

Opinion

The Battalion

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A big Meese-stake

The Iran arms deal has become a cancerous foreign policy tumor on the Reagan administration's Teflon exterior. The latest malignant act was the naming of Attorney General Edwin Meese III to head the investigation into the arms deal — a measure that's certain to determine that, in this case, justice is not only blind, it's deaf and dumb too.

Like an onion, the layers of Reagan's foreign policy have been peeled back, each time revealing a different form of questionable activity.

Now the president, busy firing staff members to distance himself from any wrongdoing, has asked his old friend Meese to do a little peeling of his own. Selecting Meese was both strategic and superfluous. Slicing into Reagan's foreign policy dealings surely will bring tears to Meese's eyes. After all, the attorney general has been the president's friend and crony for more than 20 years. He will be careful where he cuts and how deeply.

The American people deserve answers, not the biased babblings of the president's right-hand lawyer. Even Reagan confidant Henry Kissinger has stressed the need to "get all the facts out quickly, and punish the wrongdoers."

"I can be loyal to the president and loyal to the country, too," Meese claims. But when these interests lie in different directions, where Meese's loyalties lie is no secret. As one who helped set up the early stages of the Iran-Contra pipeline, Meese may wind up in the dual role of prosecutor and defense attorney.

Already the attorney general, claiming to have known about wrongdoings since Nov. 22, did not attempt to bar fired National Security Council director Oliver North from NSC offices until last Tuesday, possibly giving North a chance to shred vital, incriminating documents.

It's time to turn the arms deal investigation over to a special prosecutor. For the sake of national well-being, the Reagan administration needs to resolve the investigation as quickly as possible. Meese is not the man to rescue the administration's foreign policy, mired in murky bureaucratic coverups.

We need an objective slicer to cut through the deception of the foreign policy onion. Tears won't distort justice's insight — she's blind. Ed Meese is not, although he may see no evil.

Horns find scapegoat

By firing Head Coach Fred Akers, the University of Texas has summed up Vince Lombardi's maxim: Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing. But it's the university, not Akers, that has everything to lose from the head coach's dismissal.

School rivalries aside, Akers deserved better than to be booted out of his position merely because Texas had its first losing season in 30 years. Athletic Director DeLoss Dodds says Akers was fired because the school was seeking "new energy and leadership," but it's more likely it was looking for a scapegoat to carry the blame for a losing season.

Winning seasons come and go — sometimes the cycles may be 30 years, sometimes only two or three — but a good coach is a long-term investment. As Texas A&M learned, firing a coach every losing season or two perpetuates the string of losing seasons.

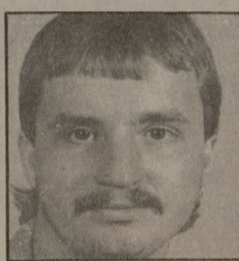
Ironically, whoever UT selects to inject this "new energy and leadership" probably will have to endure several more losing seasons before a winning team can be built.

Akers' 73.5 percent winning record at UT will be attractive to other schools seeking coaches. We only hope he can find more tolerant pastures than the fair-weather fields of UT.

Instead of adhering to the famous words of Vince Lombardi, UT should have heeded a different maxim: Don't fix what ain't broken.



Real trouble with arms deal is closer ties to the Contras



Craig Renfro

For more than six years President Reagan has held the American public in the palm of his hand. During that time, he has tried to return the country to a period of normalcy, void of the turmoil of the 1960s, the embarrassment of Vietnam and the presidential atrocities of Watergate.

But recent turns of events have proved that Reagan is nothing more than a lot of hot rhetoric backed by little fuel. First off, Reagan approved of the controversial arms sales to Iran — a country that backs terrorism. This is something that Reagan said he would never do, yet he defied his own policy.

Now it has been learned that some of the money from the Iranian arms sales has been diverted to the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Contra rebels. This is a move that Reagan says he knew nothing about.

But initially Reagan said he knew nothing about the Iranian arms situation, either. How long will it be before he confesses that he knew something about this? Probably in chapter 10 of his memoirs, "How I Started the Nicaraguan War."

In true Watergate fashion Reagan fired National Security Council director Lt. Col. Oliver North and received the

resignation of Vice Adm. John Poin-dexter, the president's deputy assistant for national security affairs.

This is nothing more than a desperate attempt by Reagan to take some of the heat off of him and make it look like those two men had total control of Central American policy. Surely Reagan doesn't expect the American public to buy this. But then again he might because we have believed him for so long.

U.S. funding of Contra activities was banned in 1984, and was illegal this year until Oct. 1, when Congress approved \$100 million of aid to the Contras. However, during that time North operated more than one clandestine operation to the Contras.

North has been linked to the Contra air-supply operation based at El Salvador's Ilopango military airport. This came to light on Oct. 5 when an American-manned plane was shot down over Nicaragua and the lone survivor, Eugene Hasenfus, claimed the arms supply operation was run by the CIA.

But for Reagan to claim no knowledge of North's activities doesn't fly in the face of reason. Indeed Reagan should have been aware, because if he wasn't, that in itself is a confession of a huge black hole in the execution of our foreign policy.

