

U.S. Foreign Policy and the Iran-Contra Affair: Was Oliver North a Patriot, a Pawn, or an Outlaw?

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Grade Level: High

Duration of the History Lab: 90 Minutes

Overview:

In 1984 and 1985, Hezbollah, a fundamentalist Shiite organization, with ties to the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini, abducted seven American citizens in Beirut, Lebanon. President Ronald Reagan denounced the Iranian government and urged Americans to refrain from selling any arms or goods to Iran. Despite strong rhetoric and a hard-line public stance against negotiating with terrorists, efforts were underway within the Reagan administration to secure the release of the American hostages. At the same time, Reagan was looking for a way to circumvent Congress and assist anti-Sandinista rebels (the Contras) in Nicaragua, in the name of protecting American interests and fighting Communism. In what became known as the Iran-Contra Affair, funds from arms sales to Iran were diverted through third parties to provide aid and military support to the Contras. In exchange, Iran agreed to broker the release of the hostages.

While questions linger about what was authorized and when, and what President Reagan knew, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a member of Reagan's National Security Council, was an active and polarizing figure in the scandal that followed. In this History Lab, students are challenged to determine if North was a "patriot," a "pawn," or an "outlaw" in the Iran-Contra affair. They will examine and analyze hearing testimony, communications, and government reports to assess North's role and legacy for themselves. In doing so they will gain an understanding of how developments in the Middle East and Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s created the environment in which the Iran-Contra scandal occurred.

History Standards

National History Standards

Era 10: Contemporary United States (1968 to the present)

Standard 1: Recent developments in foreign and domestic politics

Standard 1B: The student understands domestic politics in contemporary society

- Analyze constitutional issues in the Iran-Contra affair

Historical Thinking Standards

Standard 5: Historical Issues-AnalYSIS and Decision Making

- **Identify issues and problems in the past** and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation
- **Evaluate alternative courses of action**, keeping in mind the information available at the time, in terms of ethical considerations, the interests of those affected by the decision, and the long- and short-term consequences of each

- **Evaluate the implementation of a decision** by analyzing the interest it served; estimating the position, power, and priority of each player involved; assessing the ethical dimensions of the decision; and evaluating its costs and benefits from a variety of perspectives

Common Core State Standards: Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 6-12

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 11-12

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist No. 10*).
- Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.
- Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
- Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Maryland State Curriculum Standards for United States History

Expectation: Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultural, economic, political and social developments from 1981 to the present.

Topic: A. America Impacts the World (1981-Present)

Indicator 1. Analyze United States foreign policy from 1981 to the present (5.6.1).

Purpose

In this History Lab, students will consider U.S. foreign policy decisions in the Middle East and Latin America in the late 1970s and 1980s. They will look, in particular, at Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a key figure of the Iran-Contra Affair during the Reagan presidency.

- Through analysis of primary sources, students will be able to construct and provide support for an historical interpretation of North's role in the Iran-Contra Affair.
- Students will determine if Oliver North was acting as a patriot, a pawn or an outlaw.

Topic Background

Between 1984 and 1985, seven Americans were abducted in Beirut, Lebanon by Hezbollah, a fundamentalist, Shiite terrorist organization with links to the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. President Ronald Reagan denounced the Iranian government and urged Americans to refrain from selling any arms or goods to Iran. In 1985, the United States Congress passed the International Security and Development Cooperation Act (ISDCA), which enabled the president to prohibit trade with any country supporting or harboring terrorists or terrorist organizations. The United States government appeared to take a hard stance publicly on terrorism in the Middle East. In the meantime, however, Reagan's administration had already begun the process of selling weapons to Iran, using Israel as an intermediary, in an effort to secure the release of the hostages. In 1986, the arms for hostages deal turned into a major scandal in Washington and beyond. At a press conference on November 25, 1986, Reagan claimed he was "deeply troubled that the implementation of a policy aimed at resolving a truly tragic situation in the Middle East has resulted in such controversy." Reagan said that he believed that his administration's policy goals had been "well founded."¹

In order to understand the rationale for the administration's willingness to exchange weapons for hostages, it is necessary to understand the complexity of the growing tensions in Latin America and the Middle East in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During the Carter and Reagan Administrations, the number of communist-led and supported governments in Latin America and parts of the Middle East had increased. In countries such as Nicaragua and Afghanistan, communist governments had gained control. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and supported the communist People's Democratic Party.

