

Reagan testifies he had no 'inkling' of aid

WASHINGTON - Former President Reagan testified in a videotaped deposition released Thursday that he never "had any inkling" his aides were secretly arming the Nicaraguan Contras during a congressional ban on military aid.

In testimony for the upcoming trial of John Poindexter, the former president also said he remained unconvinced there had been a diversion of Iran arms sale money to the rebels --

until prosecutors confronted him with the report of the Tower Commission he appointed.

Reagan said he would have expected Poindexter, his former national security adviser, to inform him of any diversion of funds to the Contras "unless maybe he thought he was protecting me from something."

Reagan's testimony was taken in Los Angeles last week and made available in Washington. The former president was jovial and testy by turns during eight hours -- winking at Poindexter as he took the stand and talking amiably with the judge but also answering in abrupt fashion when Iran-Contra prosecutor Dan Webb said he wasn't addressing a question.

He said at numerous points that he couldn't recall a date, a name, whether someone had told him something or not.

Reagan said decisively that he agreed with a letter Poindexter sent Congress saying the White House was complying with the ban on help for the Contras -- a letter that forms part of the basis for one charge Poindexter faces.

But he also said, when told by prosecutors, that he was learning from

them for the first time that former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, Poindexter's predecessor, had pleaded guilty to misleading Congress in the affair.

Reagan testified, "It was my impression" that National Security Council aide Oliver North's assistance to the Contras was limited to "communicating back and forth . . . on the need for the support of the Contras."

"I guess that I had never . . . had any inkling that we were guiding their strategy in any way," Reagan testified under questioning by Webb.

Asked what he thought North was doing, Reagan said that "you have to have people that can be available to make contact with the leaders of the Contras . . . sometimes closer than just writing a letter."

"It was my understanding because his name would crop up in memos and so forth that that's what he was doing," the former president added.

Iran-Contra prosecutors used cross-examination of Reagan to introduce evidence that Poindexter lied to Reagan about the secret aid operation after a C-123 cargo plane was shot down over Nicaragua during a supply

flight on Oct. 5, 1986.

During his videotaped testimony, Reagan said he couldn't recall which adviser told him about the crash and said he did not know if pilot Eugene Hasenfus was connected with North's secret operation.

Reagan said Thursday that "no one has proven to me" that profits from secret arms sales to Iran were diverted to the rebels fighting the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

But later in his testimony Reagan was confronted with details of the diversion from the February 1987 Tower Commission report.

"This is the first time that I have ever seen a reference that actually specified there was a diversion," Reagan said of the much-publicized report.

"Is this the first time . . . that you came to realize in fact that a diversion had actually occurred?" asked Webb.

"Yes," replied Reagan. Webb asked whether Reagan expected Poindexter to report such a diversion to his boss.

"Yes," replied Reagan. "Unless maybe he thought he was protecting me from something."

At that point Reagan seemed to lose his train of thought, saying, "But, no, I don't understand. This is very confusing to me about this."

Reagan grew testy with Webb, who told U.S. District Court Judge Harold Greene that the former president had not answered his question. Reagan retorted that he was trying to be responsive.

He said he "assured everybody that we would have to abide by the law" during the ban on Contra military aid.

Reagan also testified under oath that he never authorized Poindexter to obstruct congressional inquiries into the Iran-Contra affair or to destroy documents.

He said he was never told that North had destroyed Iran-Contra documents, an act for which the former aide was convicted of a felony last year.

"I don't know when it would have been told to me or I would have known," Reagan said when asked about when he found out about the 1985 Hawk shipment. "I, some place along the line, acquired that knowledge, and I don't know from whom or where."



Reagan

Iranian newspaper calls for freeing hostages as an Islamic and humanitarian consideration

NICOSIA, Cyprus - An Iranian newspaper close to President Hashemi Rafsanjani said Thursday all 18 Western hostages in Lebanon should be freed because they have become a propaganda tool for Iran's enemies.

Most of the captives are believed held by kidnapers loyal to Iran.

"Regardless of the West's propaganda ploys, Moslem forces, out of Islamic and humanitarian considerations, should work to get the hostages free with no precondition," the English-language Tehran Times said in an editorial, parts of which were carried by Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency.

It was the first known statement by an Iranian newspaper in support of freeing all the hostages, whose fate is believed linked to a power struggle within the Iranian government.

Eight Americans, four Britons, an Irishman, an Italian, two West Germans and two Swiss citizens are captives in Lebanon.

Terry Anderson, 42, has been held the longest. He is chief Middle East

correspondent of The Associated Press and was abducted March 16, 1985.

Anderson's sister, Peggy Say, was in Damascus, Syria, on Thursday as part of a tour with an Associated Press delegation to seek the hostages' release.

They should regard the hostages as victims of imperialist policies of the West and make attempts to get them all freed.

I consider that Iran is not part of the problem, but part of the solution."

Arafat told Say in their meeting last week that Rafsanjani had the greatest influence with the kidnapers, but hard-liners in the Iranian government limited his room for

Tehran Times English-Language newspaper

Among leaders with whom she has met are Javier Perez de Cuellar, the U.N. secretary-general; Pope John Paul II, and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Attempts to see Iranian leaders have failed.

