

The Iran Contra Affair: Reagan's Greatest Failure

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ABSTRACT

The paper is focused on the individuals who were involved in the affair directly and those who investigated the under the table dealings of the Reagan administration, as well as Reagan's part in the affair. It also looks at how the affair came to light, and how the whole affair was swept under the rug within a few years due to popular U.S. Cold War beliefs and the fear of communism spreading. Even those appointed to investigate Reagan could not do much, since he was so popular, and would remain so after what he had done came to light. He was essentially slapped on the wrist for having a "lax managerial style" and was not removed from the office. In the end, those convicted for their roles in the arms dealing were pardoned, even as late as 1991, by president HW Bush, who was Reagans vice president.

The Iran Contra Affair was a major political scandal in the United States that lasted from August 1985 to March 1987. \$30 million dollars' worth of missiles were sold to Iran in an attempt to free seven American hostages held in Lebanon by the terrorist group Hezbollah, a group with close ties to Iran. President Reagan, perhaps in failing health, initially made the argument that he was not "negotiating" with terrorists, but rather securing an ally in the Middle East, an area where the U.S. badly needed one. Since Iran had close ties with Hezbollah, the logic Reagan and others used was that with the selling of weapons to Iran, Hezbollah would let the hostages go. Regardless of Reagan's intent, the incident had major repercussions, including Hezbollah gathering more hostages after releasing others, and the blatant defiance of the Boland Amendment, as well as the Iran government receiving more weapons and the costs associated with that. In the end, the hostages Hezbollah gathered were, in actuality, never released after support from the U.S. stopped. Because of the political climate at the time, the major figures involved in the affair were tried but many never did any prison time.

Firstly, it is important to understand the wider context in which this occurred. America had feared the spread of communism for decades, since the beginning of the Cold War. Communism was portrayed in the United States as essentially a boogeyman that was out to end American values in the world. Stalin had an iron grip on his territories through 1953, and the people of the Soviet Union suffered immensely because of it. Even after Stalin's death, Gorbachev ran the Soviet Union during the Iran Contra Scandal, where conditions barely improved. The American populace saw their Soviet Union counterparts' lack of freedom or even basic rights as completely unacceptable, and so it became America's goal to stop the spread of communism. Because of this fight against Communism, when the communist Sandinista's took control of Nicaragua in 1979 the U.S. government, more specifically Reagan and his inner circle were naturally interested in removing them from power. The Contra opposition occurred that same year, and the U.S. began sending them supplies and training, courtesy of the CIA. The Contras were a far-right organization, which fit perfectly with Reagan's ideals, with the president even going so far as to say that "they are the moral equivalent of our own founding fathers"¹. The Contra cause could well have been defeated if not for U.S. support, which came from places even the general public did not see until years later, in 1986. President Reagan had been a willing participant in the selling of missiles to Iran, along with the chief of the CIA, William Casey, National Security Advisor John Poindexter, and then unknown Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. These men all supported the selling of missiles to

¹ Gerald Boyd "Reagan Terms Nicaraguan Rebels 'Moral Equal Of Founding Fathers'." , The New York Times, March 2nd 1985

Iran, and the subsequent diversion of funds towards the Contra rebels cause in Nicaragua. The U.S. sold \$30 million dollars' worth of missiles to Iran, but only \$12 million or so reached the U.S. government, with the other \$18 million supporting the Contra cause, all without the general public knowing. This went strictly against the Boland Amendment, passed years earlier, that was specifically designed to keep the U.S. government from supporting the Contras.

