

George H. W. Bush's many lies – Part Two

By Carla Binion

(This is Part Two of a series. The sources for all of the following information are the "Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair," published by the New York Times [Times Books, 1988], and two "PBS Frontline" broadcasts with Bill Moyers, one aired in 1987 and another in 1990.)

January 16, 2000—What happens when a president, vice president, and their administration willfully break laws, run a secret war in defiance of Congress, sell arms to declared enemies of the U. S., actively undermine the Constitution, and repeatedly lie about those activities to Congress and the American public? How could such events be swept under the rug? How could they stay covered up, so that even today the American people remain crippled in their ability to learn from their own recent history? All of those things happened as a result of the Iran-Contra scandal.

Bill Moyers says, "The basic Constitutional issues still have not been confronted. Can a president, on his own, wage a war that Congress opposes? And how are we the people to hold our leaders accountable if we are kept in the dark about their deeds? What happened in Iran-Contra was nothing less than the systematic disregard for democracy itself. It was in effect a coup, a spirit at odds with liberty. Officials who boasted of themselves as men of the Constitution showed utter contempt for the law. They had the money and power to do what they wanted, the guile to hide their tracks, and the arrogance to simply declare what they did was legal."

Part Two of this series focuses on President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George Bush's lies to the public regarding Iran-Contra, with an emphasis this time on Bush. Not only did the president and vice president have the arrogance simply to declare what they did was legal, they also had the arrogance to repeatedly lie to the American people about their deeds. They did this despite the fact that some of their lies had already been exposed, but not widely reported.

George H. W. Bush's most widely reported lie is, "Read my lips, no new taxes." A far more serious lie is Bush's claim that he was opposed to negotiating with terrorist nations. The Reagan-Bush team was secretly selling arms to the terrorist nation Iran, allegedly in exchange for the release of hostages, and then funneling the profits from the arms sales to the Contras. Bill Moyers says, "At ten high level meetings, top officials have discussed the arms shipments to the terrorists. George Bush has attended at least five. He also heads the President's Task Force on Terrorism."

Bush said at a press conference, "Today I am proud to deliver to the American people the result of the six months effort to review our policies and our capabilities to deal with terrorism. Our

policy is clear, concise, unequivocal. We will offer no concession to terrorists, because that only leads to more terrorism. States that practice terrorism, or actively support it, will not be allowed to do so without consequence."

Even as the vice president spoke, the Reagan Administration was selling arms to terrorists. Bush knew it. He had attended meetings on the arms shipments.

One arms shipment around the time of the Bush speech netted \$800,000 profit. The Iranians accepted 1,000 American-made missiles without releasing even one hostage. They paid triple market price for the weapons. Bill Moyers says, "The arms sales have become big business, off the shelf and off the books, accountable only to the inside trader. The profits will wind up not in the U. S. Treasury, but in a private slush fund -- what North, Casey and company now call the Enterprise. Nearly \$4 million of it will keep the Contras supplied with the weapons of war, despite the congressional ban."

By fall of 1986, the Enterprise was making huge profits, but few hostages were released. Since few hostages were being released, the obvious question is: Were hostages or profits the real reason for making deals with terrorists? As Moyers says, "The hostages had become a cash cow for the undeclared war." The Enterprise made \$16 million by inflating prices on weapons sales to the Iranians. A sixth arms shipment to Iran generated an \$8 million profit, but no hostage was released. Instead, two more hostages were taken. The Enterprise made additional huge profits with the seventh arms shipment in October. The Iranians then released only one hostage, but only after seizing another.

Although Bush attended high-level meetings on the subject of arms shipments to terrorists and headed the President's Task Force on Terrorism, he continued to deny knowing about arms for hostages. Bill Moyers showed film footage of Bush talking with a group of reporters. A reporter asked, "Did you know about the Contra aid or not?" Bush replied, (This is verbatim.) "I sensed that there were, that we were sending arms, and I sensed we were trying to get hostages out, but not arms for hostages." Another reporter asked, "Did you not begin to smell a rat here?" Vice President Bush answered (Again, this is verbatim.) "Not really, no. I could see that it was, got a little close, but not, not, enough to say no this is not arms, that this is purely arms for hostages."

Another serious deception is Bush's lie that he was "out of the loop" on Iran-Contra. To this day, Bush has not publicly admitted he lied about it. In addition, to this day, most mainstream journalists have not worked hard to make sure the majority of the American people know Bush lied. The following official minutes of a June 1984, meeting of the President's National Security Planning Group show that Bush was "in the loop."

National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane: "There seems to be no prospect that the Democratic leadership will provide for any vote on the Nicaraguan program."

President Reagan: "It all hangs on support for the anti-Sandinistas. How can we get that support in the Congress? We have to be more active."

UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick: "If we can't get the money for the anti-Sandinistas, then we have to make the maximum effort to find the money elsewhere."

