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'No plans' to give Iran more arms – Reagan

Won't fire anybody, he says of Shultz

By Jeremiah O'Leary
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Reagan yesterday said he has "absolutely no plans" to send additional arms to Iran and denied a rift with Secretary of State George Shultz.

"I'm not going to fire anybody," Mr. Reagan said, when asked if Mr. Shultz' displeasure over recent U.S.-Iranian contacts would lead to his dismissal or resignation.

Mr. Shultz has said he had only "fragmentary" knowledge of the arms shipments to Iran, a decision he called "debatable."

Mr. Reagan, who approved the shipments in a secret January memo, said no further deliveries are planned.

"We have absolutely no plans to do any such thing, but Wednesday night we can discuss this in depth," the president told reporters, referring to a nationally televised press conference set for 8 p.m. tomorrow.

Charles Redman, the State Department spokesman, said he had no further comment on Mr. Shultz' statement of a week ago that he has "no plan to resign."

"I'm not going to give you sort of an hour-by-hour status report of everything that crosses his mind," Mr. Redman said.

The president has said the covert emissaries he sent to Iran in May believed they were dealing with representatives of the legitimate government when they agreed to send a small arms shipment and asked for the release of American hostages, a senior administration official said yesterday.

But the official insisted the release of the three American hostages by pro-Iranian terrorists in Lebanon was not the original intent of the overtures to Iran that began 18 months ago.

The primary purpose of those contacts with Iranian moderates was to establish improved U.S.-Iranian relations, to help end the war between Iran and Iraq and to put an end to state-supported terrorism, he said.

The U.S.-Iran revelations prompted a meeting here yesterday where representatives of 16 Arab nations expressed concern over the difference between the administration's arms embargo policy toward Iran and its secret sale of arms to the Tehran government.

The general assessment was that the secret sale of U.S. arms was in conflict with the declared U.S. policies expounded by administration officials, including Mr. Shultz, according to Ambassador Clovis Maksoud, representative of the Arab League.

"We grappled with the idea" of discussing the problem with Mr. Shultz, said Mr. Maksoud, "but it is obvious that the administration is not totally in tandem with itself on the issue."

Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said Mr. Reagan made the decision that CIA Director William Casey not inform Congress about the covert Iranian operation in an "intelligence finding" he signed on Jan. 17.

"There was only one document, and it in effect lifted the executive order embargoing arms shipments to Iran," Mr. Speakes said. "It was all in one document, and it authorized no disclosure until the president authorized it in a timely fashion."

Mr. Speakes said the document permitted the National Security Council staff and CIA to establish contact with moderate elements in Iran in a covert operation designed to establish improved relations with Iran, end the war and end the support for terrorism.

Mr. Speakes would not release the document but told reporters he believed it did mention hostages.

But former President Jimmy Carter said yesterday he believed U.S. arms shipments to Iran were illegal because Mr. Reagan had not canceled the executive order against such sales.

"Until the president cancels that order . . . it is still illegal — under the executive order, not a law — to sell any sort of weapons to Iran," Mr. Carter said in interview on Cable News Network.

The embargo was ordered by Mr. Carter, who cut off relations with Iran after 52 Americans were taken hostage and held for 444 days in Tehran.

The hostages were released only after Mr. Reagan assumed office.

John Poindexter, the president's national security adviser, read the intelligence memo to members of Congress last week, Mr. Speakes said.

Members of the House and Senate intelligence committees have said they want Mr. Poindexter to testify this week, but it is expected that Mr. Reagan will invoke executive privilege to block the testimony. Mr. Pindexter has said he would be available "informally" to lawmakers to defend the Iranian contacts.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, New York Democrat and a former member of the Intelligence Committee, yesterday criticized the president's decision not to inform Congress of the U.S.-Iranian contacts.

"You can't conduct foreign policy from the basement," Mr. Moynihan said at the White House yesterday.

The Reagan administration decided to make the covert opening to Iran 18 months ago with elements in Tehran who are in disagreement with the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's desire to fight the Iran-Iraq war to the finish. Those "moderates," according to administration officials, wish for better relations with the United States through terminating the state-supported terrorism advocated by the fanatics.

The initiative was launched when Robert C. McFarlane, now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and formerly Mr. Reagan's national security adviser, along with an unnamed group of about four other Americans, traveled secretly to Tehran last May and talked with many of the moderate leaders.

Mr. McFarlane said that if the names of the moderates were made known, they might be hanged.

"What's changed is that it is public now, and that has made it impossible to establish the relationship we wanted," Mr. Speakes said. The story was leaked by Iranian sources to a pro-Syrian publication in Lebanon and has become one of the most serious foreign policy crises in the six-year Reagan presidency.

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White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan said that as published reports of the Iranian contacts grew, the White House decided it probably had lost any chance of getting more hostages out. He insisted that the the diplomatic overtures were the overriding purpose of the gamble and that the release of hostages was secondary. The president agreed to the secret arms shipment so the Iranian contacts would know with whom they were dealing, according to administration officials.

In turn, the United States had to know it was dealing with people with power in the Iranian government, he said. Since the lengthy discussions began, as far as is known, Iran has committed no international acts of terrorism.

It was Mr. Reagan's modification of the executive order embargoing arms shipments to Iran that has embarrassed the administration. The public stance of the United States has been to urge all other nations to stop supplying arms to the combatant forces of Iran and Iraq.

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