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UNDER THE UNCERTAINTY OF IRAN-CONTRA

Insights of Ronald Reagan to the Infamous Scandal

Bachelor's Thesis

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1. INTRODUCTION

“He’s the most warmly ruthless man I have ever seen. He did not take any pleasure in hurting people, but you were gone if you were in his way.”¹ Thus commented Reagan’s former advisor Martin Anderson. This view was also shared by many about the 40th president of the United States. As a president, he was often seen as passive and stubborn, while maintaining firm optimism towards everything he pursued. This complex equation of his character features resulted in a presidency full of paradoxes, Iran-Contra as one of them.²

Fascinated by the leader described above, this bachelor’s thesis will examine Ronald Reagan’s presidential character, personal emotions, behavior and decisions during the Iran-Contra scandal. By observing his emotions and reactions from his own diary entries, I aim to offer a broad and detailed view of an American leader, as well as, about the scandal and the part Reagan’s personal emotions might have had in affecting his decisions and judgment during it.

As the most severe crisis of the Reagan presidency, Iran-Contra offers ideal circumstances to observe the personal factors behind Reagan’s decision-making. Problematic and challenging political situations like the Iran-Contra, are most likely to bring forth different character features that have been previously unseen in a person’s character. Especially considering political actors, scandals offer rare opportunities to examine their reactions and behavior in unwanted situations: “The ultimate test of presidential character is not in never making mistakes but in dealing with mistakes when they are made”.³

1.1 PRIMARY SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

As the primary source on this research, I am going to use *The Reagan Diaries*, a published version of the actual diaries of Ronald Reagan. Edited by historian Douglas Brinkley and published in 2007, the diaries reached the top spot on the *New York Times* Bestseller’s List. Newsweek praised the diaries for helping all Americans to understand why and how Reagan did what he did, and for “painting a portrait of a president who was engaged by his job and had a healthy perspective on power”.⁴ Also *The Chicago Tribune* described the book as a useful piece, that will help historians and policymakers with their researches for years to come.⁵

¹ Reeves 2005, 14.

² Pfiffner 2013, 81-82.

³ Abshire 2005, 183.

⁴ Newsweek, 03.06.2007.

⁵ Brinkley 2007, Reviews on the Reagan Diaries.

Even though Reagan had not kept a diary before, for his eight years as president he managed to write every day, never neglecting an entry. He wrote about his daily activities in the office, as well as about his personal life, religion and marriage with Nancy Reagan. Indeed, while reading it, one cannot help but notice that family was everything to Reagan. His openness about all parts of his life allows the reader to form a comprehensive image of him and examine Reagan's "true nature".⁶

Since it is an edited version of the real diaries, certain factors need to be kept in mind while examining the content. The actual diaries consisted of five thick volumes, which were stored in the White House residence. However, because the full diaries would have been too voluminous to include in one book, Brinkley had to undertake strict choices on what material to include and what not. He stated that his objective was to entail both the most prolific historical material and the more conventional realities of president Reagan's day-to-day life. Brinkley also mentions that after reading all five volumes, the National Security Council decided to remove some material for security reasons along with Nancy Reagan, who wanted to protect certain personal matters.⁷

Regarding source criticism, another thing that needs to be taken into account are the motives that Reagan might have had for writing his diary during his years in the White House. The possibility for the diaries to become public one day may have affected his way of writing crucially. Therefore, it begs the question whether he wrote the diaries for his own personal use, or were they written with the very knowledge that the diaries could be published someday. There indeed is a great chance that the diaries of the president of the United States, were created with in mind that they will someday end up to the eyes of the public and as a possible way to defend one's actions. Nonetheless, despite of what his motives might have been, the diaries still offer an exceptional opportunity to examine the insights of Mr. Reagan.

As the main research method, I will approach this study from the perspective of *History of Emotions*. Rather than examining the external behavior and actions of individuals, history of emotions aims to explore the most personal of subjects: human feelings. Through studying different emotions, researchers may shed light on how different decisions, actions and operations have come together on a more personal level.⁸ Considering politics and foreign relations, this can be seen extremely important, since emotions are a necessary factor in the rational decision-making process. Emotions affect the intensity of what someone wants and does and participate in forming and strengthening persons beliefs. Therefore, history of emotions may demonstrate, that although

⁶ Brinkley 2007, x.