In Iran, meanwhile, a homegrown revolution had overthrown the American-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who fled to the United States. In 1979, Islamic cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took total control of the government, with the goal of establishing an Islamic republic and ridding Iran of all Western influence. In an act of deliberate aggression against the United States, the new Islamic government captured and held 52 Americans in Tehran for 444 days.

Many historians agree that the inability of the Carter administration to resolve the crisis was instrumental in the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. Negotiations were, in fact, secretly underway, but the release of the hostages did not occur until Reagan was sworn into office in January

1981. The United States broke off relations with Iran and instituted a series of economic sanctions in an attempt to weaken the theocratic government.

In Latin America, the Sandinistas, a Marxist-socialist organization, took control of Nicaragua, challenging the Monroe Doctrine that had influenced American foreign policy in the Western hemisphere for decades. By the beginning of the 1980s, it appeared to the United States that communism and the Soviet Union were gaining momentum in the region, posing a threat to the United States.

In the 1984 election, Ronald Reagan won 49 of the 50 states in a landslide. In response to his mandate, Reagan enacted his own “Reagan Doctrine,” in which he proclaimed, “we must not break our faith with those who are risking their lives - on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua - to defy Soviet aggression and secure rights which have been ours since birth...Support for freedom fighters is self defense.”² Reagan’s defense of freedom fighters was indicative of his staunch anti-communist beliefs.

Reagan had promised to confront the spread of communism and restore American’s faith in their economy and government. As historian Gil Troy described in *Morning in America*, “In foreign and domestic policy, he [Reagan] believed that America could pursue peace by strengthening the military.”³ In Nicaragua, Reagan supported the rebel forces attempting to overthrow the communist Sandinista government and military. In December 1981, Reagan sent the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) into Nicaragua as a paramilitary force to help the Contras. Congress did not support the rebels and outlawed assisting them with Boland Amendment in 1982 and again in 1984. In the Second Boland Amendment, Congress clearly stated that “none of the funds...may be used by the Central Intelligence Agency of the Department of Defense to furnish military equipment, military training or advice, other support for military activities, to any group or individual, not part of a country’s armed forces, for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.”⁴

Nevertheless, the CIA acquired weapons confiscated from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the Israeli government in May 1983 and July 1984 and supplied the Contras with the weapons in Nicaragua. During this time, in June 1984, Reagan met with Vice President George Bush, and other chief aids to find other means to help the Contras. During this meeting, the idea to assist the Contras through a third party emerged. In March 1985, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council, proposed to National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane that Saudi Arabia, Honduras, and Iran serve as possible third party donors.⁵ In April, President Reagan had called President Roberto Suazo Córdova of Honduras to assure him that the United States was committed to helping the Contras even without financial assistance from Congress. Support for the Contras was not favored in the country, with the American people divided about whether or not to interfere in Nicaragua. Public opinion polls showed shifts ranging from 47% to 65% against assistance for the Contras.⁶

In the summer of 1986, Oliver North began raising funds for the secret operations in Nicaragua by meeting with officials from Brunei and Panama. In August of 1986, North met with General Manuel Noriega, the military dictator of Panama and a known drug trafficker, to organize an arrangement between the two countries. In a message to National Security Advisor, John Poindexter, North

explained Noriega's willingness to "take care of the Sandinista leadership" in return for U.S. assistance in "cleaning up" his image. Though an exchange never occurred, it demonstrated the extent to which the administration was willing to go in order to meet its foreign policy goals in Latin America.⁷