But things also aren't so bright in Washington after it was reported that North destroyed documents implicating others in the Contra-funding scheme. Reagan has ordered White House staff members to preserve all records and cooperate fully with official inquiries.

This really sounds like Watergate, and raises the question of just how much does Reagan know and when did he know it. We probably will have to wait until the tapes are released — that's the president doesn't decide to hear them first.

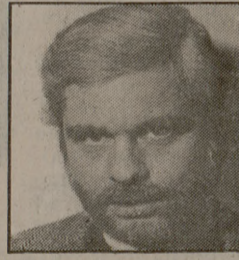
Despite the attention being focused on the diversion of funds to the Contras, a major concern will be how the Democrat-controlled Congress investigates the entire spectacle.

Whatever the outcome of the pending investigation, the vital issue remains that the Contras secretly were backed by the United States. Reagan has been less than candid with the American public. He has talked about the efforts of the Contra freedom fighters but he has said nothing about our help to the rebels. In fact, he has vehemently denied knowledge of any connections.

In a not-so-secret move, Contras are being trained by the CIA at a U.S. Air Force base near Fort Worth, Fla. Whether Reagan and his administration are found guilty of any wrongdoings may prove to be irrelevant if they become any more involved with the Contras. When the first wave of U.S. soldiers hit the ground secret details will be forgotten in the name of freedom and democracy — at least until we have the Pentagon Papers II to find out just why we became involved.

Craig Renfro is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

A question of competence



Richard Cohen

Immediately after President Reagan's press conference, the television screen filled with the faces of the usual commentators. They pronounced their verdicts: The president was inconsistent, contradictory, not credible. But, to recast the title of John Stormer's controversial 1964 book, "None Dare Call It Treason," none dared call Reagan incompetent. That, though, is surely what he was.

But incompetent is not a word that can be publicly uttered in Washington. For so long the president has been so personally popular that his incompetence — his weak grasp of the issues and their historical context — has been overlooked. With few exceptions, Reagan has instead been accorded all the respect the people of Oz paid their Wizard. If the polls approved, Washington fell into line — mumbling only in private that on more than one occasion the president didn't know what he was talking about.

Forget for a moment the manner in which the president answered questions and just take a look at his opening statement. In it, he cited instances in which his administration had acted boldly: Grenada, Lebanon, the Philippines and Libya. Lebanon! Wasn't that the place where 239 Americans were killed when a terrorist drove a bomb-laden truck into the Marine barracks? Wasn't Lebanon a debacle and an example of using troops when the administration should have used its head?

The president uttered other minor whoppers. He referred to pre-revolutionary Iran as once a member of the "family of democratic nations" when it was, under the shah, a dictatorship with a ruthless secret police — the infamous Savak. He tackled a question about the plight of the homeless by citing the case of a New York family that was being sheltered in a hotel at a cost of \$37,000 a year. Instead of this being an example of a desperate housing shortage for the poor, the president saw it as yet another welfare scam and an opportunity for private enterprise: "And I wonder why somebody doesn't build them a house for \$37,000." A house for \$37,000 in Manhattan? Who'll live in it? Minnie Mouse?

As Sen. Gary Hart pointed out, other presidents would be skewered for such preposterous statements. This president, though, has routinely uttered them with impunity, as if the tongue is not connected to the brain. Only in the inner recesses of the White House is Reagan being compared to Gore Vidal's version of Abraham Lincoln — a president whose wisdom was appreciated by few of his contemporaries and who, in fact, was widely thought to be a fool.

Whether Reagan will turn out to be another Lincoln remains to be seen. In the meantime, facts and truth matter — matter even more than personal popularity or the salesman's talent to sell anything. It matters that a president who talks fiscal restraint has added more to the federal debt than all past presidents combined. It matters that the "risks" he so proudly mentioned were mostly military and that he associates daring with shot and shell — not with thoughtful policy-making.

On Iran, it matters that the president presumes that the United States play a decisive role in the choosing of the Ayatollah's successor when the whole Iranian initiative — from nothing but a rationalization for a stage swap anyway — is, in the words of Henry Kissinger, premature. It matters that the United States assured British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher the proposals made to the Soviet Reykjavik have been supplanted by "priorities," but that the president's press conference suggested otherwise. And it matters that the president seemed not to know precisely what he had offered the Soviets — or they had.

And, finally, it matters that when it comes to Israeli complicity in the Iranian arms deal, the president repeatedly denied knowing anything about it only to issue a clarification 25 months later. The clarification, though, demands its own clarification. Was he or, even worse, did he forget to know in the first place? How could a president not be aware of the musical ingredient in the Iran scheme?

In a voice as rumblingly ominous as the deep organ notes of Richard Strauss' "Thus Spake Zarathustra," Henry Kissinger suggested a reorganization of the White House staff. The amount of personnel shuffling and approval will address the president's principal problem. That problem is his credibility, consistency or competence. A staff shuffle probably the best that can be expected. As Kissinger suggested, Reagan can do all the help he can get.

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