

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S COMMUNICATION RESPONSE TO THE IRAN
ARMS CRISIS

By

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To Jean, my parents—Rita, Jesse, and Margo—and my grandparents J.D. and Erma. Their support made this research project possible.

This paper is also dedicated to the memory of Captain Michael Gibbs. Captain Mike, a former Army Seabee engineer, passed away the evening before this thesis was defended. At the time the Iran arms crisis occurred, Mr. Gibbs was busy taming tigers, quelling uprisings, and emptying bars. A true adventurer, he would have most likely attempted to free the hostages himself had someone only asked.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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This study investigates the root causes of one of the most damaging presidential crises in modern American history and identifies potential linkages between crisis communication theory and the healthy functioning of presidential administrations. The primary research question probes a key consideration regarding the functioning of executive governance: When managing crises, should executive leadership place priority on its symbolic resources or its stakeholder relationships?

The priorities which guided the Reagan Administration's defensive discourse in the midst of the Iran arms crisis were explored. Specifically, image restoration discourse theory and a stakeholder theory-based typology were used to categorize the defensive discourse offered by the Reagan Administration in the midst of the Iran arms crisis of 1986. The statements offered in response to the charge that arms were traded for hostages were analyzed by administrative source and over time. The Reagan Administration initially prioritized the continued viability of the operation involving the exchange of arms for hostages. However, once threats to the Administration's credibility reached a critical threshold, the Administration's priority became the protection of its symbolic assets.

Throughout the crisis period, the Administration attempted to resolve the disparity between public expectations of its actions and stated foreign policy regarding Iran by explaining the Iran initiative using ambiguous discourse. Image restoration discourse theory accounted for most of the statements which emerged from the data, but several defensive discourse strategies fell outside the theoretical typology. When added to the existing typology, these previously unidentified discourse categories accounted for most of statements analyzed in this case.

Implications for further political communication and crisis communication were considered. Specifically, how do communication decisions impact the ability of a president to govern and public faith in government? When choosing operational considerations over the symbolic reputation and image of the administration, how will that impact the effectiveness of an administration? Such considerations are highly relevant to communication scholarship and society at large given the numerous presidential crises which have occurred in recent history.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Numerous United States presidential administrations have faced crises which threatened their ability to govern, their legitimacy, and the confidence of their constituents. Modern presidential administrations embroiled in crisis must navigate a complex media environment in which news about a crisis travels instantly. Therefore, the communication component of an administration's crisis management efforts is crucial to preserving a president's ability to govern. The Reagan Administration was acutely aware of this fact. According to former White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, "No government in history can have been more sensitive to the media, or more driven by the printed word and the television image, than the Reagan Administration" (Regan, 1988, p. 6).

Communication technologies which emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, have enabled the emergence of an immediate and global media environment. In this environment, when crisis hits, information is communicated to mass audiences instantly. A presidential administration's stakeholders have ready access to information that allows them to scrutinize every action taken, and every message disseminated. When embroiled in crisis not only the outcome of the crisis, but how presidential administrations communicate during the crisis has a major impact on their credibility and future effectiveness.

Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Iran hostage crisis, are examples of modern presidential crises which have occurred in complex media environments. In 1972, the Watergate crisis erupted after members of the Nixon Administration broke into the Democratic National Headquarters. Nixon eventually resigned, and his name and administration were indelibly fused with scandal in the public memory (Schudson, 1992, 2004). From late 1979, until January 20, 1981, President Carter unsuccessfully tried to negotiate the Iran hostage crisis. The crisis

culminated in Carter's failed attempt to free the hostages militarily in the spring of 1980 (Busby, 1999). The hostages were freed on the day President Ronald Reagan was inaugurated, but Reagan would soon be mired in crisis after he attempted to free Americans held hostage in the Middle East. The efforts of the Reagan Administration to free the hostages would eventually lead to the Iran-Contra scandal, one of the most damaging presidential scandals in United States history (Busby, 1999).

According to Busby (1999) and Schudson (1994), the Reagan Administration was plagued by corruption and scandal, yet until Iran-Contra, crisis did not stick to the Reagan Administration. Busby argues, "The Reagan Administration experienced corruption on a scale never before recorded or exposed" (p. 17). He backed up this assertion by citing a 1988 report which found that over 225 Reagan appointees were alleged to be involved in criminal wrongdoing (Busby, 1999). Schudson (1994), discussing housing and urban development, and savings and loan scandals, claims Reagan, "presided for eight years over an administration that combined the old-fashioned graft of the Grant and Harding eras with an undisguised grab for power that would have done credit to Richard Nixon" (p. 341). Despite these claims, Schudson acknowledges Reagan left office with "a higher public approval rating than any modern American Chief Executive" (p. 341).

Prior to revelations about the Reagan Administration's involvement with Iran, Reagan had been labeled the "Teflon president" due to his ability to shake off crisis. Before Iran-Contra, Reagan weathered several minor crises which had minimal effect on his public approval rating. He angered Jewish groups in the United States when he attended a memorial service honoring German SS troops in Bitburg, Germany, but this had no real effect on his public standing (Busby, 1999). His Administration faced further criticism for engaging in a disinformation

campaign in Libya, and for the so-called “Daniloff affair,” but neither of these transgressions caused lasting damage to his Administration. In October 1986, Reagan’s staff turned the President’s failures during the United States–Soviet summit in Reykjavik into public perceptions of success (Busby, 1999). Until Iran-Contra, no crisis caused major damage to Reagan’s relationship with the electorate, and the majority of Americans approved of the President’s job performance (Gallup poll data, 2006).

The Iran-Contra scandal changed the public’s view of President Reagan and his Administration. The last poll taken before the Iran-Contra affair was made public indicated Reagan’s public approval rating was 63%. By the time the next poll was taken in early December, his public approval rating had dropped 16%. Reagan’s public approval ratings remained below pre-Iran-Contra levels until the last poll of his presidency (Gallup poll data, 2006). The Iran-Contra scandal threatened Reagan’s ability to govern, his legitimacy, and his ability to enact his policy agenda (Wallison, 2003).

The crises faced by Nixon in 1972 and Carter throughout the last year of his presidency constrained Reagan’s ability to reach a favorable outcome to the Iran-Contra scandal. As Reagan tried to negotiate the treacherous waters of the Iran-Contra affair, his actions were understood in the context of Watergate and the previous Iran hostage crisis. Reagan was also constrained by his previous tough-talk against terrorist regimes, specifically Iran. Reagan was under a tremendous amount of public pressure to free the hostages, but his ability to do so was limited by his own public policy and public memory of past crises (Busby, 1999; Schudson, 1994).

Historian Theodore Draper has pointed out that the term “Iran-Contra affair” is actually a misnomer. The terms “Iran” and “Contra” refer to different sets of covert operations undertaken by the Reagan Administration. Initially, these operations were entirely unrelated except for the

fact that they were both implemented and overseen by the same members of the National Security Council staff out of the White House. The Iran initiative involved efforts to negotiate for the release of Americans held hostage in Lebanon by selling American-made armaments to moderate factions in Iran. The Contra component of the scandal involved efforts to provide financial and military support to paramilitary rebel forces in Nicaragua, who were attempting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. These two operations were linked when National Security Council staffers began to divert funds from the arms sales to the Contra rebels. The operations were publicly fused together when the Reagan Administration announced the funds transfers in late November 1986 (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991; Walsh, 1994).

While seemingly trivial, understanding the distinction between the Iran and Contra operations is crucial if one seeks to understand the Iran-Contra scandal. It was the Iran component of the affair which set-off the Iran-Contra scandal. The Reagan Administration's initial attempts to explain its involvement with Iran set the context in which Reagan would attempt to address public anger over Iran-Contra.

Through a complicated chain of events, the funds diversion was discovered due to the confusion that arose when the Administration attempted to explain the details of the Iran initiative (Draper, 1991; Walsh, 1994). The crescendo of press criticism which resulted from the original news reports of the arms sales prompted the National Security Council staff to develop a chronology of the details of the Iran initiative. Because the Iran initiative was highly compartmentalized, the majority of the Administration's representatives did not know exactly what had transpired. The chronology was developed so that members of the Administration would have a common bank of information to communicate consistently to the public and media (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 108, 144). When National Security

Council staffers were unable to piece together a coherent recounting of their actions, a Justice Department staff member suspected a major impropriety may have occurred (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 110). Attorney General Edwin Meese received the President's approval to investigate the details of the National Security Council staff's actions. The investigation uncovered the funds diversion and the scandal erupted. While one may assume that the funds diversion would have been discovered regardless of the Administration's actions, the failure of the Administration's crisis communications efforts were at least indirectly related to the discovery. From the time of crisis emergence, the Administration's myopic crisis response escalated press criticism, increasing public, and the Congress', ire over the transgression. It was this pressure from the news media that necessitated the investigation which uncovered the diversion (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 144).

Therefore, the subject of this study is the crisis communication offered by the Reagan Administration in response to the Iran arms crisis of November 1986. This crisis preceded, and ignited, the Iran-Contra scandal. Not only did communication efforts regarding the Iran arms deals play a role in the discovery of the diversion of funds from the arms sales to the Contras, but evidence suggests that the Administration's crisis management efforts were more damaging than the transgressions which spawned the crisis (Walsh, 1993; Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003). This is evidenced by the fact that the National Security Council staff members involved in the Iran initiative, were convicted of, or pleaded guilty to, crimes related to efforts to conceal their actions (Walsh, 1994).

This study probes the evolution of the Reagan Administration's communications from November 3 through November 24, 1986, regarding the Iran arms deals from a crisis communication perspective. To gain insight into the complexity of the rhetorical environment in

which the Administration attempted to explain its actions, the individual defensive discourse offered by various representatives within the organization is scrutinized. Furthermore, the discussions which took place within the Administration during staff meetings, in inter-office memoranda, in press guidance documents, and in other internal documentation was analyzed to gain further understanding of the priorities which guided the Administration's crisis communication response.

The objective of this study is to identify, to the greatest degree possible, the priorities which guided the Administration as it attempted to calm the crisis which resulted due to the arms sales to Iran. Specifically, this study probes the degree to which the Administration's crisis communication was enacted to protect its symbolic assets (i.e., image, credibility, and reputation), its relationships with various stakeholder groups, or some other concerns.

This study is significant for several reasons. As noted above, the Iran arms crisis was the antecedent to the Iran-contra scandal, one of the most damaging presidential scandals in United States history. Understanding the priorities underlying this particular crisis management process may provide insight that can minimize the likelihood of a crisis in American government of this magnitude from recurring. Evidence suggests the primary damage caused to the Administration, and thus the public's faith in government, was caused by the Administration's crisis communication response, not the transgression itself.

The Reagan Administration's crisis communication requires analysis from a modern public relations perspective. It has been argued that until November 25, 1986, the Iran arms crisis was essentially a public relations problem (Wallison, 2003). Analysis of the situation from a public relations perspective yields insight into the success and failure outcomes of the crisis management efforts. A previous study analyzed President Reagan's defensive discourse offered

during Iran-Contra from a public relations perspective, but that study is outdated, and substantial insight about this case from other perspectives have been yielded since the study's publication (Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991).

Communications scholars develop theory regarding crisis communication to provide guidelines which may improve an organization's chances of surviving a crisis. The primary research question proposed in this text may serve as the first step in the application of public relations-based crisis communication theory to presidential crises.

More broadly, the primary research question cuts to core considerations regarding the functioning of government. When managing crises, should executive leadership place priority on its symbolic resources or its stakeholder relationships? Furthermore, how do such decisions impact the functioning of our government and the lives of our fellow citizens? Such considerations are highly relevant to communication scholarship and society at large given the numerous presidential crises which have occurred in recent history. The purpose of this study is to contribute one analysis and provide insights into Reagan's handling of the Iran arms crisis.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Definitions

Penrose (2000) states “a crisis occurs when an event increases in intensity, falls under close scrutiny of the news media or government, interferes with normal business operations, devalues a positive public image, and has an adverse effect on a business’ bottom line” (p.157). Ziaukas (2001) defines an organizational crisis as a situation which threatens to damage an organization’s ability to carry out its goals. Hale, Dulek and Hale (2005) refer to organizational crises as “events characterized by high consequence, low probability, ambiguity, and decision-making time pressure” (p. 115). Venette, Sellnow and Lang (2003), Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2001), Horsley and Barker (2002), Fishman (1999), Pearson and Clair (1998), and Egelhoff and Sen (1992) also describe crises as relatively unlikely, potentially damaging and ambiguous events often requiring swift organizational response.

Several authors describe crises in terms of effects on publics and their relationship with the entity undergoing crisis. Pearson and Clair (1998) study crises from a cognitive perspective. The authors refer to crises as “emotional events that can play multiple parties’ interests against one another” and further state that “all crises share in common a breakdown in the social construction of reality” (p. 62, 64). In a similar vein, Horsley and Barker emphasize the importance of stakeholder perception and note that crises are often “subjectively experienced by these individuals as personally and socially threatening” (2002, p.408). Egelhoff and Sen (1992) indicate crises are often rooted in a “major incongruence” between public expectations of an organization and “what happens in the environment” (p.444). Thus crises often rupture stakeholders’ individual and shared assumptions of reality leading to feelings of vulnerability

and impaired rationality. The more severe the rupture, the more difficult the crisis management process is for the organization (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

Crisis situations are often analyzed in terms of impacts to an entity's image. Coombs defines crises as events that threaten an organization's image and disrupt operations (1999, 2002). While Coombs' definition is rooted in the symbolic approach to crisis management, he also invokes a slightly more relational approach describing a crisis as "an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly" (p. 2). Coombs' (1999) definition may be limited in its applicability due to its qualification of a crisis event as unpredictable. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) characterize crises as "threats to an image" (p. 39). Likewise, Benoit and Brinson (1999) refer to crises as image attacks.

Crisis has been defined in terms of organizational legitimacy. Hearit (1994) claims "crises occur when an event or series of events threaten a corporate actor's legitimacy and therefore, ultimately, its survival" (p.46). Hearit (1994) defines legitimacy as "a global or summary belief among stakeholders that an organization is good or has a right to continue operating" (p. 45). Similarly, Suchman (1995) defines organizational legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are...appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p.574). Sellnow, Ulmer and Snider (1998) maintain that legitimacy is derived from behavioral compliance with environmental values. According to Christen (2005), political systems theory defines legitimacy in terms of power, with little emphasis on stakeholder perception.

Tyler (2005) defines crisis from a postmodern perspective. The author views a crisis as a disruption in the dominant narrative an organization communicates about itself. Tyler refers to an

organization's dominant narrative as "an organizational fiction" (p. 567). Venette, Sellnow and Lang (2003) refer to such a narrative as a metanarrative.

For the purposes of this project, a definition based on an integration of the relational and symbolic perspectives is proposed. A crisis is a situation or event that threatens to damage an organization's operations, its reputation, and the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders. Such an event is often of high-consequence and low-probability. Additionally, such an event is often of an ambiguous nature, and requires immediate organizational action due to potential outcomes facing the organization and its stakeholders, as well as the high level of media and public interest that may result (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Coombs, 1999; Coombs, 2002; Egelhoff & Sen, 1992; Fishman, 1999; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Penrose, 2000; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2001; Venette, Sellnow & Lang, 2003; Ziaukas, 2001).

Crisis Types

There are many varieties of crisis. Penrose (2000) lists an array of organizational crises including natural disasters, extortion, hostile takeovers, plant explosions, and product recalls. Citing the works Egelhoff and Sen (1992), and Marcus and Goodman (1991), Coombs (1995) identifies the following crisis dimensions that characterize various types of crises: internal or external, violent or nonviolent, intentional or unintentional, severe or normal damage, technical or sociopolitical failure, remote or relevant environment, high or low deniability, and concrete or diffuse victims.

Coombs argues that identifying the crisis type is essential to determining appropriate crisis response strategies (1995). The author developed a crisis type matrix based on dimensions of intentionality (unintentional-intentional) and control (external-internal). The matrix yields the following four crisis types: faux pas (unintentional-external), accidents (unintentional-internal),

terrorism (intentional-external) and transgressions (intentional-internal). Coombs (1999) provides a “master list” of crisis typologies (p. 61). The crisis types included are natural disasters, malevolence, technical breakdowns, human breakdowns, challenges, megadamage, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence and rumors.

In Contrast to Coombs (1995), Hearit and Courtright (2003) warn against a mechanistic approach to crisis management based on identification of crisis type. “It does not follow that a particular type of crisis situation invariably necessitates the same strategies every time that it occurs” (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 86).

DeVries and Fitzpatrick (2006) describe four types of crises: natural crises, crises of malevolence, crises of deception, and crises of management misconduct. Natural crises are uncontrollable natural disasters. Crises of malevolence involve the use of “criminal or other extreme means to express hostility toward companies, organizations or countries” (p. 161). Crises of deception arise from “the deliberate practice of deceiving stakeholders or concealing unfavorable information” (p. 162). Crises of management misconduct result from illegal acts, amoral behavior and behavior rooted in questionable values.

Crises as Opportunities

Crises are generally characterized in terms of their negative impacts, but several scholars have discussed the potential for positive outcomes of crisis (Fink, 1986; Penrose, 2000; Seeger 2002; Sturges 1994; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow 2002; Ziaukas, 2001). Sturges (1994) contends crises “may portend either positive or negative potential outcomes and may create problems and opportunities” (p. 298). “Opportunities exist within any crisis situation,” asserts Penrose (2000, p. 156).