It is interesting to see how the affair came to light, and it highlights just how connected our world was, even back during the last 1980's. The Lebanese magazine *Ash Shiraa*² revealed condemning evidence of the weapon sales to Iran. The magazine reported that the U.S. had been selling weapons to Iran so 7 American hostages could be released. This clearly went against Reagan's "don't negotiate with terrorists" policy, which had also been U.S. policy in the past and still stands today. It also went against Reagan's general persona as someone who did not negotiate with enemies, which is what partially drew people to him at the polls. *Ash Shiraa* was told this information by Mehdi Hashemi friends. He had been a senior official in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, but was arrested right before the affair began while in Iran, since he was a revolutionary with potentially damaging information. Eugene Hasenfus had been a pilot working for the CIA, but during one of his runs to the Contras with much needed weapons his aircraft was shot down by the Sandinistas. He admitted to them that he was working for the CIA and essentially admitted to the affair. With this information being brought to light, it spread quickly, and on November 25th, 1986 Attorney General Edwin Meese announced all that the U.S. had done in the affair. Because of this revelation to the public, John Poindexter was forced to retire, and Reagan fired Oliver North due to his involvement, shortly after the affair was discovered.

What happened after the affair was leaked was very interesting and telling of the American political mindset at the time. In the short term, Reagan suffered a loss of popularity among even members of his own party, and was forced to take full responsibility for his actions in the affair. But by the time his 2nd term ended, he left with one of the highest popularity rankings of any president since FDR, decades earlier. President Bush pardoned those convicted in the affair in 1992, showing that even for those involved, there would be no repercussions. But why did the public seemingly care so little for the whole affair? An Amendment was violated, rebel groups were supported, and the U.S. clearly negotiated with terrorists. The answer lies in the political and social thought of the time, which was staunchly against the spread of Communism and its ideals, and in support of President Reagan. If it was a different time period, the public would likely have viewed this severe lack of judgment of Reagan and his advisors as a potentially impeachable offense. Also, the personality Reagan had won many voters over, and that kind of natural charisma can help immensely with public image when a major affair happens. Imagine, if President Trump had made a similar mistake during his term. The Democrats would have immediately moved to impeach him, potentially succeeded, and his popularity would have fallen even further than it was. Reagan did have impeachment leveled against him, but it did not go through in the end, and within a few years he left office with a strong following that lasts even today. The other main factor for the public's acceptance of the affair would be their disdain for communism. Every American wanted the Soviet Union to stop spreading its influence and it is unlikely anyone would have been greatly upset by the collapse of the Soviet Union. So when they heard that the money being diverted was being sent to an anti-communist group in Nicaragua, that would have softened the blow of the blatant defiance of the law. While it is true that Congress and most of the American public did not want to send support to the Contras, the fact that it was Reagan doing it made it easier to accept. It was clear from the start that Reagan would manage to escape all major repercussions of his actions because of these 2 factors, and in fact he did. Many presidents throughout history have relied on their popularity to ignore the rules placed before them, from Andrew Jackson ignoring the Supreme Court and removing Native Americans from their land to FDR serving 4 terms during World War 2 because the people believed in him. Truly, popularity can be among the president's most powerful tools.

But how exactly did the whole affair manage to avoid the public eye? Well, there were a number of plans in motion to keep the public uninformed and even the larger governmental body out of the loop, one of which being the operation of a Swiss bank. It was purposely planned out by the parties involved that the U.S. government at large

² Hassan Sabra, *Ash Shiraa* November 3rd, 1986

would be kept in the dark on the funneling of money to the Contras, which was done through a Swiss bank account. Oliver North, General Richard V. Secord, and Albert Hakim all played a part in the setting up of the bank account³. Richard Secord in particular had a Panama-based company by the name of Lake Resources. Oliver North helped set up the account, as well as some other individuals. Albert Hakim set up the Stanford Technology Trading Group International⁴(STTGI) company with Secord, but the company quickly became another way to supply the Contra Rebels. The bank records spent a year in litigation in Switzerland, but when the documents were released it was substantial to put it lightly. There were thousands of pages about the dealings of North and the others funneling the money to the Contra rebels, and they also detailed the American weapon sales to Iran. The evidence practically guaranteed the indictment of Oliver North, since he both set up the account and knew full well what the money was going towards, as well as purposely going around the U.S. government.

