The Iran Contra Affair Essay, Research Paper

The Iran Contra Affair was a secret arrangement to provide funds to Nicaraguan contra rebels from profits accumulated by selling arms to Iran in the 1980’s. There is much controversy surrounding this scandal, including the president’s knowledge of these events. Throughout the trials, President Regan claimed that he knew nothing about the diversion of funds, or the illegal arms sales to Iran. The following information gathered will prove otherwise. The president not only knew about these arrangements, but also made certain that the contra rebels would be funded.

During the trial of Oliver North, he was asked, “Do you remember thinking that you were in a den of thieves?” North was indignant. “I never regarded that I was working in a den of thieves,” he declared. “I honestly believe I was working for honorable men doing their level best to make this country a better place, and I was carrying out lawful orders to that end.” North testified that he had believed that the diversion of arms proceeds had been approved by President Reagan. Throughout the trials North claimed that he was carrying out direct orders from the president, and he felt he was involved in something that was beneficial to him and his country.

President Reagan had pushed congress to authorize funding for the Contras, but congress took no such measure. Even so, the president would have it this way. In 1986, President Reagan authorized the CIA to sell arms directly to Iran, and North coordinated this activity for the president. As the foreign funding for the contras ran out, North and his colleagues inflated the price of the weapons sold to Iran and secretly diverted the excess funds from the U.S. to private Swiss bank accounts.

It seems impossible that President Reagan had no clue as to what was going on in his own administration. He was the head of the U.S. government. At times he contradicted himself when asked about these events. On October 8, 1986, Reagan was asked by a news conference: “ Was there any United Sates involvement in this fight over Nicaragua – carrying the arms – any involvement whatsoever?” Reagan replied, “I’m glad you asked that. Absolutely not.” Later, after the government admitted to selling arms to Iran, Reagan stated that these sales would be stopped. He had to have known about these arrangements before the American public found out.

Reagan’s first priority was freeing the hostages, and Iran had already stated that it would free the hostages if more arms were supplied. This is an even greater cause for Reagan to proceed in aiding the Contras. He wanted to stay an adored public figure, and he wanted to succeed where President Carter failed. He would do so even if the law had to be broken. It was well known that the President ran the White House with full authority. He was personally active in national security affairs and attended almost all of the relevant meetings involving the Iran initiative. He, as much as anyone, should have insisted that an orderly process be observed. In addition, he especially should have made sure that plans were made for handling any public disclosure for the initiative. He must take primary responsibility for the chaos that descended upon the White House when such disclosure did occur.

The President was in full control and should take responsibility for these actions. Everyone in the White House knew who was in charge, so how could something like this just slip by without him knowing?

President Reagan’s knowledge of these events is fairly obvious. It is just hard to see because he knew how to hide things well. The president always watched the way he would say things, and made sure to say them clearly. He never did say go lie to Congress. He did say, for example, when learning of the contribution of a foreign country that we shouldn’t share that with congress. This may seem innocent, but in actuality he is telling these people to lie for him. His knowledge of these events seems pretty clear in some of his statements. On December 8, 1986, Reagan stated, “Let me just say it was not my intent to do business with Khomeini to trade weapons for hostages, nor to undercut our policy of antiterrorism.” Then on March 26, 1987, Reagan stated: “With regard to whether private individuals were giving money to support the contras, yes, I was aware that there were people doing that. But there was nothing to my knowledge, of anyone whom I was aware of.” Two days later Reagan said, “As a matter of fact, I was definitely involved in the decisions about support to the freedom fighters. It was my idea to begin with.” It seems Reagan is taking the credit when it is convenient, but he otherwise denies involvement. Reagan later denied having known of the diversion of funds or having authorized his colleagues to violate the Boland amendments or to deceive congress.

These Iran operations were carried out with the knowledge of, among others, President Ronald Reagan. Reagan had been informed from not one, but many people in his administration. He had known about the secret deals before anyone else. McFarlane spoke with President Reagan shortly after the President’s return from Bethesda Naval Hospital where he had undergone his cancer surgery. McFarlane claims to have informed the president of his proposal to supply arms to Iran, but the president had no recollection of this conversation. Reagan frequently answered questions in this manner. He would say that he could not recall, or he couldn’t remember the conversation.

Reagan had told many lies about the arms deals, and the transfer of funds. He told the Tower Commission that he “approved the shipment of arms by Israel to Iran” but later said that he was “surprised that the Israelis had shipped arms to Iran.” Then he said that incorrectly remembered both instances. He was good at doing this, telling stories that is. Reagan was a good public speaker, and a lot of people believed in what he had to say. He was a true American in the sense that he was what every American pictured in the American president.

Reagan wrote in his autobiography that, “To this day I still believe that the Iran initiative was not an effort to swap arms for hostages. But I knew that it may not look that way to some people. Unfortunately, an initiative meant to develop a relationship with moderate Iranians and get our hostages home took on a new shape I never expected and was never told about. The only way to get the hostages back and develop that relationship would be to negotiate with the Iranians. They wanted something, and the President had to comply to get what he wanted. The hostages got released, and the contras were funded with the President’s knowledge and participation. The commander-in-chief would make these types of negotiations, of compromises.

Reagan was the leader of the government, but to those under him he was more than that. Poindexter said, “The President was the commander-in-chief; and he was also an irresistible civilian employer, a charming and shrewd old man to whom the players felt overpowering loyalty. Reagan was our boss, they were his staff of and his servants, political appointees serving at his pleasure.” This is how most of the administration felt about Reagan. What he wanted was given to him the way he wanted it. His staff and employers did as they were told, no matter what it was. Oliver North once boasted that he would take a spear in his chest for Ronald Reagan. His men were taught to be loyal, and they stayed loyal. They would have done anything for Reagan, even lie at times.

President Reagan lied himself, and frequently told others to lie. He was once pressed by some of his advisors for a commitment that no more arms would go to Iran, but this proposal drew no support. After the meeting, a White House press release stressed concern for the safety of the hostages and pledged that, “no US laws have been or will be violated and our policy of not making concessions to terrorists remains intact.” President Reagan asked his advisors to ensure that their departments refrain from making comments or speculating about these matters. This sounds like the President was trying to keep this covered up, and for no one to look into this statement any further. He did not want anyone to form any ideas that may lead to uncovering a secret.

The Iran Contra is difficult to understand at times. It is hard to determine who told the truth, and who lied. It just seems easier to trust the one man, whom nearly everyone did trust, the President. He was more than the President to a lot of Americans. He was what many Americans pictured as the classic family man with all of the morals and truth that should come with any man. People are very innocent and na?ve. This man was the head of the United States government. There were no secret negotiations that went on behind his back. Those negotiations were secret from congress and the American public. Reagan asked for permission from congress to supply arms to Iran on many occasions, and when he did not get what he wanted, he took it. He lied to congress, he lied to the American people, and he had other people in his administration do the same. He ran the White House. He had all of the power, all the trust and loyalty of his administration, and they went down for him. He is as much to blame for this scandal as anyone.

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