

Our Dangerous Liaisons

INSIDE THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

The True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan's Foreign Policy
By Constantine C. Menges
Simon and Schuster. 418 pp. \$19.95

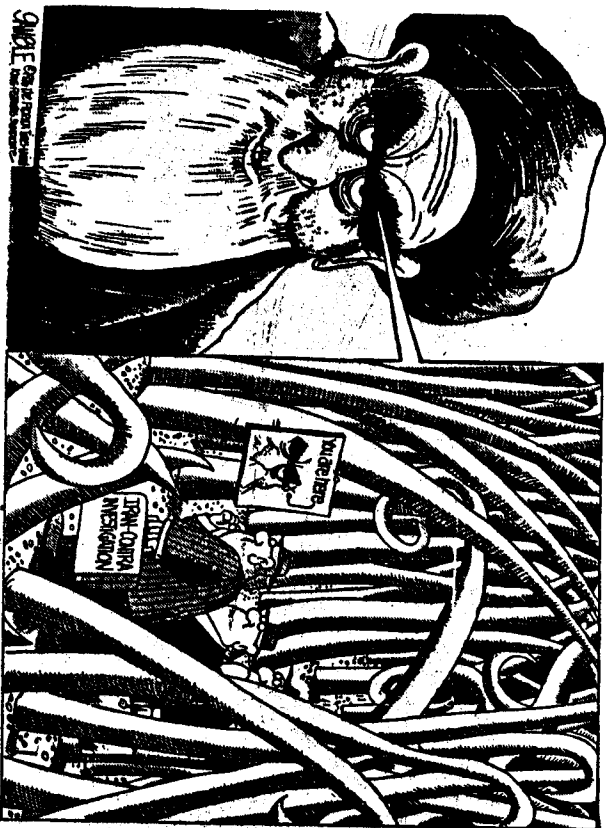
THE IRANIAN TRIANGLE

The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair
By Samuel Segev
Translated from the Hebrew by Haim Watzman
Free Press. 340 pp. \$22.50

By Steven Emerson

IKE THE Greek monster Hydra, the Reagan administration's Iran-contra debacle has produced numerous talking heads, each promising to tell the "real story" of what happened. Two of the latest are Constantine C. Menges' *Inside the National Security Council: The True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan's Foreign Policy* and Samuel Segev's *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair*.

Menges, a special assistant to the president for national security affairs from 1983 through 1986, describes the infighting that plagued the Reagan administration's national security apparatus. Bitter battles were



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fought over Central America, the Middle East, counterterrorism, the Caribbean and Africa. But this is not exactly new. Ever since the Nixon era, such internal warfare, pitting the National Security Council against the State Department, has become the norm as each of those power centers strove to control foreign policy. Yet the severity of the acrimony, pettiness and backstabbing at the highest levels of the U.S. government as described by Menges is astounding. Menges' tale is made even more extraordinary by its revelations—I dare say unintended—about the seeming paranoia, egomania and naïveté of a senior Reagan administration official, Menges himself.

Menges portrays Secretary of State George Shultz as a rather unlikely Darth Vader, ruthlessly scheming to sabotage the president's foreign policy. Shultz's chickeny reaches new depths when he goes to

the length of excluding Menges from key meetings.

Menges is assiduous in painting himself as the lone defender of Reagan on the national security staff, arrayed against a grand conspiracy determined to stifle Menges at every opportunity—Democrats, the media, even Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter. If only Menges could get to the president to warn him of the plot to conceal information from him, there would have been no problems. Indeed, Menges believes that the Iran-contra affair would never have happened if the president had received a personal letter from him in 1985—in which he says he outlined the "breakdown of the NSC decision-making process" caused by the State Department. Alas, he says, that letter, though edited and blessed by Director of Central Intelligence William Casey (Menges' hero), was blocked. That Menges ac-

tually believes the Iran-contra affair to be caused by the State Department, rather than a contemptuous disregard for the law by top administration officials, including Casey, is indicative of his book's problems.

ONE OF the lingering mysteries in the Iran-contra affair is the precise nature of Israel's role, which has never been thoroughly investigated—publicly at least—by the U.S. or Israeli governments. What was the exact nature of Israeli actions? What was said or promised to Iranian officials by Israeli and American officials in 1985 in clandestine meetings in Europe? What were the covert operations planned by Israeli counterterrorism official Amram Nir (who recently died in a plane crash in Mexico) and Oliver North?

With *The Iranian Triangle*, Segev, a respected columnist for the Israeli newspaper, *Ma'ariv*, has written a disappointing book. Though the first third of Segev's book provides a fascinating history of the mostly secret relationship between Israeli leaders and the Shah of Iran going back to the 1950s, Segev is less than satisfying in trying to provide the "untold story of Israel's role" in the Iran-contra affair. Much of it consists of rehashing material adequately covered in the investigations by Congress, the Tower Commission and the American news media.