⁷ Brinkley 2007, xiii.

⁸ Matt & Stearns 2014, 1-2.

academics generally see policymaking as a result of rational calculations by rational actors, this is not actually the case.⁹

Today, the more contemporary politics become fixated about individuals and interpersonal relationships, the more emotional research perspective has to offer. However, like historian Barbara Keys points out, examining the role of emotions in policymaking poses some challenges: “Emotion is a slippery subject to study because it is an internal state that can leave ambiguous evidence. It is difficult, for example, to distinguish between deeply felt emotion, highly transient emotion, and emotion feigned for instrumental gain.”¹⁰ Keeping this in mind, I need to be very cautious while interpreting the material, as it is quite easy to get confused and see emotions everywhere, even when they are not there.

By advancing the approach discussed above, my goal is to go beyond the conventional themes of history: actions and events and examine the political consequences of the personal emotions of president Reagan and the character under the stress, pressure and temptation. To achieve this, my research will proceed in three stages, aiming to answer the following *research questions* provided: **What kind of emotions can be observed from the Reagan Diaries? How much those emotions affected his actions?** Furthermore, I intend to explore how well the emotional perspective fits for the research field of political history and presidential studies.

1. I will examine Reagan’s diary entries considering the Iran-Contra affair and interpret the reactions and emotions in them.
2. Next, I am going to observe how the mentioned factors above reflect Reagan’s presidential character, leadership, management style and actions in the scandal.
3. Finally, with all the information gathered, I aim to conclude a comprehensive image of Reagan and about the personal factors behind the actions of the president of the United States.

1.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Since the leader of the United States has always been in the spotlight on a global level, it is no wonder that a lot of research has been done on various leaders and their characters. And while their

⁹ Costigliola 2012, 300.

¹⁰ Keys 2011, 593.

decisions can have worldwide effects, factors behind those decisions need to be investigated. Moreover, research in this area is important, because the public should know their representatives as well as possible in democratic states.

Accordingly, like other presidencies, Reagan's has also created thousands of papers, books and analyzes worldwide, covering topics from Reagan's policies to his public image, leadership and character. Despite the numerous amounts of various researches, the general opinion of Reagan is remarkably similar; he was a complicated president, whose complexity was reflected to his politics as well. Studies considering Iran-Contra and Reagan's role in it, have also followed similar lines since the exposure of the scandal. As James Pfiffner argues in his article *The Paradox of President Reagan's Leadership*, the scandal can be interpreted as the ultimate result of Reagan's chaotic and confusing style of management. Pfiffner describes Reagan as complex, ambitious and persistent person, who had a habit of sticking to his policies regardless of the outcome.¹¹

Following Pfiffner, also Reagan's administrations former security advisor, David Abshire, portrays an image of Reagan as a willful individual and formidable president. Abshire notes that Reagan's motives were always pure and founded on integrity, even on the Iran-Contra affair. Reagan was reportedly deeply disappointed with himself during the crisis, and shocked that his government had indeed acted against his own principles and against the national law.¹² However, while observing Abshire's arguments, it needs to be taken into account that he was a member of Reagan's administration, and his personal relationship with Reagan may have affected his writings. Nevertheless, Abshire's job working closely with the president does still provide a perspective out of the ordinary.

Considering the honesty of political actors, which is also central for this thesis, John Mearsheimer argues that even though lying is generally seen as a shameful behavior with possibly dangerous outcomes, political leaders tend to do it anyways.¹³ In international politics and foreign affairs, lying is even more serious, since you may not be displeasing just your own country, but others as well. This might be the reason why Mearsheimer concludes that overall, leaders are more willing to lie to their own people and nation, than to other countries.¹⁴ The occasion of lying, however, needs to be carefully considered, since there is always the risk of exposure. Unfortunately, sometimes

¹¹ Pfiffner 2013, 81-92.

¹² Abshire 2005, 88-89.

¹³ Mearsheimer 2013, 99-101.

¹⁴ Mearsheimer 2013, 6-7.

even the most explicitly thought plan does not prevent the secrets from coming up. Like we are going to notice, that was the case with the Iran-Contra affair.

