

As EIR warned, Gregg is Bush's albatross

by William Jones

"Since recent revelations in the Oliver North trial prove that Bush repeatedly lied about his involvement in Iran-Contra operations, Gregg's nomination hearings before the Senate in May could become a media extravaganza targeting the failing presidency," *EIR* warned last April 28. Donald Gregg, George Bush's former aide and proposed ambassador to the Republic of Korea, has indeed become the albatross of the administration.

Ironically enough, it was a number of key Bush nominations which have set up the administration for a revived probing into the Iran-Contra affair, which had been rather successfully swept under the carpet. Already with the appointment of John Negroponte, the former ambassador to Honduras, as ambassador to Mexico, eyebrows were raised. In his position in Honduras, Negroponte was a key link to the Honduran government, whose support was necessary for the Contra supply effort. In hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee earlier this year, Negroponte was grilled concerning his possible involvement in the Iran-Contra affair. The senators, apparently not entirely satisfied with the answers they received, are scheduling more hearings with Negroponte for next month.

Even more problematic was the appointment of Vice President Bush's national security adviser, Donald Gregg, as ambassador to South Korea. Gregg, who had worked under CIA "renegade" Ted Shackley, in Saigon during the height of the Vietnam War, was a key player in the Iran-Contra affair, having introduced then-Vice President Bush to Felix Rodriguez, an on-the-ground controller in El Salvador for the Contra resupply effort. Working hand-in-hand with Oliver North, Rodriguez remained in close contact with his old Vietnam buddy Gregg in Washington.

The other factor pushing a renewed investigation into the

Iran-Contra affair was the trial of Lt. Col. Oliver North. North, who was convicted on three of the charges raised against him, but pronounced innocent on nine others, was one of the people who were hung out to dry. The fact that the men and women on the jury declared North innocent of nine charges underlined their feeling that, although North bore considerable responsibility, there were higher-ups not yet brought to trial, or even accused of a crime, who bore an even greater responsibility. This was also expressed by some of the jurors in interviews after the trial.

Material released by the government during the course of the North trial showed that there had been a meeting between Honduran President Suazo and Vice President Bush, where Bush allegedly assured the Honduran President that he would receive more U.S. financial assistance if he agreed to support the Contras on Honduran territory. Bush denies that this was the subject of the meeting. North and the other defendants, Adm. John Poindexter and Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, have little reason to cover up for other responsible parties, who have allowed them to "take the rap."

As was recently revealed during the the appearance of Donald Gregg before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Gregg was originally considered for a top CIA post, having served his entire career as an intelligence officer. Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, and several other committee members then threatened to investigate Gregg's role in the Iran-Contra affair. In a *Washington Post* article on May 19, it was reported that Boren said that he had advised the White House that if it tried to give Gregg the Central Intelligence Agency job, he would conduct "prolonged hearings . . . which would have the effect of reopening questions about the Iran-Contra affair." Bush then dropped the idea and instead appointed Gregg

to be U.S. envoy to South Korea.

It was undoubtedly thought that hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would be something of a breeze compared to what the Intelligence Committee wanted to put Gregg through, although the administration had plenty of warning that this would not be the case. Earlier this month, committee chairman Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) had asked the administration to withdraw Gregg's nomination to the ambassadorial post because of his possible involvement in Iran-Contra activities. Bush insisted that he was standing by his man.

'The dog ate my homework'

The first session of hearings with Gregg proved somewhat painful for the former CIA man. Senator Cranston began his interrogation by asking Gregg about the statements given by Oliver North at his trial. North said that Gregg had introduced him to Felix Rodriguez in December 1984. North also claims that he talked to Gregg before selecting Rodriguez as the on-the-ground controller for the Contra operations. Gregg insisted that none of this was true and that he knew nothing about the Iran-Contra affair until he discovered "the tip of the iceberg" in August 1986, and that he didn't see the whole picture until December 1986. Gregg attempted to convince the committee that he knew nothing of the activity of his old Vietnam comrade during the entire period Rodriguez was involved in the Contra resupply effort, although they communicated frequently during that time, in conversations Gregg described as Rodriguez undergoing "combat catharsis."

