administration's unwavering commitment to winning the Cold War.

Boland II changed the mechanisms with which the Reagan administration operated the Contra war and thus transformed the Reagan Doctrine. In spite of the legislative restrictions, Reagan instructed the NSC to keep the Contras supported at all costs. As funding for the CIA and DOD depleted, the White House tasked Oliver North in the spring of 1984 with sustaining the Contras. "I was given the job of holding them together in body and soul," North testified. He stated his responsibility was "to keep them together as a viable political opposition, to keep them alive in the field, to bridge the time between the time when we would have no money and the time when the Congress would vote again." National Security Advisor John Poindexter thought North "made the whole system work" in the wake of Boland II. He described North in a deposition during the Iran-Contra investigation "as the kingpin to the Central America opposition."⁸² The

⁸² United States. Congress., *Testimony of Oliver L. North (Questioning by Counsels)*, 75, 267; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*. Appendix B: Volume 20, Depositions, 100th Congress, 1st Sess., 1987. Senate Report 100-216, November. (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 1059; United States. Congress., *Testimony of John Poindexter: Joint Hearings before the House Select Committee*

White House installed North as a point man to preside over the covert program's operation. His goal was to brave the legislative storm by keeping the Contras sustained until aid returned as part of its dual track strategy. In North, the White House had a committed Reaganite who shared the president's sentiments and anti-Communist values. As a result of the Vietnam War, he had a disdain for congressional mandates on executive power. He considered the Contra war a "Vietnam Redux," and, in turn, conducted the president's covert war in Nicaragua with an absolute resolve to win militarily rather than diplomatically.⁸³

The NSC's support network for the Contra's consisted of two apparatuses: off-the-books operational support and third party monetary assistance. At Casey's behest, North organized a network, what North termed "Project Democracy," with a former U.S. Air Force and CIA asset Richard Secord. It was an "off-the-shelf, self-sustaining, stand-alone" organization that conducted foreign policy on behalf of the Reagan administration. Secord and his business partner Albert Hakim called the network "the Enterprise." At its height, the Enterprise comprised multiple shell companies, Swiss bank accounts, five airplanes, one ship, airstrips, a warehouse, maintenance facility, pilots, and a crew. The Enterprise facilitated resupply operations for the Contra using funds obtained through the White House's private fundraising, third-country solicitations, and later funds from the Iranian initiative. It also became intertwined with the White House's dealings in Tehran. In Nicaragua, however, the Enterprise held together the Contras with lethal aid, providing arms as well as monetary and other material assistance. The operation proved difficult,

to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran and the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, Vol. 100-8, 100th Congress, 1st Sess, July 15, 16, 17, 20, and 21, 1987 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1987), 54.

⁸³ Bradley JR., *Guts and Glory*, 113, 163, 541; Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song*, 15-16, 139-150.

reckless, and in constant violation of the Boland amendments, but it always maintained White House approval.⁸⁴

In fall 1984 and spring 1985, the Enterprise completed the first two rounds of arms resupply for the Contras. Secord had spearheaded a precursor to the weapons supply program in 1983—Operation Tipped Kettle. An operation in which Casey asked the Department of Defense to request Israel donate \$10 million in weapons they confiscated from the Palestinian Liberation Organization to the Contras. The Israelis happily obliged. In Operation Tipped Kettle II, the Israelis again donated weapons to the Contras when U.S. funds diminished in 1984. Well versed and connected in the arms trade, Secord purchased \$2.3 million in weapons from China in November 1984 with funds solicited by the NSC's private network. The purchase encountered problems, as it required legitimate end-user certificates for documentation that the arms were being used by the destination country. The Enterprise turned to forgery as a solution. In the meantime, Secord purchased \$8 million in explosives and arms from the Eastern Bloc. Again, EUCs presented a problem, but North asked the Guatemalan government to falsify them. North also attempted a purchase of Blowpipe anti-aircraft missiles from Chile, but the deal failed to materialize. In April 1985, the Chinese arms finally landed after the Enterprise used false Moroccan EUCs. The off-the-books operations involved an international cadre of willing and often anti-democratic suppliers coordinated by Secord and Hakim.

⁸⁴ United States. Congress., *Testimony of Oliver L. North (Questioning by Counsels)*, 317–318; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 40, 64; Secord and Wurts, *Honored and Betrayed*; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 472; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 157–158.

Although overseen by North, who operated out of the White House, the Reagan Doctrine in essence became privatized.⁸⁵

The Enterprise continued supplying assistance to the Contra until the collapse of the operation in October 1986. During 1985, it managed to fend off competing arms suppliers and setup an airstrip for facilitating a more efficient supply process for the southern front of the Contra war. The arms trade offered competition. The Honduran government allowed an "arms Supermarket" for the Contras. Ronald Martin and James McCoy, two American arms dealers, sold weapons to the Contras through it. Likewise, Major General John Singlaub, an anticommunist crusader, offered weapons to the Contras from the Soviet bloc. This irked North, as it undercut his leadership of the Contra program; and it angered Secord, because he was losing profit. In May 1985, Secord picked a new supplier and brought in arms from Poland and Romania into Central America for the Contras. Monzer al-Kasser, a Syrian arms dealer known to supply terrorist networks, was one of his intermediaries. As they often did, the NSC turned a blind eye to its partners in the Contra war. By July 1985, North consolidated his role as sole supplier to the Contras, permitting a final shipment of arms from Singlaub to arrive on July 8. North then implemented new plans for the Contra's offensive: opening an airstrip to supply lethal aid to a southern front. The Contra war expanded and escalated.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 49–53; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 387; Secord and Wurts, *Honored and Betrayed*, 217; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 43, 46; Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003), 412-414; Court Document, In the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, United States of America v. Oliver L. North, Defendant [U.S. Governments Stipulation on Quid Pro Quos with Other Governments as part of Contra Operations, April 6, 1989, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA.

⁸⁶ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 125–126; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 86–89; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate

In late June 1985, North met with the Contra leadership in a Miami hotel. They reviewed the program, and North chastised their incompetence and corrupt practices. The Boland amendments had removed the CIA, thus leaving the Contras without a sufficient resupply network. North tasked Secord with building an aerial resupply network and opening a southern front out of Costa Rica for the Contras to launch attacks, in addition to handling the Contra's financials, which a Swiss bank account in the name of a shell company controlled. With the help of U.S. Costa Rican Ambassador Lewis Tambs and the CIA, the Enterprise setup a secondary airstrip to supply the southern front in Santa Elena, Costa Rica. Alberto Monge, the Costa Rican president, allowed the airstrip in a quid pro quo for U.S. funding. The Contra's main resupply airstrip resided at the Ilopango Air Force Base in El Salvador, where longtime CIA operative Felix Rodriguez convinced the Salvadoran military to allow the Contra supply network to operate alongside the U.S. Military Group and CIA. Secord tasked two retired U.S. Air Force colonels Richard Gadd and Robert Dutton with managing the site by setting up an air services proprietary for conducting operations. A CIA proprietary company, Southern Air Transport, functioned as the commercial intermediary. The facility had fuel, supplies, maintenance capabilities, and five transport aircrafts, such as Fairchild C-123 Providers and Canadian C-7 Caribous. In spring 1986, it was finally operational enough to conduct weapons deliveries to the Contras but the program encountered logistic and personnel problems.⁸⁷

Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 50–51; for more on Felix Rodriguez's clandestine career, see Felix I. Rodriguez and John Weisman, *Shadow Warrior: The CIA Hero of a Hundred Unknown Battles* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

⁸⁷ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 127–132, 211; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 94–100; John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 523–525;

While the White House stayed abreast of the Enterprise's operations, North and his operatives overcame logistical problems, eventually completing many successful supply operations before the Iran-Contra affair erupted in the media. National Security Advisor Poindexter kept Reagan informed of the supply operations, including the Santa Elena airstrip after its construction. Reagan understood the NSC and North in particular directed the Contra program while the Enterprise operated logistics and supplies. Moreover, Reagan was aware of North's military coordination with the Contras. As the Reagan administration struggled with Congress over aid, Felix Rodriguez coordinated multiple deliveries of lethal aid to the Ilopango Air Force Base. Meanwhile, North "crossed another legal barrier" by mixing the congressionally approved humanitarian aid with military assistance, loading the planes operated by the Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office—under the control of the State Department but overseen by the NSC—with both lethal and nonlethal aid. Secord's crew conducted nearly eighty successful missions in the spring and summer of 1986. With the introduction of sophisticated communications equipment, the Enterprise became more efficient. Yet, southern front deliveries proved difficult for the Contra Program, and Felix Rodriguez's unhinged behavior complicated matters.⁸⁸

North faced an irrational Rodriguez in El Salvador and Washington, while the Enterprise confronted difficulties with deliveries on the southern front. Although

U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 61–62.

