

# McFarlane blasts North as self-serving liar

by Edward Spannaus

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## Special Trust

by Robert C. McFarlane and Zofia Smardz  
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A scathing assessment of Oliver North, now the Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Virginia, has just come from the pen of his former boss at the National Security Council, Robert McFarlane. As President Reagan's national security adviser from October 1983 to December 1985, McFarlane was North's superior, and he assigned North to work on both the support operations for the Nicaraguan Contras, and on the hostages being held in Lebanon by Iranian-allied terrorists. He later found, especially on the Contra operations, that North was lying to him as well as to everyone else, and that North was involved in far more dirty business than McFarlane himself knew.

Nevertheless, believing that the prosecutions by the Iran-Contra special prosecutor were wrong, McFarlane did his best to protect his subordinate, and he claims that he was largely responsible for North's convictions being overturned. In fact, McFarlane says: "Ollie North went scot-free. He never went to jail, and never paid a fine, largely due to my testimony. And from that day to this, I have never heard another word from Ollie."

"The man I had thought was patriotic, self-sacrificing and loyal," McFarlane continues, "was revealed to be devious, self-serving, self-aggrandizing, and true first and foremost to himself. At every turn in the Iran-Contra scandal, he had sought to protect himself at the expense of others, acting out of self-interest and expediency."

## Iran and the Contras

McFarlane may be best remembered as the official who tried to kill himself during the Iran-Contra investigation. It almost seems as if McFarlane himself wants to perpetuate that image, for that is how he opens his book in the first paragraph. His attempted suicide in February 1987 is one of the great unexplained episodes of what is known as the

"Iran-Contra" saga, and he does not satisfactorily explain what happened. Nor is his resignation in late 1985 satisfactorily explained. A number of sources have asked whether McFarlane was the victim of some sort of blackmail operation. (Israeli author Ari Ben-Menashe, whose stories are of varying credibility, wrote that McFarlane was being blackmailed by the Israelis, and that he was forced to resign because he was leaking intelligence to the Israelis.)

McFarlane's role in what became known as "Iran-Contra" is anomalous. As North's superior, he holds himself ultimately responsible for what Ollie did, although he castigates North for operating behind his back in a deceitful and scheming manner. McFarlane portrays himself as the one who deployed North in both the Iran initiative and the Contra supply operations, but he assumes more blame for North's actions than he should. North was working for Vice President George Bush (on counter-terrorism and on the "continuity of government" project), and also with Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, long before McFarlane became National Security Adviser.

In May 1984, as congressional opposition to continued funding of the Contras mounted, President Reagan made his now-famous directive to McFarlane regarding the Contras, to "do whatever you have to do to help these people keep body and soul together." McFarlane turned to North, who was already involved in Central America as the NSC liaison to the CIA on the Contras, and as having been the NSC staff liaison to the Kissinger Commission on Central America and having accompanied George Bush to Central America in December 1983.

In the fall of 1984, McFarlane instructed North not to involve himself in raising funds for the Contras. North assured McFarlane he was not doing so. (On this, Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh seems to agree.) Nevertheless, North continued to do so. When North testified before the congressional hearings in July 1987, McFarlane says he found North to be "deceitful, mendacious, and traitorous."

"Watching his performance on television," McFarlane writes, "I felt as though I were being stabbed, over and over again, straight in the heart. . . . North's testimony revealed, first of all, that he had lied to me, all through 1984 and 1985. When he had flat-out denied raising money for the Contras, he had lied. Willfully and knowingly. He had not only raised money for them, he had set up, without my approval or knowledge, an off-the-shelf enterprise with Dick Secord to funnel funds and weapons to the Contras."

Worst of all, says McFarlane, North claimed he had done all this with McFarlane's knowledge and approval. McFarlane, who had already testified once before Congress, went back and appeared a second time in order to refute North's lies.

Although McFarlane doesn't detail it, it is abundantly clear from other sources that North's Contra activities were

not directed by McFarlane or the CIA. The “off-the-shelf,” “full-service” Contra supply operation was run by free-lance “former” intelligence operatives who were run by George Bush’s office and by Casey personally. It was Casey, who faced opposition from within the CIA Operations Directorate to many of his schemes, who put North in touch with Richard Secord, who then organized the Contra resupply airlift operation. It was Don Gregg, Bush’s national security adviser, who put North in touch with Felix Rodriguez, who was running another piece of the Contra resupply operation out of Ilopango air field in El Salvador.