In recent years, the emotional approach to policymaking has increased its importance. Groundbreaking work on the area has been carried out by such researchers as Barbara Keys and Frank Costigliola. The former has examined characters like Henry Kissinger, past U.S. foreign minister, and the latter officials from President Roosevelt to George F. Kennan, an American diplomat who had an extremely important role in the Cold War politics of the United States. Both, Keys and Costigliola have proved on their papers', that the contribution of emotions to the policymaking cannot be ignored. Even though many political power characters aim to paint a picture of themselves as individuals driven by only rational thoughts and decisions, this rarely is true. Studies such as Keys' and Costigliolas', can thus be regarded as critical for contemporary politics and as a core inspiration for this thesis. Even more inspiration for this paper stems from the fact, that I have not managed to find any other academic studies with the emotional approach to Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Contra.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 REAGAN AS A PRESIDENT: POLITICS, POPULARITY AND LEADERSHIP

Ronald Reagan entered the office on January 20, 1981 representing the Republican party and replacing the incumbent president Jimmy Carter. As the 40th president of the United States, he served for two terms, ending his time in the White House on January 20, 1989. Often referred to a "Larger-Than-Life-Individual", Reagan is remembered as a complicated leader whose presidential character was defined by abundant public activity, as well as, broad lines and stubbornness while carrying out his politics. Many people also recall Reagan as a great communicator, whose presidency was "The Role of a Lifetime".¹⁵ The former acting career in Hollywood had left its marks, what ended up eventually enhancing Reagan's political career.¹⁶

During his years in the White House, the Reagan administration conducted big tax reductions, tackled criminality¹⁷ and expanded the military power of the United States, while

¹⁵ Cannon 1991, book title.

¹⁶ Raphael 2009, 7.

¹⁷ Holmila & Roitto 2018, 284.

eventually improving the relations with the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Indeed, Reagan's progress with the Soviet Union can be seen as one of the greatest successes of his presidency. Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher even praised Reagan for "Winning the Cold War without firing a shot".¹⁹ Besides the Cold War, on foreign relations Reagan's main objectives were stabilizing the chaotic conditions of Central America, and defeating any terrorist movements, since they were among the gravest threats to the security of the United States²⁰ However, the latter one proves out to be quite controversial on the next chapter, while observing the Iran-Contra affair more specifically.

Reagan's White House management and leadership were based entirely on first drawing the big pictures of the political lines, and then leaving the specifics to be handled by his staff. He believed in delegating authority to different officials he trusted, while isolating himself from the subjects, as long as his policies were fulfilled effectively. His administration managing was often distant, and it was not unusual that he daily lacked knowledge of details, even from his own policy proposals.²¹ Unfortunately however, such a management style provided too much freedom for his employees, who could act without Reagan being aware of anything. That pattern led to some of his presidency's biggest failures, as well as to some important successes, when his policies were carried out fluently and within the law. The Iran-Contra affair instead demonstrates the extreme point where the president's general political indifference meets the passive style of management.²²

However, unlike on other presidential scandals in the U.S., the consequences of Iran-Contra to the president himself were surprisingly small and short. Reagan succeeded in fixing the issues and the credibility gap the scandal temporarily caused, while for example president Richard Nixon was forced to leave the office after the Watergate²³ scandal.²⁴ As can be observed from the figure below, although Reagan's approval rating takes a sudden decrease right around the scandal at the end of 1986, from 64 % to 47 %, it then starts to slowly rise towards the end of his presidency. Reagan's overall approval rate during his years in the White House was 52.8 %, which makes him one of the most popular U.S. presidents of the 20th century. In fact, Reagan was even more popular on his second term with the approval rate of 55.3 % while his first term average was 50.3 %, which

¹⁸ Schaller 2006, 4.

¹⁹ Margaret Thatcher on her eulogy for President Reagan, 11.6.2004.

²⁰ Schaller 2006, 18-20.