⁸⁸ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 135, 140, 168, 174, 175, 177, 181; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 95, 75; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 460–463, 502; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 63–67.

Rodriguez was an important cog in the Contra war machine at Ilopango, his “loose cannon” personality and desire to run the operation himself without consulting proper channels created friction within the Enterprise and the Agency. Furthermore, he believed the Contras rather than the Enterprise owned the planes and weapons, a notion that Secord and North rejected completely. The dispute made its way to Washington. Rodriguez took his grievances to Vice President Bush but soon returned to El Salvador and created further problems with his intransigence. Secord’s crew, meanwhile, had trouble making deliveries to the Contra’s southern front, mostly due to “structural issues” with the secluded location of the airstrip in western Costa Rica, as well as the bad weather and substandard communication with the drop zones. It was at bottom a second-rate private network attempting conducting a major military supply operation. Congress eventually restored funding as the Enterprise formulated an effective method for shipments, such as upgraded radio gear, day flights, and predetermined drop zones. In the end, however, the Sandinistas shot down a supply plane on October 5, 1986, triggering the undoing of Reagan’s Contra war.⁸⁹

The Enterprise encompassed Casey’s vision for an off-the-books private network to sustain the Contras operationally. Its monetary counterpart involved third party funding that the White House facilitated through soliciting funds from third-countries by engaging in quid pro quos with the governments. North and others also embarked on a mobilization of right-wing American Contra supporters to raise funds. In January 1984,

⁸⁹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 182–185, 211–215, 218–220, 231–235; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 477–480; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 67–69, 71–75; Felix I. Rodriguez and John Weisman, *Shadow Warrior: The CIA Hero of a Hundred Unknown Battles*, 236-248.

North and Constantine Menges drafted an outline for NSDD 124, which called for soliciting funds from third party sources. McFarlane removed the language from the NSDD, but briefed Reagan on the idea. He received the president's approval. Following a May 1984 congressional rebuff of Reagan's request for Contra aid, the administration formulated a plan for third party funding. The president and cabinet discussed the topic during a June 25, 1984, NSPG meeting. Casey suggested Reagan ask for funding with an offer to enhance U.S. economic assistance in return. Weinberger and Kirkpatrick agreed. Shultz rejected the idea, citing Chief of Staff Jim Baker as saying third-country solicitation was "an impeachable offense." Casey, in turn, sought a narrow legal opinion to justify the solicitation. Attorney General William Smith supported the legality of foreign governments aiding the Contras, unless it was part of a quid pro quo. The legal opinion proved simultaneously retroactive and irrelevant, as the White House had the process underway and ignored it throughout.⁹⁰

Prior to the NSPG meeting in June, the covert funding process had begun in 1984 as a contingency plan for when Congress limited or ended Contra funding. The exposure of the harbor mining politically damaged the administration's efforts to obtain positive legislative action on aid, thus enforcing the method. National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane originally approached Israel for aid, but the Israelis declined out of "unfavorable domestic political circumstances." Instead, the Israeli government offered

⁹⁰ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 387; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 84; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 38, 54 Note 114; Minutes, National Security Planning Group Meeting, "Central America," June 25, 1984, DNSA Collection: CIA Covert Operations: From Carter to Obama, 1977-2010, DNSA; For legal judgement, see Memo, Stanley Sporkin, "Memo for the Record on Meeting with William Casey, William French Smith and Others regarding Third-Country Support for the Contras, June 26, 1984, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA.

arms for increased economic and military assistance from Washington—Operation Tipped Kettle II. The White House then turned to South Africa, an anti-Communist ally, to solicit funding. It proved unattainable, as the backlash from the harbor mining revelation foiled the plan. Although evidence exists in Oliver North's notebooks that South Africa later clandestinely provided arms for the Contras. The administration eventually found reliable monetary assistance from Saudi Arabia and Taiwan to the grand total of \$34 million.⁹¹

Saudi Arabia contributed \$32 million to the Contras, while Taiwan provided \$2 million, a gesture of good will from American allies gaining favor with the administration. McFarlane met with Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan in May 1984 to request Contra funding. Rather than directly solicit a donation, McFarlane employed not-so-subtle hints at Reagan's desire to keep the program alive. The Saudis responded in kind with \$1 million per month for the Contras to assist them through 1984, in what the Saudis described "as a humanitarian gesture." McFarlane provided the Saudis with a Grand Cayman Islands bank account to deposit the funds. He told Reagan, who was elated at the news. In February 1985, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz informed Reagan during a meeting that he would double the donations per month. Reagan insisted the Saudi's role remained secret, but most of the White House sooner or later became aware of the contributions in the two year following the initial donation. The other fund

⁹¹ Stephen Engelberg, "U.S. Planned in '84 For South Africa to Help Contras," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1987, sec. World; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 38; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 79–80, 359 note 13; see paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 in Court Document, In the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, United States of America v. Oliver L. North, Defendant [U.S. Governments Stipulation on Quid Pro Quos with Other Governments as part of Contra Operations, April 6, 1989, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA.

provider, Taiwan, received solicitation in November 1985 from Singlaub, whom North dispatched to request money. The Taiwanese government dithered until North personally told a Taiwanese representative that America "would be very grateful" for the donation. Afterwards, Taiwan transferred \$1 million in fall 1985 to the Enterprise and again in spring 1986. Other than Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan, Latin America provided the bulk of support for the Contra cause.⁹²

Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama assisted the Contra program at the request of the Reagan administration in return for U.S. assistance. In 1981, the Reagan administration completed an agreement with the Argentine military to provide a counter-revolutionary training program for the Contras with lethal and monetary aid.⁹³ In return for the Enterprise's airstrip and territory for the Contras, the White House ensured Costa Rica benefitted from security and communications assistance, as well as payments for guarding the airstrip. One official received a meeting with Reagan at the White House for helping with the airstrip. El Salvador received U.S. economic and military aid for its role in helping the Contras. In return for Guatemala's help with the Contras, Reagan restored military aid to the country at a time of massive human rights violations. Honduras provided support in exchange for military aid packages. Reagan sent a personal letter thanking them for the assistance, and Bush visited to personally express gratitude. In another quid pro quo, Hondurans allowed

⁹² *Iran-Contra*, 81–83; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 388; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 39, 44–45, 63; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 80–84.

⁹³ Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy*, 54–55; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 115–116; For more on the Argentine role in the Contras, see Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977–1984* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997), Chps 4–5.

the Enterprises resupply program to continue in return for sophisticated weaponry. In Panama, the Contras benefitted from CIA asset General Manuel Antonio Noriega, who allowed Contra camps and supplied his own planes to transport arms. The Reagan administration indeed relied heavily upon Latin American governments in conducting the Contra campaign, for without their assistance it would have faltered.⁹⁴

Despite the support from Latin American countries and two overseas allies, not all of the administration's attempts at soliciting foreign support proved successful. Gen. Singlaub approached South Korea, for example, but the country opted against aiding the Contras out of diplomatic concerns. In a farcical episode, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams solicited the Sultan of Brunei in the summer of 1986. Abrams traveled to London and asked Brunei's foreign minister for a \$10 million donation for the Contras. He told the minister it would be looked upon favorably by the administration. The money, however, deposited into another account. It never reached the Contras. North's secretary Fawn Hall had transposed two digits of the bank account number, resulting in an incorrect deposit into a random account. The money returned to Brunei after the Iran-Contra affair had become a national scandal. The Reagan administration's sources for funding also turned toward Americans seeking to aid the Contra's war. Domestic fund raising in turn complemented the administration's foreign solicitations.⁹⁵

North worked alongside republican fundraisers Carl R. "Spitz" Channell and Richard R. Miller in soliciting funds from wealthy conservative donors. Miller retired

⁹⁴ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 150–151, 390–392; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 87–88, 173, 229–231; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 104–107.