Clearly affairs like this do not simply happen, they need people, usually of high ranking and importance, to carry them out. A multitude of individuals, with specific abilities were involved in this, due to their connections and knowledge of the system and how to avoid it. People like Robert McFarlane, Manucher Ghorbanifar, John Tower, Casper Weinberger, Oliver North, William Casey and many others all helped keep the public and most of the government in the dark, or at least to lessen the severity of the accusations against President Reagan, in John Towers case. Even future president George HW Bush played an important role in the affair, since he pardoned many of the individuals involved just before leaving office.

Robert McFarlane and his influence on the affair cannot be overstated. He assigned Oliver North to the handling of the money used from the missile sales in Iran to the Contras, although he later claimed this was not the case, and that North had done that of his own volition, which seems unlikely since McFarlane was his superior officer. He clearly felt conflicted in his role in the affair, and eventually attempted suicide, feeling he was betrayed by Reagan, who had greenlit his every move but claimed otherwise. He was charged with 4 misdemeanors in the end, which essentially were regarding lying to members of Congress and other figures in the investigation.

When the scandal came to light, Reagan was forced to appoint a commission to investigate the events and find evidence of wrongdoing, so former senator John Tower, former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie were all put on the commission. They also had a secondary goal, which was to find and suggest a way in which to stop such activities from happening in the future and report those ideas to the National Security Council. The commission concluded that Reagan was not involved with the affair, and that CIA director William Casey should have overseen the operation of weapon sales more closely, and that he should have also told Reagan about the dealings as well as Congress. This report is immensely indicative of how the situation was seen and handled at the time. Reagan was a very popular president, so no one wanted to come out and criticize him. He appointed Tower to the commission specifically because he thought he would be let off easier with a Republican in charge of the group looking into the affair, which clearly worked in the end. While it is highly probable that Reagan knew all about the dealings, with multiple people attached to the affair saying he gave them the go-ahead, the public was not interested in attacking the popular president. Even the commission's report used soft spoken language, stating that "Reagan was accountable for lax managerial style and aloofness from policy detail"⁵. That statement shows how beloved Reagan was, despite his breaking of several laws and the Boland amendment, the public was still unwilling to hold him fully accountable. Even in the years after the affair was discovered, and the public became more willing to acknowledge that Reagan was likely involved, he is very rarely seen as the "bad guy" and is still a very popular ex-President. This is simply another symptom of the cause that was the Cold War. In another time, Reagan likely would have been held much more accountable, but because of his charisma and Cold War social and political thought, he is

³ Philip Shenon, "Swiss Bank Records In Iran-Contra Case Are Released to U.S." The New York Times, November 4th, 1987

⁴ Albert Hakim: Head Of The Enterprise, Brown University, accessed 11-21-22

⁵ Tower Commission Rep, 1987.

remembered as a true American, despite all his wrong doings. In the end, people saw him as a person who would fight communism no matter the cost, which was a fantastic way for the public to view anyone in the late 1980's. It was clear from the beginning that the Tower Commission either could not or would not criticize Reagan for his role in the affair, due to their own potential bias, the public outcry that likely would have arisen from such severe accusations, and potentially Reagan's ability to make their lives very difficult if they went too far.

Manucher Ghorbanifar was an Iranian arms dealer, who allegedly was the person who urged Oliver North to funnel the funds from the missile sales to Iran into the Contra rebellion. The U.S. government labeled him a "intelligence fabricator", since he failed 3 separate lie detector tests, which potentially angered him, leading to his urging of his Iranian contacts to leak the story of the affair. Despite this, in the future he continued to give intelligence to the U.S. government, especially his fake intelligence about enriched uranium being snuck into Iran from Iraq, which obviously turned out to be untrue, but is a potential justification for U.S. involvement in the Middle East.

