

CONVERGENCE

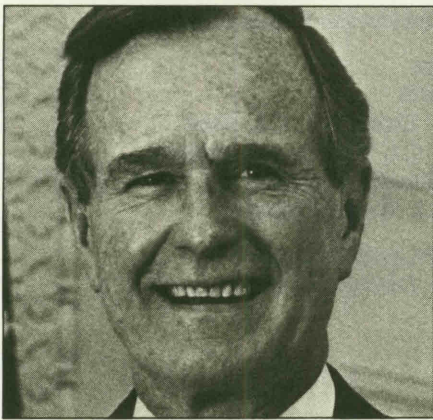
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Iran-contra puzzle unsolved

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By EVA BERTRAM

Two and a half years after an obscure Lebanese newspaper printed the first reports of United States missile sales to Iran, pieces are still being added to the Iran-contra puzzle. New evidence surfaced in the trial of Oliver North and in recent investigations by the Senate Intelligence Committee and a Foreign Relations subcommittee. The American public has yet to learn the full story, and has seen virtually no changes in the policies or personnel behind our national security affairs. There is no reason to believe we will not see a recurrence of the abuses of power and violations of law exposed in the Iran-contra affair.

Yet the White House remains perplexed and more than a little annoyed that the Iran-contra issue stubbornly refuses to fade into history. "If there are unanswered questions," announced spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, "my vote would be to leave them to the historians and others who want to delve into this, and we get on with the business at hand."

President Bush and members of his administration fail to understand that the Iran-contra scandal left deep cracks in the public's confidence in government that will not be smoothed over by a series of limited official investigations followed by no reforms in law or policy, or by the criminal indictment of a handful of those involved and the partial conviction of Oliver North. Nor will the public's trust be restored by the election of a key player in the scandal to the nation's highest office, or by his limp assurances that he was "out of the loop," that his "conscience is clear," and—in the case of an illicit third-country agreement on contra assistance—that "there was no quid pro quo."

The Iran-contra scandal has persisted because our democratic institutions—Congress, the courts, the executive branch and the press—have thus far failed to respond to a political and constitutional crisis on the order of Vietnam and Watergate.

The Iran-contra affair began with a secret White House strategy to sell arms to Iran and supply the Nicaraguan *contras* in direct violation of stated United States policies and Federal law. The President himself had pledged never to negotiate with "terrorist" nations, including Iran,

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