⁹⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 89–90, 224–225; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 196–197.

from the Agency for International Development in 1984 to enter into public relations. He worked with the Contras through his consulting business. Channell was a fund raiser for conservative politicians and causes, whose tax-exempt organization National Endowment for the Preservation of Liberty channeled money to the Contras. North's foray into private fundraising produced mixed results. An Iranian con man, Mousalreza Ebrahim Zadeh, for instance, convinced North and Miller he was a member of the Saudi royal family in a scheme to receive a luxurious courting from them, which cost \$270,000 and included European trips. In the end, Zadeh went to jail for bank fraud after bouncing a \$250,000 check. Despite this setback, North, Channell, and Miller managed to raise money from Republican donors connected to Channell's networks.⁹⁶

The "one-two punch" process involved North wooing the potential donor with an impassioned presentation on the Contras, followed by Miller and Channell asking for the money. Miller and Channell brought donors to D.C. to stay at the Hay-Adams Hotel near the White House. North then offered "a dramatic presentation" on the Contras, often in North's office in the Old Executive Office Building, and left the room to allow Channell to solicit money, which removed North from illegally asking. North also went outside of Washington on occasion seeking funds. He once traveled to Dallas to provide Texas oilman Nelson Bunker Hunt with a supply list for the Contras. Hunt accepted the list and later donated \$237,000. The soliciting continued throughout 1985 and 1986, allowing the Contras to purchase supplies. Ellen Garwood, a Texas donor, provided \$65,000 for a helicopter, which the Enterprise named "Lady Ellen." In one instance, Joseph Coors,

⁹⁶ Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 55–59; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 187–188, footnote 5, 190; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 90–91.

owner of the famous beer company, visited North to contribute. He received instructions from North to purchase a Maule aircraft for the Enterprise. Top donors received meetings with the president, wherein Reagan spoke generally about support for the “freedom fighters” and took pictures with the group. In all, the private funding process raised \$10,385, 929. The Contras obtained \$3,306,882 directly, while the Enterprise’s partners in the operation, including individuals within the Contras like Adolfo Calero, received the remainder. Notwithstanding corruption and profit, the domestic fundraising operation helped the Contra, but it proved insufficient for North and the White House.⁹⁷

Another source of funding for the Contras derived from the covert arms-for-hostages deal the Reagan administration conducted with Iran. Due to the hostility between the Islamic Republic and the U.S., a paradoxical operation developed out Reagan’s aspiration to free American hostages held in Lebanon and moderate relations between the countries. North’s rash scheming led to the Iran initiative intersecting with the Contra program. As Malcolm Byrne has argued, three factors paved the way for the arms-for-hostage deal. One, it happened against the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war, which raged from September 1980 until August 1988. The U.S. had declared Iran a supporter of terrorism and placed an arms embargo on the country limiting access to weapons. Yet, the Islamic Republic carried out a vicious campaign against Iraq with supplies from other countries, but the Iranian army needed more arms. Two, Israel was one of the countries supplying arms to Iran. The Israelis sold arms as a means to counterbalance Arab nations in the region as part of a “periphery” strategy. Three, Islamic militant groups in Lebanon

⁹⁷ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 54, 137–139; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 60–70; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 91–100; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 190–191.

seized hostages, notably Iranian-funded Hezbollah. After Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to fight the PLO, Reagan sent Marines into the country on a peacekeeping mission. This coincided with the rise of Hezbollah, who in retaliation bombed the Marines barracks in October 1983, prompting Reagan to withdraw U.S. troops. Hezbollah's offshoot Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) began taking Americans hostages as a tactic to further political aims. These factors allowed an arms-for-hostage deal by which the U.S. traded arms to Iran through Israel in exchange for the release of American hostages.⁹⁸

The Reagan administration regarded the hostages held by Hezbollah's IJO as a dire situation, which resonated intensely with Casey and Reagan. IJO abducted seven Americans between 1984 and 1985. In 1984, the group kidnapped CNN Beirut Chief Jeremy Levin, Presbyterian minister Reverend Benjamin Weir, and CIA agent William A. Buckley. Casey regarded Buckley a personal friend, and thus dedicated himself to returning Buckley home safe. In 1985, IJO seized Father Lawrence Martin Jenco, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson, American University Hospital director David P. Jacobsen, and American University Dean of Agriculture Thomas P. Sutherland. The kidnappings troubled Reagan deeply. He developed an "overriding interest" in resolving the hostage situations. Following Islamic Jihad's threats to execute hostages, he considered severe military action toward Tehran in January 1985. The operations mentioned included missile attacks and harbor mining. Meeting with the hostages' families furthered Reagan's commitment to saving them. The public perception of a weak

⁹⁸ Malcom Byrne argues for these factors as critical to laying the groundwork for Iran-Contra, see Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 30–38; For more on the U.S. role in Iran-Iraq war, see James G. Blight, Janet Lang, Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman. *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012) and Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); For Hezbollah see, Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013).

president and charges that the U.S. disregarded the plight of the hostages also politically motivated the administration. In short, the hostages in Lebanon impelled Reagan and his cabinet to seek drastic measures to resolve the crisis at their own peril. When an opening presented itself, the administration sought a controversial solution.⁹⁹

Although the origins of the scheme remain unclear, a Saudi Arabian businessman with connections to Israel, Adnan Khashoggi, and an Iranian arms dealer, Manucher Ghorbanifar, concocted a plan to use Israel as an intermediary for selling arms to Iran. Along with profits from arms deals, it was their belief that when Iran opened for business after the war they stood to benefit from billions in trade. Ghorbanifar proposed a plan to the Israelis. He suggested selling U.S.-made Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) missiles to help Iran combat Iraq's superior T-72 Soviet Tanks. He stated that it could secure the release of CIA Agent Buckley, which enticed the U.S. into allowing Israel to sell the weapons. He claimed the weapons would go moderates, thus helping to open relations with the West. These plans were not new to the Reagan administration, whose earlier policy papers had raised the prospect of encouraging allies to make arms deals with Iran in hopes of helping American political standing within the Islamic Republic. Meanwhile, the White House dispatched a counterterrorism consultant, Michael Ledeen, to Israel on a mission to seek information about fomenting a coup

⁹⁹ Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 120–121; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 160; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 38–40; Bruce Riedel described Reagan as “obsessed” to Malcolm Byrne in an October 23, 2007, interview, see 350, note 56; For Reagan's discussion of military action toward Iran, see Minutes, National Security Planning Group Meeting, "Response to Threat to Lebanon Hostages," January 18, 1985, DNSA Collection: Terrorism and U.S. policy, 1968-2002, DNSA; Reagan himself claimed he had a "heavy weight" on his shoulders to save the hostages, see Reagan, *An American Life*, 513; According to Bob Woodward, Casey "directed extraordinary measures be taken" to save Buckley, see Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, 394-395.

against Ayatollah Khomeini. While there, Prime Minister Shimon Peres informed Ledeen of the potential arms deal, in “a coincidence that triggered the whole thing.” The meeting generated Peres’ initiative to sell the TOWs and encourage U.S. involvement.¹⁰⁰

Several events precipitated McFarlane briefing Reagan on the “strategic opening” to Iran. On July 1, 1985, Kashoggi provided Israel and the U.S. with a policy paper outlining the political dynamics of Iran. It suggested extremist, moderate, and an in-between factions comprised the division vying for leadership of the country. The moderates, of course, leaned toward a pivot to the West rather than the Soviets. Ghorbanifar had actually drafted the paper, which suggests it contained little validity. Its contents nonetheless thrilled Israeli and American intelligence. Israel's Foreign Ministry director general, David Kimche, met National Security Advisor McFarlane on July 3, 1985, and discussed opening up to moderates in Iran as well as arm shipments. McFarlane in turn informed Weinberger and his assistant, Lieutenant General Colin Powell. Five days later, Ghorbanifar presented an Iranian official, Hassan Karoubi, to the Israelis at a meeting in Hamburg, Germany. A CIA operations officer had previously referred Karoubi to the State Department in November 1984, which suggests he was a known intermediary. The same day, Reagan fallaciously remarked to the American Bar Association “that America will never make concessions to terrorists.” After receiving a briefing on the Hamburg meeting from Ledeen, McFarlane cabled Shultz to relay the

