

The overdue fall of Donald T. Regan

by Webster G. Tarpley

In a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on April 9, 1986, Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche demanded the jailing of the White House Chief of Staff, Don Regan. In the late afternoon of Friday, Feb. 27, 1987, the first step toward the fulfillment of that demand was completed as the sacked Regan flung out of the White House in apoplectic rage after his job had been transferred to Howard Baker, the former Republican Senate Majority leader.

For two years Don Regan had sought to hold the President and the White House in a tyrannical grip. His peripeteia was as unceremonious as could be imagined: Although Regan knew that the Tower Commission report had brought his tenure to an end, he was obsessed with the notion of a graceful exit, prolonging the agony into the following week to save face. Instead, one day after the Tower Commission report was delivered, Baker was called to the White House and offered the job of chief of staff, which he accepted. Nancy Reagan's office in the East Wing then issued a statement welcoming Baker's appointment, even before Regan's resignation had been announced. The President then issued a statement saying that Don Regan had asked months ago to return to private life, and that now, with the Tower report completed, the President was regretfully accepting his resignation, effective immediately. It was only then that the furious Regan dictated his one-line resignation, and departed from the White House forever.

Baker was not the first choice to fill the chief of staff post, but rather the second or third choice. The job may have been offered to former Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis. It was certainly offered to Reagan crony and former Sen. Paul Laxalt, who declined, and television networks attributed the refusal to Laxalt's own desire to run for President. Laxalt

suggested Baker for chief of staff. Although Baker, by his own admission, had previously declined an offer by the President to become the director of Central Intelligence, he accepted what he called the highly sensitive post of organizing the White House.

A scoundrel departs

With Don Regan a scoundrel departs from the Washington scene. This was the boss of Merrill Lynch who, in the late '70s supervised the creation of money-laundering mechanisms that processed hundreds of billions of dollars in dirty money from the international narcotics traffic. Don Regan was the White House enforcer for the junk-bond asset-stripping bandits of Wall Street, and, through them, for the oligarchical families which control the great rentier *fondi* of Europe. Regan was the single most important factor in the debacle of the second Reagan administration, having had prime responsibility for the insane Gramm-Rudman law and the deficit-cutting hysteria, the Reykjavik sell-out, and the big lie of the Reagan recovery. Regan's ham-handed stupidity played a part in the decision to launch the Challenger Space Shuttle under the worst conditions. Regan's obsession with austerity had poisoned administration relations with the Congress. He was hostile from the very beginning to launching a War on Drugs, even telling Nancy Reagan that she should refrain from getting involved. He was responsible for the nomination of William Weld as assistant attorney general, a move that condemned the War on Drugs to failure. Most characteristic of Regan was that he was consumed with hatred for Lyndon LaRouche and his friends, and took a leading role in fomenting the illegal, politically inspired vendetta that has been unleashed against LaRouche.

Don Regan will be followed into oblivion by his bureau-

cratic hatchet-men and retainers, the so-called Mice. The victims of this imminent hecatomb will include White House counsel Peter Wallison, Assistant to the President for Cabinet Affairs Peter Kingdon, Regan's own executive assistant Thomas Dawson, and Regan's Staff Secretary David Chew. The weekend at the White House will be devoted to a comprehensive staff reorganization. At the same time, Frank Carlucci and Gen. Colin Powell at the NSC are completing a review of all ongoing covert operations with a view to determining if they are in harmony with overall policy.

Don Regan was one of the great villains of the history of the 20th century. One day soon he will be brought to justice. The mere fact of his ouster is a vast net gain for humankind as a whole.

Baker's background

Howard Baker entered the Senate in 1966. He had married Joy Dirksen, the daughter of Everett Dirksen of Illinois, the GOP Senate leader of the middle '60s. During the Watergate scandal, Baker was the ranking Republican member of the committee chaired by Sam Ervine that investigated the affair. Baker's profile was moderate to liberal. In 1977, he became the Republican majority leader. He entered the Republican presidential primaries in 1980 but was soon forced to drop out of the race. Under the Reagan administration, he generally voted for what the White House wanted. In 1984 he was not a candidate for reelection because he wanted to prepare another bid for the White House. In the meantime, he has been earning \$750,000 a year working for Vinson and Elkins of Houston, John Connally's law firm, which numbers among its clients such firms as Merrill Lynch, Parisbas, Morgan Stanley, and Dillon Reed.