What about the Iranian side of things? McFarlane recounts how he was first approached in July 1985 by David Kimche, the director general of the Israeli Defense Ministry, who proposed seeking out opposition elements in Iran. Of Reagan’s top advisers, only McFarlane and Casey openly favored exploring the possibility of supplying Iran with weapons in return for release of U.S. hostages being held in Lebanon—all, including George Bush, were aware of the proposal. Casey urged that the operation be run out of the White House, not the CIA. When Reagan gave his approval, McFarlane designated his deputy, John Poindexter, and his counter-terrorism staffer, Oliver North, as the contacts for the Iran initiative.

A few months later, discouraged by the Iranian response, McFarlane urged Reagan to shut down the initiative. Much later, he says, he realized that North was already making his plans to sell arms to the Iranians in order to finance a slush fund for the Contra operations: “A project of which he knew I would disapprove, which I never would have permitted him to pursue.” Later, he realized that North was deceiving not only him, but also Poindexter and the President as well.

### **McFarlane bails out North**

All such memoirs and accounts of events, particularly those surrounded in controversy, are inevitably self-serving, and McFarlane’s is no exception. But in this case, much of his account can be cross-checked with other sources. In crucial respects, his book corresponds to his own sworn testimony and to findings of Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh, and can thus be verified at least to that degree.

Unlike North and others, McFarlane did not take the Fifth Amendment, or refuse to testify, and he criticizes North and Poindexter for bargaining for immunity. Especially North, who was “behaving in a way that Marines don’t behave, evading responsibility, seeking shelter.”

In the face of a pending indictment by Walsh for perjury and other felony counts, McFarlane pled guilty to four misdemeanors involving withholding information from Congress pertaining to congressional inquiries about financing of the Contras. Earlier, when the Iran-Contra scandal began to break, he had urged that Reagan and his administration

forthrightly defend their actions, and he faults Reagan for lacking the moral and intellectual courage to defend his policies and his subordinates.

McFarlane professes that he believed it was his responsibility to defend his subordinates. Surprising as it may seem, he did go to bat for Ollie North, despite North’s treachery and back-stabbing. He did not believe that North should have been charged and prosecuted for actions generally initiated by his superiors. “Whatever he did when I was his superior had been my responsibility, and I would do my part to prevent his conviction.”

When called to testify at North’s trial, McFarlane says that he was therefore determined “to help, not hurt, North, and all my testimony was designed to assume responsibility for whatever he had done on my watch.” When North was convicted on only three charges, while being acquitted on six, McFarlane says it is “undeniable that my testimony had made the difference.” But, he comments, he never received a word of thanks or acknowledgement from North.

McFarlane’s account does appear self-serving, but it is supported by Walsh’s Final Report written last August, in which Walsh complains that the government’s task in prosecuting North was complicated by witnesses such as McFarlane who “at every opportunity sought to help the defendant.”

That wasn’t the end of it. McFarlane’s testimony in post-trial hearings was crucial to the overturning of North’s convictions by the Appeals Court. McFarlane claims this, and Walsh’s account agrees: McFarlane testified that his own trial testimony was “colored” and influenced by North’s immunized testimony before Congress. Walsh complains bitterly that it was Congress’ decision to grant immunity to North, which enabled North to ultimately escape being held accountable for his crimes.

North’s deceitfulness and ingratitude are seemingly without bounds. After McFarlane’s interview on CBS’s “60 Minutes” on Sept. 11, North sought to discredit McFarlane’s attacks on him by quoting criticisms of McFarlane by the judge in North’s trial, where the judge assailed McFarlane as lacking credibility and “not a reliable witness.” It was apparently McFarlane’s efforts to protect North which led to the judge’s outburst against him—which North then used against his former boss as well.

This book is not solely about Oliver North and “Iran-Contra”; it has many other interesting features which we will take up in a future issue of *EIR*. But the timeliness of McFarlane’s portrait of North is that North not only lied to Congress (which North sometimes admits, even boasts of), but that he lied to everyone around him, including his superiors, and he lied *about* them as well—all the way up to the President he claimed to be protecting.

And now, this fabricator and falsifier wants to be a U.S. senator. God save this United States.