PS1 for 5/28/87#WHAT THE SECORD TESTIMONY REVEALED

The Irangate/Contragate Soap Opera isn't playing in Peoria, a shocked eastern newspaper headline proclaimed. While press and political persons in our nation's capital view it as compelling, the rest of the country is saying ho-hum.

The hearings are all-too-obvious political theater designed to create the image that the Reagan Administration is in disarray. It's all so self-serving, both for the liberal Democrats running the show and for the liberal media reporting it.

Every line of testimony is fed into a computer so that little inconsistencies of memory can be trumpeted immediately. Yet, after retired Major General Richard Secord and former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane had been cross-examined for days, and pilloried for the amusement of spectators, they still look like sincere Americans trying to do a dangerous task in which they earnestly believed.

It's too bad that everyone didn't watch Congressman Jim Courter's (R-NJ) precise questioning of General Secord. He was a private citizen at all times relevant to Irangate and had years of experience in secret air drops in Southeast Asia. Their dialogue yields a coherent explanation of the entire Iran initiative.

First, Courter brought out that Secord could have had a grant of immunity from prosecution if he had asked for one. Since Secord believes that he did not do anything wrong, he did not seek any immunity and he testified frankly, for which he should be commended.

The Democrats have staked out four theories to explain why the Reagan Administration initiated the Iran venture: (1) the strategic reason, that is, to protect our interests against the Soviets in a critical area of the world, (2) to get the release of our hostages in Lebanon, (3) to allow individuals to make financial profits, and (4)

to aid the Contras in Nicaragua.

The Courter-Secord colloquy showed that it is customary to try to improve relationships with governments with which we have no diplomatic relations, and to use private individuals to gather intelligence and assist government's goals. For example, in the 1985 Achille Lauro type of incident, we would have expected our government to have covertly used the ship's captain or crew, or the ship's manufacturer to get the layout of the ship, or a private plane or boat to gain access to the ship.

Courter brought out how, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a TV commentator served as the conduit for critical secret messages between President Kennedy and Khrushchev. Courter told how private citizen Jesse Jackson went to Syria to help liberate Robert Goodman, the U.S. Navy flier shot down in 1983, and how private citizens have repeatedly tried to get out U.S. POWs from Southeast Asia.

Since there is nothing unusual about using private citizens, so there was nothing unusual about the Reagan Administration using Richard Secord to assist in its Iran initiative. Our government could not deal directly with the Ayatollah because he refused to deal with us, calling us the Great Satan.

The second reason for the initiative was the hostages, chief of whom was William Buckley, a CIA agent kidnapped and held captive in Lebanon. Our government knew that, under torture, Buckley had been forced to give his captors at least 400 pages of secret information.

It made sense for our government to take any reasonable route to get our hostages released. Just because those plans didn't work is no reason to condemn them; second-guessing with hindsight is a cheap shot.

The third motive for Irangate advanced by the Democrats is that the Reagan Administration was trying to set up some individuals to

make large profits. Secord testified that he is worse off financially because he gave so much time to the Iran venture that he lost lucrative clients.

Was Iran an excuse to raise money to aid the Contras, as some Democrats tried to assert? Secord testified that, over ten months, he managed to squeeze out only $3.5 million for the Contras. That couldn't have been the main goal of the Iran initiative because it was more productive to raise money for the Contras from foreign governments and from private individuals.

But the $3.5 million was a valuable fringe benefit. Secord testified that, without it, the Contras ""would have been driven from the field and defeated in detail,'' and it would have cost the U.S. taxpayers much more than the $105 million Congress voted in 1986 if that earlier aid from Iran had not bridged the gap.

Secord emerged from the Courter questioning with the image of a gutsy private citizen who took on a difficult job for our government, and who stood up strongly under attempts to harass and humiliate him. The Courter questioning showed that the Iran initiative was sincerely undertaken within the foreign policy jurisdiction of the executive branch for important national security goals.