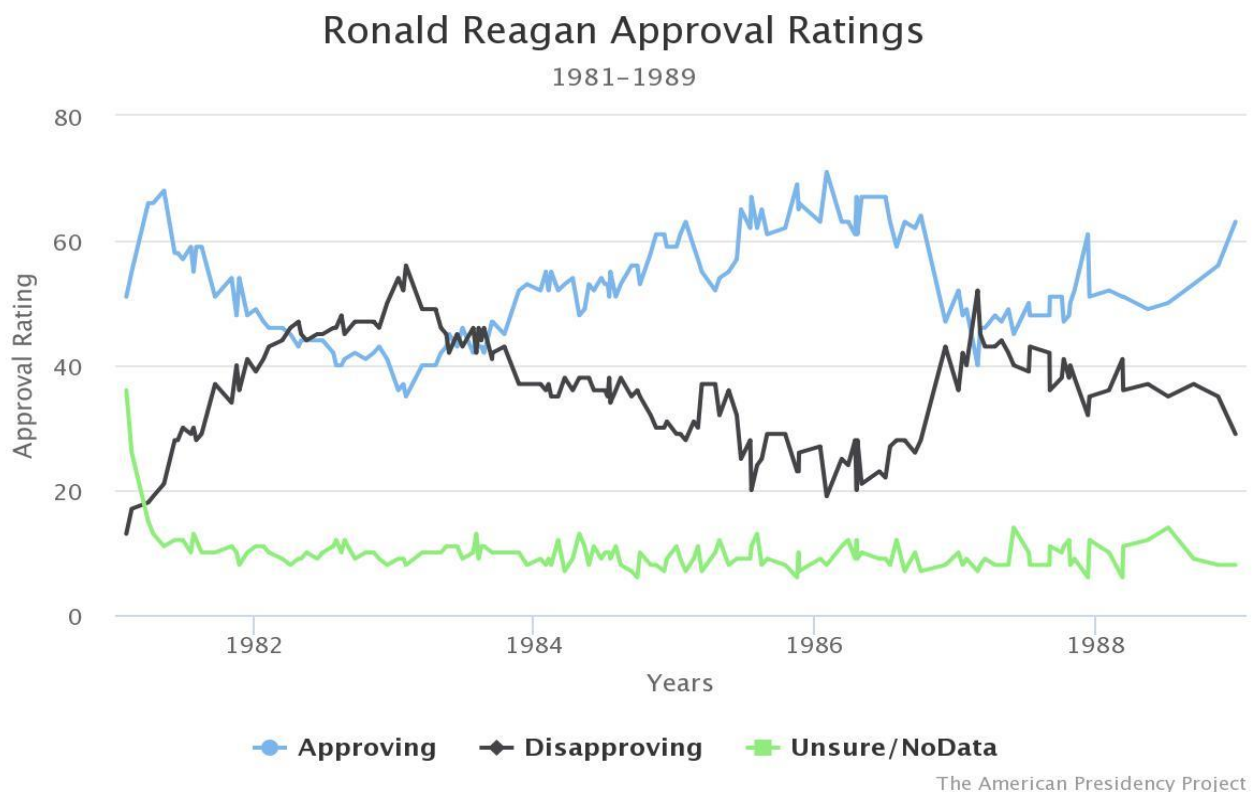
²¹ Abshire 2005, 200.

²² Pfiffer 2013, 81-87.

²³ Severe political scandal of the Nixon administration in 1972-1974, where Nixon's staff members invaded the Democrat party's election offices in Washington D.C.

²⁴ Abshire 2005, foreword.

indicates about the successful damage control after the Iran-Contra. Gallup conducted about a month before his last day in office, showed an approval rating of 63 %, so clearly public were eventually satisfied with his policies.²⁵ Therefore, we need to remember to observe the approval ratings as a whole which is affected by a number of things and not just by one failure. In the end, Reagan was extremely popular person, mostly because of his simple way of communicating, to make the even most common Americans to understand his messages.²⁶



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2.2 THE IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

Two years after his re-election in 1984, president Reagan became involved in one of the most controversial political scandals of the U.S. presidency of the 21st century. On November 3rd, 1986 a

²⁵ Gallup Poll, Presidential Approval Ratings. Question asked: “Do you approve the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as President?”.

²⁶ Holmila & Roitto 2018, 282-283.

²⁷ Presidential Job Approval Ratings. The American Presidency Project.

Lebanese newspaper reported the first rumors of the sales of American weapons to Iran. Once the information reached American media outlets, two secret government operations were about to expose. However, even after years of Congressional and juridical research, not to mention the investigations media has conducted, it is entirely possible that there is still facts unknown about the scandal.²⁸ Complex structures of the U.S. government are more than likely to allow serious corruption and the concealment of facts by different facets. In fact, historian Kyle Longley states that Reagan's administration was full of corruption and criminal activities from the beginning of his presidency. Evidently, at least 138 officials from his administration were either investigated or convicted for illegalities, which is the most out of the administration of any president. Some reports even place the number to as high as 190.²⁹ Therefore, Iran-Contra was not the only controversy of Reagan's administration, but the only one in which Reagan was entirely involved.