¹⁰⁰ Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 129–141; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 59–66; David Kimche claimed it was a coincidence in an interview with Byrne on November 16, 2007, see 355 note 26; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 163–165; Draft, National Security Decision Directive, “U.S. Policy Toward Iran,” June 11, 1985, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988., DNSA.

immediate ramifications for the hostages and the long-term prospects for Iran-US relations. The possibilities of both saving hostages and opening relations to Iran proved too exciting for Shultz and McFarlane. This plan moved up to the president for approval, thus starting the arms-for-hostages deals.¹⁰¹

McFarlane first informed Reagan of the Iran deal on July 18 at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he recovered from stomach surgery. The deal proposed a creation of a political opening with Iranian moderates, which in turn would pressure Hezbollah to release the American hostages. Israel's approval of the operations heavily influenced Reagan's opinion on the matter. He and his advisors thoughtfully debated the proposals twice thereafter. Shultz and Weinberger dissented, but Reagan, McFarlane, and Chief of Staff Regan concluded the operation should commence. Reagan then authorized the Israelis to sell the TOWs to Iran. McFarlane provided Reagan's approval to the Israelis and agreed to replenishing the missiles with new stock. On August 19, the arms transfers went ahead despite Ghorbanifar stating he could not guarantee the release of hostages. After the deal, Ghorbanifar claimed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard took control over the arms transaction, thus making the outreach to a moderate faction and the release of hostages null and void. Without a hostage release, tumultuous meetings ensued between Ghorbanifar and the Israelis. Ghorbanifar, however, convinced the Israelis that another

¹⁰¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 66–70; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 141–148, 151–152, 155; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 166; see also Memo, Robert C. McFarlane to George Shultz, "Israeli-Iranian Contact," July 13, 1985, DNSA Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002, DNSA; Cable, George Shultz to Robert McFarlane, "Reply to Backchannel No.3 from Bud," July 14, 1985, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA; For the Reagan's speech, see Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association, July 8, 1985," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1985, Book II, June 29 - December 31, 1985* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1988), 895–900.

deal could be made for 400 TOWs in exchange for one American hostage. He called Iranian Prime Minister Hossein Mousavi himself for verification of his story. The Israelis agreed, selling 400 missiles on September 14. The next day, Reverend Benjamin Weir appeared at the U.S. embassy in Lebanon. North, whom McFarlane dispatched to handle the hostage release, arranged Weir's return to America. The U.S. believed seven hostages would be released, which irked those involved, especially the failure to secure Buckley's freedom. The arms-for-hostages deal netted one hostage for 400 TOWs, and botched opening a channel to the elusive moderates within Iran.¹⁰²

In November 1985, another arms-for-hostages deal went through for Homing All the Way Killer missiles (HAWK), but it proceeded disastrously. It happened for many reasons, such as Reagan's desire to save the remaining hostages, arms dealers' lust for profit, Israel's geopolitical goals, and Iran's need for weaponry. McFarlane kept Reagan, Shultz, and Weinberger updated, including a quick meeting with Reagan at the November U.S.-Soviet Geneva summit. Shultz and Weinberger continued their objections to the plan. Moreover, North's increased involvement produced the first intersection of the Iran and Contra programs. On November 17, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin phoned North at the request of McFarlane to solicit help with the HAWK operation. North subsequently brought Secord and the Enterprise aboard to assist. On November 20, the first diversion of funds happened. Israeli liaisons deposited \$1 million into a Swiss bank account of the Enterprise for operational expenses. North and Secord then diverted \$850,000 toward the Contras. Later, North stated Israel overlooked the diversion when he

¹⁰² Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 156–60, 166–175; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 70–75; Reagan, *An American Life*, 506; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 167–169.

said it was "for the purpose of the Contras." In any case, North originated the idea and executed the diversions of funds from the Iranian operations into the Contras' program. After many logistical issues, North, Secord, and the CIA helped facilitate HAWK shipments, but the plane arrived days late, without the full shipment, and HAWK missiles which Iranians determined insufficient for their needs. It did not help the situation that blue Star of David stamps covered the HAWKs. The plan failed completely, as Iran rejected the arms and Hezbollah released none of the hostages.¹⁰³

North accepted the deal as a loss, but immersed himself further into the operation and presided over new shipments in an attempt to free hostages and support the Contra war. Additionally, the administration covered its tracks with a retroactive finding that violated the law on two counts: it was written to cover future covert action and directed secrecy toward Congress. The former was invalid due to findings only covering future operations and the latter violated law instructing the executive to brief the legislative of new findings. Furthermore, the Arms Export Control Act banned sales to countries that supported terrorism—which the U.S. considered Iran—as well as the president must notify Congress of the transactions in advance. Reagan violated all of the above, but he seemed unconcerned about consequences. This is prevalent in his words during the above mentioned December 7, 1985, meeting between Reagan and his cabinet in the Family Quarters of the White House, wherein he stated he would face impeachment, committed himself to saving the hostages at all costs, and disregarded his cabinet's advice to

¹⁰³ Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 183-187; Draper concludes that in spite of North's congressional testimony, one can trace the beginning of the diversions to his November 1985 transfer of Israeli money to the Contras, see 198-199; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 92-103; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 177-184.

facilitate more arms-for-hostages deals. North likewise disregarded legal restrictions to marry the Enterprise to Iranian arms deals, helping bring his “neat idea” of funding the Reagan Doctrine with the ayatollah’s money to fruition.¹⁰⁴

In January 1986, the Reagan administration commandeered the Iran operation, removing Israel from the equation and turning it over to North and the Enterprise. Reagan signed a new finding based on high-level deliberations and the legal advice of Attorney General Ed Meese. Meese argued that based on the Economy Act, Reagan could authorize the Defense Department to sell weapons to the CIA, which in turn could transfer weapons under the National Security Act. Under this opinion, foreign policy is within the purview of the president, thus Reagan did not have to notify Congress. Later, Meese admitted that he had neither research nor Justice Department opinion to support his legal analysis. Reagan signed the finding January 17, 1986, removing Israel, installing the CIA, and appointing the NSC to run the operation in conjunction with “third parties”—the Enterprise. It established that U.S. policy work toward a moderate Iran, pursue intelligence activities, and achieve the release of hostages. The arms-for-hostages deal that followed in February 1986 generated a \$10 million sale of 1,000 TOW missiles, for which the Enterprise transferred \$3.7 million to the CIA to cover the cost from the Defense Department. The remainder lay as profit for Secord’s business and Contra assistance. The deal also produced no hostages, an impediment for the continuation of the operation. Although Iranian middlemen suggested after a high-level meeting in Iran hostages would be released. The Enterprise’s continued involvement in multiple arms

¹⁰⁴ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 104–108; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 203–216; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 186, 195, 197–198.

deals allowed North and Secord's scheme, in which they overcharged the Iranians for arms to supply the Contra program with funding, to proceed.¹⁰⁵

The nexus underlying the Iran-Contra affair is the diversion of residual funds from the Iran initiative into the Contra program. An April 4, 1986, memo sent from North to Poindexter officially outlined North's operation to support the Contras with money from the arms deal. It put in summary the Iran initiative and sought Reagan's approval on several objectives regarding the next arms deal, but it also included a recommendation that "residual funds from this transaction" be utilized by the Enterprise to "purchase critically needed supplies for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance Forces." It endorsed using these funds as a "bridge" assistance measure until Congress restored lethal aid. This plan violated the Boland amendment and suggested unconstitutional provisions to subvert Congress. North drafted the memo at Poindexter's request for the president, but according to Independent Counselor Walsh there is "No direct evidence" that Reagan viewed it. Yet, Walsh suggests Reagan would not have continued the Iran initiative "unless he knew that the arms sales continued to supply funds to the contras to bridge the gap before the anticipated congressional appropriations became effective." Reagan was aware of third party funding to the Contras and the rest of the accompanying covert operations regarding Nicaragua and Iran. Poindexter testified he neglected to brief Reagan out of "plausible deniability." Yet, others within the administration knew of the diversion, including Casey, McFarlane, and Shultz. North stated under oath that Reagan

¹⁰⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 154–167; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 245–263; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 208–209, 213–222; for the new finding, see Presidential Finding, "Scope: Iran," January 17, 1986, DNSA Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002, DNSA.