Casper Weinberger was the Secretary of Defense when the Iran Contra affair began, and although he had told President Reagan that the weapon sales to Iran was illegal, he was involved in the affair by the end. He lied to Congress multiple times about his knowledge of the missile sales, and attempted to stop Congress from seeing his personal journals, which clearly showed that he had extensive knowledge of the dealings with Iran. Lawrence Walsh, who was appointed to be the Independent Council in the Iran Contra affair, attempted to show all of Weinbergers' crimes, but could not do so before Weinberger was pardoned by President Bush. If he had not been pardoned, then Walsh was prepared to charge Weinberger with 5 counts, those being:

1. Obstruction of a congressional investigation by concealing and withholding relevant notes.
2. Making false statements to Congress regarding his knowledge of Saudi Arabia's funding of the Contras.
3. Perjury before Congress about his knowledge of the planned shipment of HAWK missiles to Iran in November 1985.
4. Perjury before Congress about his knowledge of the issue of replenishing missiles that Israel had shipped to Iran.
5. False statements to the Office of Independent Counsel and the FBI regarding his notetaking.

These charges possibly would likely have seen Weinberger serve serious prison time, but even that appears to not be a guarantee, since it is entirely possible that years later, HW Bush would pardon him regardless.

George HW Bush was President Reagan's Vice President, so naturally he also played an important part in the affair. When he ran for re-election in 1992 and lost to Bill Clinton, he pardoned some of those involved in the Iran Contra scandal. The people he pardoned were those that were clearly guilty of their roles in the affair, and from withholding information about what had happened from Congress. Among those he pardoned were Casper Weigner and Robert McFarlane, both of whom played important parts in the affair. Weigner specifically was set to go on trial in just 12 days, and if he had it would have been probable that his personal notebook would have been turned over, which would have had a very negative impact on President Bush' legacy. The notebook had information in it confirming what many at the time thought, that Bush knew about the weapon sales to Iran and covered it up from the American public. Since president Bush was on his way out from office, he did not face any consequences for this action, and even today he is looked favorably upon by Republicans.

William Casey was the CIA director during the Iran-Contra affair, and many suspected that he knew more than he let on about the affair. He tried to limit what the outside world knew about the potential CIA involvement in the selling of weapons to Iran, and although many suspect that he was involved, there is no definitive proof. On the day before he was set to testify to Congress, he suffered 2 seizures and was hospitalized. He was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and soon after Richard Secord testified that Casey knew the details of the affair, Casey died. After his death, the House October Surprise Task Force made public that the charges against Casey were being dropped.

As important as these men were in conducting the affair, it is also important to know about the men who investigated them, and why even their in-depth investigations were not enough to see anything significant happen to those involved. Lawrence Walsh was appointed Independent Council and was tasked with following the investigation through to its conclusion. A 3 city operation was started, in New York City, Oklahoma City, and Washington, DC⁶, and Walsh, with help from several different teams, compiled a very detailed list of charges and the people involved with the affair. When the evidence was presented, many of those who played a part in the affair were convicted, but many of which were either pardoned by a 3-judge panel soon after or by President HW Bush years later. When this happened, Walsh was quoted as saying “The Iran-Contra scandal cover up... is now complete”. The conclusion of the affair was clearly something that Walsh did not want to happen, at least not in the way he wanted it to end. He clearly wanted to see those guilty of their crimes punished, but unfortunately the U.S. was still a little too anti-communist to allow that to happen. I would argue that if we were not in the Cold War, those convicted would have faced harsher consequences for their actions, and would not have simply been able to walk away from the charges.

It would take an exceptionally popular president to not be impeached because of these offenses, let alone regain his popularity after the affair was discovered, but Reagan managed to do both. He was able to do this because of the economy, and his natural charisma. The economy was a major reason that people valued Reagan so much and continue to do so. Democracy has a number of advantages over Communism, and the economy is a major factor. Part of the reason Reagan and the American public did not want Communism to spread was because the people of the Soviet Union were so poor that even basic commodities were unaffordable, and it was thought that if this way of government spread then everyone within those territories would suffer immensely. Huge bread lines were the norm in that part of the world, and even getting basic necessities like shoes was difficult. The U.S. prided itself on its economy and widely accessible goods, and during the Reagan era especially the U.S. was very proud of these factors. Communism was yet again seen as the polar opposite of what we had achieved in the U.S., and the U.S. had another reason to be profoundly anti-communist. Reagan promised to lower taxes, which was a very popular idea at the time as well as today, and the citizens of the Soviet Union were perceived as being taxed more, and they also had to pay taxes for not having children, for example.