Iran-Contra affair included two different secret initiatives that were; supplying Nicaraguan Contra rebels with assistance to their military activities from 1984 to 1986 and selling arms to Iran in 1985 and 1986. Both of the operations were against the United States policies and legislation, Contra aid against the Congresses Boland Amendment³⁰, which prohibited any support to the rebels, while Iran arms sales violated governments policies and an arms export control act. In addition, as noted earlier, Reagan's administration had stated publicly that it would not communicate with any states that supported terrorism. The two operations got merged when former national security council member Oliver North, got the idea to divert some of the funds from the Iran arms sales to the Contras, through different secret bank accounts. Before the merger, funding for the Contras had mainly come from wealthy private citizens and foreign countries, who supported Reagan's Contra policies.³¹

Motives for the execution of the two initiatives are various. During his terms as a president, Reagan had pressured the Congress to permit the aid to the Contras, a rebel group fighting against the socialist Sandinista government, which had obtained its power from the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua. By supporting the Contras, Reagan claimed to pursue stable and secure conditions for Central America, as the unsteady circumstances of Nicaragua were a serious threat to its neighbor countries. However, it is generally claimed that Reagan's concerns towards the region were mainly caused by the Soviet Union, who had taken a strong interest in the area and was

²⁸ Strong 2005, 143.

²⁹ Longley 2006, 105-107.

³⁰ Amendment named after former Massachusetts senator Edward Boland, who was the main sponsor of the bill.

³¹ Walsh 1993, executive summary.

supporting the ruling Sandinista government. If the Soviets were able to get a grip from the conflict areas of Central America, they could use their position to weaken and even threaten the U.S.³²

The Iran arms sales were conducted for a couple of reasons: First, since the Carter administration, the U.S. had been dealing with constant hostage situations when American citizens were kidnapped, mostly in Lebanon. Reagan claimed, that he hoped the Iranians to whom they sold arms, could help with the liberation of the hostages, as they were well connected with the Lebanese. Second, while holding a large share of the world's known oil reserves and having converging relations with the Soviet Union, Iran was not a nation that the U.S. afforded to ignore. Therefore, when the Iranians first approached with the suggestion of the arms deal, Reagan decided to agree.³³

Even though Reagan himself did not receive any charges from the secret initiatives, 14 people from his administration were prosecuted, and 13 of them convicted. Convictions came either from the straight involvement on the initiatives, or from the covert attempts after the operations were exposed. The key-individuals involved were strategically sacrificed to take the blame for the initiatives and the cover-ups, which would ultimately protect Reagan's presidency for the last two years in the White House.³⁴ Indeed like noted, the president himself survived the scandal extremely well and unharmed. The Final Report on the Iran-Contra affair concluded that, although Reagan had in the end admitted that he had been aware about the Iran arms deal on some level, it could not be successfully proved or prosecuted, that he had known about the diversion of funds to the Contras, which was the more illegal side from the two secret initiatives. It was also resolved, that Reagan was on top of the cover operations and the false accounts, yet he got cleared up from them too. Such false accounts initially denied the president's knowledge of the two initiatives, but were later changed, when it became clear that the truth was about to be exposed anyway.³⁵ The debate on whether or not Reagan actually was aware of the whole events, and how important role his style of management and leadership played in the scandal, is still a matter of intense controversy.

³² Lynch 2011, 8-9.

³³ Lynch 2011, 211-212.

³⁴ Walsh 1993, executive summary.

³⁵ Walsh 1993, 445-447.

3. DIFFERENT EMOTIONS TOWARDS THE SCANDAL

As observed, the presidential character of Reagan was indeed confusing, complicated and relentless, ultimately leading to the biggest crisis of his presidency. But for the luck of this analysis, the previous factors provide ideal circumstances for examining his innermost feelings and reactions.

From the diaries, I anticipate finding a variety of different emotions, from the beginning of the scandal, to the point where the investigations started to concentrate more on to Reagan's staff members, and not on Reagan himself. However, in order to form a comprehensive picture of emotions and their variability, it is also necessary to examine the time after the investigation turn from Reagan being in the center of the controversy to when he was no longer, as there could be some difference in Reagan's feelings after the investigations had concentrated to his staff members. Therefore, the official time limit for this thesis and for the diaries, is about an eight-month period from November 3, 1986 to the end of July 1986.

