

The Iran-Contra Affair

① The Iran-Contra Affair was a secret action not approved of by the United States Congress. It began in 1985, when President Ronald Reagan's administration supplied weapons to Iran — an enemy of the United States. President Reagan hoped that American hostages, held in Lebanon, would be released if he sold weapons to Iran. They were held hostage by Hezbollah terrorists who were loyal to Iran's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini was the leader who replaced the Shah when he was exiled to the U.S. (and led to the Iran Hostage Crisis).



② The U.S. took millions of dollars from the weapons sale and routed (sent) them to the right-wing "Contra" guerrillas in Nicaragua (people fighting against revolutionaries in Nicaragua, loyal to the government). The Contras opposed the Sandinista Junta of National Reconstruction Party in Nicaragua. The Sandinista Junta took power in July 1979, after overthrowing Anastasio Somoza Debayle. This ended his family's 43-year control of the country of Nicaragua.

Illegal trading

- ③ The transactions that took place in the Iran-Contra scandal were against the legislation (laws) of the Democrat-controlled Congress, and did not follow official Reagan administration policy. Part of the deal was that, in July 1985, the United States would send 508 American-made TOW anti-tank missiles from Israel to Iran in return for the safe release of a hostage, the Reverend Benjamin Weir.
- ④ After that successful transfer, the Israelis offered to ship 500 HAWK surface-to-air missiles to Iran in November 1985, in exchange for the release of all remaining American hostages being held in Lebanon. Eventually the arms were sold, the hostages were released, and the money was hidden by the U.S. government by sending it away to support the Contras.
- ⑤ In February 1986, 1,000 TOW missiles were shipped to Iran. From May to November, there were more shipments of various weapons and parts.
- ⑥ Eventually Hezbollah decided to kidnap more hostages following their release of the previous ones, which left the U.S. no longer willing to make deals with Iran.

The affair is exposed

- ⑦ It was not until 1986 that word had got out about the secret deals. The Lebanese magazine Ash-Shiraa published a series of articles in November 1986 that exposed the weapons-for-hostages deal. On November 18th, 1987, the Congress issued a report on the affair that stated the president bore "ultimate responsibility."



Contra support.

Upon further investigation, Attorney General Edwin Meese verified the report, confirming that the Iran-Contra Affair was true. An independent special prosecutor, Lawrence E. Walsh, was assigned to investigate the (8) deals involving the arms sale and the Contra support.

President Reagan appointed a review board, headed by former Republican Senator John Tower. The Tower Commission's report concluded that the president had not done well in controlling the National Security Council, the agency that had actually made the illegal deals. Also, they decided that he had known about the arms sale to the Iranians. However, it could not be discovered in hearings if the president had known about the

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(10) Court hearings and convictions

The hearings surrounding the scandals were on television from May to August in 1987. Military aide Marine Lt. Colonel Oliver North, former CIA chief William J. Casey, National Security Advisor John Poindexter, former defense secretary Caspar Weinberger, and many other high-ranking government officials were publicly investigated.

(11) It was finally found that National Security Advisor Poindexter had personally authorized the transfer of money to the Contra rebels. However, he had withheld the information from President Reagan. The CIA's William J. Casey played a part in the conspiracy, but he died during the hearings.

As a military aide to the National Security Council, North had been the main negotiator. During his hearings he repeatedly explained that he was

(12) "under orders from his superiors." North's plea of innocence was ignored, and in May 1989, he was convicted of obstructing Congress and unlawfully destroying government documents. A few years later, when George H.W. Bush was president, North's conviction was taken off his record on the grounds that he had acted strictly out of patriotism.

(13) Poindexter was convicted in April 1990 on five counts of deceiving Congress and sentenced to six months in prison. Two years later, Weinberger also was convicted of five counts of deceiving Congress. Both Poindexter and Weinberger's convictions were overturned — which relieved them of any accumulated responsibility. On Christmas Eve 1992, President George H.W. Bush issued presidential pardons to all indicted in the scandal. The Iran-Contra Affair was ended.

