

Editorial

North admits to lying; others must confess

As the Iran-Contra congressional hearings unfold, one thing is becoming increasingly evident: a nexus of contradictions and lies has permeated the Reagan administration, the justice department, the CIA and the National Security Council. Consider the following:

The original sin: The Reagan administration's position regarding terrorism was not to give in to terrorist demands under any circumstances. But when the United States engaged in an arms-for-hostages deal with Iran, the Reagan administration contradicted its own terrorist policy, thereby beginning the erosion of the administration's credibility with the American public.

With the same act came the betrayal of our allies' trust. The administration pressured allied nations not to sell arms to Iran, but then went on to contradict its own diplomatic rhetoric by selling weapons to the Iranians.

Next, when the Iran arms deal broke, President Reagan lied to the American public in a statement by denying U.S. involvement in the arms sale.

Two weeks later, Reagan reappeared to address the public, this time justifying the arms sales to Iran. Reagan asserted the arms deal was carried out with the purpose of developing diplomatic relations with "moderate" Iranian factions.

The term "moderate Iranian," however, is a contradiction, much like the phrase "military intelligence" under the direction of Lt. Col. Oliver North. The moderate that North and others at the White House dealt with in Iran was the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani is an extremely radical Iranian. He supervises the Iranian government's relationship with Hezbollah, the Shiite Moslem extremist group responsible for the abduction and detention of American hostages. In fact, Rafsanjani allocated \$12.5 million to Iran-sponsored terrorism for 1986-87. Thus, to label Rafsanjani a moderate is a lie, albeit a semantic one.

Then came the diversion of profits from the arms sales to the United Democratic Front, the anti-Sandinista counter-revolutionary force termed the Contras but propogated as the "freedom fighters" — which is yet another semantic lie.

The diversion of funds to the Contras by U.S. intelligence organizations was prohibited clearly by the Boland Amendment.

Then came the great white lie. While the Reagan administration implemented a war on drugs, the Contras allegedly engaged in what appears to be drug trafficking — including exporting cocaine to the United States in an effort to finance its counterinsurgency.

Another lie: Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams assured congressional investigators he had not solicited funds for the Contras from foreign governments when in fact he had.

Attorney General Edwin Meese lied Nov. 25 in an attempt to cover up U.S. involvement in the November 1985 arms shipments to Iran. Specifically, Meese claimed that the shipment "took place between Israel and Iran, (and) did not involve at that time the United States."

The CIA, however, was involved in the shipment, and evidence suggests Meese knew about it.

Next, North and then-CIA director William Casey concocted a story that the CIA had not known it was delivering HAWK missiles, but rather "oil drilling equipment."

North lied to Congress and created false chronologies of events. He later heroically admitted to these lies to congressional investigators and the American public — but that is the only thing he has done heroically.

Now that North has told the truth, it is high time others come forth and admit to their lies. This should be done for the sake of accountability to the American people, if not for the sake of veracity.



Commentary

Hearing makes North celebrity

Lt. Col. Oliver North, Vietnam war hero and admitted liar, has become a celebrity following six days of grueling testimony to congressional committees regarding his role in the Iran-Contra fiasco.

In the wake of the hearings, North has emerged as America's newest heartthrob; a man who demonstrated gusto, guts and conviction to his ideals, even though those convictions could lead him to be — well — convicted on criminal charges.

Commentary by
Mike Drummond

But why is North enjoying new-found celebrity status and what does this say about the American consciousness?

North has done an about-face in the eyes of the American public. Before his testimony, he had been characterized as a "loose cannon" in the White House and as somebody who put President Reagan's integrity on the line.

But that opinion has softened considerably. Part of the reason for his renewed ascent to grace has to do with his meritorious military perfor-

mance in Vietnam and, ironically, his derring-do as a National Security Council employee.

North's six rows of ribbons and various other medals of honor pasted to his Marine uniform testify to the lieutenant colonel's wartime glories. The battlefield traditionally has been a proving ground for valor — a kind of metaphor for masculinity — and no matter what one can say against North, no one can deny that he was a good soldier.

His stint with the NSC also conjures images of a man serving his country. Taken by themselves, details of his secret, global exploits while with the NSC show fantastic, albeit misguided, gumption.

He has admitted to performing classic cloak-and-dagger sorties — from dawned disguises to participating in clandestine operations — from implementing the seizure of the Achille Lauro terrorists to helping with logistics for the U.S. bombing of Libya. He even admitted he was prepared to pop a cyanide pill if captured and tortured by kidnappers when he went to Tehran.

To understand why the United States has come to accept, nay, to adore the colonel one only has to look at the superficialities of the Iran-Contra hearings. Oliver North has swept the nation off its feet with imagery, pure and simple.

The medals and uniform North wore to the hearings each day were not thrown on by accident. It was all part of a carefully orchestrated defense, masterminded by North's attorney, the famed Brendan Sullivan Jr.

The spit-and-polish Marine who, for the most part answered the committee's questions with a big-toe-in-the-sand brand of

sheepishness, came across as a persecuted man being harassed for doing his duty and doing it well.

Sullivan's protestations to the committee — the impassioned "Get off his (North's) back," comes to mind — illustrated the "maligned Marine" scenario of the hearings.

Indeed, at the onset of the hearings North portrayed himself as the underdog, and America's support for the underdog is a time-honored tradition.

Moreover, the glare of the public through the watchful eye of the media helped North's testimony rather than hindered it. From their television sets, America got a first-hand view of North — alone save for his wife and counsel — pitted against two rows of inquisitive congressmen. It was the perfect forum for the underdog; a highly conducive arena for eliciting emotional support.

But all of these syrupy-sweet images of North as family man, North as dedicated Marine, North as man persecuted by his fellow man gloss over the real, substantive issues — issues like, why did he lie to Congress, the American people and the CIA? Why did he feel compelled to shred documents if what he thought he was doing was perfectly legal and legitimate? And why, if he received all of his orders from superiors, were policies and laws governing the sale of arms circumvented?

Americans temporarily seem to have forgotten these issues and the possible criminal repercussions North faces and, instead, have succumbed to "Olliemania." This is nothing less than frightening, for the American public's gullibility has overshadowed its sense of reason.

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