Ziaukas (2001) contends that a prompt and appropriate response to a crisis may engender a positive perception among stakeholders. Ulmer (2001) insists that crises can “be resolved

positively” with appropriate communication responses (p. 592). In Contrast, Penrose (2000) views the opportunity as arising from organizational perception. He posits that the situation is self-fulfilling. If an organization views a crisis situation as containing opportunities, crisis managers are likely to perceive a wider range of options due to increased perceptions of control over the situation. In Penrose’s words, “Recognizing that crises can provide opportunities is crucial to balancing an organization’s external communication practices. Furthermore, by communicating a balanced perception of a crisis, the organization is more likely to sway public opinion and dispel false rumors about the severity and ultimate consequences of the crisis” (2000, p. 167). While discussing the applicability of chaos theory to the study and practice of crisis communication, Seeger (2002) asserts that the “disorder,” “decline” and “collapse” often associated with crisis may lead to “renewal,” “growth,” and “rebuilding” (p. 332).

Staged Conceptualizations of Crisis Development

Various crisis communication scholars conceptualize the development of crisis situations in terms of sequential stages. The crisis management models presented by Coombs (1999), Fink (1986), Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996), and Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005), provide theoretical insight into crisis development. Fink’s (1986) four-stage model of crisis management indicates four corresponding stages of crisis development: 1) the prodromal phase (or early-warning phase), 2) the acute phase, the point at which the crisis breaks, 3) the chronic phase, at which time the crisis is underway, and 4) the crisis resolution phase. Crisis communication models presented by Coombs (1999), Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996), and Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) indicate a slightly simplified conceptualization of crisis development: 1) pre-crisis, 2) crisis and 3) post-crisis. While Fink (1986) differentiates between the acute and chronic stages, Coombs (1999), Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996), and Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) collapse these stages into one “crisis” stage.

Crisis Management and Communication

The distinction between the terms “crisis management” and “crisis communication” must be delineated with adequate clarity. Crisis communication is a mere subset of the more comprehensive crisis management process—crisis communication is a tool available to crisis managers. The term “crisis communication” regards the use of communication tactics in response to crisis. “Crisis management,” instead, describes the use of all varieties of public relations strategies and tactics, including issues management and environmental scanning, to minimize the damage threatening an organization during crisis. Crisis management processes may be enacted on an ongoing basis, during all phases of a crisis including the pre-crisis phase. Such processes are often pro-active with the objective of thwarting potential crises before they arise (Fink, 1986; Hua-Hsin & Pfau 2004; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Hale, Dulek & Hale, 2005; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Lauzen & Dozer 1994; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2001; Ziaukas, 2001).

According to Ziaukas (2001) crisis management is a subgenre of public relations that developed in the 1980s and 1990s after the emergence of several high-profile crises, including the Three Mile Island accident and Johnson & Johnson’s cyanide-laced Tylenol scare. Ziaukas defines crisis management as the implementation of public relations strategies and tactics to minimize damage threatening an organization during crisis (2001). Pearson and Clair (1998) describe crisis management as “a systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that occur” (p. 61).

For the purposes of this project, crisis management is defined as the comprehensive and on-going implementation of public relations strategies and tactics to address threats to an organization’s operations, its symbolic resources, and/or the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders. Crisis communication is defined as the process of using

communication tactics in response to crisis to address threats to an organization's operations, its symbolic resources, and/or the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders (Fink, 1986; Hua-Hsin & Pfau 2004; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Hale, Dulek & Hale, 2005; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Lauzen & Dozer 1994; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2001; Ziaukas, 2001).

Defining crisis management effectiveness is difficult due to the complexity and subjectivity inherent in most crisis situations. Evaluation of the success of crisis management efforts will vary depending on many factors, including the time scale of evaluation, the evaluator's perspective, and the specific objectives for enacting the crisis management efforts. Indeed, what may appear to be a management success to one stakeholder group (i.e., stockholders) may prove to be a failure from the perspective of stakeholder group (i.e., employees). An inherent difficulty arises from the fact that, by its very nature, crisis management success is often invisible while failures are often highly visible (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Pearson and Clair deemed crisis management efforts effective "when potential crises are averted or when key stakeholders believe that the success outcomes of short- and long-range impacts of crises outweigh the failure outcomes" (1998, p. 61).

Crisis Management Approaches

A review of scholarly literature revealed that crisis management can be segmented into considerations of crisis management implementation (traditional perspectives and critical perspectives) and considerations of the objectives of management efforts (relationally motivated and symbolically motivated). Traditional perspectives generally recommend the use of crisis communication plans and broad guidelines calling for openness, quick response, candor and consistency. Critical perspectives question the utility of such approaches and acknowledge the environmental complexity of most crisis situations. Symbolically motivated management

approaches focus on the protection of symbolic resources (i.e., image and reputation), while relationally motivated approaches place priority on maintaining favorable relationships with stakeholders (for example, see Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2002; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Gorski, 1998; Lauzen & Dozier 1994; Martin & Boynton, 2005; Susskind & Field, 1996; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000).

Traditional guidance regarding the implementation of crisis management efforts tends to advocate for the enactment of linear approaches, conceptualized as cause-and-effect processes. Premiums are placed on crisis communication plans and broad guidelines calling for openness, quick response, candor and consistency. Various staged models of crisis management and the five models identified by Penrose (2000) (to be discussed) exemplify a traditional, linear approach to crisis management. Critical perspectives question the utility of such methods, which are viewed as serving powerful organizations at the expense of stakeholders. Other perspectives hold that factors such as organizational culture and history are more accurate predictors of crisis management success than the existence of crisis communication plans and adherence to other traditional recommendations.

Crisis management efforts differ not only in their implementation, but in their objectives as well. Most notably, the literature review revealed relational approaches (which seek to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders) and symbolic approaches (those which seek to protect an organization's symbolic resources) to crisis management. The following section will first discuss traditional and critical perspectives to crisis management, and then will discuss symbolic and relational approaches.

Traditional Guidance and Linear Approaches

Although specific management approaches vary, the literature review revealed four broad guidelines that serve as the foundation for many scholarly and practitioner-oriented crisis

management recommendations. Those involved in a crisis should remain open to inquiry, respond communicatively to the crisis situation with minimal delay, respond honestly, and maintain consistency of message throughout the crisis period (Fink, 1986; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Maier, 2005; Venette, Sellnow & Lang, 2003; Ziaukas, 2001).

Traditional approaches often recommend pre-crisis planning in anticipation of future crisis events. Benoit's (1997) image repair discourse theory recommends the preparation of crisis contingency plans. Horsely and Barker (2002), Burnett (1998), Gorski (1998), and Pearson and Clair (1998) also emphasize benefits of developing crisis management plans to address future events. Taking a somewhat extreme stance, Gorski argues "regardless of the emergency, the planning process for crisis management is the same" (1998, p. 78).

Linear approaches: staged models

Some scholars conceptualize the crisis management process as a staged process. Such staged approaches tend to address crisis situations from a linear perspective. Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt (1996) propose a four-stage model of crisis management of issues management, planning and prevention, crisis and post crisis, argue that "every crisis has a life cycle, which can be influenced" (p. 81). The four steps of the model are 1) issues management 2) planning and prevention 3) crisis period and 4) post-crisis period. A foundational tenet of the model is "that every crisis has a life cycle" and the most effective strategy "for avoiding a negative media coverage. . . is to engage in symmetrical, reputation-enhancing, socially responsible activities" (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, p. 81). Though the crisis may unfold in stages, the authors contend that the crisis management process should be continual and ongoing (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) refer to a three-stage model of crisis prevention, response and recovery. To reflect the complexity of the crisis response stage Hale, Dulek, and Dale posit a spiral crisis response model. This model involves "a series of sequential

communication activities [which] occurs iteratively throughout the crisis response phase” (2005, p. 122). While Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) stress the response stage, Fink (1986) emphasizes the prevention stage, which is sub-divided into mitigation, planning and warning. Similarly, Penrose (2000) depicts crisis management as occurring in five stages: mitigation, planning, response, recovery, and renewal.

The three-staged conceptualization of prevention, response, and recovery corresponds to Coombs’ (1999) division of the crisis event into three stages—pre-crisis, crisis event and post crisis. Despite this division, Coombs (1999) contends crisis management should be viewed as an ongoing process without a discrete beginning or end. These seemingly Contradictory concepts are reconciled by the fact that actual crises are complex events in which the various crisis stages may overlap and cycle, in agreement with Horsley and Barker’s (2002) concentric model (Coombs, 1999). The concentric model is “united by an ongoing awareness of public relations” for crisis management, which like Coombs’ (1999) conceptualization of crisis management as an ongoing process (Horsley & Barker, 2002).

Linear approaches: Penrose’s five major models

Penrose (2000) summarized several “major” models of crisis management (p. 158). The major models as identified by Penrose (2000) are Littlejohn’s six-step crisis model, Fink’s comprehensive audit, Mitroff’s portfolio planning approach, crisis/strategic management integration and Burnett’s crisis classification matrix. These models indicate crises can be addressed in a linear, cause-and-effect fashion.

Littlejohn’s six-step model is described by Penrose (2000) as a linear procedure composed of the following steps:

1. Develop an organizational structure in preparation for future crises.
2. Select a crisis management team.
3. Train the team via simulations.

4. Conduct an audit of potential crisis situations.
5. Draft a crisis contingency plan.
6. Actively manage crises as they arise (Penrose, 2000).

Fink's comprehensive audit emphasizes crisis preparedness via information gathering and planning. The model calls for a complete audit of potential crises that may arise in each of an organization's functional areas and the subsequent development of a crisis management plan. The plan describes the situation and states desired and acceptable outcomes. The management team then develops appropriate strategic options (Fink, 1986, Penrose, 2000).

Mitroff's portfolio planning approach first groups crises based on their "underlying structural similarities" (Mitroff, 1988, p. 16). The crisis groups are then analyzed and organizations prepare for the worst-case scenario in each group. Preparation for each worst-case scenario is also preparation for similar scenarios. The goal of this approach is to "teach an organization to confront, in advance, the stress that will arise when a crisis happens" (Mitroff, 1988, p. 17; Penrose, 2000).

Crisis/strategic management integration described by Penrose (2000) argues for the integration of crisis management perspectives "into the strategic management process" (p. 159). The process of crisis management is described as primarily defensive, while the strategic management process is portrayed as being primarily an offensive act of marketplace competition (Penrose, 2000).

Burnett's (1998) crisis classification matrix is based on the premise that generic responses to crises are not appropriate; the wrong response can be as damaging as the crisis itself. The model classifies crisis situations using a 16-cell matrix based on crisis threat level, response options, time pressure and degree of control. The matrix is the basis for a crisis continuum that serves as a tool to reveal, and prioritize potential crises and thus determine the most appropriate

management response (Burnett, 1998; Penrose, 2000). Burnett's (1998) matrix is similar to Coombs' (1995) crisis type matrix that will be discussed in more detail later.

Critical Perspectives

Some scholars question the effectiveness of traditional crisis communication recommendations. Coombs (1999, 1998), Marra (1998), and Murphy (1996) de-emphasize the value of pre-made crisis plans. Egelhoff and Sen (1992), and Penrose (2000), portray crisis management plans as fallible and potentially dangerous to an organization. Egelhoff and Sen (1992) argue that crisis management plans have the potential to exacerbate a crisis situation. Pre-formulated plans may deliver a false sense of control to crisis managers and may limit an organization's response options. If the plan is overly rigid, it may be inappropriate to deal with the specifics of the crisis situation.

Several scholars have voiced opposition to traditional recommendations regarding candor and openness (Eisenberg & Witten 1987; Lyon & Cameron 2004; Tyler, 1997, 2005). Writing from a postmodern perspective, Tyler portrays guidance for candor as being self-serving to the interests of the powerful and exclusionary to stakeholders. She argues that approaches advocating openness fail to acknowledge the subjective nature of truth and an organization's motivations for disclosure (2005). Tyler's view receives some support from Eisenberg and Witten (1987) who maintain that openness does little to equalize the power differential intrinsic to the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders.

In some cases, open communication may place the organization, or individuals, in jeopardy, legal or otherwise (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Tyler, 1997). Eisenberg and Witten (1987) assert that open communication may unduly harm an organization during crisis. The authors criticize the tendency of theoreticians to uncritically accept the "efficacy of open communication" (p. 418). The authors, instead, advocate the utility of strategic

ambiguity. Lyon and Cameron (2004) also advocate for the use of strategic ambiguity (in Contrast to candor) to address difficulties faced by organizations who must communicate with multiple stakeholder groups. Tyler (1997) admonishes crisis communication scholars “to acknowledge that candor and openness are sometimes impossible and that when the legal consequences of candor have the potential to destroy the company financially, equivocation or strategic ambiguity is more appropriate” (p. 67).

Regardless, Horsley and Barker (2002) argue that the threat of legal penalty does not justify stonewalling. Instead, public relations practitioners and legal counsel “should work together to develop a response that satisfies the public’s need to know yet avoids self-implication of legal wrongdoing” (Horsley & Barker, 2002, p. 410). Though phrased normatively, this guideline is ambiguous. Somewhat less so, Ziaukus (2001) argues that the “fear of litigation is not an ethically valid excuse for avoiding responsibility and blame” (p. 246).

Postmodern perspectives

Holtzhausen (2000) and Tyler (2005) discuss the application of postmodernist theory to the practice of public relations. As described by Tyler (2005), postmodernist theory applied to crisis communication is highly critical of traditional, linear approaches to crisis communication. Postmodernist thought questions the use of organizational narratives, presented as truth, which serve to maintain power differentials between an organization and its stakeholders (Tyler, 2005; Venette, Sellnow & Lang, 2003). According to Holtzhausen (2000), “where modernism maintains that it has found the real truth, the postmodern holds that this truth is merely the viewpoint of some dominant groups in society and should not be privileged over another viewpoint” (p. 96). Thus, Tyler (2005) writes, “from a postmodernist perspective it is possible to see crisis as a disruption in the dominant narrative that members of an organization’s power elite wish to perpetuate” (p. 566).

Tyler's (2005) view is supported by Venette, Sellnow and Lang's (2003) discussion of metanarrative as a crisis response option. Holtzhausen (2000) defines metanarratives as "single, dominant ideologies and theories" (p. 96). Thus, organizations in crisis often reconstruct the original narrative of the crisis situation ("as portrayed in the media") as their own metanarrative, making the story more favorable to the organization's interests (Venette, Sellnow & Lang, 2003, p. 220).

Postmodernist theory applied to crisis communication questions the value of much traditional guidance due to the complexity of the narrative environment. While an organization's metanarrative may hold privileged status due to power differentials and its presentation in the media, the "impossibility of predicting all of the possible narratives that may be publicly told by various stakeholders. . . further calls into question the value of the much-lauded crisis communication plan" (Tyler, 2005, p. 579). Furthermore, Tyler (2005) is skeptical of the value of organizational attempts to respond to crises openly and quickly, to respond to crisis with a unified voice often via a single spokesperson, and to establish a crisis response headquarters.

Chaos theory

Chaos theory attempts to provide insight into "the behavior of complex non-linear systems" (Seeger, 2002, p. 329). The application of chaos theory to crisis management by Murphy (1996) and Seeger (2002) questions the effectiveness of traditional, linear approaches to crisis management due to the "environmental complexity, interdependence and instability" of crisis systems involving organizations and stakeholders (Seeger, 2002, p. 332). Seeger asserts chaos theory "hints at a broad conceptualization of both organization and crisis that moves beyond the traditional crisis communications and public relations frameworks of strategic responses, image restoration and apologia" (p. 329–330). Chaos theory does not support the application of crisis communication plans, precise objectives and scientific prediction. The

theory implies that the most appropriate action may be to evaluate the crisis after it has occurred because outcomes are not predictable and the situational structure may not be initially apparent (Murphy, 1996).

Chaos theory further implies that the public relations function may be unable to predict or control crises, and instead should focus on monitoring and interpreting change. An understanding of key aspects of chaos theory such as bifurcation points (points in time at which system changes are likely to occur) and strange attractors (underlying, unifying features of a system) may empower the public relations practitioner to manage the change that often accompanies crisis (Murphy, 1996; Seeger, 2002). Chaos theory supports the use of two-way symmetrical communication—the adjustment of organizational behavior to accommodate publics based on system feedback—in response to a crisis. In this regard, the application of chaos theory to crisis management supports, at least to some degree, a relational approach to crisis management (Murphy, 1996).

Organizational culture

Several scholars overtly contend, or in some cases imply, that organizational culture and structure are more important indicators of an organization's ability to withstand a crisis than the existence of crisis communication plans or an organization's reliance on other traditional management approaches (Belcher, 1995; Coombs, 1999; Fink, 1986; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005; Kauffman; 2005; Lauzen & Dozier 1994; Marra, 1998; Mitroff, 1988; Penrose, 2000; Wise, 2003). Organizational culture has been defined as “the dominant values of an organization, the shared understanding of employees, the shared synthesis of basic assumptions regarding the organization and its environment, and the philosophy determining organizational policy toward an organization's internal and external publics” (Lauzen & Dozier 1994, p. 171).

Lauzen and Dozier (1994) assert that an organization's culture affects its ability to manage crisis situations. The authors define and Contrast authoritarian and participative organizational cultures. Authoritarian cultures are characterized by "centralized decision making, individualistic goals, rigid chains of command, tight supervision of subordinates" and an unwillingness to gather information outside of organizational confines (p. 172). Participative cultures instead "emphasize teamwork and shared mission, humanistic concern for organizational members away from work, horizontal organizational structure, shared power, innovativeness" and are open to ideas originating outside of organizational confines (p. 172). The authors conclude that organizations characterized by participative cultures are better equipped to manage crisis (Lauren & Dozier, 1994).