3.1 EMOTIONS OF ANGER AND FRUSTRATION

Friday, November 7, 1986.

“Discussion of how to handle press who are off on a wild story built on unfounded story originating in Beirut that we bought hostage Jacobsen's freedom with weapons to Iran. We've tried no comment. Then our returned hostage arrived with his family – his statement to press was same line I have advocated – in short: they should shut up.”³⁶

Saturday-Sunday, November 8-9, 1986.

“The Saturday night & Sunday morning talk shows continued to hammer on the hostage & Iran arms story giving credence to every rumor & supposed leak. They can do great harm with their irresponsible drum beating. Now the Democrats (House & Senate) have joined the chorus.”³⁷

Wednesday, November 12, 1986.

“This whole irresponsible press bilge about hostages & Iran has gotten out of hand. The media looks like it's trying to create another Watergate.”³⁸

³⁶ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 448-449.

³⁷ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 449.

³⁸ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 450.

Thursday, November 13, 1986.

“I will go on TV at 8 pm tonight and reply to the ridiculous falsehoods the media has been spawning for the last 10 days. – I did a 12-minute TV speech on the Iran incident & gave the facts to refute the firestorm the press is raising based entirely on unsubstantiated rumors and out right inventions.”³⁹

Monday, November 17, 1986.

“The press continues to harp on the Iran situation to the point of writing & broadcasting pure fiction.”⁴⁰

Tuesday, November 25, 1986.

(After hearing about the Contra connection)

“Told the press what we had learned. This headed them off from finding out about it & accusing us of a cover up. Press was like a circle of sharks.”⁴¹

Friday, November 28, 1986.

“Press is still shooting us. Now they claim someone shredded documents.”⁴²

Reagan’s first mention of the scandal is not until November 7, although the first press reports on the subject were released on November 3rd. Why, though? Reagan might have expected that the entire scandal might come to an end before full global exposure and chose not to comment until the story was certain to be relentless. Consequently, as his diaries might turn out to be possible evidence, he took the scandal relatively late as part of his entries, though denying the whole time the “ridiculous falsehoods”.

From the entries, it is apparent, that since the scandal was exposed Reagan felt extremely annoyed and even angry. By using phrases like “they should shut up” and “this whole irresponsible press bilge about hostages & Iran has gotten out of hand”, Reagan confirms that while in the core of the storm, he experiences some emotional extremities. Nonetheless, for a person who thought his acts would remain as a secret and out of the public eye, his first reaction can be seen

³⁹ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 450.

⁴⁰ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 451.

⁴¹ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 454.

⁴² The Reagan Diaries 2007, 454.

quite awaited. But as his position was as public as it was, and since he was clearly aware of other political scandals and their outcomes, it is confusing that his feelings and reactions were so intense, when the risk of exposure existed from the start of the hidden activities.

The feeling of frustration may evolve from the fact, that Reagan and his staff were unable to close down the rumors before they spread. And after the news spread, it was impossible to stop. Indeed, perhaps the most obvious issue discoverable from the entries is, that during the scandal, Reagan remained extremely bitter towards the press. With comments as “circle of sharks”, he builds an image of himself as the victim who has been rigorously persecuted, relentlessly targeted and even hunted by the news media. He addresses the Watergate, and how the media just aims at producing another similar controversy, as if it was their fault that the administration of Reagan carried out illegal activities. It is certainly confounding how could Reagan be that shocked that the press got interested in the topic and continued to produce stories on the first page; what was he then expecting? News outlets get their viewers and readers from the news coverage, and controversies like the Iran-Contra are massive bombshells to them, boosting sales and ratings. Instead of getting mad every time those outlets revealed something about the operations that had been covered, he could have made sure that there was no cover-up in the first place.

3.2 EMOTIONS OF ANXIETY, FEAR AND WORRY

Thursday-Friday, November 20-21, 1986.

Dick Wirthlin⁴³ shows this Iran drumbeat has lowered my ratings with the people... Ed Meese⁴⁴ assured us again that I am on the clear legally on what we were doing.”⁴⁵

Sunday, November 30, 1986.

“They feel like I should get an attorney and have him get affidavits from any who were involved in the Iran gambit that I was not informed of what was going on. Their idea is that someone might try to involve me to protect his own hide.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Political strategist and pollster for Reagan.

