

The Reagan administration also pressured the governments of Honduras and Costa Rica to permit rebel bases to operate from their territory.

Disclosure of the Iran/contra diversion in late 1986 created the greatest crisis of Reagan's Presidency. Having weathered an assassin's bullet in 1981, the chief executive had forged a reputation as a survivor, a "teflon" President to whom no blame stuck. But after first denying the arms sales to Iran and then insisting that missiles were not traded for hostages, Reagan had to face questions about his own involvement in the illegal transfer of funds to the contras. A Presidential commission led by former Senator John Tower concluded in 1987 that the Commander-in-Chief had mismanaged his staff but that he had no personal knowledge of the diversion. Televised hearings conducted by the House and Senate committees investigating the Iran/contra affair later supported this conclusion. Yet Reagan felt compelled to fire North, accept Poindexter's resignation and support Attorney General Edwin Meese III's request that Lawrence Walsh, a former President of the American Bar association, be appointed special prosecutor in the case. Walsh indicted North, Poindexter and two private arms dealers in 1988 for conspiring to defraud the government and for various coverup charges, including the destruction of official documents. But Reagan reiterated his belief that "Ollie" North was an "American hero" for assisting the contras and refused to rule out eventual pardons for Poindexter and the former NSC Marine.

Despite North's sincere and compelling performance in the televised hearings of the summer of 1987, moderate Republicans joined Democrats on the investigating committees to issue a harsh assessment of the Reagan administration's involvement in the Iran/contra scandal. In a year's-end report that summarized the most thoroughly and highly publicized investigation since Watergate, panel participants complained of "pervasive dishonesty and inordinate secrecy" and "disarray at the highest levels of government." In particular, they cited the administration for failing to comply with the Boland Amendment and the Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980, which required the President to inform two Congressional watchdog committees of CIA covert operations "in a timely fashion." Blaming Reagan for failing to live up to the constitutional mandate that "the laws be faithfully executed," the report charged that a "cabal of zealots" had taken control of the administration's foreign policy in key areas. Reagan officials failed to report the Iranian arms sales to Congress as required by law, the committees concluded. But the panels placed greater emphasis on the administration's attempt to pursue foreign policy goals already rejected by Congress and concluded that Ronald Reagan bore "ultimate responsibility" for policies managed by aides.

Following the Iran/contra hearings, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez induced Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to agree to a 5-nation Central American peace settlement. The 1987 accord, which won Arias the Nobel Peace Prize, required participants to increase political freedoms and lift states of siege, provide amnesty for political prisoners, prohibit use of territory for insurgencies against neighbors and work toward negotiated ceasefires in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Perceiving the regional settlement as a means of reducing American influence in Central America, Nicaragua sought to implement the accord by permitting the reopening of opposition newspapers and radio stations. Congress responded to the Arias Plan by refusing an administration request for continued military aid to the contras. The peace process quickened in early 1988 when the Sandinista government reversed a longstanding policy by agreeing to negotiate directly with the rebels over terms of a ceasefire. In turn, the House of Representatives rejected another administration military package by a 219 to 211 vote, although it approved \$48-million for contra food, clothing and medical supplies.

Stymied by Nicaraguan cooperation with the Arias Plan and Congressional refusal to fund the contras, Reagan reacted to a minor border clash between Sandinista regulars and Honduran-based contra rebels by sending 3,200 troops to southern Honduras. Yet the soldiers stayed only 10 days and served merely as a symbolic show of American force. In April 1988 the Nicaraguan government and the contras agreed to a ceasefire which obligated both sides to negotiate the release of 3,300 Sandinista political prisoners and the extension of political freedom to those contras willing to lay down arms and return home. Having spent over \$200-million in aid to a failed insurgency since 1981, the Reagan administration now faced the collapse of its Central American policy. Once again American policymakers had allowed a narrowminded Cold War vision to distract them from the realities of third world poverty and nationalism.