Penrose (2000) asserts organizational culture is often the "main factor in affecting crisis outcomes" (2000, p. 160). To illustrate this point, Penrose (2000) presents the case of NASA's crisis management failure in the aftermath of the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* (Penrose, 2000). Prior to the disaster, NASA developed an "extensive" crisis management plan in anticipation of future crises. Despite planning efforts, NASA's "closed communication culture" negated any benefit the "comprehensive crisis plan" engendered (Penrose, 2000).

Kauffman (2005) studied NASA's handling of the crisis catalyzed by the 2003 explosion of the space shuttle *Columbia*. The author found that though NASA's crisis management efforts were generally successful (in large part due to a comprehensive crisis communication plan), the space agency's organizational culture led to crucial management missteps which negatively impacted its crisis management efforts (Kauffman, 2005).

Assertions regarding the importance of organizational culture are supported by other communications scholars (Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1988; Marra, 1998; Coombs, 1999; Hale, Dulek

& Hale, 2005; Wise, 2003). Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) indicate that an organization's culture is often critical to its ability to withstand crisis. In a study of Connecticut-based Griffin Hospital's handling of a bioterror crisis, Wise (2003) found organizational culture to be "the most important factor in the organization's successful handling of the case" (p. 461). Marra (1998) contends an organization's communication culture has a profound impact on its ability to effectively respond to a crisis, more so than the existence of crisis communication plans. Coombs (1999) argues organizational culture needs to facilitate information flow for crisis management to be effective. Fink (1986) contends that the crisis manager's access to authority, as well as the amount of authority they are entrusted with, is a critical factor in effective crisis management. Mitroff (1986) argues that organizations should "have a permanent, trained crisis management team" (p. 19). Coombs' (1999) stresses the importance of collecting environmental information while illustrating the importance of the ability for this information to be shared within the organization, in agreement with Marra (1998) and Penrose (2000). Thus the public relations practitioner should reside in a management position with an advisory role in strategic planning (Marra, 1998).

Organizational history

According to Murphy (1996), Coombs (1998), Penrose (2000), Coombs and Holladay (1996), Coombs and Holladay (2001), and Martin and Boynton (2005), an organization's history should be understood to determine the appropriate response to a crisis. Murphy (1996) argues crisis events are unpredictable and thus the most appropriate crisis response is to analyze the "events after the fact" to improve understanding of future crises when they arise (p. 12). Murphy's (1996) analysis is supported by Coombs' (1998, 1999) who argues that an understanding of an organization's history is necessary in order to assess and address the crisis situation. Coombs (1998) further maintains that the history of an organization's performance is

positively related to stakeholder perceptions of crisis responsibility and thus the damage that a crisis may inflict on an organization's image. Martin and Boynton's (2005) paper *Contrasting NASA's handling of the space shuttle Challenger and space shuttle Columbia disasters* illustrates the benefit organizations may reap by learning from past crises.

Coombs and Holladay (2001) acknowledge the importance of the relationship history between an organization and its stakeholders when formulating a response to a crisis. The authors found that an organization with positive stakeholder perceptions of its history is less likely to be adversely impacted by a crisis than is an organization perceived to have a negative relationship history. Thus, crisis managers should gain an understanding of the history of their organization's relationships with its stakeholders and use this information to develop the crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Similarly, Penrose (2000) argues that an organization's "history of open communication is more crucial in handling a crisis successfully than its crisis management plan" (p. 410).

Relational and Symbolic Management Approaches

Crises can be managed via symbolic and relational approaches. Relational management approaches acknowledge the role an organization's relationships with its stakeholders play in the development of, and response to, a crisis. Relational perspectives focus on maintaining favorable relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, and are thus grounded in stakeholder theory. According to this approach, crisis management efforts should be implemented on an ongoing basis, both before and after the onset of a crisis (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002a; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham, 2003; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Susskind & Field, 1996; Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). In Contrast, symbolic management approaches focus on the maintenance, protection, and repair of an organization's image. Despite a lack of focus on long-term relationships, the symbolic approach to crisis management may be enacted on an ongoing

basis, not just in response to crisis (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 1999; Marra, 1998).

Relational and symbolic crisis management approaches are discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

Relational management approaches

Crisis management recommendations proposed by some scholars are rooted in the relationship management approach to the practice of public relations. The focus of the relational perspective is the maintenance of mutually beneficial organization-stakeholder relationships (Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham, 2003). According to Ledingham (2003), “the relationship management perspective holds that public relations balances the interests of the organizations and publics through the management of organization-public relationships” (p. 181). The author’s use of the term “publics” appears to be synonymous with “stakeholders.” The author proposes the adoption of the relationship management perspective as a general theory for public relations due to the fact that “the relationship perspective is applicable throughout the public relations process and with regard to all public relations techniques” (Ledingham, 2003, p. 195). As crisis management is a subgenre of public relations, it is reasonable to assume that the relational management perspective is applicable to crisis management (Ziaukas, 2001).

Relational approaches to crisis management place intrinsic value on organization-stakeholder relationships. Relational maintenance is the highest priority (Marra, 1998). The relational approach implies a high likelihood of crisis management failure outcomes if an organization projects an image that does not match its behavior (Ledingham, 2003). Relational approaches view “crises as an episode in a larger relationship, between an organization and its stakeholders” (Lyon & Cameron, 2004, p.214). Thus, the crisis management process should be ongoing and proactive, both before and after crisis (Ledingham, 2001; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Ulmer, 2001).

Stakeholders are individuals, or groups of persons, that can impact, or be impacted by, an organization's operations. Stakeholder groups are generally non-monolithic, and highly heterogeneous. Due to their varying needs, as well as the various contexts in which they experience crisis, communicating consistent, and favorable, messages to varied stakeholder groups is often a difficult task. The term "stakeholder" is often used interchangeably with "publics" (Phillips, 1997).

Because the relational approach to crisis management attempts to maintain mutually-beneficial organization-stakeholder relationships amidst crisis, relational crisis management is rooted in stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory was introduced as an approach to organizational strategic management. A goal of stakeholder theory is to allow organizations to operate in such a way as to minimize "the potential ethical problems created by capitalism" (Phillips, 1997, p. 63).

Stakeholder theory is integral to a relational approach to crisis management. According to stakeholder theory, an organization's survival is dependent on the maintenance of positive relationships with its stakeholders (Martin & Boynton, 2005; Phillips, 1997; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). The theory emphasizes the need to recognize the "multiplicity of groups having a stake in the operation of the firm" and to factor the needs of these groups into "managerial decision making" (Phillips, 1997, p. 52). Stakeholder theory emphasizes the broad interests of the organization, and the potential for the organization and its stakeholders to affect each other, both positively and negatively (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000).

Proponents of stakeholder theory indicate that an organization's dependence on positive stakeholder relationships is amplified during crisis situations (Martin & Boynton 2005; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). Stakeholders often "represent a network of support during crises" (Ulmer, 2001, p. 594). If organization-stakeholder relationships are unfavorable,

stakeholders “may withdraw support during a crisis, prolong the effects of a crisis, or intensify the threat associated with the event” (Ulmer, 2001, p. 594). Ulmer (2001) further warns that neglected stakeholder groups are likely to exacerbate the crisis in question. Therefore, organizations hoping to survive crises should ideally “maintain positive relationships with their stakeholders” because “an organization’s viability depends on its ability to maintain a positive relationship with its stakeholders” (Martin & Boynton, 2005, p. 254 ;Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000, p. 144).

Maintaining relations with stakeholder groups amidst crisis is often difficult due to the fact that a crisis can impact multiple and disparate stakeholder groups (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). Fully identifying these groups, their unique needs, a firm’s potential to impact their lives, and their potential to impact a firm’s operations, is often a complex, and sometimes unachievable, task (Phillips, 1997). The result is that messages disseminated during crisis may be ambiguous, and are subject to differing interpretation by various stakeholder groups (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). The utility and ethical grounding of stakeholder theory has therefore been called into question (Phillips, 1997; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000).

According to stakeholder theory, identifying stakeholder groups impacted by crisis is critical to an effective crisis response (Horsely & Barker, 2002; Ulmer, 2001). Ulmer (2001) recommends proactively identifying stakeholders prior to the onset of crisis, but Ulmer and Sellnow (2000) caution that “the criteria for determining stakeholders after a crisis is likely to be considerably different from normal operations” (p. 144). Therefore, organizations should be willing to broaden their view of stakeholders after a crisis begins (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). Due to the multiplicity of organization-stakeholder relationships arising in most crisis systems, organizations wishing to respond to crisis ethically should prioritize their obligations to

stakeholder groups based on stakeholders' needs "rather than a bottom line or shareholder orientation" (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000).

Symbolic management approaches

Symbolic approaches to crisis management emphasize the protection of an entity's symbolic assets. An organization's symbolic assets include its credibility, reputation and image. Though these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, their meanings differ. Organizational and individual credibility has been asserted to be essential for effective crisis management. An organization's credibility is a symbolic asset assigned by stakeholders. Ziaukas (2001) called credibility "the overriding element" to effective crisis management and argued that it must be maintained "throughout the crisis and into the post-crisis phase" (p. 246). In discussing the role of metanarration in crisis response, Venette, Sellnow and Lang (2003) relate the importance of the rhetor's believability when attempting to restructure public understanding of a crisis. Thus, for the purpose of this study, credibility refers specifically to an audience's perceptions of an entity's believability, whether an administration representative, the administration or government as a whole.

Reputation refers to the general perception an audience holds about an entity. Both credibility and reputation are assigned to an entity by its stakeholders based on stakeholders' perceptions of the entities' actions. In Contrast, image refers to the perceptions a firm projects about itself to its stakeholders. For the purpose of this study, image will refer to statements or attributes about the entity that it projects through its actions or discourse; whereas, reputation reflects the attributes perceived by the stakeholders. Plainly stated, credibility and reputation are earned, image is contrived.

Coombs (2002) identified three dominant research streams advocating for a symbolic approach to crisis communication: apologia, Benoit's image restoration discourse theory, and

Coombs' situational crisis communication theory. These three concepts will be discussed below. A comprehensive discussion of image restoration discourse theory will follow.

The oldest symbolic approach to crisis management appears to be apologia, “the speech of self-defense” which Ware and Linkugel (1973) link to well-known rhetors such as Socrates and Martin Luther (p. 273). Ware and Linkugel (1973) describe four rhetorical strategies commonly invoked in apologetic speech—denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Denial negates the existence of the crisis while bolstering involves a speaker’s attempt to “identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience” (p. 277). These two strategies are informative, “they do not alter the audience’s meaning for the cognitive elements involved” (p. 278). On the other hand, differentiation and transcendence are transformative—they alter meanings held by the audience. Differentiation involves attempts to change audience meanings by “separating some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views that attribute” (p. 278). Transcendence alters meaning by taking the audience from “the particulars of the charge at hand in a direction of some more abstract, general view” (p. 280).

Image restoration discourse theory bears similarity to Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) discussion of apologia, as well as by later works authored by Caillouet and Allen (1994), Caillouet and Allen (1996) and Hearit (1994). Caillouet and Allen (1994), Caillouet and Allen (1996) and Hearit (1994) discuss impression management strategies enacted in crisis response. Image restoration discourse theory is proposed as a tool to develop, or evaluate, rhetorical discourse options available to, or offered by, an organization in response to crisis (Benoit, 1997; Benoit, & Brinson, 1999; Benoit, & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Brinson, & Benoit, 1996; Zhang, and Benoit, 2004).

While proponents of image restoration discourse theory contend the theory offers guidance in crisis response development, Coombs and Schmidt (2000) criticize the theory's lack of predictive power. According to Coombs and Schmidt (2000), "image restoration theory is actually a taxonomy and not a true theory in the sense of making predictions" (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000, p. 175). Additionally, Coombs (2002) criticizes image restoration discourse theory for ignoring an organization's operational concerns in crisis response formulation. Coombs (2002) instead advocates situational crisis communication theory as an approach which factors operational realities into an organization's crisis response.

Coombs and Schmidt's (2000) critique of image restoration discourse theory was directed specifically at Benoit and Brinson's (1999) findings regarding a case study of Texaco's efforts to repair its image in the aftermath of a crisis involving charges of institutional racism. Coombs and Schmidt (2000), speaking of Benoit and Brinson's (1999) methodology, argue that "many conclusions drawn from image restoration case studies should be taken only as tentative" (p. 163). This critique illustrates a difference in the two approaches headed by the two scholars. Benoit's studies utilize case study methodology while Coombs' relies primarily on experimental designs (Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Coombs, 1999; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Zhang & Benoit, 2004).

A fundamental premise of Coombs' (1996, 1998, 2002) conceptualization of a symbolic approach to crisis management is that such an approach ties the selection of crisis response strategies to a synthesis of attribution theory and neoinstitutionalism. In other words, an organization's choice of crisis response (denial, distancing, ingratiation, mortification, or suffering) should be guided by an understanding of stakeholder perceptions of organizational

responsibility for the crisis (attribution theory) as well as stakeholder perceptions of an organization's legitimacy (neoinstitutionalism; Coombs, 1996, 1998, 2002). Attribution theory implies that stakeholder perception of organizational responsibility for the crisis is strongest if the organization has a history of crises, if the organization controls the factors that led to the crisis, and if the crisis was caused by intentional organizational action. Coombs and Holladay contend "the more publics attribute crisis responsibility to an organization, the stronger the likelihood is of publics developing and acting on negative images of the organization" (1996, p. 282). As discussed previously, Coombs (1995) argues that identifying the crisis type is essential to determining appropriate crisis response strategies.

Image restoration discourse theory is proposed as a tool to develop, or evaluate, rhetorical discourse options available to, or offered by, an organization in response to crisis (Benoit, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; & Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Zhang & Benoit, 2004). The theory is based on two key assumptions: (a) "communication is a goal oriented activity" and (b) "the maintenance of a favorable image is a primary goal of communication" (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002, p. 380–381). Benoit (1997) contends that audience perceptions of crisis responsibility and crisis offensiveness must be understood to formulate an effective rhetorical response. Additionally, the response strategy must be appropriate to the threat facing the rhetor's image (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). Thus, the theory states that three criteria will ideally be met for the response to be effective: (a) the rhetorical strategies employed are appropriate to the crisis threat, (b) the message strategies are subsequently embedded in discourse regarding the crisis, and (c) the response is persuasive (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997).

Image restoration discourse theory presents five rhetorical strategies—denial of responsibility, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (asking forgiveness)—to be used individually or in any combination in response to a crisis (Benoit, 1997). These five broad rhetorical strategies are sub-divided to allow for more detailed understanding of crisis response options (Zhang & Benoit, 2004). According to Benoit (1997), denial may take two forms: straightforward denial or shifting of the blame.

Straightforward denial occurs when a firm repudiates charges that the offending act actually happened, that the firm actually carried out the act, or that the act had any negative impacts.

Shifting the blame occurs when the accused claims the offensive act was caused by someone else or another firm. There are four varieties of the evasion strategy: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions.

When invoking the provocation strategy, the rhetor may claim the offending act was a response to provocative actions taken by another actor. Defeasibility

involves a rhetor's claims that the offending act was the result of a lack of information. The

accused may also evade responsibility, and therefore be held less accountable, by claiming the act was the result of an accident. Lastly, responsibility may be evaded by claiming the act was

undertaken with good intentions. Organizations attempting to protect their symbolic assets via image restoration discourse theory may also attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the act in

question. Benoit (1997) describes six versions of this strategy: bolstering, minimization,

differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation. Bolstering involves

attempts to strengthen an audience's positive perceptions of the accused to "offset negative

feelings connected with the wrongful act" (p. 180). Rhetor's using this strategy may "describe

positive characteristics they have or positive acts they have done in the past." (Benoit, 1997, p.

180). The accused may also attempt to "to minimize the negative feelings associated with the

wrongful act” (Benoit, 1997, p. 180). Rhetors may similarly attempt to differentiate the act from “other similar but more offensive actions” (Benoit, 1997, p. 180). Rhetors may also attempt to reframe audience understandings of the offending act by attempting to “place the act in a more favorable context” via the transcendence strategy. The accused may also reduce the offensiveness of the act by attacking the accusers (i.e., negative statements regarding the credibility of the press) or by compensating those harmed by the act. Lastly, the accused may simply take corrective action for the offensive act or express mortification. The corrective action strategy involves “restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive action, and/or promising to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act” (Benoit, 1997, p. 181). The mortification strategy involves issuing an apology, and possibly begging forgiveness, for the act in question.

Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici (1991) developed an early version of image restoration discourse theory by synthesizing the theory of dramatism, apologia, the study of accounts. The outcome is “a synthetic typology of image restoration strategies that includes four general strategies (denial, evasion of responsibility, minimization, and mortification—reduction of offensiveness added in later works) as well as specific variants of each” (p. 276). The categorization scheme underlying this early version of image restoration discourse theory was updated in Benoit’s later research in defensive discourse.

Benoit, Gullifor and Panici’s (1991) study analyzes the defensive discourse offered by President Reagan as the Iran-Contra scandal progressed from late 1986 through the summer of 1987. Specifically the authors review numerous speeches and news conferences during which Reagan discussed the Iran-Contra scandal. The authors found that Reagan’s defensive rhetoric

progressed through three distinct phases throughout the duration of Iran-Contra: denial, justification, and, finally, corrective action (Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991).

