

Ronald Reagan's Horatio

Like the legendary Roman hero Horatio, Lt. Col. Ollie North has singlehandedly held the bridge against a sea of foes and so saved Ronald Reagan's imperiled presidency. As for the Congressional inquisitors who thought they were going to roast North and his boss, Ronald Reagan, they ended up looking alternately like a lynch mob or a bunch of timid political hacks.

In other words, the Democrat's best laid plans backfired. North's guts and eloquence reminded Americans that someone had to do the nasty but necessary jobs around the world that Congressional liberals have so long shirked. I was both stirred and proud to see North blast his inquisitors for their inconsistency, irresponsibility and moral failure. North was speaking for a lot of us when he said it was time for America to stop abandoning its allies around the world. The fate of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia must not be repeated. North reminded me of the hopelessly outnumbered Marines on Wake Island, 1941, whose last, glorious message before being overrun was "Send us more Japs."

Now, I don't agree with many of the things North did, particularly the disastrous Iranian arms fiasco or the bombing of Libya. But North was dead right when he said that the worst crime was done by Congress in tying the hands of the Executive Branch and castrating U.S. foreign policy. Having myself nearly gone to work at the National Security Council, I saw first hand how the President's ability to run a coherent foreign policy was being systematically degraded by a Congress whose first thought was for domestic politics.

Today, U.S. foreign policy is in a state of near paralysis.



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Liberals have blocked many covert operations and declared the CIA. The U.S. is hard pressed to help anti-communist forces abroad. While Soviet arms were pouring into Central America, liberals in Congress cut off aid to the Contras and decided that South Africa was a greater threat. Ethnic lobbies now boss around Congress. The Jewish lobby has veto power over U.S. Mideast policy; the Greek lobby makes life miserable for Turkey, one of America's key allies; the black lobby makes policy for southern Africa and so on. And the liberal media savages senators and congressmen who dare violate the *Diktat* of the Park Avenue and Beverly Hills establishment.

So Lt. Col. North has now become a symbol, and a very effective one, of the mounting civil war between the Executive and Legislative branches of the U.S. Government. This struggle for control of foreign policy has been growing since the days of Watergate when Congress suddenly discovered its latent power to influence overseas policy through its hold on the purse strings. While the Constitution does give Congress some say in foreign affairs, the main role is clearly left to the President and his staff.

Politicians need issues the way actresses need new roles. Democrats discovered during the Vietnam War that foreign policy issues were safe, attractive and more fun than debating sewer bills. But once you politicize foreign policy, stalemate must set in, particularly when the Democrats control Congress and the Republicans hold the Executive. This is what good soldier North has been telling the American people.

Yes, of course, he did break the quasi-law imposed by Congress through the five vague amendments that forbade any help to the Nicaraguan anti-communist resistance. But it was a stupid law imposed by small-minded men who were playing petty politics with America's security. The same men who cannot keep anything secret and leak news of covert operations to the *Washington Post* within 15 minutes of leaving classified briefings.

More important, there is a good case to be made that Congress does not have the right to so limit the Executive branch. The Supreme Court, not Congress, should be deciding this basic constitutional question. Something must be done quickly. Which of America's allies can now rely on Washington's discretion, good sense or ability to act after watching this week's political circus?

If Congressmen, now so busy posturing for TV, really cared about the nation, rather than viewer ratings, they would have held this week's hearings in private. What we have been seeing amounts to a disgusting display of national indecent exposure. Shame too on the senior Republicans who run the government for hiding out behind Ollie North and letting him take the fall. It's splendid, but also deeply dismaying, to see the administration defended by one lone Marine.