Secretary of State George Schultz: "I would like to get the money for the Contras also, but ... Jim Baker said that if we go out and try to get the money from third countries, it is an impeachable offense."

CIA Director William Casey: "Jim Baker said that if we try to get money from third countries without notifying the oversight committees it could be a problem."

Secretary of State George Schultz: "Baker's argument is that the U. S. government may raise and spend funds only through an appropriation of the Congress."

President Reagan: "We must obtain the funds to help these freedom fighters."

Vice President George Bush: "The only problem that might come up is if the United States were to promise to give these third parties something in return, so that some people could interpret this as some kind of any exchange."

National Security Adviser McFarlane: "I certainly hope none of this discussion will be made public in any way."

President Reagan: "If such a story gets out, we'll all be hanging by our thumbs in front of the White House until we find out who did it."

Pretending to be out of the loop on Iran-Contra, Vice President Bush later told reporters (This is verbatim.), "I saw some references in one of these stories to the nine, nine o'clock meetings. Let me tell you how it works. Somebody comes in there, like there's Don Regan, me, and the president. 'Anybody hear anything new on the hostages today? We got and heard of that? Has it moved forward at all? No, but we'll ask Poindexter.' Poindexter would come in the room, 'No, we haven't had a report.' That's the end of that meeting. Then you go ahead and talk about the budget, or talk about something else."

Bush neglected to add, "And sometimes you talk about ways to get around the law."

Another George H. W. Bush lie was his claim that the deal making which helped continue the illegal war in Nicaragua did not involve any "quid pro quo." Bush's concern during the June 1984, meeting (as mentioned above) was that there could be a problem if the U. S. were to "promise to give third parties something in return" for their help in the covert war, in other words, a quid pro quo. The truth is, the Reagan Administration did promise to give something in return in many instances. Vice President George Bush personally delivered the "quid" in one instance and then lied about it.

Here is how Bush came to deliver the quid: After the Reagan Administration decided to disregard Congress and secretly continue the war in Nicaragua, they needed help to keep the Contras going. They then pressured small governments, such as Honduras, for assistance. Bill

Moyers says regarding Honduras, "The deal is simple: You help the guerillas bring down Nicaragua. We'll help you with weapons and money. It is a quid pro quo verging on bribery, and they [the Reagan Administration] know it."

Reagan's team did not want to send a U. S. ambassador to Honduras to deliver the quid, because an ambassador might be called before Congress for questioning. As the government eventually admitted in Oliver North's trial, Vice President George Bush was the person the Reagan Administration sent to deliver the quid to Honduras. As Moyers says, that quid amounted to "more than \$100 million in expedited military, economic, and CIA assistance." Honduras agreed to the quo. In return for the \$100 million worth of U. S. help, Honduras served as a base for the Contras in the war against Nicaragua.

After he became President, George Bush denied what had already been admitted in open court, namely the fact that he personally delivered the quid to Honduras. Bush told the press (again, this is verbatim), "Honduras, there was no quid pro quo. For those who suggest there was, the onus is on them. The word of the President of the United States, George Bush, is there was no quid pro quo. The records of the meeting demonstrate that there was no quid pro quo."

Honduran President Suazo met with President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and much of the cabinet, in Washington two months after Bush's visit to Honduras. In a May 21, 1985 memo, National Security Adviser McFarlane writes to President Reagan: "It will be important to reiterate to [Honduran President] Suazo the importance we attach to his continued cooperation in enabling the FDN [a Honduran-based Contra group] to remain a viable element of pressure on the Sandinistas. Without making the linkage too explicit, it would be useful to remind Suazo that in return for our help we do expect cooperation in pursuit of our mutual objectives. You could underline the seriousness of our security commitment, which the Hondurans seem to regard as the main quid pro quo for cooperating with the FDN." McFarlane is yet another source supporting the fact that there was a quid pro quo with Honduras, again showing that Vice President Bush lied to the American people on the subject.

Unlike the sex lies the media pursued so feverishly during the Clinton scandal, the many lies of George H. W. Bush and Ronald Reagan involved widespread human rights abuses and constitutional issues of statecraft. As head of the President's Task Force on Terrorism, Vice President Bush said that offering concessions to terrorists only leads to more terrorism. The administration knew what it was doing. Reagan and Bush's concessions to terrorists did in fact lead to more terrorism, more kidnapping of hostages, and more killing of innocent civilians in Nicaragua, and they knew it.

The many lies of the Reagan-Bush Administration were not as harmless as Bush's widely reported "no new taxes," (or as President Clinton's "I did not have sex with that woman – Monica Lewinsky.") Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush's many lies caused much human suffering, bloodshed, death, and destruction – often primarily for financial profit. In addition, those lies threatened the constitutional separation of powers. Reagan and Bush were aware of that, too.

During Iran-Contra, our system of checks and balances failed us. The failure allowed Reagan and Bush to hide their dirty linen and bloodstained hands from the American people. Those issues will be the subject of the next article in this series.

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