This study is the genesis for the currently accepted incarnation of image restoration discourse theory, and therefore, the work provides background necessary for maximum understanding of the theory. For example, the authors explicitly list the “crucial assumptions” underlying image restoration discourse theory—“the susceptibility of reputation or ‘face’ to attack, the availability of verbal means of redress, and the importance of image purification” (p. 275). Additionally, the authors relate a key insight that implies a certain degree of flexibility to image restoration discourse theory’s categorization theme: “...the general strategies for image restoration are useful for focusing the critic’s attention, for guiding critical analysis of the discourse. Yet the strategies as actually embodied in the discourse remain more important than the abstract categories themselves.” (Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991, p. 291).

Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici’s (1991) study provides insight into the Reagan Administration’s defensive discourse, but the study suffers from several shortcomings. The main shortcoming is that the study oversimplifies the environmental complexity in which the Reagan Administration attempted to respond to the crisis. The authors’ analysis is limited to speeches and news conferences led by the President, though a multitude of Administration officials offered a wide variety of defensive rhetoric, in various settings, and over various media. By failing to acknowledge the role other voices played in communicating the Administration’s response to the crisis, the authors fail to acknowledge the complexity of the Reagan Administration’s crisis communication efforts and operating environment.

Political Science Perspectives of Crisis Management

Damage Control, Crisis, Scandal, and Affair

Rozenthal and Kouzman (1997) describe crises as threats to organizational values and goals, and/or social system norms. The authors contend crisis situations are characterized by time pressure, uncertainty and a need for leaders to make critical decisions. Governmental crises may present political opportunities for opposition parties and critics. Crises may constitute threats to governmental legitimacy and “occasions for a restructuring of power relations” (p. 287). Busby defines crises as “political situations where tension rises to [the] breaking point, and political and public attention is focused on episodes which have significant political implications” (p. 12).

The words “damage control,” “scandal,” and “affair” are often associated with crisis. Symbolically-motivated crisis response efforts are often referred to as “damage control” (Busby, 1999, p. 24). Busby defines damage control as “the often frantic effort to play down and suppress information which could have an adverse effect upon the credibility of an Administration” (1999, p. 24). Busby (1999) defines a scandal as a crisis event characterized by corruption or purposeful deception which is often self-induced. Tumber and Waisbord (2004) contend that scandals arise as much from media coverage of corruption as from the corrupt act itself. This argument is supported by McQuail (2005) who asserts that the course of political scandals “is often determined by the mass media” (p. 529). Tumber and Waisbord note the public response to revelations of scandal is often apathetic and argue “it is important to investigate the reasons why some secret official wrongdoing turns into a public event. . .the proliferation of scandals requires the study of conditions of publicity rather than the conditions for corruption” (2004, p. 1034).

Busby defines an affair as “a term with a collective property. . .employed to group together a wide array of events which produced a political scandal” (1999, p. 12). The collection of events and covert operations related to negotiations with Iran and the funding of the Nicaraguan Contra

rebels by the Reagan Administration is often referred to as the Iran-Contra affair. Busby (1999) states that scandals generally progress in two phases: the substantive phase and the procedural phase. The substantive phase involves the “initial exposure of wrongdoing” while the procedural phase regards efforts to minimize the negative effects wrought by the substantive phase (Busby, 1999, p. 24). According to Busby, the procedural phase “is potentially more hazardous for an Administration than the substantive phase” (1999, p. 24). Busby (1999) relates that in the case of the Iran arms crisis, the emergence of the procedural phase of the Iran-Contra scandal was precipitated by the Reagan Administration’s failure to manage the substantive phase of the scandal.

Busby (1999) argues that scandals can be viewed from two perspectives: the aberrationist perspective and the legalist perspective. The aberrationist perspective views scandals as arising from the actions of individuals which lead to wrongdoing. According to Busby (1999) this perspective ignores dynamics within political systems that may be the root of the wrongdoing and facilitates the use of damage control measures to obscure wrongdoing. In Contrast, the legalist perspective focuses on the structure of a political system as the root of scandal in the political realm (Busby, 1999).

To aid in crisis identification, Rozenthal and Kouzman (1997) propose a crisis typology based on two variables: those related to the crisis situation itself and “those pertaining to the perceptions of solutions held by crisis participants” (p. 283). The variables related to the crisis itself include “the object of the basic threat” (either physical or involving “crucial norms and values”), “the domain of threat” (geographical considerations and the extent of crisis damage), and “the origins of threat” (“either endogenous or exogenous to the system affected”) (p. 284–

285). The variables related to participants' perceptions include the perceived necessity of organizational response and differences regarding response strategies.

In agreement with crisis communication scholars who advocate for the use of crisis communication plans, Rozenthal and Kouzman (1997) contend that crisis impacts are often compounded "because policy makers have prepared neither themselves nor the public for appropriate responses once tragedy strikes" (p. 277). Rozenthal and Kouzman (1997) acknowledge that not all crises require immediate action and that government action may exacerbate crisis situations. In such cases "decisional restraint, providence, media consciousness, open communication and a long-term policy perspective may be more effective" than immediate crisis responses (p. 300).

Organizational Structure

Haney (1998) investigates the role of organizational structure in crisis situations, specifically "how presidents organize and manage decision-making groups during international crisis" (p. 939). The author argues that the quality and attributes of a president's advisory structure impacts an Administration's ability to manage crises. Of specific relevance to the case being studied, Haney (1998) contends "the decision-making structure that a president puts in place must be able to operate in an atmosphere of divided presidential attention and perhaps the lack of presidential attention" (p. 954).

Haney (1998) identifies three presidential advisory group structures enacted amidst crisis: formalistic, competitive, and collegial models. Formalistic structures are characterized by an adherence to organizational hierarchies. The formalistic model allows for thorough analysis and vetting of information before it reaches the president. The accreditation and filtering process may distort crucial information as it flows up the hierarchy. The formalistic model is associated with the Eisenhower and Nixon Administrations. Competitive structures, as exemplified by the

Franklin Delano Roosevelt Administration, may stimulate the development of creative solutions to crisis problems but often lead to staff friction. Additionally, competitive models place large demands on a president's time. In Contrast to competitive models, collegial models stress teamwork. Such a model, theoretically, discourages Administration infighting, and decreases demands on decision-makers. Unfortunately, such a structure tends to breed groupthink. The Reagan Administration's organizational structure conformed to the collegial model (Heith, 1998).

Heith (1998) examines presidential Administration organizational structure in regards to the use of public opinion data. Consistent with the collegial model described above, Heith (1998) found the organizational structure of the Reagan Administration to be relatively open, the author found that poll data was shared among its top staff members, including President Reagan. According to Heith (1998), the Reagan Administration staff was particularly adept at analyzing public opinion data.

The Rally Round the Flag Effect

According to the rally round the flag theory, foreign policy crises will often inspire a surge of public support for a president (Brody & Shapiro, 1989; Callaghan & Virtanen, 1993; Norrander & Wilcox, 1993; Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson & Sullivan, 1994; Busby, 1999). The rally round the flag theory attempts to account for boosts in public support for a president amidst crisis (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson & Sullivan, 1994). Busby (1999) defines the rally effect as short-term changes in public opinion following foreign affairs crises that may be either positive or negative. This prediction did not hold true for the Reagan Administration during the crisis of November 1986 (Brody & Shapiro, 1989).

Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson and Sullivan (1994) describe the process by which the rally phenomenon develops. In the initial stages of the crisis, the White House controls important

information related to the crisis. Without their own information, opposition elites tend to squelch their expression of public disagreement with the President, thus creating the appearance of elite consensus with, and support for, the President. In the absence of elite criticism, news media have difficulty finding alternate viewpoints to report and journalists risk appearing to seek out negative sources if they zealously search for critical perspectives. Thus journalists “become conduits of one-sided, supporting messages” for the Administration (p. 261). As the public is presented with only favorable views of the Administration, public support for the President tends to increase.

Brody and Shapiro (1989), Callaghan and Virtanen (1993), and Allen, O’Loughlin, Jasperson and Sullivan (1994) see the absence of elite criticism of a president as the key factor leading to the enactment of the rally phenomenon. Brody and Shapiro (1989) identify the opinion leadership hypothesis as affecting support for a president in the midst of a crisis. According to this view, the rally effect occurs when elites offer no criticism. If elite discourse criticizes the president, such criticism may override and negate the predicted rally effect (Brody & Shapiro, 1989). Though Callaghan and Virtanen (1993) found support for such views, the discussion indicates that the rally effect may be prompted instead by the emergence of nationalistic feelings among the public in the face of external threats to the nation. Krosnick and Kinder (1990) present priming theory as an alternate explanation for the drop in public support for President Reagan during the crisis. They contend the volume of media attention devoted to a particular issue is directly correlated to public assessment of the issue in question. The authors found that “changes in the media’s agenda provoked by the Iran-Contra revelations” led citizens to hold President Reagan “to an altered set of standards” after the November 1986 disclosure that funds from the sale of armaments to Iran had been diverted to the Nicaraguan Contras (p. 509).

Comparisons of the Iran Arms Crisis with Preceding Presidential Crises

Schudson (1992; 2004), Busby (1999), and Wallison (2003) argue that American public memories of past crises played a role in the development of the Iran-Contra scandal and guided the Reagan Administration's response to the initial crisis. This topic is dealt with most completely by Schudson (1992), who contends that the public memory of Watergate affected perceptions held by the general public, Congress and the media of the Reagan Administration as the Iran arms crisis developed. The author shows that this is in part due to the fact that in 1986 some members of the legislature, the Reagan Administration, and the media had some form of direct involvement in the Watergate scandal. This, he contends, influenced their actions in regards to the Iran-Contra scandal (Schudson, 1992). Wallison (2003), the White House legal counsel at the time, relates that within the Administration comparisons were made between Watergate and the emerging Iran arms crisis in November 1986. Miller (1992) compares the Reagan Administration to that of Nixon in terms of the corruption that he argues characterized both Administrations.

Busby (1999) compares the crisis communication responses of the Nixon and Reagan Administrations. The author argues that in both the Watergate scandal and Iran-Contra scandal "damage control strategies simply would not alleviate the problem, indeed they often seemed to compound it" (Busby, 1999, p. 43). Busby (1999) credits the Reagan Administration for abstaining from character assassination attempts used by the Nixon Administration to the counter criticisms it faced.

In addition to Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis which occurred during the Carter presidency also impacted the Reagan Administration. Busby (1999) argues that the hostage situation faced by the Carter Administration precipitated the controversial actions undertaken on Reagan's behalf by some of his aides. This is in part because the public memory of the hostage

crisis of 1979–80 placed a tremendous amount of pressure on President Reagan to free the hostages held in Beirut, Lebanon in 1986. According to Busby (1999) the American public’s experience with the hostage crisis of the Carter Administration made it impossible for Reagan “to frame the debate on its own terms” (p. 52).

Previous Analyses of the Reagan Administration’s Crisis Response

In general, the attempts of the Reagan Administration to control the crisis that emerged on November 4, 1986, have been categorized as a failure. This contention is supported by Brody and Shapiro’s (1989) finding that Reagan’s public approval rating saw record declines as the crisis progressed. Brody and Shapiro (1989) posited that the drop in public approval was explained by the opinion leadership hypothesis. The authors concluded that in times of crisis, if opinion leader elites openly criticize the President, even in circumstances in which the rally effect is predicted, public approval of the President and the Administration is likely to decline (Brody & Shapiro, 1989).

In a similar study, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) reach a different conclusion as to the source of, or lack thereof, support for President Reagan after the initial disclosures regarding the Iran arms crisis. Instead of the opinion leader hypothesis, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) argue that the priming theory explains why support for President Reagan declined. Brody and Shapiro’s (1989) conclusion discounted the priming effect though their content analysis of *The New York Times* and CBS News’ coverage during the crisis time period indicated the amount of critical information presented by the media increased from November 3 through November 30, 1986.

Several authors contend that the Reagan Administration’s failures were due to internal issues. Busby’s (1999) analysis indicates a major issue was Reagan’s tendency to delegate responsibility and thus to remain disengaged from events unfolding around him. Wallison (2003), who was directly involved in Reagan’s crisis response, provides ample evidence in

support of Busby's claim. He wrote, "Reagan's refusal to become involved in the details of his Administration—indeed his apparent disinterest in these details—is not a matter of dispute" (p. 5). Because of this disengagement Reagan was dependent on his aides to account for their actions, and unable to discern whether the information they provided him was true. The result was that Reagan consistently disseminated false and misleading information which undermined his credibility (Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003). This contention seems to support Marra's (1998) suggestion that internal structure is a strong predictor of the ability of an organization to respond to a crisis effectively.

Another problem issue appears to have been the amount of time it took for the Administration to respond to the crisis. Busby (1999), Draper (1991) and Wallison (2003) show that the first official Administration response was not released until almost a week after the crisis emerged. According to Busby, "the longer a problematic or scandalous event lingers, and the higher its long-term prominence, the more inept a President may appear in his attempts to deal with [the event]" (1999, p.22). He further argued that not only is public support affected by the length of time it takes for an Administration to explain its actions, but by the length of time it takes to do so to the public's satisfaction (Busby, 1999). Several analyses have shown that the public was not satisfied with the Administration's response at any time during the crisis (Shapiro & Brody, 1989; Draper, 1991; Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003).

The public's dissatisfaction with the Reagan Administration's response appears to have resulted from the mixed messages emanating from the White House. According to Busby, "a key aspect of damage and information control is the uniformity of the Administration's approach to an issue" (1999, p. 83). During the crisis, major internal rivalries surfaced within the Administration and many of these rivalries became apparent in the media. The result of these

rivalries was an abundance of Contradictory information emanating from the White House which confused message recipients and alerted them to the fact that they were being misled (Draper, 1991; Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003). Every effort made by the Administration to explain its actions only exacerbated its problems as it continually Contradicted itself (Busby, 1999).

Dickinson (1994) discusses Reagan's failure to calm the crisis from a rhetorical perspective. Reagan, a particularly well-known rhetor, developed a signature rhetorical style based on three master themes: "heroism, the individual/the people, and traditional values" (Dickinson, 1994, p. 157–158). By 1986, Reagan's audience expected his rhetoric to follow this familiar rhetorical line; Dickinson (1994) labels this expectation a signature constraint. Reagan's signature constraint was especially powerful because much of the success he had enjoyed as president was forged via use of the three master themes of his rhetorical signature. But these themes were of little utility as a response to the criticisms Reagan faced. Reagan's rhetorical signature, "based on relentless optimism, simple answers and appeals to American values," was incompatible with the crisis situation (Dickinson, 1994, p. 157). His early rhetorical stance was one of denial, which the public did not believe.

CHAPTER 3 CASE STUDY

Crisis Roots

On Thursday, July 18, 1985 President Ronald Reagan lay in his Bethesda Naval Hospital bed recuperating from abdominal surgery. His doctor had just removed the metal clips from his incision, and his feeding tubes would be out before lunch. Reagan seemed content to simply be recovering (Morris, 1999). At 10:22 A.M., having been awake since 5:15 and still groggy, the President was about to lend his approval to a covert operation that soon threatened his presidency (Draper, 1991).

On that morning Robert McFarlane, Reagan's National Security Advisor, needed the President's approval to undertake an emerging national security initiative. First he needed Nancy Reagan's approval to see her husband. McFarlane knew Mrs. Reagan was not to be trifled with, so he sought White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan's help. After much persuasive effort on the part of the Chief of Staff, Regan let "Bud" McFarlane into her husband's room. McFarlane and Ronald Reagan spoke for 23 minutes (Regan, 1988). McFarlane told the President he had recently been approached by David Kimche, Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Kimche claimed he could help the United States establish a strategic relationship with Iran. Kimche believed the sale of armaments to Iran would facilitate such a relationship (Draper, 1991; Walsh, 1994).

The Reagan Administration sought such an opening due to Iran's considerable geostrategic importance, primarily related to the Persian Gulf region's abundant oil reserves. The Persian Gulf region houses vast supplies of oil. The Administration feared Soviet encroachment into the region, leading to increased Soviet influence over Iran, and culminating in Soviet control over the flow of oil from the Middle East. It was believed a strategic relationship with Iran could

thwart such potentialities (*Joint Hearings*, 100-2, 1987, exhibit 51; *Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 213; “Shultz urges,” 1984; Weinraub, 1985). The Reagan Administration needed Kimche’s opening because the United States officially broke relations with Iran in 1980 (Atkinson, 1984, December 9).

Developing a relationship with Iran via the provision of American-made arms contradicted stated U.S. policy, specifically the U.S.-led arms embargo imposed on Iran via Operation Staunch. Operation Staunch expressly forbade the sale of arms to terrorist nations (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 71). Reagan publicly labeled Iran a terrorist nation, part of ““a new, international version of Murder, Inc.,”” guilty of ““actively supporting a campaign of international terrorism against the United States, her allies and moderate third world states”” (Cannon, 1985, July 9; “Excerpts,” 1985, July 9, section A, p. 12; “Major news,” 1985, July 14, section 4, p. 1; “Shultz Urges,” 1984, June 25; Weinraub, 1985, July 9).

In November 1986, seven United States citizens were being held hostage in Beirut by the terrorist organization Hezbollah. While Iran’s culpability for Hezbollah’s actions was unknown, Iran was believed to hold relatively strong influence over the group (Draper, 1991). Based on Reagan’s assertions and Iran’s association with Hezbollah, the proposed Iranian initiative was in potential violation of Operation Staunch. Contradictions to U.S. policy notwithstanding, President Reagan was under by intense domestic, public pressure to bring the hostages home (Busby, 1999).