Between 1985 and 1986, the arms deals between Israel, Iran, and the United States were in motion. The CIA made arrangements with Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian businessman, to broker the exchange of weapons. On August 20, 1985, the Israelis provided the Iranians with 96 TOW anti-tank missiles. In September, 408 more TOW missiles were delivered to Iran and one hostage was released the same day. In October, another hostage was reportedly killed despite Iran's guarantees. The United States continued the covert supply of weapons to Israel for sale to Iran. In November, the Israelis sent eighteen HAWK anti-aircraft missiles to Iran, but they were rejected. Consequently, in December of 1985, the CIA determined that they could no longer provide arms without explicit presidential approval. The United States took a more direct role in the exchange process when Reagan insisted that his administration could not pass up an opportunity to free the hostages.⁸

In February 1986, an American and Iranian contact met to discuss the details of another exchange and concluded the following:

"The USG would establish its good faith...by immediately providing 1,000 TOW missiles for sale to Iran. This transaction was covertly completed on February 21, 1986 using a private U.S. firm and the Israelis as intermediaries.

A subsequent meeting would be held in Iran with senior U.S. and Iranian officials during which the U.S. hostages would be released.

Immediately after the hostages were safely in our hands, the U.S. would sell an additional 3,000 TOW missiles to Iran using the same procedure employed during the September 1985 transfer."⁹

Despite the exchange of weapons on two occasions in February, no other hostages were released.

In early March, the Iranians demanded more weapons and U.S. officials refused to accept these demands, but then in April a new agreement had been reached. Using the Israelis, the administration organized the sale of weapons to Iran and the diversion of the profits to the Contras in Nicaragua under a plan known as "Enterprise" led by Oliver North. "Enterprise received approximately \$16.1 million in profits from the Iran arms sales by marking up the price charged to Iran over the price paid to the U.S. Government... approximately \$3.8 million was 'diverted' from the arms proceeds to the freedom fighters" in Nicaragua.¹⁰ On November 2, 1986, an Iranian official leaked the news that the U.S. government had been selling arms to Iran.

In 1987, members of Congress began investigating the Iran-Contra Affair to determine who had taken part and to what extent President Reagan was involved. The Democrats had managed to maintain their majority hold on Congress despite Reagan's Republican, presidential victory. As the joint committee of the House and Senate prepared for their investigation, Reagan assured the American public that the

United States government did not negotiate with terrorists and ordered his own White House investigation, the Tower Commission, to look into affair in late 1986.

On March 4, 1987, Reagan again spoke to the American public and informed them that his administration had taken part in an arms-for-hostages program without his knowledge and as president, he assumed the blame. In his address, Reagan claimed that he overlooked the specifics of the freeing of the hostages because he was more concerned about their welfare than the specifics of the plan. On May 5, 1987 joint committee hearings were held to investigate the covert arms sale. On August 12, Reagan again addressed the nation to quell public concerns. This time, he took the blame, but insisted that he was unaware of the complexity of the Iran-Nicaraguan exchange.

Congress released its report on November 16, 1987 and revealed that members within the U.S. military and Reagan's administration were aware of the details of the exchanges. The document, compiled primarily by Democrats on the House and Senate Select Committee, claimed that Reagan was unknowing of the operations; however, the report did blame him by stating that "if the President did not know what his national security advisers were doing, he should have." The Majority Report by the Congress stressed the importance of the powers of Congress and the need for the executive branch to recognize the legislative branch's role in foreign policy decisions.¹¹

On the other hand, the Minority Report of the Iran-Contra Congressional Report, compiled primarily by Republican members, offered a different perspective and criticized the congressional committee as a witch hunt. The Republicans in the Senate and House of Representatives stressed that "there was no constitutional crisis, no systematic disrespect for "the rule of law," no grand conspiracy, and no Administration-wide dishonesty or cover up." The Minority Report stressed that the Boland Amendment was an attempt by Congress to control the executive branch and determine foreign policy in Latin America. The Republican generated report stressed that the executive branch had the right to act decisively in order to safe guard the United States of America.¹²

The Minority and Majority Reports for the Iran-Contra Affair demonstrated the growing tension that had existed between the Executive and Legislative branches since the Vietnam War. The divergent findings of the reports underscored this partisanship.