President Reagan’s favored economic strategy was the Trickle-down Economics theory. The trickle down theory in the U.S. was supported by Reagan, and it was 1) endorsed by Republicans and 2) radically different from the Soviet model, so many members of the leadership endorsed it, partially for that reason. The choosing of this economic system shows very clearly how the U.S. operated at the time. If communism made its citizens poor and did not have strong private companies, then the obvious solution, as it seemed to the U.S., was to strengthen private corporations and then the average citizen would receive a portion of that wealth. Virtually every American at the time prided themselves on not being communist, and being labeled as such could quickly destroy a politician’s career. The word itself was essentially taboo, and the U.S. government wanted to be as anti-communist as possible, even so far as to influence our ideals of how economies should work. It was not necessarily based in fact, but the bottom line was that our businesses were strong and U.S. citizens had access to much more than their Soviet counterparts. Our leader, President Reagan, had a very high popularity rating because of how citizens viewed his economic outlook as well as his hard stance against communism, and in the late 1980s, those 2 factors covered most of your bases for the voting electorate. Once again we see how the Cold War affected our country in every aspect, from what lengths our leaders would go through to secure democracy, to how our economy was run, as to show why our form of government was the only option for any country that wanted to have a successful, economically viable system of government.

Another clear sign that Cold War politics played a role in the affair was the U.S. ability to overlook the Contras’ various crimes committed during their rebellion. In July of 1985, a part of the Human Rights Watch organization, Americas Watch found that Contra forces regularly attacked civilians and used torture to get information to use against the Sandinista government.⁷ The Reagan administration claimed that the opposite was true, and the Contras

⁶ Walsh Report, 1993

⁷ Tyroler Report, 1987

were fighting against the government partially for committing these actions. The U.S. often ignored data collected by the embassy in Managua, Nicaragua's capital, when it proved what was actually happening in the country. Under different conditions, the U.S. could well have reacted very differently to this data, but because of the Reagan administration's compulsion to stop the spread of Communism no matter what, they let the war crimes slip under the radar.

Up until this point in the paper, we have focused primarily on the U.S., but to understand the consequences we must also look at the other countries involved, and how past history informed their decisions during the affair. Firstly, we will cover the Nicaraguan Revolution, in part. The revolution lasted from 1978-1990 and the series of events that led to the Contra Rebellion occurred in 1978 and 1979, when the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) succeeded in removing the Somoza dictatorship from power, which they had held since 1936. The Somoza rule was primarily one of inequality for its citizens and greed, since the family regularly accepted corporate bribes as well as took the international aid meant for the 1972 earthquake relief.⁸ The Sandinista cause was created out of an effort to remove the Somoza's from power, and in time they grew strong enough to fight back with a military of their own. Eventually, the Sandinistas won when they took the capital city, Managua. Perhaps ironically, once the Sandinistas were in power they claimed that elections were unnecessary. One election was held in 1984, but some of the opposing parties refused to participate, and the FSLN won the election. Daniel Ortega was elected President, and he quickly began securing power for himself, similar to what the Somozas had done in the past. In 1990, elections were held in Nicaragua again, where Chamorro, of the UNO party surprisingly won, which forced the Sandinistas to leave control of the government to their enemies. Because of the outcome of the election, the U.S. government and popular media outlets, as well as Reagan and Bush rejoiced that the Nicaraguans had chosen democracy over authoritarian, communist rule.⁹ This is yet more evidence that the public, while mostly against the funding of the Contras, still wanted to eradicate communism wherever it may be. This also shows why exactly the public was more accepting of the affair than they would be otherwise, without the fear of communism. The U.S. had helped defeat a communist government, and at the end of the day no American during the Cold War could be completely against that outcome, even if the means to reach it were highly questionable.