⁴⁴ Attorney General.

⁴⁵ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 452-453.

⁴⁶ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 455.

Monday, December 1, 1986

“Polls were not happy making. 71 % of the people like & think I am a nice fellow. But 60 % do not think I am telling the truth.”⁴⁷

Friday, December 5, 1986

“Meeting with top 4 in Congress. They have agreed to 1 committee from each house to look into Iran matter. I believe they are united against me calling a special session of the Congress.”⁴⁸

Sunday, December 14, 1986.

“Attorney Jack Miller is going to find out from Poindexter⁴⁹’s lawyer, if he and Oliver North are taking the 5th thinking they are protecting me. If the answers are right, it is possible I might ask the Cong. committees to offer them immunity so they can tell the whole story.”⁵⁰

Tuesday, December 16, 1986

“Statement to the press asking Congress to grant immunity to Poindexter and North so they can testify and get this damn thing over with. By afternoon learned the democrats said no. They want to keep this going for year if they can.”⁵¹

As can be observed from the entries above, despite the fact that Reagan’s public appearances during the scandal stayed very cool and sort of carefree, this did not really extend privately. Multiple times, from the discovery of the scandal, to the July Congressional hearings, Reagan cites numerous Gallup polls on the response of the public, so he was clearly concerned about how his popularity might vary. I suggest, however, that his anxiety was mostly caused by the possible charges and even forced resignation, rather than by the worry for public’s support.

After December 1986, the entries considering the scandal start to diminish. In my view, this is because of the fact that Reagan had discovered during the two months following the exposure that he could not be charged with the two illegal measures and, thus no longer noticed the scandal as in the beginning. Although the public and the press were still actively running reports on the subject, the investigations started to focus on certain members of the administration instead of the president. It obviously perfectly suited Reagan’s damage control strategy. While anticipating the

⁴⁷ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 455.

⁴⁸ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 457.

⁴⁹ National Security Advisor.

⁵⁰ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 459.

⁵¹ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 460.

Congressional hearings of North and Poindexter in July 1987, and whose testimonies could do Reagan the most harm, he only notices the scandal by briefly informing about a meeting, noting how the polls are responding or by assessing the press. It was clear, however, that his general anxiety and fear faded gradually as soon as his own position was secured, even though some of his staff members were just thrown under the bus. Explaining that disinterest in his employees, David Pfiffner suggests, that although Reagan was widely viewed as a warm and friendly person, those qualities did not apply towards those who worked for him. Neither was he able to show gratitude for their efforts on his behalf.⁵² This could also explain his indifference during the Iran-Contra, when his workers were in deep trouble and forced to sacrifice themselves for him.

Final closure for Reagan's worries came on July 15, after the testimony of Mr. Poindexter: "*John Poindexter had flatly denied ever telling me about the extra Iran funds & their diversion to Contras. This was the bombshell I have been waiting for the past 7 months. The day is brighter.*"⁵³ After those 7 months of constant uncertainty, Reagan was eventually completely excluded from any criminal proceedings. His presidency was saved, and the relief and happiness can be easily perceived.

4. HOW THE EMOTIONS REFLECT REAGAN'S ACTIONS AND LEADERSHIP?

In my view, the most interesting question about Reagan's decisions in Iran-Contra, is why he first decided to lie about the Iran initiative by claiming: "We did not – repeat – did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages."⁵⁴ Why did he deny everything, when just 14 years earlier Nixon had been forced to resign because of his lies on the Watergate? Reagan's emotions may provide a thorough answer to this question; his fear of the next big presidential tragedy obviously took over him and contributed to his presidency's most controversial decisions being carried out.

As are his emotions, also Reagan's passive leadership is illustrated during the scandal. It is clear from the diaries to discern, that since the exposure, Reagan has been more than willing to remove himself completely from the events; even more so than he normally did. It could also have been triggered by the anxiety and worry he was feeling. He might have had thought, that the best way to save his insecure presidency was to remain completely ignorant and then appeal to that ignorance when it was time to take responsibility. Nonetheless, this particular behavior puts the

⁵² Pfiffner 2013, 97-98.

⁵³ The Reagan Diaries 2007, 516.

⁵⁴ Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy, November 12, 1986.

Reagan presidency under tight surveillance, because his behavior and reactions, make him appear as if he was not even a president and a leader, but rather just another irritated staff member.