approved the diversion. In the end, Reagan had authorized the majority of all operations directly, his knowledge of the specific “diversion memo” is a moot point.¹⁰⁶

After the diversion memo in April 1986, North and the Enterprise presided over a deal with Iran for HAWK spare parts in May and another one for 500 TOW missiles in October. On November 3, 1986, a Lebanese weekly, *Al-Shiraa*, published a story involving the American visit to Iran, opening the flood gate of scandal. This concluded the Iranian initiative, but it was not all for naught. In May, McFarlane, North, and others had secretly traveled to Iran in order to negotiate further, but it proved pointless. Hezbollah, however, finally released a hostage in July. Lawrence Jenco was the last hostage released under the arms-for-hostages deals. The Iran arms-for-hostages deals produced the release of three out of seven hostages: Benjamin Weir in September 1985; Jenco in July 1986; and David Jacobsen in November 1986. Jeremy Levin had escaped in February 1985. William Buckley, on the other hand, suffered a terrible fate, dying under torture in June 1985. The two remaining hostages received freedom several years later. Hezbollah released Terry Sutherland in November 1991 and Terry Anderson in December 1991. As a result of the Enterprise’s involvement, a diversion of roughly \$4.7 million from the Iranian arms deals went into the Contra program.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ United States. Congress., *Testimony of John Poindexter*, 182–183; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 299–302; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 225; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 446, note 7; Bob Woodward claims Bill Casey admitted the diversion on his deathbed. See Woodward, Veil, 505-507; For the diversion memo, see Memo, Oliver North, "Release of American Hostages in Beirut, April 4, 1985, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Kinzer, “The Last U.S. Hostage; Anderson Arrives at Germany Base And Appears Vigorous and Healthy,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1991, sec. World; Dirk Johnson, “Ex-Hostage Joyfully Returns to the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 1991, sec. U.S.; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 168–172, see note 51 on 171; Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 75, 194–206; Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 170–171, 382, 455, 457–464.

The Reagan administration's clandestine effort to maintain the Contra war in Nicaragua intersected with its arms-for-hostages deal with Iran. A scandal arose once the Congress and American public became aware of the operations. It is of no question that the Reagan administration conducted extralegal operations in its support for the Contras, including the use of funds from a deal in which the U.S. traded arms to Iran for the release of hostages. Reagan's demand that the NSC and CIA sustain the Contras elicited a committed covert program that conducted the president's stated policy. The Reagan Doctrine called for the unwavering support of anti-Communist guerrillas and nationalist resistance groups against the Soviet Union at the periphery of its empire. The global Cold War necessitated worldwide operations. The Reagan administration called on support from its allies in the form of monetary and material assistance for the Contras. It employed a private network to facilitate the covert war in Nicaragua. North, with assistance from the White House and the CIA, determinedly held the Contras together "body and soul" for as long as the operation proved sustainable. The means to uphold the Contra program skirted ethical and legal boundaries continuously in pursuit of the end goal of rolling back a Soviet-leaning state. The Iran-Contra affair was a result of the Reagan Doctrine. It is the contention of this study that it is the chief manifestation of the doctrine's application. The next chapter now turns to what Iran-Contra reveals about Reagan's foreign policy in general and the Reagan Doctrine in particular.

Chapter 4

A Revelation: The Reagan Doctrine and The Iran-Contra Affair

Despite \$37,306,882 million in domestic and foreign contributions, in addition to \$11 million in arms from Israel as well as millions in assistance from Latin American countries, the Enterprise diverted funds from its arms-for-hostages operation in Iran to help the Contras. As such a bold operation, Iran-Contra illustrates that the measures the Reagan administration undertook to keep the Contra war alive and bleeding are astounding. What it reveals about the Reagan Doctrine provides a principal case in which Reagan's foreign policy can aptly be assessed in operational terms. As R.W. Apple put it, Iran-Contra shows "a National Security Council led by reckless cowboys, off on their own on a wild ride, taking direct operational control of matters that are the customary province of more sober agencies."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the Contra program in Nicaragua operated at once quite absurdly, unseemly, and malignantly, but it was nevertheless the Reagan Doctrine. Virulent anti-communism motivated those within the White House who recklessly supported and conducted the Contra program. The Reagan Doctrine at bottom becomes a question of ends justifying means. Sweeping democracy and winning the Cold War defined the ends, while an off-the-books operational network, third party funding, and congressional subversion comprised the means. Reagan's "body and soul" command for supporting the Contras ended in a political scandal, but the Iran-Contra affair's methods and mechanisms reveal the true nature of the Reagan Doctrine.

¹⁰⁸ John Tower, Brent Scowcroft, and Edmund S. Muskie, *The Tower Commission Report: The Full Text of the President's Special Review Board*, Introduction by R.W. Apple (New York: New York Times, 1987), xv.

Before Reagan ever entered the oval office, he articulated his vision for America's policy to end the Cold War once and for all. During a January 1977 meeting in Los Angeles with Richard V. Allen, a future National Security Advisor in the administration, Reagan conveyed his strategy. "It is this," Reagan said to Allen, "We win and they lose. What do you think of that?"¹⁰⁹ Behind a veneer of simplicity, however, laid an unwavering commitment to a strategy that often eclipsed rationality and legality in its complex operations. This chapter examines the Reagan Doctrine, a strategy aimed at the Third World embodying Reagan's single-minded vision, by analyzing its application in Nicaragua. In evaluating the means of the Reagan Doctrine to achieve the ends of Reagan's policy, it explores the mechanisms with which the Reagan administration applied the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua, such as the clandestine operations exemplified by Iran-Contra. It shows how the administration applied the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua and the Iran-Contra affair demonstrate best the operations and inherent characteristics of Reagan's foreign policy.

The Enterprise, an off-the-books network operated by Secord at the direction of North, provided operational and monetary support for the Contras. The U.S. government, primarily the NSA and CIA, facilitated the Enterprises' organization and operations, allowing North and Secord to operate in an extralegal manner. Top officials within the administration, including the president and director of the CIA, had an in-depth or surface-level knowledge of the program. After Congress ended funding that allowed CIA participation, members of the NSC oversaw the covert activities of supporting the

¹⁰⁹ Richard V. Allen, "The Man Who Won the Cold War," *Hoover Digest*, no. 1 (January 30, 2000), <http://www.hoover.org/research/man-who-won-cold-war>.

Contras. The CIA aided the NSC in a limited capacity thereafter. It was to great lengths that the White House conducted its clandestine support for the Contra program. The application of the Reagan Doctrine run roughshod over congressional authority and law. It disregarded the Boland amendments and the Arms Export Control Act. Moreover, it proved paradoxical, or rather hypocritical, in its processes. The clandestine, political, and public mechanisms that the White House utilized run counter to the rhetoric and ideology espoused by Reagan and his administration. It is precisely in these methods that one must consider the Reagan Doctrine in operational terms to engage beyond political scandal for an illuminating look at the underbelly of Reagan's foreign policy.

Charles Krauthammer, who coined the Reagan doctrine, has suggested "Rolling back Soviet acquisitions (albeit only at the periphery, where there is no threat of general war) is the innovation of the Reagan Doctrine." He defined the doctrine in simple terms: "Anti-communist revolution as a tactic. Containment as the strategy. And freedom as the rational."¹¹⁰ As shown in the previous chapters, the doctrine was simple in definition, but complex in practice. It supported anti-Communist guerrillas and nationalist resistance groups conducting counter-revolutionary campaigns in the Third World on behalf of U.S. interests and their own. Reagan infused his broad call for a global democratic revolution with counter-revolution, and thus the U.S. supported covert counterinsurgency campaigns. Reagan's turn toward counterinsurgency tactics a decade removed from Vietnam caused concern among those within Washington and the administration. The White House pursued the policy despite those inside the Capitol passing legislation to

¹¹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, "The Poverty of Realism," *New Republic* 194 (February 17, 1986): 16.

halt it.¹¹¹ The Reagan Doctrine functioned as the centerpiece of the administration's foreign policy, and Iran-Contra fit neatly within it. The affair and doctrine are mutual components of Reagan's strategy of containing and defeating the Soviet Union. The diversion of funds from the Iran initiative developed from the application of the Reagan Doctrine, which functioned under a broader policy of confronting the Soviet Union and reversing the periphery of its power.