Following the Congressional Report, numerous members of the Reagan administration were indicted for providing false testimony, conspiracy, and diversion. Oliver North was indicted and charged with 16 counts. In January 1989, North's trial began and Lawrence Walsh, the independent counsel in the Iran-Contra Investigation, noted "the trial would....reveal...how much high level support the Contras had received from the Reagan administration in defiance of the Boland amendments."¹³

The defense's witnesses portrayed North as a hero and savior, while the prosecution relied on witness testimonies that depicted him as a thief and liar. During the trial, North admitted to altering documents and misinforming Congress about the events related to the Contras; however, he insisted that it was not unlawful because he was carrying out orders. Lawrence Walsh noted that the trial became about whether or not Oliver North was a "pawn or knight errant." In the end, the jury found North guilty of

"aiding and abetting the preparation of the false testimony for the Congressional testimony..., destruction of NSC documents, and...acceptance of illegal gratuity."¹⁴

Following the trial, Walsh claimed that the verdict "nailed North as the felon he was," yet he was later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush. Afterwards, North emerged as a national figure. North's fame allowed him to become the host of *War Stories*, a military documentary on Fox News Channel, an author of eleven books, and a public speaker. In 1994, *U.S. News and World Report* noted that 45 percent of Americans had a "positive opinion of North" and 62 percent believed he did what was best for the country.¹⁵ Based on Oliver North's involvement in the Iran-Contra affair, America's foreign policy stance during the Cold War, and American public sentiment towards North's actions, how should Oliver North's role in the Iran-Contra Affair be remembered? Was Oliver North a patriot, a pawn or an outlaw?

Notes:

¹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Announcing the Review of the National Security Council's Role in the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy." 25 November 1986. Available from University of Texas at Austin <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/112586a.htm>. Accessed 27 June 2011.

² Charles Krauthammer, "Essay: The Reagan Doctrine," *Time*, 1 April 1985.

³ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 239.

⁴ "Appropriations – Deficiency Act, 11 September 1984," United States Government Accountability Office, available from <http://redbook.gao.gov/14/f10067296.php>. Accessed 27 June 2011.

⁵ National Security Archives, "The Iran Contra Affair 20 Years On," George Washington University, available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/index.htm>. Accessed 27 June 2011.

⁶ Gil Troy, *Morning in America*.

⁷ Alexander Cockburn, *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs and the Press* (New York: New Left Books, 1998) 287-288.

⁸ "Iran-Contra Report: Arms, Hostages and Contras: How a Secret Foreign Policy Unraveled," *The New York Times*, 19 November 1987.

⁹ National Security Archives, "White House, John M. Poindexter Memorandum to President Reagan, Covert Action Finding Regarding Iran, 17 January 1986, available from George Washington University. [http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/15-Reagan%20Finding%201-17-86%20\(IC%2002181\).pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/15-Reagan%20Finding%201-17-86%20(IC%2002181).pdf).

¹⁰ American Presidency Project. "Excerpts from the Tower Commission's Reports." University of California Santa Barbara, available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/PS157/assignment%20files%20public/TOWER%20EXCERPTS.htm>. Accessed 27 June 2011.

¹¹ American Presidency Project, "Congressional Committee Iran Contra Majority Report."

¹² Understanding the Iran Contra Affair, "Minority Report," Brown University, available from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/h-thereport.php. Accessed 27 June 2011.

¹³ Lawrence E. Walsh, *Firewall: The Iran Contra Conspiracy and Cover Up* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997) 184.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Vocabulary

Contras – a member of the U.S.-supported, counter-revolutionary force that tried to overthrow the Nicaraguan government in the 1980s

Covert – secret; not intended to be known, seen, or found out

Extralegal – not permitted by or subject to the law

Islamic – a monotheistic (singular god) religion based on the word of God as revealed to Muhammad during the seventh century

Marxist – a person who subscribes to the political, economic and social principles and policies of socialism as advocated by Karl Marx, a 19th-century revolutionary philosopher and economist

Paramilitary – an organization supplying military weapons and tactical aid to a group fighting against the official ruling power

Pawn – one who is used for the advantage of another person or organization

Conducting the History Lab

Overarching Question: How did American foreign policy decisions in the Middle East and Latin America during the 1980s lead to the Iran-Contra Affair?

