

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 9-AWASHINGTON TIMES
18 July 1985

STAT

The last Reaganite

Ask 10 Americans to identify Constantine Menges and 11 of them will say he's a Mediterranean shipping tycoon or a Nazi war criminal whose bones were dug up in Latin America. In fact, Mr. Menges — the brightest light on the National Security Council — pursues obscurity in a manner befitting a hero. His detractors in the foreign policy apparatus — mostly NSC mediocrities and State Department careerists — are pursuing his obscurity for him in a manner befitting cad.

As the NSC's area director for Latin American and Caribbean affairs, Mr. Menges brought prodigious knowledge and understanding to the White House. Integral to the planning of the Reagan administration's most significant foreign success, the liberation of Grenada, Mr. Menges ought to have considerable stroke. In the minds of the duds, alas, Latin America has become too important to be left to those who know anything about it.

NSC watchers have noticed that Mr. Menges's authority has been progressively de-emphasized, with policy being forged without his participation. Most troubling: Mr. Menges, nearly the sole remaining area

director on the NSC with allegiance to Ronald Reagan, has been moved to an ambiguous "public liaison" position; the president was informed that he was "promoted." National Security Adviser William McFarlane has gradually built a shop with a distinctly careerist odor — one that takes an unnatural interest, for example, in squirting tapioca into presidential speeches dealing with the Soviet empire.

Mr. Menges finds himself increasingly cut out at a time when Elliott Abrams, the Reaganite hardliner whose performance as assistant secretary of state for human rights was widely praised, takes over the Latin American desk at Foggy Bottom. Mr. Abrams will need an ally at the NSC, as no doubt has occurred to those now plotting Mr. Menges's demise.

So alarmed were 26 House members by the squishy consistency of the NSC that they sent a letter to President Reagan inquiring after Mr. Menges's fate. Similar inquiries have come from the Senate. What happens in the next several weeks may determine whether the president can overpower the foreign policy bureaucracy and leave a Reaganite tattoo on it.