PS1 for 3/12/87#THE TOWER REPORT

The Tower Report on the Iran affair shows the wide gap between illusion and reality in the way the media present the news to the American people. The long-awaited report was heralded as a momentous event, but it was a dud, just 300 pages of words from which reporters had to strain to find any newsworthy quotation.

The first 12 paragraphs of the (BF)New York Times'(end BF) major front-page news story on the Tower report didn't quote a single sentence from the Report. (BF)U.S.A. Today(end BF) devoted most of its front-page news story to asking questions that the Tower Report didn't answer.

Sam Donaldson's face at the news conference showed the national media's disappointment that the Tower Report didn't give them a sword with which they could deliver a fatal blow to the Reagan Administration. Even though the Tower report contained no raw meat for the circling sharks, they chewed on the pages anyway, hoping to make Ronald Reagan's sins sound mortal even though they were only venial.

Despite all the recent headlines about ""scandal,'' the Tower Report didn't find that anybody committed an illegal act, that anybody was killed, that anybody lied, that anybody covered up any evidence of wrongdoing. The Tower Report uncovered ""no hard proof'' of a diversion of money to the Contras, and ""no evidence'' that the President even knew any was talked about until three months ago.

The (BF)New York Times(end BF) apparently couldn't find any portion of the Tower Report damaging enough to quote in a box on page one, so instead we were given a summary of the Report by Democrat Edmund Muskie. And what was the worst this partisan Democrat could come up with?

Muskie accused the Reagan Administration of not having ""general procedures for interagency consideration,'' of lacking ""a formal institutional record and informed analysis,'' and of lacking ""orderly process.'' That doesn't sound like ""colossal'' mistakes or a ""devastating'' indictment, as the epithets and

headlines tried to make us believe.

The Tower Report concluded that some events ""were not treated by many of the participants as sufficiently important.'' That's right, and this attitude is shared by the American people who are bored to tears with media coverage of the Iran affair.

The Tower Report said that the Reagan Administration had two concerns: (1) the release of the hostages and (2) trying to open potential channels to Iran because of ""Iran's strategic importance'' and ""the risk of Soviet meddling in the succession crisis that might follow the death of Khomeini.'' Both are surely legitimate objectives.

The Tower Report accused members of the Reagan Administration of having ""quite diverse'' recollections of meetings. So what else is new! Have you tried comparing your recollections of specific details of an event you attended in 1985 with those of others who also attended? Differences in recollection are inevitable.

The (BF)New York Times(end BF) featured 13 full pages under the banner ""The White House Crisis.'' The strongest quotations that can be gleaned from this in-depth coverage are: ""inconsistency'' between Administration policies on terrorism and its initiatives, ""established procedures'' ignored, initiatives ""not adequately vetted,'' ""contradictory policies,'' and the ""decision-making process was flawed.''

The (BF)New York Times(end BF) tried to make the Tower Report read like a whodunit, with boxes for the cast of characters and a detailed chronology. But the problem is that there is no corpus delicti. There wasn't any crime!

Three men at the end of their long and full careers studied the alleged ""scandal'' and ended up just second-guessing foreign policy decisions and criticizing President Reagan's management style. But those three have no expertise to do that. Except for Muskie's tenure as Governor of a small state (Maine), those three men never managed anything significant. John Tower was a college professor and a Senator, Edmund Muskie a politician, and Brent Scowcroft

a foreign policy intellectual and a Kissinger associate.

The only ""crisis'' was in the media; it certainly was not in the handling of foreign affairs. The mistakes were made in the handling of politics and public relations.

The appointment of Howard Baker as chief of staff is a splendid omen. It means that the moderate-liberal wing of the Republican Party is now extinct; its last remaining leader has joined up to implement the Reagan agenda. Now let's get on with the task.