On June 17, 1985, one month before visiting the president in Bethesda Naval Hospital, McFarlane issued a National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) to the secretaries of Defense and State “to stimulate our thinking on U.S. policy toward Iran” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-4, p. 512). The NSDD addressed the threat of Soviet intervention in Iran which was

undergoing “dynamic political evolution” and was thus vulnerable to Soviet influence (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-4, p. 513). McFarlane advocated for, among other things, “the provision of selected military equipment” to Iran (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-4, p. 517). To reiterate, such a course of action, the so-called “Iran initiative” amounted to a reversal of Operation Staunch, a policy that was being actively promoted by the U.S. State Department worldwide (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 71).

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz strongly disapproved of McFarlane’s recommendations (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 135). Weinberger forwarded the document to his Senior Military Assistant, Major General Colin Powell with the attached note, “this is almost too absurd to comment on” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-4, p. 511). Weinberger felt the “public-policy reversal” advocated by McFarlane “would be seen as inexplicably inconsistent” and doubted that the “assumptions on which the proposed NSDD were based were in any way valid” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 134).

Despite the concerns voiced by other Presidential advisors, and despite expressly stated U.S. policy to the contrary, McFarlane sought Reagan’s approval to undertake the Iran initiative. Lying in his hospital bed recovering from surgery, barely more than a week after publicly labeling Iran’s leadership “the strangest collection of misfits, Looney Tunes and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich,” President Reagan gave McFarlane permission to begin negotiations with Iranian representatives (Draper, 1991; “Major news in summary,” 1985, p.1; Morris, 1999). The President summarized his meeting with McFarlane in his diary: “Bud came by—it seems 2 [sic] members of the Iranian govt. [sic] want to establish talks with us. I’m sending Bud to meet them in a neutral country” (Morris, 1999, p. 605). McFarlane took no notes

at this meeting but Chief of Staff Regan, who was present for the entire conversation, did: “Middle East/Hostage Release/problem” (Draper, 1991; Morris, 1999; Regan, 1988). Regan later wrote that “the hostages were discussed in a general way” but “swapping arms for hostages was not mentioned by either man” (Regan, 1988, p. 20–21)

One outcome of this meeting, and the ensuing negotiations between U.S. and Iranian representatives, was that American-made armaments were transferred to Iran via a complex chain of middlemen, including a retired Air Force Major General and an Iranian expatriate, on multiple occasions. The first arms were delivered to Iran in August 1985; additional transfers occurred in February, May, and October 1986 (Draper, 1991; Regan, 1988). When reports of the negotiations and transfers surfaced, the Reagan Administration found itself engulfed in a presidential crisis reminiscent of Watergate (Schudson, 1992).

The first newspaper reports related to the Iran initiative regarded negotiations which occurred in the spring of 1986. In May 1986, roughly six months after resigning his official Administration post, Robert McFarlane led a group of unofficial United States representatives to Tehran to negotiate with equally unofficial Iranian representatives for the release of American hostages held by Hezbollah. It was believed that if Iran was offered weapons, the country’s leadership would exert influence over Hezbollah (Draper, 1991). McFarlane and crew failed to win the release of any hostages, but the meeting was highly significant because it was the subject of an article which appeared on November 3, 1986 in the Lebanese weekly publication *Al-Shiraa*. This article catalyzed the crisis which imperiled the Reagan Administration in the fall of 1986 (Draper, 1991; Hijazi, 1986, November 4; Wallison, 2003).

The Crisis Emerges

The crisis emerged on election-day. On Tuesday, 4 November 1986, *The Washington Post* reported that “the U.S. government may have conducted secret talks with Iran,” as described by

Al-Shiraa the previous day (McCartney, 1986, November 4, first section, p. A1). Former White House legal counsel Peter Wallison later wrote of the event: “Thus began. . .the greatest crisis of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. . .During the four months it continued the Reagan Administration was essentially brought to a standstill” (Wallison, 2003, p.168).

Regardless of its significance the report aroused little interest during the White House daily operations meeting that morning. Instead, discussion concerned the day’s mid-term elections. To the extent the Iran arms sales story was discussed, Alton Keel, the National Security Director’s deputy, labeled the story nonsense and advised White House spokesperson Larry Speakes to refuse comment (Wallison, 2003).

Secretary of State George Shultz was forced to acknowledge the story earlier than most of the White House staff. On November 4, 1986 while airborne en route to Vienna, the press questioned him about the emerging story during his routine in-flight press conference (Ottaway & Hoffman, 1986, November 8). Shultz wrote to Vice Adm. John Poindexter, the President’s National Security Advisor to warn “the big story the press is after is to establish that the U.S. violated its own policy by cutting a big secret arms deal with Iran in order to get our hostages released” and thus had bargained with terrorists (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-35, p. 563). He assured Poindexter that he refused to comment on the story (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-35).

The story placed the Secretary of State in a difficult position. On November 4, he was traveling to Vienna to encourage international adherence to U.S.-led arms embargo against Iran. The State Department expressed opposition to providing military supplies to Iran in an article appearing in *The New York Times* the day prior (Gwertzman, 1986, November 4). Despite such

statements, Shultz was aware that his government, via the National Security Council (NSC) staff, had initiated arms sales to Iran (Walsh, 1994).

Shultz understood the potential damage inherent in this story and immediately argued that the Administration fully disclose its activities and “give the key facts to the public” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-35, p. 564). Several Reagan Administration staffers including Donald Regan agreed with Shultz’s assessment of the situation, but several key persons did not. Internal debates regarding public disclosure continued throughout the crisis (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 217, 244; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 21, 37, 57).

Internal Conflicts Emerge

National Security Advisor Poindexter argued for continued non-disclosure. He wrote to Shultz to express his disagreement with recommendations for full public disclosure of the Iran initiative. Poindexter told the Shultz, “we must remain absolutely close-mouthed” because “speculation about our efforts to secure the hostages [sic] release only increases the danger to the hostages” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-36, p. 566). Poindexter contended that Congressional intelligence committees should be briefed “before the Administration speaks publicly on the matter” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-36, p. 566). He further argued that public disclosure of the negotiations could intensify Iranian political power struggles, possibly inspiring additional Iranian disclosures which were likely to contradict information provided by the Administration (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-36).

Poindexter had established a command role for himself in coordinating the messages the Administration would communicate in response to the burgeoning crisis. Vice President George Bush, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey supported Poindexter’s recommendations. As the crisis developed, it became

apparent that Reagan placed a great deal of faith in Poindexter's guidance (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 41; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 57; Wallison, 2003).

Poindexter attempted to insure a unified response to the crisis, to no avail. The arms deals with Iran directly contradicted stated public policy and thus undermined the Administration's credibility. There was little motivation for the Secretary of State or others within the Administration who disagreed with Poindexter to adhere to guidance which protected the NSC staff at their expense. The communication of between these two officials staked out the sides that would characterize the internal conflict soon to become publicly apparent (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 41). Meanwhile, on November 5, the White House staff members present at the daily operations meeting were preoccupied with "analyzing the implications of the Republicans' loss of the Senate," though press coverage of the secret mission was beginning to snowball (Wallison, 2003, p. 173).

White House Staff Gains Interest, Stonewall Emerges

On Thursday, November 6, the White House staff began to pay more attention to the Iran story. At the daily operations meeting, White House spokesperson Larry Speakes said the number of press inquiries regarding former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane's visit to Tehran was increasing. John Poindexter argued for continued non-disclosure to protect the remaining hostages. White House legal counsel Peter Wallison suspected that Poindexter was using the welfare of the hostages to protect himself. Despite the interest displayed during the morning meeting, the Iran story received minimal attention in the cabinet meeting Wallison attended later that afternoon (Wallison, 2003).

Poindexter's argument for non-disclosure was supported by statements made by hostage mediator Terry Waite appearing in *The Washington Post*. Waite blamed press speculation for

complicating the hostage release efforts (McCartney, 1986, November 6). Contrarily, additional coverage of the Iran initiative in *The Post* on Thursday, November 6 challenged the Reagan Administration to provide full public disclosure of its activities (“The Iranian Connection,” 1986, November 6). Both *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* presented information, some of which was attributed to Chief of Staff Regan, that undermined contentions that the negotiations were strategic in nature (Pincus, 1986, November 6; Boyd, 1986, November 6). The following day’s newspaper coverage continued to be highly critical of the Administration (Pincus, 1986, November 7; Krauthammer, 1986, November 7).

On the morning of November 7, White House legal counsel Peter Wallison received an indication of how problematic the Iran initiative really was when Larry Speakes asked him if the President could violate his own executive order. In the executive order referred to, the President had labeled Iran a terrorist state, thus arms sales to Iran were possibly in violation of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) of 1986. The AECA prohibited all sales of arms to terrorist states unless Congress was notified in advance (Wallison, 2003). Unsure of the answer, and unaware of the details of the secret operation, Wallison convened with Chief of Staff Regan. Regan imparted his knowledge of the operation, and recommended Wallison speak with National Security Advisor Poindexter (Wallison, 2003).

When Wallison found Poindexter he inquired about the arms sales to Iran. The White House legal counsel was “stonewalled” by the President’s National Security Advisor whose answers were “not forthcoming” and false (Wallison, 2003, p. 176). Wallison concluded Poindexter was engaged in a cover-up operation, focused on self-preservation, which threatened Reagan’s presidency (Wallison, 2003).

Wallison's conclusion was supported by an exchange which occurred later that evening and illustrated the tensions brewing between the President's closest advisors (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-36, p. 37). At 8:30 on Friday evening Robert McFarlane sent a desperate memo to Poindexter in which he threatened to sue Chief of Staff Regan for libel over recent statements appearing in the press (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-36). Poindexter recommended that McFarlane remain calm and reminded him that "right now would be an absolutely stupid time for the Administration to say anything" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-37, p. 366).

The Situation Worsens

Press coverage of the Iran story over the weekend indicated that the issue was moving beyond crisis to scandal (Busby, 1999). On Saturday, November 8, *The Washington Post* reported that White House officials bypassed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to avoid disclosing information about the Iran initiative to Congress (Pincus, 1986, November 8). Several reports indicated that the Reagan Administration was losing credibility both abroad and domestically due to the mixed messages it was disseminating (Smothers, 1986, November 8; Ottaway, 1986, November 8; Gwertzman, 1986, November 8). In one article, Secretary of State Shultz directly criticized the hostage negotiations while President Reagan argued that the negotiations (which were occurring in Geneva on that very day) had to "happen again and again until we get them all back" (Draper, 1991; Ottaway, 1986, November 8). In the same article – and others – the President claimed Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger supported the negotiations that Shultz himself was criticizing (Ottaway, 1986, November 8). On Sunday, November 9, *The New York Times* asked, "Is there in fact a guiding intelligence behind all the seeming contradictions?" while William Drozdiak wrote, "The first casualty of the U.S.-

Iranian connection appears to be U.S. leadership” (“Arms for Iran,” 1986, November 9, section 4, p. 22; Drozdiak, 1986, November 9, first section, p. A1).

The White House Responds

The damaging press coverage of the weekend carried over through Monday. On November 10, *The Washington Post* reported that the House and Senate planned to “investigate allegations that the National Security Council has been used to circumvent Congress” (Pincus, 1986, November 10, first section, p. A1). The Administration finally responded.

That morning, President Reagan led a meeting to draft an official response to the avalanche of press coverage regarding the Iran arms sales. At 11:30, the President, Vice President Bush, Shultz, Regan, CIA Director William Casey, Attorney General Edwin Meese, and Poindexter (with his deputy Alton Keel in tow) convened in the White House Oval Office to draft a statement for press distribution (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A). The meeting was contentious. Poindexter described operational details of the arms deals, leading some in the group to feel they had been misled. After hearing the National Security Advisor’s description of what had transpired, Shultz referred to the arms deals as “ransom” and Weinberger complained that “we have given the Israelis and the Iranians the opportunity to blackmail us” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 386-388, CWW-28, 578–579, Weinberger testimony, p. 154). Both Shultz and Weinberger argued that the negotiations with Iran encouraged further acts of terrorism despite Poindexter’s claims to the contrary. Regan and Weinberger pointed out the damage that was being done to the Administration’s credibility (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, CWW-28). Throughout the meeting, Poindexter argued that the Administration should adhere to the “no comment” policy (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 388–389). He complained of leaks originating from the White House and contended that public disclosure endangered the hostages. Disclosure was also unnecessary, he argued, because news

coverage of the negotiations had peaked and the public would soon lose interest in the story. These views were not shared by Weinberger, Shultz, and Regan who advocated for immediate disclosure of NSC staff activities (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A). The President appeared to fall somewhere in the middle of the argument. He said the Administration should “say something” but should not answer press inquiries, out of concern for the hostages’ safety (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 389). The meeting ended on a note of hopeful, yet false, consensus. Chief of Staff Regan’s notes indicated that all present agreed the statement should “face as many facts as possible” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 390).

Following the meeting, a statement was drafted by Poindexter. It was approved that afternoon by most of those present in the morning’s meeting. Shultz was en route to an Organization of American States meeting in Guatemala, so the press statement was “cabled” to him “on the plane” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 41, GPS-39A). The draft statement said that, among the President’s “senior advisors. . .there was unanimous support for the President’s decisions” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-38A, p. 569). Shultz disapproved of the statement; he supported the President, but not the decision to violate Operation Staunch. He marked his edits on his printed copy, and “responded from the plane” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 41). The correction was made, and Chief of Staff Regan directed Poindexter to “proceed for evening news release” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 393).

The statement stressed that press speculation was endangering the hostages, no laws had been broken, the initiative was strategic in nature, and the Administration’s terrorism policy remained intact. To address speculation about internal conflicts within the White House, the statement claimed President Reagan had the “unanimous support” of his senior advisors and that

he supported his staff (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-40, p. 584). Despite this claim, official statements appearing in the press provided ample evidence to the contrary.

Secretary of State Shultz did not support the messages being communicated by the Administration. In an internal memo dated “November 1986,” apparently written to the President soon after the official statement was drafted, Shultz directly refuted Administration claims regarding the wisdom of strategically engaging Iran via a series of arms deals. He continued to argue for full public disclosure (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-40):

There is a real danger of spinning a web of misleading if not incorrect statements that won't stand up to press and Congressional investigation. If there is not full and swift disclosure—to the public and to the intelligence committees, as appropriate—this affair is going to go on and on in an agonizing and terribly corrosive way. . . .every achievement of this Administration [sic] will be at risk (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-40, p. 584)

The White House statement had little positive affect on the news coverage of Tuesday, November 11. *The Washington Post* portrayed the Administration as being operationally inept and reported complaints that the White House provided more information to Iranian mullahs than the Senate (Pincus & Hoffman, 1986, November 11). An editorial written by Mary McGrory claimed President Reagan “made tapioca of his own credibility” and then criticized the Administration’s “feeble” response to the story (McGrory, 1986, November 11, first section, p. A2). *The New York Times* further questioned the Administration’s credibility (Weinraub, 1986 November 11; Lewis, F., 1986, November 11).

White House legal counsel Peter Wallison was concerned with the Administration’s public stance, particularly by claims that no laws had been violated. On Veteran’s Day, November 11, Wallison recommended that Reagan waive executive privilege if the issue came up because he

“believed that the President would be hurt far more by an appearance that he was covering up wrongdoing than by disclosure of any lapses that occurred” (Wallison, 2003, p. 181) Wallison’s analysis of the situation would eventually be proven correct (Walsh, 1994).

The next day, Wallison met with the Chief of Staff in hopes of scheduling a meeting with Poindexter. Regan told Wallison he did not have the authority to require Poindexter to speak with him nor to get the President “to commit to more complete disclosure” (Wallison, 2003, p. 182). At this time Regan acknowledged that Poindexter was the major influence on President Reagan’s communication decisions (Wallison, 2003).

President Reagan’s public stance and the intense press coverage of the story was causing concern among other Administration officials (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42; Wallison, 2003). White House communications director Patrick Buchanan wrote to the Chief of Staff on November 12 and urged full and immediate disclosure of Administration involvement with Iran. He argued that Iran issue posed “a grave communications problem” that threatened to cause “deep and permanent damage to the President’s standing” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42, p. 394). Buchanan, echoing Shultz’s recent claims, predicted “the story will not die, until some much fuller explanation. . .is provided” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42, p. 394). Regan replied that he agreed and “we are going to do something on Thurs(tmrw)[sic]” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42, p. 395)

The Administration acted. On Wednesday, November 12, the President, Poindexter and Regan met to decide how the Administration should respond to the crisis. It was decided that President Reagan would brief Congressional leadership that afternoon. He would then make his case to the nation via television and radio address the following evening (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-43).

Before meeting with members of Congress, Reagan had lunch with three well-known journalists—James Lehrer of PBS, Bernard Shaw of CNN and syndicated columnist Roland Evans Jr. Prior to the luncheon, Lehrer, Shaw, and Evans agreed that the President’s statements were to be made “off the record” (Molotsky & Weaver, 1986 November 13, first section, p. A1). At 2:00, Reagan and his senior advisors provided a detailed, if not entirely forthright, briefing to Congressional leadership in the White House Situation Room. The briefing lasted two hours (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 244; *Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-21; Hoffman & Pincus, 1986, November 13). Work began on the address the following day (Wallison, 2003).

That evening, McFarlane sent Poindexter a draft of his recounting of the Iran initiative which emphasized the strategic elements of the operation. One statement about “Iran’s critical geography” would show up verbatim in the President’s address the next night (*Joint Hearings*, 100-2, McFarlane, 1987, exhibit 51, p. 632). The main significance of this document is that it would soon be massaged into a controversial chronology detailing NSC staff actions during the Iran initiative (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-2, McFarlane, 1987, exhibit 58).

