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# IRAN IS SAID TO GET U.S. WEAPONS AID IN A HOSTAGE DEAL

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 6 — The United States sent military spare parts to Iran as part of a secret operation intended to gain the release of American hostages in Lebanon, American intelligence sources said today. It also persuaded Israel to do the same, the sources said.

The operation, which has been going on for more than a year and a half, was also intended to provide the Administration with a way of addressing, and perhaps influencing, relations between Teheran and Washington once the rule of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ends, another intelligence source said. He described the effort as "prudent," an apparent reference to Washington's desire to help moderate elements gain control of the Iranian Government.

The information on the operation followed statements by Iranian officials on Monday that Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security adviser to Mr. Reagan, had made a secret trip to Teheran in an effort to gain the hostages' release.

## Terms Reports 'Fanciful'

Mr. McFarlane, who has declined to comment on the report, said today that there had been "fanciful" reports on his activities but added that he was not able to correct the "considerable misinformation" at this time.

"I'm in the awkward position of not being able to comment on the reports," he told reporters after giving a speech in Highland Heights, Ohio. "They're very fanciful, largely fictitious issues. And I'll comment on them when the time is appropriate."

Mr. McFarlane added that the public would soon learn that the Administration had adhered to its policy of not providing arms to Iran as long as Washington believes Iran aids terrorism.

## Description of Operation

The intelligence specialists, who are familiar with the shipments but who asked not to be identified, described the operation as one of several actions taken by the Administration in a highly secret program that was directed by a small group in the National Security Council at the White House.

In this operation, they said, the United States provided the direct shipment of parts that had been bought by Iran but not sent after an arms embargo was imposed in 1979.

A White House spokesman, Dan Howard, described the embargo as a "very technical business" and said he did not know if it included spare parts.

In April 1980, President Jimmy Carter expanded a November 1979 executive order freezing Iranian assets in the United States to void any contracts or licenses granted before that date involving "the sale, supply or other transfer" by any person in United

States jurisdiction of "items, commodities or products" to Iran except for food, medicine and donated clothing. The order does not specifically refer to military spare parts.

## Other Channels for Shipments

In addition to direct shipments by the United States, the intelligence specialists said, the Administration sought to encourage third parties to provide similar shipments, with one such channel being Israel.

Neither the White House nor the State Department would indicate if direct arms shipments to Iran violated the arms embargo.

President Reagan declined to comment when asked today if the United States had made some sort of deal with Iran to gain the hostages' release. But he appealed to reporters not to speculate, saying it was "making it more difficult for us in our effort get the other hostages free."

Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger told a group of reporters today that the United States had not changed its policy against supplying military spare parts to Iran. Although the United States has an official policy of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war, Mr. Weinberger said it was not to Washington's advantage to have Teheran win its six-year-old war against Baghdad.

"There is no interest in helping Iran win that war," he said. "It would be very destabilizing to the whole region. It would be very much against our interest for Iran to win that war."

Pete Roussel, a White House spokesman, said the United States had systematically urged other countries not to sell arms to Iran, citing this as the only effective way to bring Teheran quickly to negotiate an end to the war.

The intelligence sources said the operation had been run within the National Security Council because of White House concern that word of the plan would leak out if the Central Intelligence Agency handled it. It was feared that the C.I.A. would be required brief Congressional intelligence committees and that Congressional officials would then disclose the plan, they said.

One National Security Council official who is believed to have been involved is Lieut. Col. Oliver North, a specialist in counterinsurgency and terrorism, who Administration officials have said was in Cyprus last weekend when David P. Jacobsen, one of the American hostages, was released from Lebanon.

While officials would not indicate if Mr. Reagan had approved such a plan, it is unlikely that it would have been put into effect had the President not done so.

"This was a really solo operation," a ranking Administration official said.

## Better Relations With Military

He said that there had been discussion in the White House about the belief that the Iranian military might be willing to improve relations with the United States in the hope of receiving needed spare parts and that Washington could take advantage of this desire.

The sources said the operation had generated some internal debate, with the State Department, for example, raising objections to a policy that essentially involved trading arms for hostages. One specific State Department concern, they said, was that it would incur the resentment of moderate Arabs, who would become upset that the United States was using Israel to supply military equipment to the fundamentalist Islamic leadership of Iran.

The Los Angeles Times, quoting anonymous Administration sources, reported today that both Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Mr. Weinberger were angered by the parts shipments.

The sources said that over the period that the operation has been in place, the Administration had, at times, backed away from expediting the shipments, but that in each instance the plan was reinstated at White House insistence, "because it worked," one source said.

## Iran's Mediation in Hijacking

According to the sources, the operation intensified after the hijacking in June 1985 of a Trans World Airlines airliner, when Iran intervened with the Islamic Holy War group to free the Americans who were being held aboard. Iran's role became central after Syria proved unable to influence the Shiite faction in Lebanon, a turn of events that served to reinforce the Administration's belief that Teheran held the answer to gaining the release of the other Americans in Lebanon.

While the Administration's policy has been to reject making concessions to or negotiating with terrorists, White House officials have indicated that it is not opposed to conducting talks that could gain the release of the remaining American captives.

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The operation, however, would appear to contradict the Administration's policy of not dealing with governments that sponsor terrorism, as it has charged Iran does.

One Iranian source said a plane had arrived at Teheran's Mehrabad Airport at 5:30 A.M. on July 4 carrying an American delegation and arms, apparently as a part of the operation.

According to the source, the Americans were allowed into Iran under a secret arrangement that involved Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament.

Speculation about Israel or Israeli parties providing supplies to Iran have been based on several reports, including unconfirmed radio reports in Israel. In September 1985, for example, a DC-8 cargo plane flying from Iran to Spain made an unscheduled landing in Tel Aviv after reporting that it had developed communications trouble, Turkish authorities said at the time. In that month, the Rev. Benjamin Weir was released.