Gregg had also introduced Rodriguez to Gen. Paul Gorman, then commander of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama, and to Thomas Pickering, the ambassador to El Salvador. He also introduced Rodriguez to top Ibero-American leaders. In February 1985, cables from Gorman state that Rodriguez, who was ostensibly sent to Central America to deal with the insurgency in El Salvador, actually had the Contra operation as his top priority. A notation in Oliver North's diary reports on a meeting with Lt. Col. James Steele, who in 1985 was stationed at the U.S. embassy in San Salvador, and Gregg in September 1985. Gregg said that North's diary was wrong, although Steele confirmed for Senator Kerry that there was in fact a meeting.

A memo from Col. Sam Watson, Gregg's aide in the vice president's office, wrote a memo on Feb. 4, 1986 about the need for more logistical support for cross-border attacks. The memo passed by Gregg on its way to the vice president, and Gregg notes on it, "Felix agrees with this. It is a major shortcoming." An appointment memo dated April 16, 1986, states that Gregg had set up a briefing for Bush by Rodriguez on "resupply of the Contras." Gregg, who couldn't account for the formulation, offered the "speculation" that the memo concerned "resupply of the *copters*" for the El Salvadoran government and that the secretary had misunderstood—but she misunderstood again in another memo dated April 30,

1986, also dealing with a Rodriguez briefing to the vice president.

On Oct. 5, 1986, when Eugene Hasenfus's plane crashed over Nicaraguan territory, Rodriguez called Gregg's office, although, according to Gregg, without mentioning anything about the Hasenfus incident.

Even more problematic is the fact that Gregg denies ever having informed his boss, Vice President Bush, about the Iran-Contra operations. Cranston described Gregg's testimony as "the dog ate my homework" argument.

If Gregg is in fact lying, then his goose is cooked. And yet, as Cranston pointed out, if Gregg did not inform his superior of what was going on, that would cast a shadow on Gregg's judgment. Cranston said that it also raises "fundamental questions about your suitability to be U.S. ambassador." Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) found it exceedingly strange that Gregg would inform the vice president about minor problems of helicopter resupply to the El Salvadoran government, but would say nothing about Contra supply problems. Gregg claims that the operations were not important enough to bring to the vice president's attention, and that Bush was first informed about the Contra operations after the story broke through quotes from Gregg published in the *New York Times*.

Kerry said that this "was conceivably one of the most significant constitutional confrontations in the history of this country," adding, "Over Watergate we came close to impeaching a President of the United States," although Watergate involved no more than a "two-bit burglary."

Keeping the lid on a further extensive probe of the Iran-Contra affair may prove to be impossible for the administration, although certain senators like Claiborne Pell (R-R.I.) fear that "the unraveling that can come out of this hearing could be of harm." But there are much bigger fish than intelligence operative Donald Gregg who would then be drawn into the Iran-Contra net. Some voices are being raised asking to know how much President Bush actually knew about Iran-Contra. Cranston has said that he would hold further hearings unless the Gregg nomination were withdrawn. "If the nomination stays before us," said Cranston, "we have to learn all we can about his deeds before we can make a decision."

On May 18 the White House reiterated its commitment to see the nomination through, claiming that Cranston "has chosen to make this a personal kind of cause." Conceivably, the White House or Gregg could withdraw his nomination and try to sweep everything under the carpet. But that in itself would raise suspicions that something was being covered up in this affair, and could create even greater interest in re-launching investigations into Iran-Contra.

The trials of Poindexter and Secord will provide the backdrop to the congressional hearings, not to speak of any possible surprises that the defendants may have in store for their former colleagues in their attempts to avoid prison sentences. Whatever turn events may take in the course of the next few weeks, the Iran-Contra affair promises to continue stalking the President's every step.