**United States History Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Unit 13: Did Reagan Know About Iran-Contra? Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

On November 25, 1986, the biggest political and constitutional scandal since Watergate exploded in Washington when President Ronald Reagan told a packed White House news conference that funds derived from covert arms deals with the Islamic Republic of Iran had been diverted to buy weapons for the U.S.-backed Contra rebels in Nicaragua. President Reagan had initially denied that weapons had been traded for hostages in Iran four months earlier. Reagan's announcement, in which he named two subordinates—National Security Advisor John M. Poindexter and National Security Council staffer Oliver L. North—as the responsible parties, was the first to link the two operations.

The scandal was almost the undoing of the Teflon President. Of all the revelations that emerged, the most **galling** for the American public was the president's abandonment of the long-standing policy against dealing with terrorists, which Reagan repeatedly denied doing in spite of overwhelming evidence that made it appear he was simply lying to cover up the story. What is more, the actions of his administration were in direct violation of the Boland Amendment (1982-1984), a law that forbid U.S. officials from helping the Contras, who were known to be guilty of rape, murder, and trafficking in drugs.

Despite the damage to his image, the president arguably got off easy, escaping the ultimate political sanction of impeachment. While Reagan may not have known about the diversion of money to the Contras or certain other details of the operations, he directed that both support for the Contras (whom he ordered to be kept together "body and soul") and the arms-for-hostages deals go forward, and was at least **privy** to other actions that were no less significant.

Reagan's success in avoiding a harsher political penalty was due to a great extent to Poindexter's testimony (which left many observers deeply skeptical about its **plausibility**). But it was also due in large part to a tactic developed mainly by Attorney General Edwin Meese, which was to keep congressional and public attention tightly focused on the diversion of funds to the Contras. By spotlighting that single episode, which they felt sure Reagan could credibly deny, his aides managed to minimize public scrutiny of the president's other questionable actions. Meese also made sure that thousands of documents were destroyed by Oliver North, who oversaw the Iran-Contra deals, in a “shredding party” that took place very early in the investigation. Meese also moved very slowly in his own investigation, giving witnesses—which included at least ten top officials—time to shape their testimony.

President Reagan also appointed a special board to investigate the scandal on November 25, 1986, headed by former Senator John Tower. Reagan himself testified before Tower Commission in December 1986, giving contradictory testimony, at first noting that he authorized the arms deals and then stating that he could not remember authorizing them. The commission concluded in its 200 page report that Reagan was guilty of not being aware of what his administration’s officials were doing. The Tower report did not find any evidence that Reagan directly knew about the details of the funds for the Contras. A similar report issued by Congress came to the same conclusions: the president was ultimately responsible for not knowing what his aides were doing.

President Reagan apologized before the public on March 4, 1987: “A few months ago I told the American people that I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that’s true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not.” Reagan’s political popularity dropped from 67% to 46% as a result of the scandal, but, by 1989, the public seemed to have forgiven him as his approval rating went back up to 64%.

The extent of Reagan’s true knowledge of the scandal can never be known. Colonel Oliver North, who oversaw the plan, testified that Reagan knew a great many details of the affair but there is little documentary evidence about what those details were. Seven administration officials who were convicted of various charges—lying under oath, obstruction of justice, and withholding evidence—were later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush. In 1994, it was revealed that Reagan was suffering from Alzheimer’s, leading many to suggest that, in fact, he might have been speaking the truth when he said he could not remember details of the deals.

1. According to the first paragraph (lines 1-15), what made Reagan’s announcement of the scandal so shocking in November 1986?
2. No one had heard of the Iran-Contra arms deal before November 25, 1986.
3. The fact that the U.S. was secretly at war with the Contras.
4. President Reagan’s admission that he alone directed the arms deals.
5. The fact that Reagan had denied U.S. involvement in arms deals earlier.
6. In the second paragraph (lines 16-28), the context suggests that the word **galling** most likely means:
7. Bitterly upsetting
8. Angrily approving
9. Strongly confusing
10. Thoroughly informing
11. Although there is no direct evidence of President Reagan’s involvement in the Iran-Contra affair, which of the following is *indirect* evidence?
12. Reagan traveled to Iran in 1985 and must have done some negotiation.
13. Reagan later pardoned officials who were convicted of crimes.
14. Reagan’s inability to remember suggests that he was acting.
15. Reagan openly approved of the Contras and wanted to help them.
16. Which of the following was NOT a reason for Reagan’s success in avoiding impeachment, according to paragraph 4 (lines 39-57)?
17. Attorney General Edwin Meese’s slow investigation allowed official time to develop their stories.
18. Poindexter’s testimony helped focus attention on the diversion of funds to the Contras, which Reagan could plausibly deny knowing about.
19. Reagan admitted in 1994 that he had been suffering from Alzheimers, which may explain why he had lapses in memory.
20. Colonel Oliver North held a “shredding party” to destroy crucial documents early in the investigation.
21. What is the most likely reason that President Reagan appointed the Tower Commission (mentioned in paragraph 5, lines 58 to 74)?
22. Presidents are required by law to appoint special commissions whenever it appears that they might be impeached.
23. Reagan could give the appearance of honestly seeking the truth by appointing an outside investigatory commission.
24. The U.S. Congress ordered him to set up a special commission to investigate the scandal.
25. Reagan knew that the commission would find him not guilty, since Senator John Tower was a friend of Reagan.
26. Both the Tower Commission and the Report of Congress on the affair concluded (according to paragraph 5, lines 58 to 74) that:
27. Reagan surely knew of most of the details of the arms trading deal to help the Contras.
28. At most, Reagan was guilty of not knowing what his subordinates were doing.
29. Although the arms deals were bad policy, they did not violate current U.S. law.
30. President Reagan should be impeached for his role in the Iran-Contra arms scandal.
31. By telling the reader the President Reagan suffered from Alzheimer’s in 1994, the reader is supposed to infer that:
32. Reagan might have suffered from the disease in the mid-1980s, explaining his memory lapses during testimony.
33. Reagan was a true hero who deserved more sympathy than blame for his role in the Iran-Contra scandal.
34. Reagan had simply been lying under oath in his Tower Commission testimony.
35. Presidents cannot be prosecuted for actions they did if they were suffering from a disease.