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Lawmakers Want Answers on Iran

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 — Members of Congress said today that they were preparing to confront the White House and demand that President Reagan's foreign policy advisers explain their dealings with Iran.

Several House and Senate members said they would challenge the Administration if it tried to prevent members of the National Security Council staff from testifying before the relevant committees. The Administraton has previously rebuffed such requests, citing "executive privilege," the President's right to keep dealings with his personal staff private.

"The bottom line is they can't avoid oversight," said Representative Dave McCurdy, Democrat of Oklahoma, who is on the House Intelligence Committee. "When the National Security Council staff steps outside its role of being an adviser and becomes an executor of foreign policy and the transferer of arms, clearly they fall into our jurisdiction."

Hearings Are Scheduled

Both the House and the Senate Intelligence Committees have scheduled hearings for next Friday on the dealings with Iran. Administration officials have expressed differing views on how much testimony could be provided. Donald T. Regan, the White House Chief of Staff, said initially that Congress would not be given a full explanation of the Iran dealings until after all the American hostages held in Lebanon were released.

More than a year ago, two House committees looked into published reports that Lieut. Col. Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council staff, had been assisting the anti-Government rebels in Nicaragua in violation of a Congressional cutoff in aid. When the House Foreign Affairs Committee asked for telephone logs and other documents, the White House refused, citing executive privilege.

The House Intellgence Committee, investigating similar charges, did not issue a subpoena for Colonel North.

Representative George E. Brown Jr., Democrat of California, who serves on the House Intelligence Committee, said: "When we bring in executive office personnel to discuss these matters, we generally are met with a stonewall, and then the question is, do we want to pursue the matter with a subpoena. There have not been enough votes to do that. I think there will be the votes this time."

Executive privilege is the doctrine under which this Administration, like others before it, has claimed that internal deliberations do not have to be disclosed to the two other branches of government. The issue has arisen repeatedly over the years and has long been a source of conflict between Congress and Presidents.

Members of Congress said they wanted a detailed accounting, from National Security Council staff members who were directly involved, of what arms were sent to Iran, both by the United States and Israel. President Reagan, in his broadcast speech Thursday evening, said the amount of parts shipped to Iran by the United States could fit into a cargo plane that carries approximately 100 tons. But Congressional officials want to know the size and type of arms shipments made by Israel at America's behest.

Congressional officials said they would also examine whether Mr. Reagan had violated the letter or spirit of laws requiring Congress to be given prior notice of expected intelligence activity.

The Administration acknowledged Friday that the Central Intelligence Agency had been involved in the dealings with Iran. A classified Executive Order, signed by the President in January, said Congress would not be briefed on the shipments. This meant that William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, was barred from appearing before the Congressional committees. The finding, signed by President Reagan, said Congress would not be informed because of the matter's "extreme sensitivity" and "security risks," according to a knowledgable source.

The finding cited a provision of the National Security Act that allows the President to forgo giving prior notice if the committees are subsequently informed in a "timely fashion."

Several members of Congress said the Administration appeared to have violated an agreement reached two years ago between Mr. Casey and the leadership of the Senate Intelligence Committee after the furor over the mining of the harbors in Nicaragua. It included a pledge by the C.I.A. to brief the Congressional intelligence committees on any intelligence activity personally approved by the President. At the time, there had been debate over what constituted a "significant" expected intelligence operation that would require prior notice.

Citation Termed Improper

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, a former vice chairman of the committee who signed the agreement along with Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, who was then chairman of the committee, said the law cited by the President in justifying the Iran operation was not applicable.

"This loophole obtains only when the President has to do something in 18 hours and Congress has adjourned," Mr. Moynihan said. "An 11-month operation of shipping weapons isn't an emergency."

Senator Moynihan called for the resignation of Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the President's national security adviser. "Mr. Poindexter must resign," he said. "I'm sure he is an honorable and patriotic man, but he has no understanding of the relationships that have been established in Congress for intelligence, of if he does, he is contemptuous of them."

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