The next morning, an editorial written by Robert McFarlane appeared in *The Washington Post*. McFarlane’s editorial compared the initiative he led to “secret diplomacy” efforts undertaken by the Nixon Administration (McFarlane, 1986, November 13, editorial, p. A21). While other editorials appearing in *The Washington Post* that day were highly critical of Administration actions, only McFarlane chose to associate the Reagan Administration with the most scandal-ridden presidency to come before it. Ironically, one of the most damning editorials appearing that day was written by former Nixon speechwriter William Safire (Safire, 1986 November 13).

News reports appearing in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* on Thursday, November 13 expressed continued criticism of the Administration. The reports indicated the Congressional briefing held the day before failed quiet Congressional criticism of the White House (Weinraub, 1986, November 13; Hoffman & Pincus, 1986, November 13). It was against this backdrop of skepticism and distrust that Reagan would attempt to present his case to the American people.

The President's Address to the Nation

On November 13 Chief of Staff Regan directed several White House staffers, including White House communications director Patrick Buchanan and White House legal counsel Peter Wallison, to draft a speech for the President to deliver to the nation that evening. Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, an active duty Marine Corps officer and NSC staffer who had been involved in negotiations with the Iranians only three days prior, injected himself into the process. This was an unusual occurrence (Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003; Walsh, 1994). The President himself wrote the opening paragraph in which he questioned the credibility of various press reports and promised to give the American people “the facts” (“Iran-United States Relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559; Wallison, 2003).

Portions of the draft distressed Wallison, particularly a line which claimed that no laws had been broken. To Wallison this statement “represented the first major step by the President down the path to a cover-up” (Wallison, 2003, p. 185). The legal counsel later noted the speech contained “at least one other false statement”—that a recent shipment of arms to Iran was small enough to fit inside one cargo plane—and concluded that Reagan “was again used for the protection of the NSC staff” (“Iran-United States Relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559; Wallison, 2003, p. 185). The inclusion of statements which had previously appeared verbatim in NSC

internal memorandum support Wallison's analysis (*Joint Hearings*, 100-2, McFarlane, 1987, exhibit 51; "Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986).

Nevertheless, that evening at 8:01, President Reagan spoke to the American people from his seat in the Oval Office. He opened the national address by promising to provide his audience with "the facts" and then proceeded to disseminate a series of partial truths and misrepresentations ("Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986, p, 1559). As Wallison had feared, the President claimed the amount of weapons shipped to Iran was negligible and that no laws had been violated. Perhaps unwisely, Reagan antagonized the press for covering the story and thus endangering the hostages ("Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986).

During the course of the speech, Reagan forcefully denied exchanging arms for hostages, related some positive outcomes of the initiative, and described the underlying good intentions of the project. The President explained the amount of arms shipped to Iran was minimal, having negligible effect on Iran's efforts in the Persian Gulf war. He related the necessity of U.S. involvement in the region due to Iran's access to oil and Soviet ambitions in the region. He argued that past foreign policy initiatives set the precedent for the Iran initiative. Reagan repeatedly criticized the press for unduly risking harm to the hostages by covering the story ("Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986).

The main message concerned the strategic motivation for the initiative. Reagan argued the negotiations transcended hostage release efforts, and instead had the much broader goal of developing favorable relations with Iran. Because Reagan drew a distinction between selling arms to Iran for strategic purposes and selling arms to free the hostages, he may have believed his claim that "we did not—repeat—did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages nor will we" ("Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986, p. 1561; Wallison, 2003). Reagan closed the

speech optimistically, saying “given the facts, the American people will make the right decision” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, Poindexter, 1987, p. 643).

Though Reagan hoped to extinguish the blaze of criticism, the speech only added fuel to the fire (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991). On Friday, November 14, *The Washington Post* reported bipartisan Congressional criticism of the speech. Senator Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), who was present at the November 12 Congressional briefing, called the address “a public relations game” while Senator David Durenberger (R-Minn.) was “particularly discouraged by the President’s attempt to blame the media and those who question his action for the unsuccessful outcome” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 244–245; Hoffman, 1986, November 14, first section, p. A23).

Meeting the Press

Saturday yielded more bad news for the Reagan Administration. On November 15, *The Post* reported the results of an ABC News poll that found a majority of respondents disapproved of the arms-for-hostage deals whether or not they were strategic in motivation (Pincus, 1986, November 15; “Survey by ABC News,” 1986, November 13; “White House Fails,” 1986). The editorial desk of *The New York Times* continued to criticize Reagan and his efforts to manage the crisis (Baker, 1986, November 15; “Europe faults,” 1986, November 15). The President of Iran, Hojatolislam Khamenei, further complicated the Administration’s predicament by denying Reagan’s description of the negotiations between the U.S. and Iran. (Sciolino, 1986, November 15; “Iran’s president,” 1986, November 15)

By that afternoon, Robert McFarlane had apparently changed his views regarding the Administration’s “communications game plan” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-46, p. 404). At 2:33, he wrote to Poindexter to advocate for a more candid, “pro-active” and “conciliatory” communication strategy to engage journalists and senators (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-

46, p. 404). Invoking the memory of Watergate, he warned against dishonesty: “I lived through Watergate John. Well-meaning people who were in on the early planning of the communications strategy didn’t intend to lie but ultimately came around to it” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-46, p. 405). Poindexter responded that he agreed with the approach proposed by McFarlane (*Joint Hearings*, 100-2, McFarlane, 1987, exhibit 54). The next day, however, he would appear on NBC’s “Meet the Press” and would continue to disseminate the kind of information McFarlane advocated against (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-65).

Reports pouring out of the Sunday editions of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* continued to be highly critical of the Administration (Ajami, 1986, November, 16; “Dealing With Iran,” 1986, November, 16; Engleberg, 1986, November, 16; Hijazi, 1986, November, 16; Ignatius & Getler, 1986, November, 16; “Making It Worse,” 1986, November, 16; Miller, 1986, November, 16; McGrory, 1986, November, 16; Reston, 1986, November, 16; “What’s Wrong,” 1986, November, 16). To counter this flood of condemnation, Shultz, Poindexter, and McFarlane were dispatched to appear on the major television networks’ Sunday morning interview shows to present the Administration’s side of the story. Unfortunately, these three Administration officials did not agree on the details of the Administration’s official story. The result was calamity (Draper, 1991).

On 16 November Shultz appeared on the CBS program “Face the Nation,” Poindexter appeared on the NBC program “Meet the Press,” and McFarlane appeared on the ABC program “This Week With David Brinkley” (Molotsky & Weaver, 1986, November 17). Poindexter and McFarlane both made statements contradicting earlier remarks made by Chief of Staff Regan; both men suffered the humiliation of having this pointed out to them on national television. Secretary of State Shultz suffered even greater humiliation when he was forced to admit that

Administration actions regarding Iran directly contradicted his previous public statements and that he had no authority to say that the United States government would not continue to deal arms to Iran (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-65; *Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-42). Shultz's appearance led to speculation of his resignation and at least one recommendation that President Reagan fire him. The television appearances and the ensuing press coverage further eroded the Administration's credibility (Draper, 1991).

Press criticism of the Reagan Administration persisted. Coverage of the Iran issue in the Monday morning *Post* focused on questions regarding the wisdom (and reality) of attempting to engage Iranian moderates, as well as the mixed messages continuing to leak from the White House. The Administration received a bit of public support for Reagan's stated policy claims from the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations Said Rajaie Khorassani, but this bit of good news was countered by strong criticism from Iranian Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi (Homan, 1986, November 17; Ottaway, 1986, November 17; "The Moderate Fantasy," 1986, November 17). *The New York Times* provided a voice to the Reagan Administration that day—the effect was that of giving a man enough rope to hang himself. Reporter Stephen Engelberg listed Administration answers to persistent questions that at times conflicted with themselves as well as information provided by outside sources (Engelberg, 1986, November 17). Additional coverage in *The Times* that day was primarily negative as exemplified by William Safire's editorial which questioned Robert McFarlane's personal character (Safire, 1986, November 17).

The most notable aspect of the press coverage of the Iran story on Tuesday, November 18 was that Reagan publicly denounced further arms sales to Iran on both the part of the United States and its allies, though negotiations with Iran continued until late December 1986 (Weinraub, 1986, November 18; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 158).

The Washington Post associated Reagan's statement with Shultz's appearance on CBS News' "Face the Nation" where he was unable to make the same claim with any authority (Cannon & Pincus, 1986, November 18). Despite this apparent show of support for the Secretary of State, Poindexter still was the major influence on the President's response to the ballooning crisis (Wallison, 2003).

On November 18, White House legal counsel Peter Wallison called a meeting of the general counsels representing the State Department, Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Justice Department, and the National Security Council to determine how to legally support the President's stance once Congressional hearings and briefings began (Wallison, 2003). NSC legal representative Paul Thompson was asked to provide the group with a chronology of the key events of the Iran initiative but he refused. State Department legal counsel Abe Sofaer and the White House legal counsel concluded the NSC staff's stonewalling tactics were placing the President in legal jeopardy (Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003).

At this point, the controversial chronology of events was being massaged by Poindexter, McFarlane, and North. Poindexter had directed Lt. Col. North to prepare the document soon after the Iran story broke on November 4, 1986. Factual accuracy of information was not a requirement for inclusion. The document would be distributed on November 20, 1986 (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-7, OLN-18, OLN-19, OLN-20; *Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-72, JMP-73, JMP-74, JMP-75, JMP-76, JMP-77).

The President's News Conference

On November, 18 a staff meeting was held in the White House Situation Room to develop a strategy to deal with the growing crisis (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-28). It was decided that the President would give a press conference the following day. An afternoon briefing, including a question-and-answer session, was held in preparation (Wallison, 2003).

Both Shultz and Poindexter provided the President with highly self-serving information in preparation for the question-and-answer session (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-66; *Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-44; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 25, 87–89). Guidance provided by Poindexter was not only self-serving, but also evasive, misleading, and antagonistic. One piece of advice was to suggest that to the press “rumor and fiction seem to be more important than fact” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-66, p. 657). Reagan’s performance in the question-and-answer session was “close to disastrous” (Wallison, 2003, p.189). Upon completing the briefing, the President jokingly asked if he actually had to “go through with this press conference” (Wallison, 2003, p.189). Somehow his sense of humor was still intact.

After the briefing, a small group of staffers met in presidential assistant Dennis Thomas’ office. Someone suggested that the President should “simply say he made a mistake in selling arms to Iran” (Wallison, 2003, p.189). Wallison concluded “this strategy would have worked for Reagan” due to the history of his relationship with the American people (Wallison, 2003, p.189). Unfortunately, the President had already painted himself into a corner via his previous statements (Wallison, 2003).

At 9:02 P.M. on November 18, Poindexter sent an electronic message to McFarlane which indicated the control Poindexter was attempting to assert over the President. Poindexter asked McFarlane to stress a message regarding the strategic motivation for the arms deals to Reagan during Wednesday’s “pre-press conference brief so that he has it in his head to use as a Q&A. Just as long as it comes out on the record that any fool can well imagine a number of reasons why Iranians would want to change the status quo” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-7, 1987, OLN-22, p. 127).

On Wednesday, November 19, Reagan was briefed twice by his legal counsel and Attorney General Meese regarding the legal aspects of the Iran initiative (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-31). As the final briefing progressed, Wallison concluded the President was not prepared to answer questions about the Iran initiative. Wallison was still uneasy about Reagan's legal stance (Wallison, 2003).

Shultz also expressed distress about the evening's press conference. Prior to the event, Shultz told Donald Regan and the President that Poindexter's press guidance was misleading. Shultz implored Reagan not to claim that arms had not been traded for hostages (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 44-45, GPS-44).

Reports in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* on November 19 indicate the importance of the press conference to Reagan's presidency. *The New York Times'* Bernard Weinraub indicated that "the continued effectiveness of Mr. Reagan's leadership" may be determined by his performance during that evening's press conference. (Weinraub, 1986 November 19, section A, p. 10). *The Washington Post* asked various American opinion leaders to submit questions they wanted the President to answer and published the results. One respondent asked Reagan "How do you expect to lie and have us trust you again?" ("Some questions," 1986, November 19, first section, p. A17).

At 8:00 P.M., the President's news conference began. The event intensified the Administration's troubles (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991). Much of the information Reagan presented would be rebutted by one of the President's closest advisors, the American public, the press, and Congress.

The President's opening statements went well enough. He provided background to the Iran initiative, addressed the internal debate over the issue, and assumed full responsibility for

the decision to engage in the operation. After the opening statements, Reagan again criticized the press for covering the story, denied the primary charges, minimized the impact of the arms trade, related positive outcomes of the initiative, and reiterated that the initiative's objectives transcended hostage rescue efforts ("The President's News Conference," 1986).

When the question and answer session began, Reagan's control of the situation evaporated. His responses were confusing, occasionally contradictory, and generally evasive. The President seemed flustered and defensive ("The President's News Conference," 1986). As Wallison had concluded earlier that day, Reagan was not prepared for the relentless barrage of critical questions of the White House press corps. In Reagan's defense, he had been ill-served by those few individuals with enough knowledge of these events to adequately prepare him for the onslaught ("The President's News Conference," 1986; Wallison, 2003).

The President was offered a chance to bite the bullet. After correcting Reagan's description of a TOW missile, Jeremiah O'Leary of the *Washington Times*, asked "What could be wrong with saying that a mistake was made on a very high-risk gamble so that you can get on with the next two years?" "Because I don't think a mistake was made," answered the President ("The President's News Conference," 1986, p. 1590).

Thus concluded the portion of the press conference focused on the Iran initiative, and in the larger context, the Administration's attempts to affect the outcome of the crisis using communication tactics. Due to a misstatement of fact, the Administration issued a correction to one of the President's claims minutes after the conference ended ("Iran-United States relations: Statement," 1986). Many more mistakes would be identified soon after, both in the press and by Secretary of State Shultz.

Shultz recognized multiple factual errors in the President's rhetoric and was duly upset (in Donald Regan's words "the Secretary of State was boiling") (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan, testimony, p. 27). After the press conference concluded, Shultz called Regan to discuss the many statements "that were wrong or misleading" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 44). The next day he met with President Reagan and Chief of Staff Regan armed with a document which specifically identified and refuted 11 misleading or false statements made by the President the previous night (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 45, GPS-CHRONOLOGY-C, GPS-45).

The press, for the most part, portrayed the news conference as a failure in improving perceptions of the Administration's credibility, though Regan did receive statements of public support from his Secretary of Defense and from *Washington Post* staff writer Tom Shales. Shales predicted the public would soon lose interest in the Iran story and wrote, "Reagan won it on points" (Hoffman, & Pincus, 1986, November 20; Gwertzman, 1986, November 20; Lewis, , 1986, November 20; Shales, 1986, November 20, style, p. c1). Conversely, strong, bipartisan Congressional criticism of the President's performance was reported in elsewhere in *The Washington Post*, and in *The New York Times* (Walsh & Dewar, 1986, November 20; Fuerbringer, 1986, November 20).

During the next morning's White House staff daily operations meeting, there was much speculation about the root of the persistent public interest in the Iran initiative. Speakes argued that most Americans simply didn't approve of the Administration's dealings with Iran. Wallison disagreed: he felt the problem was that the American public did not believe the President (Wallison, 2003). An ABC News poll reached the same conclusion ("ABC Poll Says," 1986, November 20; Survey by ABC News, 1986, November 19). Wallison later recorded his thoughts

in his diary: “This controversy will not end until the Pres.[sic] admits he made a mistake. . .or he fires Poindexter and others, or both” (Wallison, 2003, p. 193). In less than a week Poindexter’s continued obfuscation would lead to his dismissal.

Metamorphosis: The Iran-Contra Scandal

From November 20 to November 24, the Administration’s actions were guided primarily by events which occurred within the White House, much more so than by the press coverage, which had in no way subsided. The press continued to focus on the problematic aspects of the Iran initiative, but the most important new information was developing within the White House to which the press was not privy. The Iran-Contra scandal was set to emerge.

The chronology contrived by the NSC staff was released on November 20, 1986 in order to quiet criticism of NSC staff actions (*Joint Hearings*, 100-2, 1987, exhibit 58). Paradoxically, the document only served to create a new set of problems for its authors, who later testified they knowingly included multiple inaccuracies (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-7, 1987, North testimony, p. 36, 233–234; *Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 302–303). The document falsely represented armaments shipped to Iran as oil drilling equipment and made several other misleading claims, which alerted State Department legal advisor Abraham Sofaer to the possibility of a cover-up. Sofaer’s concerns led to the involvement of Attorney General Edwin Meese, who received the President’s permission to investigate the issue on Friday, November 21. Meese planned to present his findings at a meeting of the National Security Planning Group (NSPG) on Monday, November 24 (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-49).

On the same day, Regan gave Wallison a copy of Poindexter’s chronology. Poindexter was directed to review it before the upcoming NSPG meeting. Wallison read the document and was troubled. After review, he recommended that Poindexter and North should resign from the NSC staff (Wallison, 2003).

On November 24 Wallison and Dennis Thomas, an assistant to the President, met with Regan in his office. Wallison noticed that, for the first time since the initial Iran initiative disclosures, the White House Chief of Staff was visibly shaken. He soon found out why. Regan told the pair that “a situation is developing that looks like Watergate” (Wallison, 2003, 196).

Attorney General Meese’s weekend fact-finding investigation had uncovered evidence that NSC staff member Lt. Col. Oliver North had been diverting profits from the Iranian arms deals to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The Reagan Administration, via the NSC staff, had been providing support to the *contras* in apparent violation of the Boland Amendment of 1983. The amendment banned aid to military activities in Nicaragua (Walsh, 1994). Thus the Iran arms crisis was now officially a scandal (Busby, 1999). Wallison concluded, “We were now dealing with facts or events that went well beyond managing a political or public-relations problem” (Wallison, 2003, p. 196) Wallison, with Thomas’ support, reiterated his recommendation that Poindexter and North should resign. Regan directed Wallison and Thomas to draft a statement for the President explaining the justification for Poindexter and North’s dismissal (*Joint Hearing*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 31; Wallison, 2003).

