

ASHES and DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn



Home Grown Fascist

Oliver North is a true moment of the Reagan era and indeed of the President himself. He has Reagan's own capacity for the vibrant lie, uttered with such conviction that it is evident that formidable psychic mechanisms of self-validation have in that instant convinced the liar—Reagan, North—that what he is saying is true. But on display last week in Congress was something more disturbing than a mere deceiver: the cocksure, edgy, ingratiating profile of an all-American, eighties-style fascist.

The fascist has absolute moral assurance that his lawlessness is lawful; that though he "gets things done" he is following orders; that all impediments in his path, legal or moral, are obstructions erected by hostile conspiracy.

Colonial wars are notable forcing beds for the development of the fascist personality, particularly if such wars end in defeat for the colonial or imperial power. France's defeats in France and Algeria enriched the already muscular tradition of Gallic fascism and, in a different idiom, the U.S. defeat in Vietnam produced a crop of officers brooding of the "stab in the back" by effete civilians at home. It is entirely characteristic that North should have been part of a team drafting a secret contingency plan to run the country by martial law.

This phase of his activities occurred between 1982 and 1984, according to stories—particularly in Knight Ridder paper's—based on material developed by the Iran-Contra committee staff. North's first assignment at the National Security Council in 1981 had been to carry the "football," the briefcase carrying the plans for fighting a nuclear war that accompanies the president wherever he goes. (Those who like thinking about the unthinkable might ponder this parable of impending nuclear disaster: a President who has frequently expressed the view that "apocalypse" may occur "in our life time," trailed by the football-carrying North, with his own history of mental instability.) In the following two years North was the NSC's liaison with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, revising contingency plans to deal

with the nuclear war, insurrection, or major military mobilization.

North and the FEMA folk settled down happily to develop scenarios of total control. FEMA's director at the time, John Guiffrida, had attended Army War College in Pennsylvania in 1970 and written there a paper advocating martial law in case of a national uprising by black militants, along with roundup and transfer to "assembly centers or relocation camps" of at least 21 million "American negroes." This paper was reworked in a 1982 memo written by Guiffrida's deputy,

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John Brinkerhoff, at which time North and the FEMA team developed their plan for a secret contingency order turning control of the country over to FEMA at any time of nuclear war, violent dissent or—most significantly—national opposition to a military invasion abroad. FEMA would supervise appointment of military commanders to run state and local government.

In other words, while North's colleagues at the National Security Council were preparing the invasion of Nicaragua, North was working on a scheme to introduce martial law in the U.S. as a means of crushing any internal opposition to that invasion when it took place. Attorney General William French Smith protested the North/FEMA proposal and it is unclear which secret plan President Reagan finally signed into law.

All of this confirms my father's useful piece of advice to me as a budding journalist that one's rule of thumb should be to figure out what is the worst thing a government might have in mind at any given time and then proceed under the assumption that this is exactly what the government is doing.

A telling example of North's lying was his fervent tribute to the "brave" Major Steiner who arrested the Achille Lauro hijackers as they stepped onto Italian soil from the plane

forced down by U.S. fighters and handed them over to the Italian authorities.

This bears no resemblance to what actually happened. As news accounts made clear at the time, U.S. and Italian security personnel were present when the skyjacked plane landed. The Italian carabinieri got to the plane first and took charge of the Achille Lauro hijackers. The U.S. force on the tarmac, presumably commanded by the redoubtable Major Steiner, demanded that the Italians hand over the hijackers—hoping to fly

them to the U.S. But after what was described at the time as a gunpoint confrontation, Steiner and his men backed down, and the Italians took the hijackers away.

Footnote: Readers will have their own candidate for the most richly obscene moment of North's testimony. My own would be the occasion on which he emotionally held up a placard of Abu Nidal and announced that it was the threat of this, the world's foremost terrorist, that caused him to get a \$16,000 security gate—fiddling the records to disguise the transaction—to protect his children. This pious piece of hokum came from a man who spent his waking hours supplying the murderers of women and children in Nicaragua.

The Drug Factor

However much North's performance may have juiced up his own standing as a hero for our times, the net effect of his testimony was to fortify the image of the Reagan administration as one vast co-conspiracy. While the Iran-Contra committee stumbles forward politely, other more vigorous enquiries bode further trouble for Reagan and his accomplices.

Near the end of June the Senate Foreign Relations Committee went into a secret two-day session to take testimony from Ramon Milian-Rodri-

guez. Milian-Rodriguez is currently serving a 35-year sentence at a federal prison in the eastern half of the United States.

He was first interviewed by Jane Wallace, Ty West and Leslie Cockburn of CBS's *West 57th Street* program, which on July 11 of this year ran a segment on Milian-Rodriguez's sensational disclosures to it and to the Senate Committee.

Milian-Rodriguez was one of the supervisors of money laundering for the Ochoa-Escobar cocaine cartel in Colombia handling up to \$200 million a month. On camera he stated that he had been asked to launder through a Miami company cocaine money destined for the Contras. He later identified to the Senate committee the person making this request as Felix Rodriguez. Rodriguez is the Cuban Bay of Pigs veteran long associated with CIA counter-insurgency projects, most recently at Ilopango air base in El Salvador supervising supplies to the Contras, where his phone records and his subsequent testimony to the Iran-Contra committee show him to have been in communication with the White House, with Bush's office and with North.

Milian-Rodriguez told the senators

on the Foreign Relations Committee that Felix Rodriguez had solicited \$10 million for the Contras from the Colombian cocaine barons and that this money had been duly transferred, with the participation of the CIA. He identified the Miami firm as Ocean Hunter Shrimp Company in Miami, with accompanying allegations of its involvement in drug smuggling.

Ocean Hunter has an association with a Costa Rican-based outfit called Frigerificos de Puntarenas, indicated on the CBS program to be a CIA front. Ocean Hunter was in receipt of \$200,000 in State Department Humanitarian Assistance (to the Contras) funding in late 1985, at a time the firm was under investigation by the FBI. Involved with the Ocean Hunter account while he was at the State Department was Robert Owen.

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