Reagan's Presidency restored the Cold War militance of Truman and Kennedy. But changing conditions and an increasingly critical Congress seriously hampered the President's agenda in dealing with the Soviet Union. Following dissolution of the Solidarity labor movement in Poland, Reagan expressed American outrage by banning the export of construction equipment destined for a gas pipeline linking Siberia to western Europe. But when these sanctions met disapproval from European allies, the President withdrew them. At the same time he delayed negotiations over a new wheat deal with Moscow. Reagan had responded to farmer complaints by ending Carter's embargo on grain sales to the Soviets, but despite discomfort with the Polish situation, he completed a 5-year wheat pact with the Russian in 1983.



FROM THE ECONOMIST (LONDON)

Although the President vacillated on economic ties with the Soviet Union, he refused to retreat from campaign promises for revitalization of national defense. In the largest peacetime military buildup in American history, Congress approved an \$18-billion increase in defense spending in 1981. The new budget included construction of neutron bombs, production of the B-1 bomber that Carter had canceled, and creation of a rapid deployment force. By 1982, however, administration defense policy faced a grassroots opposition from the nationwide Nuclear Freeze movement. Reagan believed that both political parties had placed too much faith in arms control as a response to Soviet military increases and that the Russians would surrender their advantages only if faced with the prospect of escalation. But critics like former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara contended that Soviet and American nuclear arsenals were equivalent and that further modernization of American weaponry would only provoke a corresponding Soviet buildup. Nuclear Freeze advocates particularly objected to the President's casual remarks about "limited" nuclear war and the possibility of confining nuclear devastation to Europe. Working to pass resolutions and ballot measures in scores of towns, cities and states, and amassing hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, activists brought the issue to Congress in 1982. The Freeze campaign called for the President to propose a mutual and verifiable moratorium on the testing, deployment and production of all nuclear weapons to the Soviets. Reagan pleaded that the resolutions would undermine Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) negotiations by weakening the bargaining position of the United States. Nevertheless, the House barely defeated Nuclear Freeze resolutions in a 204 to 202 vote.

By 1983 the Reagan administration moved toward a more flexible position on arms control, acknowledging for the first time that nuclear war should be deterred at all costs. The President also reversed himself by promising to refrain from undercutting the still unratified SALT 2 treaty. The compromise continued when Congress voting funding for MX missiles in 1985 but limited deployment to half the 100 missiles that Reagan requested. Meanwhile, the Democratic House placed severe restrictions on the President's military budget, limiting increases to a figure just above inflation in 1984 and below it in 1985. Just as Congress began to assert control over the administration's defense program, the President proposed a new anti-missile system in 1983. Based on the possible use of space satellites armed with laser weapons, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), dubbed "Star Wars," intended to fend off Soviet missile attacks before they could penetrate American air space. Prominent scientists argued that research costs and labor would be astronomical and minimized the chances of developing the necessary technologies in the near future. Other critics noted that SDI could never act as a foolproof shield and that true security lay in reducing the arms race, not introducing it to outer space. Congress responded cautiously to Reagan's proposals, appropriating no more than 20% of the first installment in 1984. While doing so, the legislators permitted only three tests of anti-satellite missiles before prohibiting them altogether and trimming one-third from the SDI budget in 1986.

The Reagan administration increased military spending from \$157-billion in 1981 to \$233-billion in 1986. Yet Americans felt no greater sense of security in a tumultuous world endangered by the spread of nuclear weapons. Pressed by the antinuclear movement, Democratic Congressional leaders and Republican moderates, Reagan met with new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva during 1985, the first summit meeting between Americans and Soviets since 1979. Gorbachev expressed a desire for "Glasnost" (Openness) in both Soviet society and in relations between Moscow and Washington. Democratic reforms in Communist Party governance, liberalization of censorship rules and new freedoms for political dissenters and emigrant applicants boosted Gorbachev's image in the Western press. Seeking to modernize the Soviet economy by redirecting defense spending to computers and consumer goods, the Russian leader persuaded Reagan to agree in principle to a 50% cut in nuclear weapons.

