*Prior to the events in this article, the U.S. was supporting a militarized rebel group in Nicaragua called the Contras, because they were fighting against (pause for effect) Communism \*gasp!\* The Contras were controversial because they used ruthless tactics like targeting hospitals and civilians to scare people into supporting them. Congress eventually passed a law called the Boland Amendment, which made it so the president and the CIA couldn’t help the Contras anymore. Spoiler alert- we continued to fund them, and this is the story of how.*

IRAN CONTRA AFFAIR (1983 - 1988)

http://www.coldwar.org/articles/80s/IranContraAffair.asp

The Iran Contra Affair began as an internal U.S. confrontation between Ronald Reagan and the Democratic Congress. In 1984, the Boland Amendment passed, which said that the CIA and Department of Defense could not give militaristic aid to other countries (specifically in Nicaragua). The conflict began in 1985, while Iran and Iraq were at war with each other. Reagan had hopes that if he were to supply Iran with United States military supplies and weapons, then the relations with Iran may be strengthened, and in turn would lead to improved relations with Lebanon and a stronger U.S. position in the Middle East. Reagan was also hoping that if he were to place the U.S. in good standings with Iran, he may be able to release seven American hostages[[1]](#footnote-1) who were being held captive by Iranian terrorists.

This “arms-for-hostages” proposal was in direct violation of the Boland Amendment passed only a year prior. One specification of the deal made in July 1985, was that over 500 anti-tank missiles would be sent to Iran from Israel in exchange for American Reverend Benjamin Weir. Ironically, the initial trade of arms for three hostages had somewhat backfired as those released were replaced by three more. More trade of military weapons for hostages continued, resulting in the release of all of the American hostages and an accumulation of over 1500 American missiles of various types in Iranian hands.

Approximately thirty million dollars were recorded as received from the Iranians; however, only about twelve million of this ended up in the proper hands. This lead to great suspicion in Washington — where did the rest of the money go? As it turned out, the money that was gained from selling the arms to Iran was used to support American contras[[2]](#footnote-2) in Nicaragua who were fighting the Sandinistas: a leftist political party founded by Augusto Cesar Sandino, a former insurgent leader. Reagan’s goal was to help the contras against a power that he deemed as a Communist threat. The funding and the process used to get it were in clear defiance of Boland Amendment. The Reagan administration had gotten around the laws of the amendment by using the National Security Council, whose actions were not restricted by the terms of the amendment. In charge of the affair were Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter, and Oliver North: leaders and staffer of the NSC respectively.

Eventually, the world learned of Reagan’s actions regarding the Iranian arms deals through a Lebanese newspaper and a great deal of questioning arose. Though Reagan denied any knowledge of what was occurring in Nicaragua, Mr. North stated that both Reagan and his Vice President Bush knew of the events and their cover-up. As of yet, there has been no evidence which connects Reagan and the contra scandal. Eventually, North and Poindexter were pardoned from criminal charges under the condition that they testify in front of then Senate. Later, in 1992, the president at the time (Bush) pardoned others, including Weinberger, involved in the scandal who kept information secret or aided the affair in other ways — defined as charges of lying to Congress. Overall, the entire event was a blow to Congress and its ability to oversee all of its departments. Additionally, Reagan lost face with his public as many were upset about his dealing with terrorists.

1. Not related to the Iranian hostage crisis at the embassy [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)