PS1 for 12/15/88#OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT REAGAN

Time is fast running out on your second term. Congress has adjourned, the election is over, and the public's mind is taking a welcome recess from politics. You have only a few weeks left to tidy up and leave your House in order for your successor.

There is only one thing, now, that can tarnish the lustre on the Reagan regime. That is, if you let other men go to prison for carrying out your policies (even though they were not your specific directives).

I certainly am not saying that Colonel Oliver North and Admiral John Poindexter didn't make any mistakes. But looking at the issue from the Reagan perspective, I suggest five factors that will diminish your own stature if you walk away from this problem and fail to close the door on Iran-Contra before you depart from the White House.

1. It is unjust for North and Poindexter to be prosecuted for trying to implement your foreign policy. It is a travesty for your political enemies to criminalize political and policy mistakes made by the Executive Branch, and it reflects badly on you if you allow them to do so.

We all know that the Democratic liberals tried to convict you and your policies in the Iran-Contra hearings, and they failed largely because of the dramatic television performances under fire by North and Poindexter. We all know also that the particular charges against those men are merely manufactured counts to try to put Reagan-surrogates behind bars.

2. It is unjust for North and Poindexter to be prosecuted after your Administration mishandled the problem at every step of the way. Your Administration not only goofed up the arms deal in the first place (which all now admit), but continued to botch it up after the mess became a national issue.

The peremptory firing of Oliver North, Ed Meese's accusation of ""diversion'' of funds, and the naming of a special prosecutor were all actions of your Administration that did great personal damage to North and Poindexter. You missed a great opportunity when you failed to take responsibility and pardon those men immediately after the hearings, when public opinion was running so heavily in their favor.

3. It would be grossly unfair for you to walk out of the White House and say to your successor, ""So long, George. I'm heading for the ranch and Iran-Contra is your baby now.'' George Bush doesn't deserve that treatment from you.

If the North and Poindexter trials go forward and they are convicted, and then there is a public demand to pardon them, why should that albatross be hung around President Bush's neck? He wasn't responsible for Iran-Contra, and he shouldn't have to wash the dirty linen of the Reagan Administration.

4. It would be a bad political mistake to give the liberal media the opportunity to rehash Iran-Contra night after night in the first half of 1989. Instead of Bush-bashing and Quayle-bashing, we would be forced to endure Reagan-bashing and Contra-bashing, as well as a second massive attempt to defame North and Poindexter.

The onslaught would also include Presidency-bashing. For several years, the liberal Democratic Congress has been trying to take control of U.S. foreign policy. The trials would give them the chance, and you owe it to constitutional government, as well as to George Bush to prevent this from happening.

5. Finally, you owe it to yourself and to the dignity of your office not to let a ridiculous sequence of events go forward that could very well put you and President Bush on the witness stand for weeks during 1989, interrogated by the special prosecutor who has already made it clear he thinks that Congress should run foreign

policy. You owe it to the country to protect the Presidency as an institution against these partisan assaults.

So, Mr. President, I'm not asking you to do a favor for Colonel North and Admiral Poindexter. I'm asking you to demonstrate the loyalty and leadership we expect of you by using whatever is the most expeditious method to stop these political trials now. You should relegate Iran-Contra to the dust-bin of history, so that President Bush can devote his energies to the problems of the present and future instead of the past.