

## Contragate: The Issues Behind the Scandal

by Bill Snyder  
& Sonja Ungemach

The emotional intensity of recent testimony by Lt. Col. Oliver North and others has blurred the greater issue behind the Iran-Contra scandal—the secret and unlimited use of governmental power.

In 1979, U.S. and world opinion had turned against the corrupt and totalitarian regime of Anastasio Somoza. The Congress voted to cut off aid, and the bill was signed into law by Pres. Carter. But arms and support continued to flow to Somoza. In spite of this secret military support, the dictatorial government of Somoza fell to the popular uprising of the Sandinistas. The new Nicaraguan government was accepted by the U.S. and the world. Somoza's generals in exile, however, continued to receive covert aid and encouragement to oust the Sandinistas.

That Somoza's former military leaders, the Contras, were now being called "freedom fighters" was the first lie to the American people. The lies continued. It was in the national security interest of the U.S. to "interdict the flow of arms" (from the Sandinistas) to the rebels in El Salvador, though no evidence of any arms flow was found. Then the President wanted to "apply pressure," to make the Sandinistas live up to their promises. That's when we (the U.S. government) mined the harbors of Nicaragua, and the CIA prepared and disseminated "assassination manuals." Next it was to prevent the establishment of a Soviet military base—\$100 million was needed to prevent a "major disruption" in Latin America. Finally, the President proclaimed, "I, too, am a Contra!"

In spite of the lies, 73 percent of Americans opposed aid to the Contras in early 1984. In March, Congress expressly cut off all aid with the passage of the Boland Amendment. The

President signed the bill into law, and again the military aid did not stop.

Congressional hearings on the Contragate scandal have shown that repeated assurances by State Department officials, the CIA, and members of the President's National Security Council did not reflect reality. Quite the contrary; the proceedings have uncovered a secret network of arms dealers, paramilitary zealots and National Security and intelligence officials within the government that persisted in arming and supporting the Contras.

### The Secret Team

These revelations have only scratched the surface, however, according to Christic Institute attorney Daniel Sheehan.

The Christic Institute, a Washington, D.C. interfaith center for law and public policy, has been investigating the "Secret Team" behind the Iran-Contra scandal since spring of 1984. Their investigations have culminated in a chilling saga of 25 years of illegal, covert operations by a group of former and current CIA and military officials, assassins, drug lords, arms dealers and mercenaries. The names of several of these men have surfaced in connection with the Contragate hearings: Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, international arms dealer Albert Hakim, Army Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, Lt. Col. Oliver North, CIA operative John Hull, and others.

The Christic investigation traces the Secret Team back to the anti-Castro efforts of the late '50s, under then Vice Pres. Richard Nixon, including a secret "shooter squad" with plans to assassinate Fidel and Raoul Castro, Che Guevara, and others. Several members of this



From the Christic Institute's brochure on the Secret Team investigation: Hull's ranch was the transfer point.

squad, many years later, were among the burglars arrested in the Watergate Complex. There are even plausible links to the assassination of Pres. Kennedy.

During the Vietnam War, the Team developed a partnership with opium traffickers to finance illegal, covert operations in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Then they moved to Iran to help the Shah, establishing contacts with Middle Eastern arms dealers. Then they moved on to Nicaragua to aid Somoza and finally the Contras.

Based on its voluminous findings, the Institute (which, incidentally, handled the Karen Silkwood, Three Mile Island, and various sanctuary movement cases) has filed a suit against 29 de-

fendants (including Secord, Hakim, Singlaub and Hull) alleging violations of federal organized crime laws. They expect that the ultimate result of this suit will be the impeachment of some of our highest elected officials, including the President of the United States.

### Preserving Democracy

On the eve of stepping down as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the threat to our democracy from the growing political power of the military-industrial complex: "We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence. . . . The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic process."

The unlimited exercise of governmental power was similarly feared by Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. To paraphrase his warning displayed in the halls of Congress: "The greatest threat to liberty is the insidious encroachment by men of zeal—well meaning, but without understanding."

To move forward with the business of the nation, it is necessary that we not only understand the issues behind the scandal but act to curtail the abuse of power.

To learn more about the Christic's Secret Team investigation, write to The Christic Institute, 1324 North Capitol St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20002, or phone (202) 797-8106. You may request information in several formats: a written affidavit summarizing the investigation, a video tape, or a two-hour audio cassette tape. There are also brochures and speaker's bureau packets available.

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