History Lab Focus Question: Based on his actions in the Iran-Contra Affair, should Oliver North be regarded as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw?

Materials

- Projector and markers
- RS#01 Background on the Iran-Contra Affair

Iran-Contra Sources (All students will receive RS#02 Source 1 and RS#09 Source Evaluation Sheet. Make enough copies of the next six sources for students to work on one individually and then in a group.)

- RS#02 Source 1 – Congressional Hearings, Majority Report, 1987 (Excerpt)
- RS#03 Source 2 – Reagan Doctrine, 1985
- RS#04 Source 3 – Legislation, 1982-1985
- RS#05 Source 4 – Hearing Testimony, Adolfo Calero, 1987
- RS#06 Source 5 – Email from Oliver North
- RS#07 Source 6 –Hearing Testimony, Fawn Hall, 1987
- RS#08 Source 7 – Polls, 1986-1994
- RS#09 Source Evaluation Sheet
- RS#10 Assessment Option 1 – Oliver North Trading Card

- RS#11 Assessment Option 2 – Ballad of Oliver North
- RS#12 Composition Scoring Tool (for Assessment Options)
- RS#13 Iran-Contra Affair Timeline (for teacher reference)

Procedures

Step 1: Initiate the Lab

To activate students' prior knowledge, conduct a brief discussion on the Iranian Hostage Crisis that riveted the nation and was influential in the presidential election of 1980. (Students may be familiar with the topic from the movie *Argo*.)

- What sort of government did Iran have in 1980 and what happened to U.S.-Iranian relations as a result of the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis?

Next, review the role and position of the United States in Cold War era foreign-policy decisions in the Western Hemisphere in the 20th Century, such as the Guatemalan Coup of 1954. Remind students that the Monroe Doctrine had long guided America's view of its pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere.

Ask: How had U.S. foreign policy been influenced by the presence of Soviet-backed uprisings and governments in the Western Hemisphere?

- Students may mention actions taken in Cuba (rise of Fidel Castro and Soviet alliance, Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis) as an example.

Transition: Mention that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and National Security Administration (NSA) continued to take a large and covert role in the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War era. Intelligence gathering in a zero-sum environment often led to risky and unethical decision-making.

- Post the overarching question and focus question on the board for students to use for reference.
- Explain that in this History Lab, students will examine the decision-making on two hot button, interconnected foreign relations matters during the Reagan administration: The kidnapping of seven Americans in Beirut, Lebanon by forces allied with the radical Iranian government in the mid-1980s and the administration's determination to support anti-communist forces in toppling the Communist government of Nicaragua. They will see how the extra-legal actions taken by members of the administration, in particular those of Lt. Colonel Oliver North, led to a major scandal in the late 1980s.
- Post and review the vocabulary for the History Lab.

Assign the reading "Background on the Iran-Contra Affair" (RS#01) for homework. Ask students to take notes, as they read, on the major events and actors. Students should write down when the events occurred and in what order.

Step 2: Frame the Lab

As a class, construct and display a timeline of the major events and people for the Iran-Contra affair, using the homework reading and student notes.

Ask and discuss:

- Why did the Reagan administration want to help the Contras in Nicaragua?
- Why was it illegal for the Reagan administration to help the Contras in Nicaragua by the mid-1980s? (Discuss the Boland Amendments passed by the Congress and signed into law by President Reagan from 1982-1984. The amendments prohibited direct support of the Nicaraguan Contras, although the restrictions were loosened between the first and subsequent versions of the legislation.)
- If Americans were being held hostage in Lebanon, why would Iran help?