Asked in Damascus about the Tehran Times editorial, Say said: "I am deeply grateful. It is encouraging."

E. German official calls concerns valid

Reduced German military suggested

EAST BERLIN - The two Germanys should reduce their combined military by two-thirds when they unite, and some U.S. and Soviet soldiers should remain during the unification process, the East German defense minister said Thursday.

Adm. Theodor Hoffmann said the armed forces should be purely defensive and both states should remain in their respective alliances until they are reunited under a new European security system.

West Germany belongs to NATO and East Germany is in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. About 380,000 Soviet soldiers are stationed in East Germany and NATO has more than 300,000 in West Germany, including about 250,000 Americans.

Hoffmann said a joint German military should be reduced to about 300,000 men initially, and later to 150,000-200,000.

All three services -- army, navy and air force -- should be retained because all are essential to defense, he told a news conference.

Gen. Hans Deim, East Germany's delegate to Vienna talks on reduction of conventional forces, told the reporters anything over 300,000 men "would cause security concerns of

maneuver.

In its editorial, the Tehran Times said the struggle against Western influence in the Middle East was legitimate and should continue, but that all forces in Lebanon should work to free hostages of whatever nationality.

"They should regard the hostages as victims of imperialist policies of

our neighbors, especially France and Poland."

West Germany has 490,000 military personnel and East Germany says its armed forces have shrunk from 170,000 men to 100,000 in recent months.

Until a new European system supplants NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Hoffman said, U.S. and Soviet soldiers should remain on German territory "even if this becomes symbolic at a certain time."

The United States and Soviet Union have agreed to reduce their troop strength in central Europe to 195,000 each. Most of the reductions will be made in Germany.

Keeping some U.S. and Soviet troops until unification under a new security system would create stability in Europe, Hoffman said. He described fears of a hasty union as justified.

"Although unification is unstoppable, it is going faster than the process of uniting all of Europe," and Europeans have "legitimate security concerns" about it, the defense minister said.

"Our neighbors have had bitter experiences with a united Germany," he added, recalling the two world

the West and make attempts to get them all freed," it said. "Maybe 1990 will be the year for the release of all the hostages."

It repeated Rafsanjani's demand for the release of Iran's charge d'affaires in Beirut, Mohsen Musavi, and three other embassy staff members kidnapped in north Lebanon in July 1982 by members of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia. All four are believed dead.

Lebanese Forces commander Samir Geagea said in August 1988 he found no trace of the men after taking over the militia in 1986. Geagea blamed his predecessor, Elie Hobeika, for their disappearance and apparent murder.

Rafsanjani has offered to help free the Western hostages.

In August 1989, he said there were "reasonable, prudent solutions" to the problem. Two months later, Rafsanjani said he would not try to get them released unless the United States freed billions of dollars in Iranian assets frozen in 1979.

wars of this century.

Talks with the West German military on merging forces could begin soon after East Germany's first free elections are held March 18 and a new government is formed, Hoffman said.

The victorious World War II Allies -- the United States, Soviet Union, Britain and France -- have agreed on a two-stage plan for reunification.

After talks between the Germanys on merging their political, economic and legal systems, the four powers are to join them for discussions of the international ramifications.

Some Europeans worry about the formula, called "two plus four," and Poland wants a peace treaty guaranteeing its borders. On Thursday, Britain expressed support for the Polish demand.

Poland also has demanded a role in the "two plus four" talks, and on Thursday, government spokesman Wolfgang Meyer repeated East Germany's agreement.

One-third of what is now Poland belonged to Germany before World War II, and the Poles are concerned about possible German territorial claims.

De Klerk accepts ANC proposal for formal negotiations

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa - President F.W. de Klerk on Thursday accepted a proposal by the African National Congress to send a delegation for the first formal talks between the white government and its foremost adversary.

The ANC's commitment to dialogue "is a positive step," reflecting a desire to "search for solutions through peaceful means," said de Klerk, who lifted a 30-year ban on the guerrilla movement three weeks ago.

De Klerk also made his first public statement on a controversy involving Defense Minister Magnus Malan, who has been linked in press reports to a secret military unit that allegedly assassinated anti-apartheid activists.

The president, interviewed by the state-run TV network, said the allegations would be thoroughly investigated by a judicial commission. He criticized the press for conducting a "trial by media" and praised the role of the security forces in saving South Africa from "anarchy and chaos."

Opposition political leaders demanded Malan's resignation and urged de Klerk to ensure that no cover-up takes place.

Malan, in statements this week, denied having ordered assassinations but did not rule out the possibility the unit may have committed such acts. He pledged the military would not interfere with any investigations.

The Star newspaper of Johannesburg quoted sources as saying Malan had been aware of the unit at least since 1987.

Police investigators have said in court papers that members of the unit, called the Civil Cooperation Bureau, are suspected of involvement in the assassinations last year of David Webster, a Johannesburg human rights activist, and Anton Lubowski, a civil rights lawyer and pro-independence activist in Namibia.

De Klerk last month ordered a judicial inquiry into charges that military and police squads murdered government opponents. The commission is expected to investigate the unsolved killings of at least 60 activists in the past decade.

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