Ortega committed many actions that years earlier, the FSLN had accused the Somoza regime for, and he was voted out of office in 1990. The UNO party victory was not to be long lasting, however, and in 2007 Ortega was elected back into office, where he still serves today. Truly, the FSLN became the very thing they wished to destroy in the Somoza regime, becoming a very repressive government that did little for their citizens. Today, Ortega regularly imprisons people that could run against him in elections, and many Nicaraguans and even U.S. reporters have fled the country, fearing for their personal liberties and freedoms.

With all this talk of the U.S. and Nicaragua, it can be easy to forget that Iran had a past that played into its role in the affair as well. The Iranian Islamic Revolution occurred in 1979, and a group of college students that supported the revolution attacked the U.S. embassy in Tehran. This was done primarily because 1) the students worried that U.S. influence in the country had grown too large and the revolution would come undone, and 2) to pressure President Jimmy Carter to send back the shah to Iran, so he would be forced to appear in court for his crimes. The captives were held for 444 days, and were released once Reagan took office. Because of this embassy attack, the U.S. became unwilling to sell weapons to Iran, and only once the hostages were released did the U.S. relax its embargo on Iran. The official operation name was Operation: Staunch, and the U.S. tried to persuade its allies to not sell weapons to Iran because of the hostages that were being held. Even after the hostages were released on his inauguration day, Reagan was hesitant to sell weapons to Iran directly, at least publicly. Weapons manufactured in the U.S. that were sold to other countries did continue to enter Iran, however, but by publicly making the claim that the U.S. would not sell weapons directly to Iran, Reagan strengthened his public image. Still, by selling weapons to countries close to Iran either politically or geographically or both, it was practically guaranteed that U.S. weapons would get inside Iran.

⁸ Nicaragua Background of U.S. Policy in Latin America and the Rise of the Somoza Dynasty in Nicaragua Brown University accessed 11-21-22.

⁹ Washington, Bush calls Reagan to rejoice over Chamorro victory, UPI February 27th, 1990.

Interestingly, the Reagan Administration did not follow Operation Staunch nearly as well as our allies did. This duality, of making laws to appear strong and then violating them behind the back of the public and our allies to our perceived benefit, is very fascinating to say the least. Reagan was against the funding of Iran because of their ties to the terrorist organization Hezbollah, and fear that they would use U.S. weapons to commit terroristic acts with. The U.S. believed that by not selling weapons to Iran, we would nudge the country to seek support from the Soviet Union. Since clearly the U.S. did not want Iran to become Communist, we began selling them weapons. Fear of communism spreading was a major driving force behind much of what Reagan did during the course of his presidency, and this is simply another example of the U.S. doing everything it could to both appear strong and fight communism. The fact that the weapons could, and likely did go on to support Hezbollah in some capacity did not matter to Reagan at the time, so long as they were not communist.

Now that we have seen how the U.S. handled the situation, it is time to ask why exactly Reagan chose to conduct the affair the way he did. Yes, the people he surrounded himself with played major roles that were crucial to how everything in the affair was handled, but at the end of the day Reagan was the President, the person in charge. So why did he allow all of this to happen in the first place? Reagan's health likely played a role in the affair, since only a few years after leaving office, he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Many over the years have questioned if his failing health played a role in the affair, and it is not out of the question that a deteriorating memory and physical ability would make someone, even the president, commit acts that they would have thought more clearly about before having the illness. Even his own son has stated that his father has Alzheimer's while in office¹⁰. Alzheimer's is a very serious disease, as anyone knows, but the real danger of it is that it is hard for you to see that you have it. The gradual loss of mental function can be difficult for other people to see in the early stages, and by the time something is clearly wrong the damage could have already been done, especially if you happen to be the President of the U.S. Would Reagan have been more hesitant to sell weapons to Iran if he was able to see the situation more clearly? Perhaps, but nothing is set in stone. Maybe he was able to see the situation clearly, but in any case, the possibility of Alzheimer's impacting his judgment can never be truly known but must always be suspected. In the case that Alzheimers did impact his judgment, then it is quite simply a massive moral failing on Reagan's part to not address the issue before it had progressed too far. Whether or not Reagan knew he had the disease, he would have been able to tell when his memory began failing him in the early stages that he should stop being president and let Vice President Bush take the office. But he did not do that, and now we will forever question his mental ability in office. The mental health of the president is paramount to the stability of the nation, and the U.S. is no exception to that rule.