Presidential leadership requires taking some responsibility in a critical situation and ignoring one's fears and anxieties. Even if the president would have been unaware of the events, he is eventually the one in charge of his staff, and of ensuring that the law is obeyed. In fact, critical characters in the scandal like Oliver North, later criticized Reagan for not standing up to the Congress and defending his staff, because they were essentially carrying out the policies he had set.⁵⁵

My final argument for this research is, that emotions most severely affected president Reagan's decision-making during the scandal. His judgment was affected by fear for his presidency, which eventually led to the decision to cover-up and lie. Anger and frustration may have acted as a defense mechanism; a way of mentally defend one's own actions and reduce anxiety, while being unsure how the events would be resolved. And since the press got wild about the scandal, they were the perfect subject for the indignation of Reagan, and a target to blame for the whole scandal. For a great communicator like Reagan, the media in a such uncontrollable state, may have been a hard thing to accept, and might have even caused some of his hatred towards them.

In a way, it is understandable that because his presidency was in danger, he made a series of bad decisions after another, but while operating as dominant as he did, he was expected to know better. Especially, when the lessons of Watergate were still out in the open for review and learning. Even more surprising is, that some ten years later, following Watergate and Iran-Contra, President Bill Clinton made exactly the same mistakes on the Lewinsky scandal⁵⁶ by lying to the public: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. These allegations are false."⁵⁷ Therefore, Reagan's reactions and choices were not uncommon, and neither were his emotions. The ultimate pressure of the presidency and worry for that precise position, created the circumstances for a lack in judgment. And while Reagan himself survived the controversy relatively well, the scandal and his decisions during it affect the way research is conducted for years to come.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Anger, anxiety, fear and worry; all of the emotions president Reagan felt during his presidential crisis, and that crucially impacted his judgment. It became evident during this research, that we

⁵⁵ Abshire 2005, 185-186.

⁵⁶ The United States political sex scandal that involved president Bill Clinton's affair to a 22-year-old White House Intern Monika Lewinsky from 1995 to 1997.

⁵⁷ The Washington Post, January 26, 2018.

cannot fully understand the decision-making process behind Iran-Contra without examining the emotions linked to those decisions.⁵⁸ But even though his feelings deeply affected his decisions and behavior, we also need to acknowledge his natural personality and temperament. Martin Anderson's quote from the introduction definitely speaks the truth; whenever there was something in Reagan's way, he was determined to get rid of it. The same applied to the treatment given to his employees that were involved in the Iran-Contra, because they jeopardized his presidency, he decided to leave them entirely in the lurch. Indeed, on Reagan's case, character features among his emotions, had a profound impact to his actions. His born stubbornness and inability to ignore his negative emotions when it was needed, prevented him from making rational decisions on a critical time. Thus, it can be argued that personal factors may even play a more important role in the policymaking than the rationality, or at least much of a greater role than is generally perceived.

Even though this thesis has put forth many negative sides of president Reagan, it must be noted that since most of us are not presidents or have not been presidents, we cannot completely understand the pressure associated with that precise position. Therefore, whatever Reagan's emotions and bad choices were, we cannot charge him for being a bad person but a human being. In fact, not one presidency is made entirely of successes and excellent decisions, but also of failures and mistakes. And as in every presidency, during the Reagan era there were both as well. That is why we must consider the general view and analyze the presidencies as a whole, made up of various phases, successes and failures.⁵⁹

Only four presidents have kept frequent diaries besides Reagan: George Washington, John Quincy Adams, James K. Polk and Rutherford B. Hayes. In addition to them, other presidents such as Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower wrote sporadically, but not on a constant basis.⁶⁰ For the benefit of historians, at least those presidencies can then be examined from a more personal level, but I think it is needless to say that more material would be preferable. Regarding past presidents, the desire for personal diaries is impossible, yet for future leaderships it is still a possibility. But of course, because of digital technology and social media, contemporary politics are so well known and tracked, that the personal and emotional approach can be better studied than ever. And while our global world and its politics continue to focus on leaders' personal relationships, and political structures keep getting more complex, it is indeed important to pay attention to the emotional factors among the rational elements.

⁵⁸ Keys 2011, 592.

⁵⁹ Pfiffer 2013, 81-82.

⁶⁰ Brinkley 2007, introduction.

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