If students are having difficulty understanding the events, considering using the parody made by a television show like *American Dad* to simplify the “plot” and engage the students. The [American Dad parody](#), titled “Oliver North Song,” is available on YouTube.

Also refer to the reference timeline (RS#13).

Step 3: Model the Historical Process

Distribute RS#02 “Source 1 - Congressional Joint Hearing, Majority Report, 1987 (Excerpt)”

Have students read the sample source. As a class, identify and discuss the **text**, **context**, and **subtext** for the source. Review definitions, if necessary:

Text – What information is provided by the source?

Context – The conditions under which the source was created. Why was the source produced? What was going on during the time period?

Subtext – What information can be determined by reading between the lines? Was the document meant to be read by the public? Whom was the source intended and why was it produced?

- Does the source offer any information to support the idea that the arms-for-hostages deal was necessary?
- Is there any evidence that arms-for-hostages deal was illegal?
- Who was the author of this source? Is this source biased (was the author trying to influence the reader)?

Reread the text. Underline examples indicating whether the author believed Oliver North was a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw.

Transition: Distribute RS#09 “Source Evaluation Sheet.” Explain that students will now examine a variety of evidence in an attempt to answer the focus question. Have students complete the section for Source 1.

Step 4: Facilitate the Lab

Provide each student with one of the six other sources. Allow students time to read the source and identify if the source supports North’s portrayal as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw. Move students into groups based on the source.

Have students complete their portion of RS#09 Source Evaluation Sheet by circling the term or terms and supplying supporting details from the source. Provide time for the students to assess the subtext of each source and its impact on the text of the source.

Step 5: Present Information and Interpretations

Each group will present its findings to the class. All students will complete RS#09.

Step 6: Connect to the Overarching Question

Discuss the focus question: Based on his actions in the Iran-Contra Affair, should Oliver North be regarded as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw?

- Which sources support the viewpoint of Oliver North as a patriot?
- Which sources support the viewpoint of Oliver North as a pawn? (For example, the Majority Report notes how Oliver North followed the direction of his superior officers in the administration.)
- Which sources support the viewpoint of Oliver North as a criminal? (For example, according to the legislation, Oliver North broke the law.)
- How should Oliver North be regarded? Which sources are the most persuasive?

Make the connection to the overarching question. Ask students: How did American foreign policy decisions in the Middle East and Latin America during the 1980s lead to the Iran-Contra Affair?

- How did Iran-Contra reflect the concerns of the Reagan Administration and its foreign policy in Latin America and the Middle East during the Cold War?
- Could the United States have pursued alternative actions with Lebanon to secure the release of the American hostages?
- Did the United States have the right to take action against the government in Nicaragua?
- **Prediction:** How would U.S. actions in Nicaragua affect the relationship between the United States and Soviet Union? Explain.
- **Prediction:** Would the Cold War intensify or improve because of U.S. actions in Latin America and the Middle East? Justify your response.

Step 7: Assess Student Understanding

The assessment can be a homework assignment. Use RS#12 Composition Scoring Tool to evaluate student writing (optional).

Assessment Option 1 – Oliver North Trading Card (RS#10)

In 1988, a company produced a set of 35 trading cards on the individuals involved in the Iran-Contra affair. Each card contained an image of the individual and a biography.

Distribute RS#10 Assessment Option 1 – Oliver North Trading Card

Explain: You have been commissioned to create a trading card for Oliver North for a set of cards on the Iran-Contra Affair. Using the template on the sheet, develop a “character sketch,” to include an image of North (on the left) and a biography (on the right), that is based on your interpretation of his role in Iran-Contra and how he should be remembered. Take into account the timeline of events and the other “actors.” Explain your rationale by referencing at 2-4 historical sources. Write in complete sentences.

Assessment Option 2 – Ballad of Oliver North (RS#11)

Many songwriters use the events of the day as their inspiration. In 1987, Tom Bridges recorded the song, “Give ‘Em Hell Ollie,” about Oliver North and the Iran-Contra Affair.

(Follow this link http://www.authentichistory.com/1974-1992/3-reagan/5-irancontra/19870000_Givem_Hell_Ollie-Tom_Bridges.html to listen to the song.)