Baker's nomination was widely welcomed in Congress, where it was said that through him the administration had procured "instant credibility." Relations between the White House and Capitol Hill, as already noted, had been made into a shambles by Don Regan. If he proves loyal to the President's deep desire to see the Strategic Defense Initiative become reality, Baker could help gain irreversible congressional commitment to Caspar Weinberger's proposal for the deployment of the SDI. It is unlikely that Baker could become the Rasputin of the White House to the degree that the President's "cousin," Don Regan, did.

The Tower Commission report

The stage for the long-overdue fall of Don Regan had been set by the release of the Tower Commission report. This document must be examined not as a serious attempt to bring to light any new truth about the Iran-Contra scandal, but rather as the seal of an attempted temporary political compromise among rival factions that are, at a deeper level, ultimately irreconcilable. This fact is reflected in the composition of the Commission itself: former Senator Tower of Texas, who was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Com-

mittee, is linked to Republican Party circles as well as to the interface of the Pentagon with defense industry. Former Air Force General Scowcroft is an asset of the Kissinger-Trilateral Commission networks. Former Democratic Senator and Carter Secretary of State Edmund Muskie was there to represent the Carter-Mondale Democrats and the partisans of Global 2000. Every statement in the Tower report reflects the haggling among these three groups.

The genesis of the Tower compromise transpired as follows, according to informed sources. Certain Democratic circles were beginning to float plans for driving President Reagan out of office, using aspects of the Irangate scandal for this purpose. These plans came to the attention of Attorney General Edwin Meese, who was impelled by his own best trait, his loyalty to the President, to launch a counterattack. Meese saw to it that certain revelations about Project Democracy, Carl Gershman's National Endowment for Democracy, and their connections to the Oliver North networks appeared in the *New York Times* and in other locations. The warning to the pro-Watergate Democratic cabal was clear: An attempt to hound the President out of office would lead to the systematic exposure and destruction of the Project Democracy infrastructure, including the most precious assets of the Democratic National Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and the AFL-CIO.

Shortly after these Meese-inspired salvos appeared, the *New York Times* published an op-ed jointly authored by Walter Mondale and Frank Fahrenkopf of the Republican National Committee. In the op-ed, entitled "An Innocent Victim of the Iran Scandal," Mondale and Fahrenkopf, who are both on the board of the National Endowment for Democracy, allege that this organization is not what Oliver North repeatedly refers to in his notes as Project Democracy, but rather a benign private, non-profit entity formed by the cooperation of labor, business, the two political parties, and organizations of the private sector. The op-ed notes that this organization is active on behalf of "openness" and "democracy" in such places as the Philippines, Haiti, Taiwan, Guatemala, South Korea, Chile, and Paraguay—all governments that are being deliberately destabilized. It is further alleged that the NED is active in a similar way in Argentina, Peru, Colombia, and the Central American and Caribbean countries, as well as in Soviet bloc nations, South Africa, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, and Nicaragua. The publication of this "bipartisan" letter was widely seen as signaling that the forces contemplating the ouster of the President were desisting in hopes of saving their "Project Democracy" assets.

Placing responsibility

The Tower Commission reflects a consensus that nothing more damaging than errors of judgment will be attributed to the President, and that Don Regan, among the officials still in office, will be singled out for retribution. The *coup de grace* for Regan came under the rubric, "The Failure of

Responsibility,” in the chapter entitled “What Went Wrong.” The relevant passage is as follows: “The President’s management style is to put the principal responsibility for policy review and implementation on the shoulders of his advisors. . . . President Reagan’s personal management style places an especially heavy responsibility on his key advisors. Knowing his style, they should have been particularly mindful of the need for special attention to the manner in which his arms sale initiative developed and proceeded. On this score, neither the National Security Advisor nor the other NSC principals deserve high marks. . . . Mr. Regan also shares in this responsibility. More than almost any Chief of Staff of recent memory, he asserted personal control over the White House staff and sought to extend this control to the National Security Advisor. He was personally active in national security affairs and attended almost all of the relevant meetings regarding the Iran initiative. He, as much as anyone, should have insisted that an orderly process be observed. In addition, he especially should have ensured that plans were made for handling any public disclosure of the initiative. He must bear primary responsibility for the chaos that descended upon the White House when such disclosure did occur.”