According to later testimony offered by Poindexter, and corroborated by other senior advisors, information about the diversion had been withheld from Reagan to allow him to claim plausible deniability. Upon learning of the diversion, President Reagan was extremely distressed. Reagan and Regan decided to provide full, immediate public disclosure of their limited knowledge of the diversion. A press conference and briefings were scheduled for the following day, November 25 (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 209, 250; *Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 65; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 30, Weinberger testimony, p. 156–157).

Early on the morning of November 25, Chief of Staff Regan personally directed Poindexter to resign (Wallison, 2003). North would learn of his dismissal at the same time the rest of the country did—when it was announced by Attorney General Edwin Meese in the afternoon’s press conference (Draper, 1991). After dismissing the President’s National Security Advisor, Regan “drew up a rather lengthy plan of action” to guide the Administration as it attempted to navigate the treacherous waters ahead (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 33, DTR-52). Though Regan was taking a command role at this time, he too would soon be dismissed (Walsh, 1994).

Congressional leaders and the National Security Council (a separate entity than the NSC staff) were briefed about the diversion before the press conference. At noon, the press conference began (Draper, 1991). President Reagan took only five minutes to announce the discovery of the diversion, the appointment of a special review board, and the introduction of the Department of Justice into the matter (“National Security Council,” 1986). He then left the press briefing room and turned the conference over to the Attorney General, who did his best to answer the deluge of questions based on his incomplete understanding of the situation (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-54; Wallison, 2003).

The announcement of the diversion of funds to the Contras at the press conference merged the Iran initiative and Contra support operations into the Iran-Contra scandal (Wallison, 2003; Walsh, 1994). Though Reagan’s rhetoric appeared to imply the dissolution of both sets of covert operations, such was not the case. The Reagan Administration’s negotiations with Iran continued through December 1986, much to the chagrin of Secretary of Defense Weinberger (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 157).

After leaving the chaotic press conference, President Reagan walked a short distance to the East Wing family dining room where the Justices of the Supreme Court were waiting. In stark contrast to the events which had just occurred, the Justices were waiting for the President to have lunch with them. Those present were apparently more concerned with exchanging humorous stories about childhood and baseball than with the disturbing details of the newly emerged Iran-Contra scandal (Wallison, 2003). Wallison watched with respect and amazement as Reagan carried on as if he had not been through the traumatic events of the past three weeks. The President exuded warmth that melted the ideological barriers between himself and liberal Justices Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan seated at the table. The lunch continued, nostalgic anecdotes flowed, and despite what he had just endured, Reagan appeared to have “a wonderful time” (Wallison, 2003).

Epilogue

The emergence of the Iran-Contra scandal on November signaled the failure of the Reagan Administration to manage the Iran arms crisis via communication means. After November 25, the issue became a matter of Justice Department involvement and legal proceedings commenced (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003). Thus, November 25, 1986, represents the end of the opportunity for the Reagan Administration to use communication techniques to manage the initial crisis.

The Iran-Contra scandal constrained Reagan’s actions and degraded his approval ratings throughout the remainder of his presidency (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003). Though Reagan faced considerable challenges over the next two years, he never faced impeachment (Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003). In the aftermath of the diversion disclosure, public approval of Reagan fell precipitously. Polls taken directly after the November 25 news conference show a drop in public approval of 16%. A Gallup poll conducted November 24

through November 27, 1986 showed 63% of the respondents approved of Reagan's job performance. By the next Gallup poll, only 47% of those surveyed approved of the President's job performance (Gallup poll data, www.Ropercenter.uconn.edu). Though the Reagan Administration's communication response to the Iran arms story failed to quell the crisis and arguably led to the eruption of the Iran-Contra scandal, Ronald Reagan eventually managed to regain the favor of the American people. Reagan's public approval ratings did not return to pre-Iran-Contra levels until the last Gallup poll taken during his presidency (Gallup poll data, www.Ropercenter.uconn.edu).

Eventually, 14 persons were charged with criminal violations for their involvement in Iran-Contra, both for operational crimes and for what Walsh (1994) labeled "'cover-up'" crimes (p. xiv). Eleven of these persons were convicted. Reagan Administration officials who faced legal retribution for their involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal were not charged with crimes related to the operational aspects of the secret initiatives, but for their attempts to cover-up the scandal. Two convictions were overturned on appeal, two persons were pardoned pre-trial, and one case was dismissed after "the Bush Administration declined to declassify information necessary for trial" (Walsh, 1994, p. xxiii). Six other individuals received presidential pardons from President G.H.W. Bush on Christmas Eve 1992 (Walsh, 1994).

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The literature review illustrates that a multitude of crisis communication concepts, developed by both communication and political science scholars, are relevant to this case. This study investigates the Administration's priorities which guided the crisis communication response. This approach will yield insight into a fundamental question of governance: in crisis situations, should executive leadership prioritize the protection of its symbolic assets, its relationships with stakeholders, or other concerns? Thus, the first research question (RQ1) is:

RQ1: Did the Reagan Administration prioritize its symbolic resources, its stakeholder relationships, or some other concern when communicating a response to the Iran arms crisis of November 1986?

The goal of this research project is to investigate the degree to which the Reagan Administration prioritized its symbolic assets, stakeholder relationships, or other concerns. This question is significant for several reasons. The Iran arms crisis damaged the Administration's ability to govern, and decreased public faith in government (Brody & Shapiro, 1989; Busby, 1999). Evidence suggests the Administration's crisis management efforts caused more harm than the transgressions themselves (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003; Walsh, 1993). As such, it is worthwhile to investigate the priorities of the Administration's crisis communication efforts to gain insight into the causes of the Administration's failure to calm this crisis. This investigation will also provide insight into the potential applicability of crisis management theories to the realm of executive governance, thus broadening the field's relevance. If crisis management theories promoted by communications scholars provide adequate explanation of the Reagan Administration's crisis communication response in this case, the theories may be applied

to other cases of political crisis. This consideration's importance is evident when one considers the numerous presidential crises that have occurred over the last four decades. If the priorities guiding the management process of this particular crisis are ascertained, this study could serve as a benchmark for future studies. Consequently, this investigation may be a valuable step in the development of theory regarding presidential crisis communication.

Three subsidiary research questions to collect evidence necessary to answer RQ1 are proposed. These questions will probe the degree to which the administration's crisis management efforts were symbolic and/or relational in nature. One of the questions will regard image restoration discourse theory, one will regard stakeholder theory, and the final question will regard discourse offered by the Administration, not covered by the first two questions.

Crises often threaten an organization's symbolic resources. These resources are directly linked to external perceptions of legitimacy and credibility. Public perceptions of legitimacy affect the ability of an organization to operate within a given environment. Damage to an administration's symbolic resources may have direct negative effects on its ability to govern, as well as to influence public understanding of the crisis in question (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998, Venette, Sellnow and Lang, 2003; Ziaukas, 2001). As such, the protection of a presidential administration's symbolic resources is often a key concern when crises surface. The second research question is:

RQ2: What insight does image-restoration discourse theory yield regarding the defensive discourse disseminated by the Reagan Administration during the crisis period?

The fundamental assumption underlying image-restoration discourse theory is that communication is enacted in crisis to protect an organization's symbolic assets (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002). Therefore, if image-restoration discourse theory describes the

Administration's use of defensive discourse, such a finding will support the contention that the Administration prioritized its symbolic assets over other concerns.

Stakeholder theory contends that an organization's survival is dependent on the maintenance of positive relationships with its stakeholders. It has been argued that an organization's dependence on stakeholder relationships is intensified during crisis (Martin & Boynton 2005; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). A crisis-management approach rooted in stakeholder theory is relational. Therefore, the third research question is as follows:

RQ3: What insight does stakeholder theory yield regarding the defensive discourse disseminated by the Reagan Administration during the crisis period?

While stakeholder theory is a broad management theory, the author maintains that the theory may be modified for discourse analysis. The specific means by which the theory will be modified is discussed in the Methodology section. If stakeholder theory, modified for rhetorical analysis, describes the defensive discourse offered by the Reagan Administration during this crisis, such a finding will support the contention that the Administration prioritized its relationships with stakeholders.

RQ2 and RQ3 will provide some indication as to the priorities underlying the Administration's crisis response, but these results will not provide conclusive evidence needed to answer RQ1. To answer RQ1, the results obtained from RQ2 and RQ3 will be cross-referenced to the results yielded when answering the fourth research question:

RQ4: Did Administration officials, publicly or privately, make any additional statements that indicated the priorities guiding their communication response?

Study Methodology

This study is a qualitative analysis of content based on an historical case. As such, the defensive discourse offered by Administration representatives was analyzed and cross-referenced

with general public discourse according to categories drawn from crisis communication theory. In summary, the first step in this process was the development of a case study of the crisis. Then, appropriate theoretical frameworks were identified and, when necessary, modified for this analysis. The next step was to collect and categorize raw data. The units of analysis are statements made by Administration officials. Once categorized, the data was sorted chronologically and by rhetor. After being sorted, the data was analyzed and trends identified.

The specific theories selected to analyze this case study are image restoration discourse theory and stakeholder theory. These two theories were chosen because they are exemplars of the symbolic and relational approaches to crisis management. By considering the degree to which image-restoration discourse theory and stakeholder theory describe the crisis rhetoric offered by the Administration, the author gained insight into Administration's priorities. Detailed justification of the decision to analyze this case through the lens of these two theories will be provided.

Time frame of the study: This study investigates the crisis-communication efforts undertaken by the Reagan Administration from November 3 through November 24, 1986. This time period is identified as the crisis period based on a three-stage model of crisis development, pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis (Coombs, 1999; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005). This three-stage model describes the development of this crisis. The period from the date of the first arms-for-hostage deal, August 1985, until November 2, 1986, may be considered the pre-crisis phase. During this time period, the release of the hostages themselves was a prodrome, as this event was the first public indication that the transgression had occurred. The period from November 3 through November 24 is indeed the crisis period. November 25,

1986, is the date of crisis resolution for this case, as well as the date of crisis emergence for the larger Iran-Contra scandal.

The Case Study

The first step in this research project was the development of the case study based on multiple sources of evidence, including historical and documentary evidence. This methodology is especially appropriate when the researcher has scant opportunity to interact with the subject of the study. The method allows the researcher to portray the situation in detail that is usually not possible with other research methods. Due to the complexity of the case methodology, modes of data collection and analysis may vary from case to case (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003).

The time period of analysis was November 3 through November 24, 1986, but relevant events leading up to, and following, the crisis were investigated as well. This phase of the research relied on primary sources, specifically internal documents generated by key Administration officials and transcripts of testimony given by these officials before House and Senate committees during the summer of 1987. This information is compiled in the 12-volume series *Joint Hearings Before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions With Iran and Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition* published by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Examples of the type of documentation referenced include internal memoranda, meeting notes, planning calendars, and transcripts of speeches and television appearances. The case study also relied on secondary sources such as newspaper reports, historical texts, biographies, and autobiographies.

Public opinion polls have been consulted to augment this phase of the research. Brody and Shapiro's (1989) content analysis of news coverage of the crisis during November 1986 has been consulted as well. This data will be revisited during the analysis section of the thesis. Secondary sources were consulted to fill in background information and to act as cross-references to the

primary sources. These include autobiographical accounts of the events written by former White House officials involved in the crisis response (Regan, 1988; Speakes, 1988; Reagan, 1989; Reagan, 1990; Wallison, 2003); the independent counsel's final report (Walsh, 1993); and biographies as appropriate. Additional secondary sources, several of which are referred to in the literature review, were also consulted.

Data Collection

Unit of Analysis

The datapoints for this qualitative analysis are documented statements made by Administration officials such as those recorded in newspaper reports, press statements, and in transcripts of appearances on mass media broadcasts (including speeches and news conferences). Sources consulted during the study are relevant documents released in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (including press statements, transcripts of the President's national broadcast address and two press conferences), newspaper reports appearing in *the Washington Post* and *the New York Times*, and transcripts of television broadcasts on which various Administration officials appeared. A total of 202 statements were analyzed.

Statements analyzed were sentence fragments, single sentences, and multiple sentences. When necessary, the surrounding paragraphs were considered to appropriately place the statement in context.

Statements were limited to discourse offered in response to the primary charge leveled at the Administration – that arms were traded for hostages. The need for this limitation arises from a careful read of Benoit, Gullifor and Panici (1991), who indicated in their discussion that they confounded Reagan's responses to different accusations with a shifting rhetorical strategy. The analysis in this thesis is, therefore, limited to defensive discourse offered in response to a single charge.

In addition, this study was limited to statements and documentation generated by officials involved in the crisis-communication process. These individuals worked within the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, and the CIA. These were the departments directly involved in the crisis-response process. It should be noted that the heads of these departments—President Ronald Reagan, White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, National Security Director John Poindexter, National Security Director Robert McFarlane, Secretary of State George Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey—helped to develop the Administration’s crisis- management efforts. The majority of statements appearing publicly and in the internal documentation, and thus analyzed, originated with these officials.

Source Material

Data was collected from the following sources:

- *The New York Times*
- *The Washington Post*
- Volumes 100-2, 100-7, 100-8, 100-9, and 100-10 of the 12-volume series *Joint Hearings Before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions With Iran and Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition* published by the U.S. Government Printing Office
- *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*

Analysis of press coverage was limited to the *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* published between November 3 and November 24, 1986. Articles were retrieved via a LexisNexis search. Keywords used were “Reagan” (in the “Headline, Lead Paragraph[s], Terms” field) and “Iran” (in the “Headline, Lead Paragraph[s], Terms” field). These papers were chosen for analysis due to their roles as national agenda-setters, their prominence, and their impact on the executive office (Bartels, 1996; McComas & Shanahan, 1999; McCombs,1994; McCombs,

2002; Messner & DiStaso, 2006; Schraeder & Endless, 1998; Wilkins, 1993; Yanovitzky & Bennett, 1999). A comparison of coverage of the Iran arms story in several other newspapers indicated strong similarity to the coverage provided by *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Additionally, former White House legal counsel Peter Wallison wrote that *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* set coverage trends for the evening television news programs and were regularly monitored by White House staff (Wallison, 2003). Additionally, the crisis emerged after *The Washington Post* relayed a report originating in Lebanon (Busby, 1999; Draper, 1991; Wallison, 2003).

The *Joint Hearings* volumes contain testimony and evidentiary exhibits from hearings held in the summer of 1987 to investigate the Iran initiative. The types of documents from which statements were pulled include interoffice memoranda, meeting notes, transcripts of television appearances, press guidance documents, and speech drafts. The volumes also contain full transcripts of testimony provided by John Poindexter, Donald Regan, Caspar Weinberger, Robert McFarlane, George Shultz, and Edwin Meese. These transcripts were reviewed to provide context and cross-reference for the discussion section of this paper, but specific statements to be analyzed were not collected from the testimony transcripts. This is due to the fact that these statements were offered well after the crisis had occurred, and that the veracity of much of the testimony has been strongly criticized (Draper, 1991; Morris, 1999). Analysis of the Joint Hearings exhibits was limited to those exhibits generated between November 3 and November 24, 1986. All exhibits generated during this time period were reviewed.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains various documents issued by the Executive office. Volumes 45, 46, 47, and 48 were consulted—these were the volumes which contained documentation from November 3 through November 24, 1986. All documents within

these volumes were reviewed. Statements were pulled from transcripts of Presidential news conferences and broadcast addresses, and press statements.

Qualitative Coding Categories

The categories into which the statements were sorted and analyzed primarily came from the variables and structure found in crisis communication theory. Representative theories were selected and then broken down into critical elements for coding purposes.

Image-Restoration Discourse Theory

The focus of this paper is the Reagan Administration's crisis communication enacted in response to the Iran arms crisis. Of the symbolically-oriented crisis communication theories reviewed, Benoit's (1997) image-restoration discourse theory is the most likely theory to yield insight into the extent to which the Reagan Administration's crisis communication efforts were enacted to protect symbolic resources. Image-restoration discourse theory is proposed as a tool to evaluate rhetorical discourse options offered by an organization in response to crisis (Benoit, 1997; Benoit, & Brinson, 1996; Benoit, & Czerwinski, 1997; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Brinson, & Benoit, 1999; Zhang, and Benoit, 2004).

Image-restoration discourse theory embodies the symbolic approach to crisis communication. Benoit, the theory's main advocate, explicitly defines crisis in terms of threats to an organization's image (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996). Likewise, the two primary assumptions underlying the theory ("communication is a goal-oriented activity" and "the maintenance of a favorable image is a primary goal of communication") indicate the theory's emphasis on the protection of an organization's symbolic assets (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002, pp. 380–381).

Image-restoration discourse theory has been identified by Coombs (2002) as one of three dominant symbolically-oriented crisis management research streams: Ware and Linkugel's

(1973) apologia; Benoit's (1997) image restoration discourse theory; and Coombs' (2002) situational crisis communication theory. Of these theories, image-restoration discourse theory is the most appropriate for this analysis. While Ware and Linkugel's (1973) apologia may be useful for evaluating messages communicated in response to crisis, significant theoretical advances have been made since the concept was introduced. Some of these advances have been incorporated into image-restoration discourse theory.