You might be asking how President Reagan's mental illness fits into a paper written on American political and social thought during the Cold War and how it pertains to the Iran Contra affair, since the 2 appear unrelated. To this I would respond that Reagan having Alzheimer's was a risk the American public was willing to take because of his hard stance on Communism. Reagan was 69 when he was elected, at the time the oldest president ever elected to office. Being that old, clearly his health was not as good as it once was, but we chose him regardless. People's perception of Jimmy Carter being unfit to lead as well as Reagan's personality made him the winner of the election. The fact that the older you get the more likely you are to suffer from an illness or be more forgetful did not deter his supporters, and in the end it could well have been a costly mistake. Because people did not care about the mental fitness of the president and his ability to lead, and only wanted a strong conservative in charge to make the U.S. appear strong, they chose Reagan. We wanted a strong leader at the time, and since Reagan was the clearest choice for much of the voting population voted for him. He symbolized America at the time, for both better and worse. Carter was seen as being weak on Communism, so the majority of Americans, in fear of their lifestyle being erased, simply had to pick someone else. This might not have necessarily been the case, but it is clear that many people felt that way during that time period.

¹⁰ The Guardian, Ronald Reagan had Alzheimer's while president, says son.

It is interesting to see just how far-reaching U.S. policy was in regards to the affair. Those that would have been convicted of serious national security crimes were merely pardoned, and it is clear that even though the investigation was thorough, that nothing serious would ever happen to the major figures in the affair. Sure, some people resigned or were fired, but against the severity of their crimes they could well have ended up behind bars for years, if it was not for the Cold War and Reagan's help for those involved in an affair that he was very clearly aware of. Reagan's popularity is what allowed him to do these actions, since the American public saw him as a fierce advocate of democracy and fighting force against communism. Even the individuals Reagan did not pardon directly still were not in much danger of prison time, since the remnants of the administration would look after their own.

Multiple laws were broken by the administration during the course of the affair, with the most major being the blatant disregard for the Boland amendment. The Amendment was designed specifically to keep the U.S. from supporting the Contra cause. It was no 1 specific amendment, but rather a series of acts that were passed through Congress. In its first act, it stipulated that no government agency could use funds to overthrow the government in Nicaragua,¹¹ but the Amendment would only last from December of 1984 to December of 1985. However, there were loopholes that Robert McFarlane exploited, those being the CIA ability to support the Contras as long as the money was not going towards overthrowing the Sandinistas, and the use of the National Security Council to do undercover activities in Nicaragua without violating the amendment. The 2nd amendment lasted through December of 1986, and closed the loopholes that the 1st Boland Amendment had. To be fair, both Democrats and Republicans, on a wide scale, did not want to support the rebels. But it is clear that Democrats were the least supportive of the rebellion, since a Democrat, Edward P. Boland introduced the Amendment, and President Reagan and most of his inner circle did not want the amendment to pass. This is very interesting, since it is a great snapshot of how Americans felt during the Cold War. Neither Republican or Democrat voters wanted to spend resources on the Contra cause that were seen as too distant from the U.S., but Republican leadership, which was very capitalist, pushed forward regardless. Capitalists and communists had been battling for decades, with both seeing the other as the morally worst parts of humanity personified in a political structure. Reagan truly believed that the spread of communism would put everyone on Earth at great danger for losing their rights and liberties. So clearly because of Cold War politics, he saw no choice in the fight against communism, no matter the lengths he had to go to.