The Reagan Doctrine was a reconfigured form of containment. Scholars posit that Reagan's grand strategy borrowed its strengths from the traditions of both asymmetrical and symmetrical containment. Whereas asymmetrical containment sought that the U.S. confront the Soviet Union with force at locations and times of America's choice, symmetrical containment conversely followed that the U.S. counter the Soviet Union with equal force at the location and time of expansion. Asymmetrical containment cost-minimized but risk-maximized, while symmetrical containment cost-maximized but risk-minimized. John Lewis Gaddis argues that Reagan conducted a strategy producing mutually high costs and risks in countering the Soviet Union. With Reagan's form of containment deriving from both traditions, high risk occurred in the Third World at the periphery of the Soviet Union's power. Here, the Reagan Doctrine worked relentlessly to rollback the influence Soviets obtained during the 1970s. Its application in the Third World inflicted a risk-maximized but cost-minimized forward strategy to achieve Reagan's goal of defeating the Soviet Union. Nicaragua in particular withstood a rather dogged application of the counter-revolutionary campaign. Thus, the "We win, they lose"

¹¹¹ See Michael T Klare, *Beyond the "Vietnam Syndrome": U.S. Interventionism in the 1980s* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute of Policy Studies, 1981).

policy toward the Cold War produced Iran-Contra. The affair's clandestine operations proceeded as a result of a singular vision of reversing the Soviet Union's power. Iran-Contra therefore reveals the mechanisms in which the Reagan administration applied its strategy at the periphery at all costs. Cold War victory for Reaganites bade harsh action in the Third World, especially toward a country in close proximity to America.¹¹²

At a time when the global Cold War was at stake, Nicaragua's location in America's sphere of influence correlated with the Reagan Doctrine's intense force toward the country. It follows that the Reagan administration harbored an exacting brand of commitment for the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. "To the Reagan radicals, Central America was a gauge of the United States' global position," Odd Westad has argued, "if it failed there, the Cold War in the Third World was lost."¹¹³ The extent of the Reagan administration's actions reinforces this assertion. In his opening Congressional testimony, former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, a principal supporter of Iran-Contra, unveiled the White House's motivation. "If we could not muster an effective counter to the Cuban-Sandinista strategy in our own backyard," he stated, "It was far less likely that we could do so in the years ahead in more distant locations." He went further, suggesting that "there was a powerful—and to many, persuasive—case that to lose in Nicaragua would invite the Soviets to step up their investment in aggression significantly in other developing nations of the world." The U.S. "had to win this one" to convince the

¹¹² John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Rev. and expanded ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 375–377; see also, John Lewis Gaddis, "Containment and the Logic of Strategy," *The National Interest*, no. 10 (1987): 27–38; Gaddis concurs with Fareed Zakaria in his assessment on Reagan, see Fareed Zakaria, "The Reagan Strategy of Containment," *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 3 (1990): 373–95.

¹¹³ Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 339.

Soviets to rethink expansion and turn the streams of nationalism and democracy against them. Within the administration, facilitating this policy became a situation of direness.¹¹⁴

CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates sent a memo to DCI Casey in December 1984 conveying his negative analysis of Nicaragua. It reflects the ethos of the Reagan administration in applying the Reagan Doctrine. Gates recalled U.S. failures in the Third World from previous decades, including attempted accommodation with Castro, a strategy of "half measures, half-heartedly applied" in Vietnam, and President Ford's inability to confront communism in Angola. He regarded a U.S. policy of nudging the Sandinistas toward democracy as foolhardy. Instead, he suggested that "the only way that we can prevent disaster in Central America is to acknowledge openly what some have argued privately: that the existence of Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua closely allied with the Soviet Union and Cuba is unacceptable to the United States and that the United States will do everything in its power short of invasion to put that regime out." He laid bare the realities of the late Cold War in the Third World in his contention that the U.S. could not accept a "second Cuba" in the hemisphere: "If we have decided totally to abandon the Monroe Doctrine, if in the 1980s taking strong actions to protect our interests despite the hail of criticism is too difficult, then we ought to save political capital in Washington, acknowledge our helplessness and stop wasting everybody's time." As an ardent Cold Warrior, Gates revealed the geopolitical stakes in his demand for U.S. determination in rolling back Soviet power and exerting superpower hegemony. The above logic pervades Iran-Contra and the Reagan Doctrine.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ United States. Congress., *Testimony of Robert C. McFarlane, Gaston J. Sigur Jr., and Robert W. Owen*, 3; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 369.

¹¹⁵ For a fully declassified copy, See Memorandum from DDI Robert M. Gates to DCI William J. Casey, "Nicaragua," December 14, 1984, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 210, Posted -

The Contra program's operations encompass the extreme application of the Reagan Doctrine. Yet, when examined within the context of the Reagan Doctrine, its application, including the Iran-Contra affair, appears consistent with the doctrine rather than an aberration. The Reagan administration's Manichaeian understanding of the Cold War invited dicey methods for conducting covert operations and diplomacy—for the end of the Cold War justified extralegal means. As Christopher Layne puts it, "The crusade against communism was deemed so vital it could not be constrained by abstract notions such as the popular will or constitutional propriety."¹¹⁶ Subversion of Congress and diversion of funds from illegal weapons sales to Iran in support of the Contras were necessary means to achieve an end goal of rolling back the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The significance of the victory in Central America had a centrality in the global Cold War beyond a principle of credibility. Afghanistan, Angola, and Cambodia held significance, too, but for the Reagan administration, another Soviet-leaning state in Central America holding a strong relationship with Cuba was intolerable, a further violation of the Monroe Doctrine.¹¹⁷ The administration's adherence to the president's call for unwavering support for the Contras against congressional, legal, and public resistance assembled and mobilized global actors, clandestine operations, a private network, and the White House

November 24, 2006, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/3-Gates%20Memo%2012-14-84.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Layne, "Requiem for the Reagan Doctrine," 10.

¹¹⁷ Robert A. Pastor, "The Reagan Administration and Latin America: Eagle Insurgent," in *Eagle Resurgent?: The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy*, ed. Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1987), 359–92; Robert A. Pastor, "The Centrality of Central America," in *Looking Back on the Reagan Presidency*, ed. Larry Berman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 33–49; For Nicaragua and the Monroe Doctrine, see Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine: 1945-1993* (New York, Hill and Wage, 1994), 185-210.

in an extralegal counter-revolutionary campaign against the Sandinistas. It is in Nicaragua above all that the Reagan Doctrine's rollback manifested.

The Reagan administration faced considerable barriers in implementing the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua, but confronted them with dogged devotion toward supporting the Contra program. The Boland amendments proved the most formidable obstacles. They restricted funding for the Contras. The White House nevertheless evaded the amendments with a private off-the-books network to assist the Contras. Casey suggested former special operative Richard Secord for the job and championed such a mechanism, which he envisioned for use in projects other than the Contras. This provision explains North's involvement with the Iranian initiative, as the network was in place to facilitate the clandestine weapons transactions. The administration established a private network for pursuing "foreign policy goals" outside of official channels. As former National Security Advisor McFarlane testified, the Enterprise facilitated U.S. policy objectives. It delivered financial and intelligence assistance, as well as trained and armed the Contras, which aided their war against the Sandinistas. It provided a private mechanism to conduct Reagan's policy covertly while the White House struggled overtly for congressional approval. Yet, not all of the operational support arrived from non-governmental networks.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Richard Secord admitted he established a private network for covert operations, see United States. Congress., *Testimony of Richard Secord*: Joint Hearings before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran and the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, Vol. 100-2, 100th Congress, 1st Sess, July 15, 16, 17, 20, and 21, 1987 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1987), 200; United States. Congress., *Testimony of Robert C. McFarlane, Gaston J. Sigur Jr., and Robert W. Owen*, 204; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 40.

