

# Soldier, actor and future pol

**I** was so damned mad," a black safety inspector told me, "I spent \$28 sending telegrams to Congress telling them to leave Ollie North alone." A whole lot of Americans, I found while travelling on the West Coast this week, are furious with Congress and enraptured by that new Lohengrin, Ollie North. Planes were even seen flying down the southern California coast, streaming banners saying "North for President."

Well, maybe more likely for Congress. As I wrote last week, it was a great show watching North singlehandedly rout the Congressional Democrats who had been lying in wait to bushwack the Republicans. He turned their anticipated Watergate II into Waterloo II.

And I thought his defence of Ronald Reagan's Central American policy was masterful and right. It was edifying to see Democratic liberals, who have made such a hash of U.S. policy, brought to their bony knees by one stalwart Marine.

So hurrah for Ollie the soldier, actor and future politician. But there is another, far more important dimension to the Iran-Contra hearings that goes beyond questions of party infighting or TV heroics. By now, it has become painfully clear that what Reagan, Casey, and North did was not only terribly inept, but decidedly anti-democratic as well.

By trading arms for hostages with Iran, North and his bosses created a disaster for U.S. Mideast interests of truly epic dimension. A disaster, in fact, that is now opening the doors to expanding Soviet influence over Arabia and the West's oil reserves.

The secretaries of State and Defence, who knew better and objected, were told to shut up. They should have



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resigned rather than have their responsibilities usurped by a Marine light colonel.

Remember too that North's raiders orchestrated the bombing of Libya, an act of war, and a variety of other questionable covert operations. As for the Nicaraguan Contras, North may have done them more long-term damage than good by his illegal fund-raising and bum-bling resupply operations.

Most important, there arises from North's testimony an evil odor of Caesarism. The good soldier claimed he was only following orders of his superiors, working for the good of his commander-in-chief and anyway, who cares about those inert, old gasbags in Congress who couldn't tell a Sandinista commissar from a cigar store Indian? It was up to Ollie, Bill Casey and their A-Team to save the republic from its enemies by getting the job done, fast and dirty. To hell with the bureaucrats and politicians.

Another colonel and Vietnam veteran, Harry Summers, played North brilliantly this week in the Los Angeles Times. The military, Summers reminded us, reports to Congress, not to the president. North's duty was to the people's representatives. And what, Summers asked, was the can-do North doing supplying arms to the

very same people who blew up 230 of his fellow Marines in Beirut?

There is also the curious matter of Manucher Ghorbanifar. Readers of this column may recall that I identified this Iranian as an Israeli agent well before North confirmed this fact on TV. North claimed that Ghorbanifar had offered him a bribe of \$1 million to keep shipping arms to Iran. Does this mean that Israel was trying to bribe a high U.S. official, and if so, why? Or was Ghorbanifar working on his own account? The good colonel does not seem to have asked himself these interesting questions.

Boxes within boxes, to be sure. Yet one thing is clear. North-Casey-Poindexter and whichever other senior officials were involved violated one of the most basic tenets of American government—the concept of accountability, of checks and balances. The men who wrote the U.S. Constitution, 23 of whom were former soldiers, ensured that no part of the government could operate independent of the others, that no official was above the law, and that the military took orders from Congress.

To endanger this most sacred creed of the American system of government for a Nicaragua or Iran is madness. The U.S. wants no Caesars, large or small, no Bonapartes, no MacArthurs, no men on horseback. America may adore and cherish a dauntless, plucky Ollie North but it must just as quickly punish a North who thinks that he or his bosses were somehow a little above, or to the side of, the law.

I don't like a lot of members of Congress either, but they are still the voice of the American people. Wrong about so much as it may be, Congress has done right this week to rise and defend the great republic.