The discovery of the affair affected the U.S. on the world stage in a number of significant ways. It was the biggest political scandal since Watergate in 1972, and for many Americans was another example of their elected officials lying to them about matters of great consequence. While Reagan got off relatively easy, this did affect Americans on a wide scale. It decreased trust in the government and our elected officials, which is a trend we see continued today. Since the affair happened, the public has been less willing to fully trust those we elect and even our presidents. In the case of President Obama, some even said he was not born in the U.S., and thus was unfit to be president, even when presented with evidence to the contrary. Many Americans believe President Bush committed crimes in the Middle East with his mobilization of troops there, and that he had ulterior motives for fighting the "war on terror" for almost all of his presidency. The fact that we have so little faith in those we elect can be associated, in part, to the Iran-Contra scandal, which happened decades ago. The violation of Operation:Staunch and the Boland Amendment embarrassed the U.S. all around the globe, and although most were not convinced, many of the members involved were forced to give up their titles.

In the end, the U.S. was able to spread its ideals once again to the rest of the world, which created, in large part, the world we live in today. It is fascinating to see that without the Cold War, American influence would not be nearly as widespread as it has become in recent decades. The ushering in of democracies to many countries during the nearly 50 years long conflict has irreversibly changed our world. If the USSR had won the power struggle, then our world would look completely different than it does today, so it is important to study every part of the Cold War, to see why everything turned out the way it did, in the end. Perhaps ironically, the Cold War allowed the U.S. to further its influence farther and faster than it would have otherwise, which was the opposite of what the Soviet Union desired.

¹¹ "The 2nd Boland Amendment." Understanding the Iran-Contra affairs – the Iran-Contra Affairs.

In a world in which the Cold War did not happen, then the U.S. could well be less popular than it is currently. Without the decades-long threat of nuclear weapons being deployed, perhaps the world would have progressed faster, and with less cause of fear.

Conclusion: The Iran Contra Scandal had massive impacts on the United States and the rest of the world, and was influenced strongly by American political and social thought. Reagan was fearful of the spread of Communism, as was the U.S. public in general, and he took actions to limit the spread, even if they were immoral and ultimately did not help anyone except the Contras in Nicaragua. The Cold War was very clearly still a factor in 1980's America, and while Democrats were in support of the Boland Amendment, Republicans voted against it showing the differing viewpoints the 2 sides had in fighting communism and the lengths required to do so. While Reagan's actions were clearly made in the wrong state of mind, it can be argued in his failing health, and potentially suffering from Alzheimer's, he could not see the situation clearly, or as clearly as he should have been able to. While Reagan announced the diagnosis years after he left office, it is very potentially true that he had the disease for some time but did not know or did not announce it to the public. In any case, when the public learned of the affair they were upset for a short time, but because of a combination of Reagan's charisma and the public's disdain for communism and its ideals, the president was not faced with any major repercussions for his actions. Even today, Reagan is very well regarded by members of his party and almost revered, with some today seeing Trump as a more modern Reagan. Those major figures involved in the affair managed to make it out of the whole scandal without any serious charges against them coming into effect. President HW Bush pardoned McFarlane and some others involved before they could be convicted, John Poindexter only served 6 months of prison time, and Oliver North was fired, but did not face prison time which some like Lawrence Walsh, clearly protested. Hearings were held and the argument to impeach President Reagan was made, but because of how popular he was nothing came of it. Within a few years Reagan left office with one of the highest popularity ratings of any president, with very few able to surpass his approval ratings when he left office. It is abundantly clear that the U.S. populace saw Reagan as a kind of all American hero that would not allow communism to crush democracy. With his personality and charisma he was able to do illegal actions and not face many repercussions for doing so, because the average American saw him in too much of a positive light. You could even say that charisma was passed down to George HW Bush, since he pardoned many of those awaiting court dates when he left office in 1992, and did not face any major repercussions. Even today, Republicans still vouch for his system of "trickle-down economics", even though it has never been proven to work, much less in the U.S. specifically. The economy was something Reagan prided himself on, and it was a big part of why the average American supported him so much. The economy was seen as a major part of every country, and having a strong economy lends itself well to the idea that our system of government, Democracy, is superior to Communism. With all of these factors, it comes as no surprise that the Iran-Contra affair was swept under the rug within a few short years.

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