The report’s limited merit

With these highly laudable observations, however, the analytical merit of the report is exhausted. The rest of the report can be charitably characterized as a failure, on the following specific counts:

- The Tower Commission refuses to restore the morality of United States foreign policy by condemning the Iran rapprochement as such: “The Board believes that a strategic opening to Iran may have been in the national interest but that the United States never should have been a party to the arms transfers.”

- The question of Carter administration arms deliveries to Iran and the activities of Cyrus Hashemi is avoided, no doubt through the good offices of Muskie, who was in the State Department at the time. The origin of the opening to Iran is relegated to “intellectual threads” in the minds of Howard Teicher and Geoffrey Kemp back in 1982-84.

- Concerning the National Security Council, the Tower report limits itself to recommending the abolition of a covert operations role: “As a general matter, the NSC Staff should not engage in the implementation of policy or the conduct of operations.” The report is at great pains to stress that no changes in the NSC system ought to be made: The “solution does not lie in revamping the National Security Council System.” The essential argument here is that the structures of the “formal interagency policy process” are sound, and the causes of the current “aberration” must be sought the human failings of individuals. This ignores the central Constitutional role of the President’s Cabinet, and also begs the question of the systematic, institutionalized perversion of the NSC initiated by Henry Kissinger. “The Board recommends that no

substantive change be made in the provisions of the National Security Act dealing with the structure and operation of the NSC system.”

- Although the report takes some pot-shots at Secretary of State Shultz and even Defense Secretary Weinberger, there is strange silence on the role of Vice President Bush, whom the Senate Intelligence Committee report had identified as being present in a number of important White House meetings on Iran, and as supporting the arms-shipment initiatives.

- The report yields scant insight into the little Irangate cover-up, the one organized by North with his secretary Fawn Hall in late November when it was clear that the jig was up. More important, there is no attention to the primary, institutionalized Irangate cover-up, located in the offices of Stephen Trott and William Weld at the Department of Justice and Oliver Revell at the FBI.

- The report makes no attempt systematically to depict aspects of the affair other than the Iran arms deliveries, although all of North’s and Poindexter’s surviving files were at the disposal of the Tower board. Scowcroft commented on television that the Tower report had lacked the time and the resources to explore the “Contra side,” and had viewed this aspect primarily as a “fallout” of the Iranian machinations. As a result, there are no revelations on such issues as Southern Air Transport, Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, and related topics.

- On the question of the Israeli instigation of the arming of Khomeini, the report is briefly promising. It is stated that “. . . elements in Israel undoubtedly wanted the United States involved for its own sake so as to distance the United States from the Arab world and ultimately to establish Israel as the only real strategic partner of the United States in the region.” It is added that “there is no doubt . . . that it was Israel that pressed Mr. Ghorbanifar on the United States. . . . At critical points in the initiative, when doubts were expressed by critical U.S. participants, an Israeli emissary would arrive with encouragement, often a specific proposal, and pressure to stay with the Ghorbanifar channel. . . . It is clear, however, that Israel had its own interests, some in direct conflict with those of the United States, in having the U.S. pursue the initiative.” However, despite mention of Michael Ledeen and others, the report does not entertain the question of the U.S. special relation to Israel, which was anchored in the NSC, nor of NSC staff acting as agents for the Israeli government.

The board was obviously embarrassed by the frequent references to “Project Democracy” that are speckled through North’s private jottings. Their solution is to play dumb: “We have no information linking the activities described herein as ‘Project Democracy’ with the National Endowment for Democracy. . . . It appears that Lt. Col. North later adopted the term to refer to his own covert operations network. We believe this is the only link between the NED and Lt. Col. North’s activities.” The Tower board knows better. As the board itself asks, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*