The CIA reinforced the Contras and the private network where possible, often joining the action beyond logistical support. As shown in previous chapters, the CIA assisted the Contras in military and supply operations. Meanwhile, the CIA shepherded the Reagan Doctrine to a lesser degree in other countries. In Cambodia, the CIA helped Thai officials coordinate aid for Noncommunist Cambodian Resistance training camps. To supply UNITA's campaign in Angola, the CIA trained their forces and established a base in Kamina, Zaire, for supplying their units. The CIA's job of applying the Reagan Doctrine in Afghanistan turned into the Agency's largest. With bipartisan support, financial and military assistance flowed into the country. The CIA delegated on-site operational control to Pakistani officials, whom the CIA trained. As Casey managed operational control of policy in Washington, Saudis and Americans assisted these CIA-trained forces. This setup, coupled with bipartisan support in Congress, allowed the CIA to conduct its covert war unhinged. The large CIA presence and autonomy also afforded Casey the opportunity to build closer ties with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis provided the vast majority of financial contributions to the Contra effort as well as minor assistance in Angola. The Reagan Doctrine was an international campaign operating in diverse regional theaters. Thus global actors similarly converged in the application of the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua.¹¹⁹

China, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and members of the Eastern Bloc, including Poland and Romania, are linked to the Contra operations in several cases either

¹¹⁹ Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 48–51, 90, 125–126, 132–138; Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991*, 284, 309–310; For an overview of CIA activities under Casey, see John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 467-572; For Afghanistan in particular, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) Part One.

by direct contributions or through middlemen. China provided weapons for the Contras via Secord's operation, which used funds from Saudi Arabia to broker a deal with a Canadian arms dealer, TransWorld Arms, which received the weapons from Defex, a Portuguese firm. Israel likewise supplied the Contras with Palestinian weapons through Operations Tipped Kettle I & II, in addition to financial support from Oliver North's original diversion of Iranian initiative funds in November 1985. In quid pro quos, third-party countries provided financial assistance. The Saudis provided the most substantial financial contributions to the Contras, enabling the continuation of their operations. Taiwan donated funds, albeit in a smaller measure. DeFex provided Eastern Bloc arms from Poland and Romania to Secord, who leased a Danish freightliner for transport to Honduras. In the case of Iran, North and Secord overcharged for the arms and diverted the funds into the Contra program, resulting in a scandal. As a result of covert, off-the-books actions to sustain the Contra program, a cadre of global actors aided and abetted the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua.¹²⁰

Conducting the Contra program clandestinely required North and the Enterprise to utilize international black markets and associate with nefarious businessmen for supplies. It also necessitated the U.S. to turn a blind-eye toward drug trafficking in Central America. One of the more controversial aspects of the Contra program involved drug running and American knowledge of and passivity toward it. The CIA had knowledge of Contra involvement in drug trafficking. In particular, Eden Pastora of the southern front offered Contra pilots to a drug cartel in return for money and planes. Other Contras

¹²⁰ See previous Chapters 3 and 4; Walsh and United States, *Iran-Contra*, 161; China also provided arms to the noncommunist rebels supported by the U.S. in Cambodia, see Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1991, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1991-09-01/back-vietnam>.

likewise involved themselves in the drug business as a source of revenue. Despite connections with narcotic trafficking, the CIA maintained association with these individuals. Reports also indicate that an American CIA asset used his farm in Costa Rica for drug shipping purposes. North had received a memo in early 1985 alerting him to the drug connections but remained insouciant. As it was the CIA's job to assist the Contras, Casey instructed officers to overlook the Contra misdeeds. Casey, in fact, had a memorandum of understanding drafted to absolve the CIA of legal constraints when using proxy agents and assets who engaged in criminality. The MOU required the CIA only report drug activities "when requested by the Attorney General," leaving a wide interpretation as to the obligation of CIA officers in the field. Aside from dealing in drugs, the Contras presented other problems for the administration with their counterproductive battle field failures and atrocious human rights violations.¹²¹

The Contra paramilitary force that the Reagan administration unwaveringly supported failed to win the hearts and minds of Nicaraguans and any significant military victories in the field. In the words of William LeoGrande, "The contras projected an image of military weakness and moral turpitude." In Washington, the Contras served the administration as either a mechanism for rolling back the Sandinistas paramilitary or applying enough pressure to force the Sandinistas into relinquishing power through more

¹²¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 132–134; Memo, Roger Owen to Oliver North, "Updates," February 10, 1986, DNSA Collection: The Iran-Contra affair: the making of a scandal, 1983-1988, DNSA; see also, Frederick P. Hitz, *Report of Investigation Concerning Allegations between CIA and the Contras in Trafficking Cocaine to the United States*, Central Intelligence Agency Office of Inspector General, 96-04145-IG, vol. 2, "The Contra Story," <https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/cocaine/contra-story>; For the CIA, drugs, and Central America, see Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall, *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).

diplomatic measures. In the field, the Contras proved inept in achieving victory in major offensives and vicious in their treatment of Nicaraguans. They raided peasant cooperatives, state farms, granaries, and villages, exacting a murderous toll on women and children. Their predilection for soft targets is illustrated in their routine executions of church and public officials, medical workers, teachers, and prisoners, in addition to the kidnappings of young men who were forced into joining the counter-revolutionaries. The CIA provided the Contras with a “murder manual” to direct selected violence toward the Sandinistas in hopes of a productive counterinsurgency. It included tips for assassinations among other counterinsurgency tactics. John Kirkpatrick, a retired U.S. Army major well-versed in paramilitary activities, drafted the manual from lessons plans for the Green Berets. The Sandinistas, though, repelled the Contras with superior counteroffensives, resulting in the Contras neither sustaining an occupation of territory for a provisional government nor achieving military victories. Despite the losses, hardliners within the Reagan White House believed sufficient lethal aid would help ensure a victory, but it never materialized.¹²²

Due to the incompetence of the Contras, the CIA assisted in the harbor mining operations, which resulted in the International Court of Justice at The Hague ruling against the Reagan Doctrine as a violation of international law. The 1984 harbor mining created the single legal repercussion outside of American courts. The ICJ ruled against the U.S. in the case of *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua*. It

¹²² LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 110–111, 302–303, 306, 309–310, 363, 364, 439–441, 489–492; Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, 40–41, 44–46; For the manual in its entirety, see Central Intelligence Agency, *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare*, October 1983, DNSA collection: *Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy, 1978-1990*, DNSA; for an inside look at the Contras, see also Sam Dillon, *Commandos: The CIA and Nicaragua's Contra Rebels* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991).

determined that U.S. support for the Contras was “in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another state.” Reagan decided against participating in the case, citing the World Court’s lack of jurisdiction. The White House blocked the ICJ’s judgement in the UN through vetoes. In Congress, the Senate and House passed resolutions condemning the act. Congressman Donald J. Pease worried about Reagan’s ends justifying means mindset toward defeating communism. “The last time an American president exhibited that mindset [...] the issue was a domestic one,” Pease cautioned while recalling Watergate, “How much more dangerous it will be for our nation if that mind-set is applied to the international arena.” Even the public resoundingly disapproved of the mining, with only 20 percent supporting the covert action. The American public’s aversion to the Contras persisted throughout Reagan’s two terms.¹²³

The Reagan administration faced widespread disapproval for its Contra program throughout its duration. From 1983 to 1986, polls show a high of only 32 percent of the America public supported a CIA-backed overthrow of the Sandinistas. The public fiercely resisted the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. A movement of groups against Reagan’s secret Contra war mobilized in protest.¹²⁴ Support for the Contras was one of two considerable public debates about the Reagan Doctrine. The application of the

¹²³ Anthony S. Winer, “Reagan Doctrine, the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, and the Role of a Sole Superpower, The,” *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 22 (2004): 186–188; Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, 50–52; Pease is quoted in LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 340, see also 331–340; For the ICJ Case, see Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America) I.C.J., 14, June 27 1986, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=3&code=nus&case=70&k=66&p3=0>.

¹²⁴ Kornbluh, *Nicaragua, the Price of Intervention*, see polls on 189; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 433; for more on public opinion, see *Public Opinion in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Controversy over Contra Aid*, ed. by Richard Sobel (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC) 1993; for U.S. grassroots movements, see Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst, Mass: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

doctrine in Angola was the second, a debate which lasted a shorter amount of time and without as much intense public resistance. Piero Gleijeses analyzed the debate over assistance to UNITA in major news publication during the mid-80s. He finds that seven publications, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, denounced assistance to UNITA, but they did so without sufficiently conveying UNITA's human rights record. Public knowledge of Nicaragua and a likelihood of a military quagmire informed the fiery debate over the Contras, while Angola received less attention due to public ignorance and an absence of fear regarding U.S. military involvement.¹²⁵ Domestic support for the Reagan Doctrine, however, reached another level of commitment during the White House's private third-party fundraising operation, as the Contra's conservative devotees donated large sums of financial and material assistance.