Discuss how Bridges depicts North. Was North a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw?

Your task is to develop your own song lyrics about Oliver North and the Iran-Contra Affair.

Distribute RS#11 Assessment Option 2 – Ballad of Oliver North

Explain: Write the lyrics for your own song about Oliver North. Based on what you have learned, express your view of North. Do you see him as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw? Make sure to include some of the other “actors” and the chronology of the events. Bonus – Set your song to music!

References

Historical Sources with Annotations:

Congressional Hearings, Majority Report (RS#02 - Source 1)

Source: Understanding the Iran-Contra Affair. “Majority Report.” Brown University. Available from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/h-themajorityreport.php. Accessed 27 June 2011.

On May 5, 1987, joint committee hearings in the House and Senate reviewed the events of the Iran-Contra Affair. The majority of the seats in the House and Senate were held by Democrats. The Majority Report criticized the Reagan Administration and blamed chief aides. The Minority Report, spearheaded by Representative Richard Cheney (R-WY), was signed by eight Republicans in the House and Senate. The Republicans described the hearings as a witch hunt.

Reagan Doctrine, 1985 (RS#03 - Source 2)

Source: Federalism and New Conservatism. “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, 6 February 1987.” *Patriot Post*. Available from http://reagan2020.us/speeches/state_of_the_union_1985.asp. Accessed 28 June 2011.

On February 6, 1985, President Ronald Reagan gave his fifth State of the Union Address, parts of which became known as the Reagan Doctrine. In it Reagan said, “We must stand by all our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives - on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua - to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth. The Sandinista dictatorship of Nicaragua, with full Cuban-Soviet bloc support, not only persecutes its people, the church, and denies a free press, but arms and provides bases for Communist terrorists attacking neighboring states. Support for freedom fighters is self-defense...”

Legislation, 1982-1985 (RS#04 - Source 3)

Source: “International Security and Development Cooperation Act.” U.S. Department of the Treasury. Available from <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/isdca.pdf>. Accessed 27 June 2011.

"THOMAS". Library of Congress. Available from <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. Accessed 28 June 2011.

In the early 1980s, the House of Representatives and Congress passed a series of laws prohibiting direct expenditures and military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras. President Reagan signed the bills into law.

Hearing Testimony Adolfo Calero, 1987 (RS#05 - Source 4)

Source: Understanding the Iran-Contra Affair. "Adolfo Calero." Brown University. Available from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/h-ac-gallery.php. Accessed 27 June 2011.

Adolfo Calero, a former manager of a Coca-Cola plant in Nicaragua, led the Nicaraguan Democratic Force and aided the Contras in Nicaragua, with the assistance of Oliver North. He testified in front of the joint committee of the Iran-Contra investigation.

Email from Oliver North (RS#06 - Source 5)

Source: The National Security Archive. "Email From Oliver North to Poindexter." George Washington University. Available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB113/north07.pdf>. Accessed 28 June 2011.

Oliver North sent an internal email to National Security Advisor John Poindexter, regarding North's meeting with Manuel Noriega. Manuel Noriega was the dictator of Panama and a drug trafficker during the 1980s.

Hearing Testimony Fawn Hall, 1987 (RS#07 - Source 6)

Source: Understanding the Iran-Contra Affair. "Fawn Hall." Brown University. Available from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/h-fh-gallery.php. Accessed 27 June 2011.

In testimony given to the Joint Committee during the investigation of the Iran-Contra Affair, Fawn Hall, a former secretary to Oliver North, provided a detailed account of the events that occurred shortly after the scandal broke in the newspapers.

Polls, 1986-1994 (RS#08 - Source 7)

Source: Rosellini, Lynn. "Oliver North's New Crusade." *U.S. News and World Report*. 116. 5 June 1994.
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A series of polls, taken prior to the Iran-Contra Scandal, during Oliver North's trial, and several years after, show the public's changing response toward the Nicaraguan Contras, as well as toward North himself.

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