In one area, however, Segev has obviously gained access to some highly placed Israeli sources. He recounts the secret European meetings in 1985 between Israelis, Iranians and American consultant Michael Ledeen. Yet Segev omits other critical Israeli material, to which the present writer gained access, and which reveals part of the secret Israeli-Ledeen plan. This material strongly suggests that Ledeen and the Israelis plotted to help overthrow the Khomeini regime by promising weapons to various Iranian officials.

There is also little new light shed on the mysterious activities of Amram Nir, who abruptly squeezed out two Israeli businessmen and took over for Israel the arms sales to Iran. ■

David Hawk, a special assistant to the president for national security affairs from 1983 through 1986, describes the infighting that plagued the Reagan administration's national security apparatus. Bitter battles were

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The Muddle Of Our Journey

LIBERTY UNDER SEIGE
 American Politics, 1976-1988
 By Walter Karp
 Holt, 255 pp., \$19.95

By David Howard Bain

LIBERTY UNDER SEIGE is an extraordinary book. Walter Karp, now a contributing editor to *Harp-er's* magazine, has written widely on American political history, most notably in his last book, *The Politics of War*, about America's last great struggle against entrenched privilege (1890-1920), and in his *Indispensable Enemies*, a brilliant study of party politics. For a time his biweekly political paper, *The Public Life*, which featured his essays on power and public institutions,

was as eagerly anticipated—and bitterly feared—as *LF Stone's Weekly*. Both set standards for political discourse that sadly seem impossibly high today in this season of non-debates and lapdog journalism.

Karp has been called a Jeffersonian for our time, one of the last pure democrats in the United States. His surpassing gift lies in his ability to see previously undiscerned patterns in American institutions, to pull himself and his readers outside of conventional

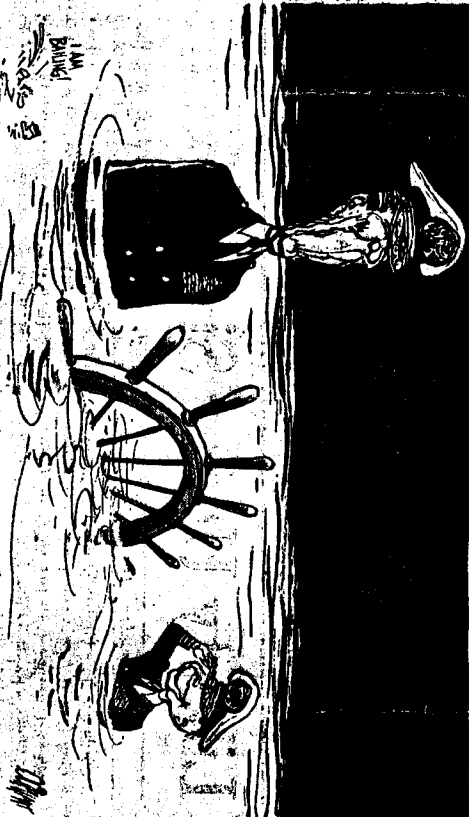
thinking about how power is exercised in this nation.

The thesis of this gaddy's *Liberty Under Siege* is challenging. America in its 1976 bicentennial stood, writes Karp, in "the sixteenth year of a vast, chaotic upheaval that was mainly democratic in spirit, purely democratic in its outcome, and deeply threatening to the nation's political establishment, which watched with increasing anxiety as its power and authority steadily eroded." The

Vietnam debacle had eroded that establishment's single most powerful political prop—national security—used at home to discourage dissent and abroad in countless interventions. Another serious shakeup occurred in the Democratic Party in 1972, when delegate-selecting power was taken away from a few party bosses and handed to voters in primaries or party caucuses. "No such democratic prospect," says Karp, "had existed since the rise of Andrew Jackson."

The key to Carter's wide appeal in 1976 was that he *was* an outsider. It also killed his presidency, but not, as is commonly thought, through Carter's ineptitude. As Karp compellingly illustrates, Democratic Party leadership—under House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Majority Leader Jim Wright—spiritually and systematically destroyed the "outsider" by killing almost every legislative reform item on the Carter agenda—electoral, regulatory, welfare, tax law and labor law reform. It would have begun quite a legacy.

Turning the other cheek under his own party's countless cruelties, Carter grew increasingly timid. By the end of his term he was abandoning his own principles (and his clear mandate) to win party approval, and nearly everyone hated him for it without knowing just how much or why. Meanwhile, party regulars grew more powerful as they sought and stuffed their coffers with millions of dollars of corporate PAC money and then voted



YOUR SHIP CAPTAIN!

BY DAVID HOWARD BAIN

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