Although the Iceland summit meeting floundered on Reagan's refusal to abandon SDI research on space defense, the two leaders agreed to talk again. By December 1987, when Reagan and Gorbachev met for a third summit in Washington, the American President faced widespread criticism of his leadership during the Iran/contra affair and sought to complete an arms deal as a legacy of his administration. The Senate, in which Democrats won a 55 to 45 majority in the 1986 elections, also pressed Reagan for progress on disarmament. As a result, the President signed an intermediate nuclear force (INF) treaty with Gorbachev. The pact called for the dismantling of 2,611 Soviet and American medium and short-range missiles based in Europe and provided for hundreds of inspectors to visit each side's installations — the most extensive system of weapons surveillance ever negotiated by the two nations.

One month before Reagan prepared to go to Moscow for a fourth summit in May 1988, the Soviets announced the scheduled withdrawal of 115,000 from Afghanistan. Signing on as a co-guarantor of the ensuing Geneva accords, the United States nevertheless extracted an agreement from Moscow that acknowledged Washington's right to arm Afghan Moslem rebels if the Soviets continued to supply the Marxist government in Kabul. The following month the Senate ratified the INF treaty. Meanwhile a report by a panel of distinguished Soviet officials and former American defense and intelligence officers urged the two superpowers to gradually demilitarize by cutting back forces and agreeing to an immediate comprehensive nuclear test ban. But despite the relaxation of Cold War tensions, Reagan's commitment to SDI minimized the chances for dramatic progress on nuclear disarmament.

As the Reagan administration drew to a close in 1988, Presidential campaigners evaluated its 8 years. Vice President George Bush, the Republican nominee, pointed to continued prosperity and economic opportunity, lower taxes and a consistent foreign policy that brought the Soviets to the bargaining table without sacrificing American interests. Bush and his running mate, Indiana Senator Danforth Quayle III, reminded Americans that Ronald Reagan and the Republicans had sought to restore the nation's sense of greatness and destiny and had succeeded. In contrast Democratic leaders such as Jesse Jackson and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis attacked "Reaganomics" for its inflated military spending and federal budget deficits (the largest in history) as well as persistent trade imbalances and accompanying plant closures, and also condemned administration corruption. Pressure from Bush and Republican officeholders led to the resignation of Attorney General Meese following an unfavorable ethics report by a government special counsel. Meanwhile Dukakis and Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen sought to unify the Democratic Party by stressing that a competent administration could strengthen defense and the economy while providing equal opportunity and social services. But Dukakis's message faded as Bush repeatedly condemned "liberal" views of defense, patriotism, crime and abortion. In their fifth victory of the six previous Presidential elections, the Republicans took 54% of the popular vote and 426-112 margin in the Electoral College to take an easy victory in the 1988 contest.

For the people of the United States the 20th Century began with the opening of overseas frontiers and approached its last decade with new pangs of insecurity and confusion in an intricately connected, troubled and complex world. Ronald Reagan had sought to restore the nation's sense of greatness and destiny. Yet after nearly a century of frenzied economic development, vast political change, and intense global involvement, most Americans felt that uncertainty and confusion, not destiny, prevailed. But whether their visions encompassed technological utopia, spiritual renaissance or nuclear terror, most Americans sensed that they as well as everybody else on the planet were on the edge of cataclysmic changes than not even their leaders could fathom.

David Horowitz is a college professor and professional jazz pianist who celebrates his 60th birthday August 17. He teaches history at Portland State University, plays piano anywhere (and regularly accompanies jazz singer Dory Hylton), and writes articles and books. He wrote "The Reagan Revolution" for *On The Edge: A History of America Since World War 2*, which he coauthored with Peter N. Carroll and David Lee.

BUCK'S BOOK BARN 
 ★ USED BOOKS & RECORDS ★ 738-4246
 1023 BROADWAY • SEASIDE

Columbia View Marketplace
A Garden Gallery
 • Antiques & Collectibles • Herbal Apothecary
 • Garden Accessories • Aromatherapy Bar
 • Wood Crafts • Local Arts • Herb Plants • Potpourries
 1380 COMMERCIAL ST. ASTORIA
 7 days a week
 9 am - 6 pm • 325-1574

Old Town Framing Co.


 1287 COMMERCIAL ST.
 ASTORIA 325-5221