North's third-party domestic soliciting operation offered another mechanism for sustaining the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua while the administration worked with Congress to restore aid. In spring 1984, the administration turned to its closest Republican allies in solidarity for the president's policy. Similar to the international coalition of Contra supporters, domestic devotees provided monetary and material assistance for the Contra program. Using a tax-exempt foundation, the National Endowment for the Preservation of Liberty, North and associates brazenly exchanged access to the White House for funding. They also illegally provided lethal aid for the Contras, as charitable foundations are prohibited from soliciting funds for such equipment. As was the case for all of the operations—international or domestic—the

¹²⁵ Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washing, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991*, 296–304.

administration crossed ethical and legal boundaries in pursuit of support for the Contras. The Reagan Doctrine inherently ascribed little value to restrictions, especially from Congress.¹²⁶

It is of little surprise the operations in Iran and Nicaragua merged, as the two covert operations segue well into each other. The uncompromising, extralegal methods the administration employed in carrying out the Contra program and the Reagan Doctrine generated an operational structure which permitted the diversion of funds from the Iranian arms-for-hostages deal. The president demanded the Contra program remain operational and approved the Iran initiative with a strong commitment to freeing hostages. The Enterprise and Oliver North facilitated both covert actions. In front of the Congressional committees, North dispelled the notion that he was “a loose cannon on the gun deck of state at the NSC.” His actions were reckless, but he understood that his operations facilitated Reagan’s strategy. “We were conducting a covert operation to support the Nicaraguan Resistance, to carry out the President of the United States' stated, publicly-articulated foreign policy," he testified. Reagan’s stated policy of not “breaking faith” with the “freedom fighters” contained a covert provision for the private network assisting the Contras. North’s “neat idea” of diverting funds was therefore within the spirit of the “body and soul” demand for sustaining the Contras. The Reagan Doctrine ultimately produced the Iran-Contra affair. It merely seemed an aberration in its appearance as a political scandal. The covert operations that intersected to create it were

¹²⁶ For overview, see U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, and House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, Chapter 4.

part and parcel of Reagan's strategy for confronting the Soviet Union in a global Cold War.¹²⁷

Under the aegis of the Reagan Doctrine, the Reagan administration conducted covert action in the Third World. The rollback of Soviet power at the periphery and in Nicaragua specifically underpinned the aggressive application of the Reagan Doctrine. This process compelled the administration to construct an off-the-books network with the ability to privately operate around the world without congressional oversight. The White House thus conducted foreign policy against the will of the American people. The CIA, NSC, and private individuals working alongside the Enterprise routinely disregarded criminal behavior. U.S. officials engaged in quid pro quos with allies for third-country Contra funding. North worked alongside a private fundraising network to solicit donations from conservative Americans. When an opportunity arose from the Iran arms-for-hostages deal, North diverted funds for the transactions into the Contra program. The Iran-Contra affair was the Reagan Doctrine fundamentally in action, a result of the Reagan administration conducting the president's foreign policy. Reagan had a simple vision for winning the Cold War, and his administration acted accordingly without regard for consequences.

The ideology and strategy of the Reagan administration produced the covert operations resulting in the Iran-Contra affair. The Reagan administration's Manichaeic worldview informed the application of the Reagan Doctrine. It also corroded the democratic institutions that Reagan championed at Westminster in calling for a democratic revolution to place the Soviet Union in history's ash heap. As Tony Smith

¹²⁷ United States. Congress., *Testimony of Oliver L. North (Questioning by Counsels)*, 36, 93.

observes, "The irony was that the threat to democratic government came in the name of defending democracy." Reagan's anti-communism and singular vision of winning the Cold War engendered a reckless abandon toward implementing a grand strategy, particularly at the periphery of world politics where the Reagan Doctrine applied. For those within the Reagan administration, the Third World was central to the end goal of defeating communism. The private network, third party funding, and evasion of Congress constituted the Reagan Doctrine's means in achieving this end.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), 301–303; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 218–219.

Conclusion

A February 20, 1987, edition of Anthony Lewis's Op-Ed column in the *New York Times* reflects on the Iran-Contra affair. "And now there is the Iran-contra affair," Lewis writes, "It is in part another product of anti-Communist zealotry carried beyond rationality." He links the Contra program with the Reagan Doctrine and claims Reagan and his aides "set up what amounted to a secret government" for conducting the president's policy. "White House aides operated abroad through a network of private agents, avoiding the scrutiny of Congress and of professionals in government - avoiding the law," he correctly reports. "There would be a good subject for a political drama," he sardonically jests, "How a President driven by fear of Communism and impatient with the checks and balances of freedom took us away from the Constitution." The high political drama arrived soon enough. What Lewis could not have known is that the very day his column published, Reagan was in a National Security Planning Group meeting suggesting that his administration remain committed to victory. The U.S. had "to win this one" in Nicaragua.¹²⁹ Even the surmounting Iran-Contra scandal failed to discourage a president determined to wage Cold War.

Reagan entered office with a single vision of confronting the Soviet Union in a battle between competing ideologies and governmental systems. For him, the Cold War had an end and détente prevented it from concluding. Aided by a coalition of Reaganites, neoconservatives, and hawkish Democrats, Reagan reinvigorated the global conflict

¹²⁹ Anthony Lewis, "Abroad at Home; The Real Threat," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1987, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/20/opinion/abroad-at-home-the-real-threat.html>; see Minutes, National Security Planning Group Meeting, "Central America," February 20, 1987, Folder "NSPG 0145 02/20/1987 [Central America]," Box 91308, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG): Records, 1981-1987, RRL.

between capitalism and communism. Members of his administration, especially William Casey, sought an aggressive strategy toward the Soviets. Reagan was rather receptive to his hardline policies. He championed them with rhetoric calling for democratic revolution. This rhetoric also identified the Soviet Union as an evil empire and defined the Cold War as a moral and spiritual struggle between good and evil. The Manichaeian worldview of the administration pervaded its policies. Above all, anti-communism motivated a committed pursuit to the president's foreign policy.

After the administration had formulated and codified the Reagan Doctrine, those tasked with conducting it proceeded with a singular determination in rolling back communism. In the case of Nicaragua, the application was particularly aggressive. If the Cold War centered in Europe between Moscow and Washington, then, the Third World occupied the periphery, where the battle raged in the latter stage of the conflict. The local impact of the global Cold War not only pressured the Sandinistas' institutions in Managua, it stressed the relations between the executive and legislative in Washington. Congressional resistance to the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua fostered a combative environment between Congress and the White House, testing the resolve of the president and the constitutional powers of the legislative branch. When the Boland amendments ended funding for the Contra program, the Reagan administration evaded congressional restraint with a private network to support their policies. Under the direction of Reagan's policy and the command of the National Security Advisor and Director of Intelligence, North managed an off-the-books supply operations for the Contras. He eventually involved the same network in arms-for-hostages deals with Iran, an initiative carried under similar pretexts of evading Congress.

In examining the Iran-Contra affair, it becomes rather apparent that political theater shrouds the event's importance in understanding the Reagan Doctrine. As this study has demonstrated, an interpretation that considers Iran-Contra an aberration of Reagan's foreign policy is incoherent. The Reagan administration's grand strategy for confronting the Soviet Union contained an aggressive component for rolling it back at the periphery of its power. In the framework of the Reagan Doctrine, Nicaragua's location, irrespective of the amount of actual Soviet presence, placed it central to the Cold War. As a truly a global affair, the Reagan Doctrine and its application in Nicaragua demonstrates best the array of actors, institutions, methods, and operations involved in conducting Reagan's counter-revolutionary campaign. Ethical and legal restrictions proved surmountable obstacles for the Reagan Doctrine, until the revelation the administration's operations. Without congressional opposition and public scandal, the Contra war could have possibly expanded into another Vietnam-style war. Indeed, an aberration of policy would have been if Reagan abandon rollback and decided against supporting the Contras.

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