Like Ware and Linkugel's (1973) apologia, Coombs' (2002) situational crisis communication theory is highly cited in scholarly crisis communication literature, but the focus of this theory is not appropriate for this analysis. Situational crisis communication theory is proposed as a predictive tool to help crisis managers develop effective responses to a crisis (Coombs, 2002). Because Benoit's (1997) image restoration discourse theory is a "typology," and not a predictive theory, it is more appropriate for evaluating discourse offered in response to a past crisis, such as this case study, than situational crisis communication theory (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000, p. 175). Additionally, various case studies developed by Benoit have demonstrated the appropriateness of image restoration discourse theory's use in conjunction with the case study method (Benoit & Brinson, 1996; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991; Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Zhang and Benoit, 2004). Situational crisis communication theory has tended to be used in conjunction with an experimental methodology (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

Image-restoration discourse theory predicts that organizations will respond to crisis by enacting one (or more) of five image restoration discourse strategies identified by the theory: *denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification*

(Appendix A, Table A-1). Based on this prediction, it may be assumed that symbolically motivated defensive discourse offered by an organization in response to crisis will invoke one (or more) of these five image-restoration discourse strategies when communicating a response to a crisis.

Analyzing the Reagan Administration's crisis communication response via this theory is expected to provide insight into the evolution of the use of image restoration strategies, the complexity of the discursive environment, and the extent to which crisis response efforts were symbolically motivated. If analysis indicates that the Reagan Administration did indeed enact multiple image-restoration discourse strategies, such findings will be considered to be evidence in support of the contention that protecting the Administration's symbolic assets was a communication priority.

Stakeholder Theory

Of the relationally-oriented crisis management theories covered in the literature review, stakeholder theory is the most likely theory to yield insight into the extent to which the Reagan Administration's crisis communication efforts were enacted to protect its relationships with stakeholders. This is because stakeholder theory is the foundation for the relational approach to crisis management (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham, 2003; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Martin & Boynton 2005; Phillips, 1997; Susskind & Field, 1996; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000).

It must be acknowledged that relationally-motivated crisis response strategies generally refer to broad management processes, not more narrowly defined communication efforts. Additionally, there is no relational counterpart to image restoration discourse theory. That is, there is no rhetorical discourse typology based on stakeholder theory. As such, for this analysis, stakeholder theory must be specifically operationalized in regards to crisis communication. A

stakeholder theory-based rhetorical discourse typology is proposed and used to evaluate crisis communication offered in this case.

Without a foundation in stakeholder theory, crisis management cannot be relational, hence, relationally-oriented crisis management programs are developed based on a consideration of stakeholder needs. In order to determine the extent to which the Administration's discourse responding to the Iran arms crisis was enacted to protect organization-stakeholder relationships, the Administration's rhetoric will be analyzed in regard to stakeholder theory. Evidence of conformity to the principle tenets of stakeholder theory will provide an indication of the degree to which the Administration placed a communications priority on relational concerns.

Based on the discussion above, some qualifications need to be stated. Stakeholder theory refers to a management approach, not a specific communication approach. Unlike image restoration discourse theory, stakeholder theory is not a typology used to analyze defensive discourse. Therefore, stakeholder theory must be modified for application to an analysis of defensive discourse by creating a typology based operationalizing the basic tenets of stakeholder theory.

The foundation of stakeholder theory is concern for organization-stakeholder relationships. Favorable organization-stakeholder relationships are critical for an organization's survival amidst crisis (Marra, 1996; Martin & Boynton, 2005; Phillips, 1997; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). Therefore, the author predicts that relationally motivated defensive discourse rooted in stakeholder theory will exhibit concern for organization-stakeholder relationships.

Underlying a concern for organization-stakeholder relationships is a concern for stakeholder groups themselves. Stakeholder theory implies the necessity of factoring stakeholder needs and interests into a crisis response (Ledingham, 2003; Phillips, 1997). Therefore,

relationally motivated defensive discourse rooted in stakeholder theory will exhibit concern for stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of identifying stakeholder groups impacted by a crisis for effective crisis response (Horsely & Barker, 2002; Ulmer, 2001). Identifying the various stakeholder groups affected by a crisis is important because of the complexity of an organization's operating environment, often composed of multiple, disparate stakeholder groups with differing needs and priorities (Phillips, 1997; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). As such, relationally motivated defensive discourse rooted in stakeholder theory will exhibit an identification of stakeholder groups affected by its crisis.

Lastly, because organizations often operate in complex environments occupied by a multiplicity of stakeholder groups, stakeholder theory predicts organizations improve their chances of survival by prioritizing stakeholder groups. The theory further predicts that organizations will prioritize stakeholder groups based on stakeholder, not organizational, needs. Therefore, relationally-motivated defensive discourse rooted in stakeholder theory will exhibit prioritization of stakeholder groups affected by its crisis, based on stakeholder, not organizational, needs.

Based on the literature review of stakeholder theory, relationally-motivated discourse rooted in stakeholder theory is predicted to fall into four categories: statements of concern for organization-stakeholder relationships, statements of concern for stakeholder groups, statements prioritizing stakeholder groups, and statements identifying stakeholder groups. If analysis indicates that the Reagan Administration's defensive discourse is described by the proposed typology, said analysis will support the contention that these efforts were relationally-oriented (Appendix A, Table A-2).

If the proposed typology fails to explain the defensive discourse offered by the Reagan Administration, such a finding either indicates relational concerns were not a priority or that the proposed stakeholder theory-based typology is flawed. Evidence of conformity to this stakeholder theory-based categorization scheme will not prove the Administration placed highest priority on relationship protection or that this was a motivation for the type of discourse. However, absence of evidence of conformance with stakeholder theory may provide strong indication that the efforts were not relationally oriented.

Data Categorization

When the source material was reviewed, the author noted statements that appeared to fit either into the taxonomies provided by image restoration discourse theory and the stakeholder theory-based typology. Statements which provided an indication of the Administration's underlying priorities, but which did not fit into either typology, were also noted. Whereas the two theoretical categorization schemes were strictly delineated, the last categorization scheme was open-ended to allow results to emerge from the data.

The data was entered into tables which captured information used to cite and sort the data. The information collected differed slightly for each categorization scheme. For image restoration discourse theory, the following information was captured: the broad image restoration discourse strategy; the specific strategy; the individual to whom the statement was attributed; the publication the statement appeared in; the date the statement was made; and the type of document (public or internal). For stakeholder theory, the following information was captured: the rhetorical component of stakeholder theory; the stakeholder group referred to; the statement; the individual to which the statement was attributed; the publication the statement appeared in; the date the statement was made; and the type of document (public or internal). The following information was captured for statements collected but not addressed by the two theoretical

frameworks as defensive discourse: the category (e.g., concern for a symbolic resource); the sub-category (e.g., concern for credibility); the statement; the individual to which the statement was attributed; the publication in which the statement appeared; the date the statement was made; and the document type (public or internal).

The method of categorization was slightly different depending on whether the source material was a primary or secondary source. When the source document was a primary source, each instance a statement was uttered was noted separately and entered into an individual cell. When the document was a secondary source which repeated statements originally found in a primary source, statements which fit into the same category were entered into the same cell. For example, when Reagan repeatedly denied that arms were traded for hostages, each individual statement was noted in its own cell. When *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* reported these statements, all of the denial statements quoted were included in the same cell. The rationale for this decision is to most accurately reflect the discourse as it was offered by the rhetor, not the media outlet. Because this study is qualitative, this decision does not affect the findings, but this distinction must still be noted. It also must be noted that in this study, all of the documents used were considered primary sources, except for newspaper articles which repeated statements made in other primary source documents.

Some statements collected in the research fit into more than one category outlined by the categorization schemes used. In these cases, if the statement could be segmented without losing adequate context, it was entered in segments into two different cells. In other cases, the full statement was kept intact to provide adequate context. In these cases the statements were entered into each category in which they fit. For example, in the following text, President Reagan

invokes both the *evasion of responsibility* via *good intentions* strategy, and the *reduction of offensiveness* via *transcendence* strategies:

That [the Iran] initiative was undertaken for the simplest and best of reasons: to renew a relationship with the nation of Iran, to bring an honorable end to the bloody 6-year war between Iran and Iraq, to eliminate state-sponsored terrorism and subversion, and to effect the safe return of all hostages. Without Iran's cooperation we cannot bring an end to the Persian Gulf war; without Iran's concurrence, there can be no enduring peace in the Middle East ("Iran-United States Relations: Address," 1986, p. 1559).

Because the meaning of the statement is most apparent when the full context is provided, the statement was kept intact. It was categorized in one cell as an example of the *evasion of responsibility* via *good intentions* strategy, and in a separate cell as an example of the *reduction of offensiveness* via *transcendence* strategy.

Data Analysis

Once the data was categorized, the analysis began. To analyze the data, multiple data sorts were conducted. The data in all three tables were first sorted chronologically. Based on these sorts, the tables displayed in the Results section of this paper were developed to provide visual representation of the evolution of the Administration's crisis rhetoric. The data was then analyzed. The data in all three tables was then sorted by the individual who made the statements. This data was used to develop a table providing a visual representation of the individual sources of the statements and analyzed to identify trends based on the sources of the Administration's crisis rhetoric.

Study Soundness

Care was taken to insure that this study was conducted soundly. As a qualitative study, it is possible that author bias may affect decisions regarding the categorization of the statements analyzed and judgments regarding the implications of the findings. To protect against this, care was taken to conduct the study with as much objectivity as possible.

The reliability of the source material was ensured by including only verified source material original to the time of the crisis itself. Statements were pulled from documents generated during the crisis period. These documents were authored by Administration officials, or contained direct quotes of statements made by Administration officials. Documents written by commentators were included as primary sources. Transcripts of testimony provided by Administration officials in the summer of 1987 were not used as primary source material for this study. These transcripts were not considered to be primary materials due to the amount of time that had elapsed between the hearings and the crisis and the fact that much of the testimony was contradictory. It may be assumed that the motivations guiding the Administration officials during the joint hearings differed from that underlying the crisis response.

Several steps were taken to establish the validity of categorization scheme. The author diligently reviewed the original theorists' defensive discourse typologies so that those used in the study were derived in a manner true to the original authors' intent. Additionally, categorization decisions were compared to Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici's (1991) previous study of President Reagan's defensive discourse in Iran-Contra. No apparent instances of author bias were identified; however, because this study is qualitative, the author acknowledges that future researchers may in fact choose to categorize the statements collected in this research project differently.

The author limited analysis of defensive discourse to that offered in response to the charge that arms were traded for hostages. This decision was made to insure that responses to different charges were not misinterpreted as changes in rhetorical strategy. This decision was made after reviewing the study authored by Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici (1991) which attempted to categorize statements offered in response to multiple charges.

To maximize the validity of the judgments made in the analysis section, the data obtained in answer to RQ2 and RQ3 was triangulated with data obtained in answer to RQ4 and with later testimony provided by the major players in this case. In this way judgments informed by an analysis of the defensive discourse were compared to the actual documents guiding the discourse well as the recollection of the major players in this case.

Though qualitative studies are not generally considered to be replicable, future researchers should be able to replicate this study if they follow the methodological steps outlined in this chapter. The author does acknowledge that understanding derived from qualitative inquiry is relative. Different authors may in fact interpret the results of this study differently. The analysis offered by this author represents one interpretation of these results based on the most comprehensive data set possible.

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

The results of the study are discussed below. The specific results associated with RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 are discussed first, then the summary results of RQ1 are presented at the end of this chapter. The results are presented in this order because the results from RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 are necessary to answer RQ1. When relating specific results for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, the discussion first concerns the chronological evolution of the defensive discourse to provide an overview of the Administration's communication. Then, the defensive discourse offered by the various Administration units is discussed to provide a detailed look at the complexity of the response.

While answering RQ2, several defensive discourse strategies emerged from the data which are not described by image restoration discourse theory's typology (Zhang & Benoit, 2004). Like the image restoration strategies, these discourse strategies were offered in response to the specific charge that arms were traded for hostages. Therefore, the strategies are discussed in regards to image restoration discourse theory, in the section regarding RQ2. The emergence of these strategies is described first in the section discussing RQ2 so the reader will have been introduced to these strategies when they are described elsewhere in the Results section.

RQ2: What Insight Does Image Restoration Discourse Theory Yield Regarding the Defensive Discourse Disseminated by the Reagan Administration during the Crisis Period? Discourse Strategies Not Identified by IRDT

Several defensive discourse strategies ignored by IRDT emerged from the data. The Reagan Administration employed four broad defensive discourse strategies that have not been identified by IRDT (Zhang & Benoit, 1997). These have been labeled *no comment*, *speaking out*, *acknowledgement*, and *accepting responsibility*. Three previously unidentified varieties of the

reduction of offensiveness strategy were also employed during the crisis response: *self defense*, *precedent*, and *justification*. The previously unidentified strategies are discussed below.

The *no comment* strategy was used frequently in the early phase of the crisis. Three varieties of the no comment strategy were identified in the data analysis: *simple no comment*, *disclosure is dangerous*, and *superior order*. The use of the *no comment* strategy generally took one of the first two forms: a *simple no comment* and a refusal to comment on the grounds that public disclosure of the Administration's actions would endanger the safety of the hostages and those negotiating on their behalf (*disclosure is dangerous*). For example, on November 5, *The Washington Post* reported that President Reagan "was asked about McFarlane's reported mission and replied: 'No comment'" (Drozdiak & Pincus, 1986, November 5, first section, p. A1). In the same article, the *disclosure is dangerous* strategy also appears when White House press secretary Larry Speakes refused to comment on "'stories of this type from the Middle East, stories involving hostages. . . We just don't think it serves the interests or the safety of the hostages'" (Drozdiak & Pincus, 1986, November 5, first section, p. A1). Another example of the *disclosure is dangerous* strategy is the following statement attributed to White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, "'I don't want to talk anything about the Iran situation or go into any details of how we're negotiating in order to get these hostages out. . . There are lives at stake here,' he said. 'Opportunities can be lost by premature disclosure'" (Pincus, 1986, November 6, first section, p. A1). The *simple no comment* and *disclosure is dangerous* strategies were used with much greater frequency than the *superior order* strategy, which was exclusively by the State Department in an apparent attempt to evade responsibility for its inability to comment on the case. For example, on November 7, *The New York Times* reported that "He [Shultz] said he had been ordered by the White House not to comment on reports that Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security

adviser, had secretly negotiated with Iranian officials... ‘The White House is in charge of the executive branch, and they have issued a statement that all questions shall be answered by the White House...I don't particularly enjoy it. I like to say what I think about something’” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 8, section 1, p. 1).

Such statements made by the Secretary of State bear similarity to the *speaking out* strategy which appeared in the data. The *speaking out* category captures discourse offered by Administration officials in which they condemned Administration actions—the *disapproval* strategy – and contradicted previous Administration claims—the *contradiction* strategy. For example, Shultz’s early disapproval of the arms sales to Iran was reported by *The New York Times* thusly: “Secretary of State George P. Shultz, signaling indirectly his disagreement with the White House, said yesterday the declared the U.S. policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists for the release of American hostages is ‘the right policy.’...Nonetheless, he made clear that he disagrees with a reported White House decision to undertake secret negotiations with Iran to gain the release of American hostages in Lebanon by offering arms as an inducement” (Ottaway & Hoffman, 1986, November 8, first section, p. A1). An example of the contradiction strategy can be seen in the following statement made by Poindexter on November 14, which directly contradicts Reagan’s earlier claims that reports of the negotiations was endangering hostages, as well as similar claims made by the Chief of Staff. On November 14, Chief of Staff Regan claimed, ““this story has received so much publicity that this avenue to [sic] trying to establish relationships with them may have been blocked for a while and unfortunately, that will also have some repercussions in our efforts to get the hostages out”” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 15, section 1, p. 5). On the same day Poindexter said, “the unexpected revelation of U.S. arms

deliveries to Iran might now ‘expedite’ the process of improving U.S.-Iranian relations and win release of more hostages” (Pincus, 1986, November 15, first section, p. A1).

The broad *acknowledgement* category of defensive discourse refers to discourse in which Administration officials at least partially acknowledged that the transgression did indeed occur. For example, two days after denying that arms were exchanged for hostages on November 3, “the Reagan Administration said. . .it was pursuing the release of the remaining American hostages in Lebanon through many channels” and that “the United States was working with other countries to try to free the hostages and refused to rule out that Iran might be one of them” (Boyd, 1986, November 6, section A, p. 10). Likewise, during the President’s address to the nation on November 13, Reagan acknowledged that “For 18 months now we have had underway a secret diplomatic initiative to Iran” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559). The use of the *acknowledgement* strategy was often highly nuanced, as in the following statement made by an unnamed “senior official” in response to a question about the arms shipments: “We have never said that we weren't shipping arms to Iran” (Hoffman, 1986, November 14, first section, p. A1).

The last broad defensive discourse strategy to emerge from the data analysis is the *accepting responsibility* strategy. This category of discourse captures statements made by the accused in which culpability was admitted. This rhetorical strategy was used by Reagan during the November 19 news conference. The President stated in regards to the decision to ship arms to Iran, “. . .the responsibility for the decision is mine and mine alone (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583).

Three variants of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategy emerged from the data: *self defense*, *precedent*, and *justification*. The *self defense* category captures statements in which the

rhetor rejected claims that the Administration's actions were incorrect and/or exclaimed the inherent correctness of the actions in question. For example, *The Washington Post* attributed the following statement to Larry Speakes: ““What we have done and what we will do is right and is in the best interest of this country”” (Johnson, 1986, November 12, first section, p. A2).

Similarly, during the November 19 news conference, President Reagan proclaimed, “I deeply believe in the correctness of my decision” and when asked “What would be wrong in saying that a mistake was made on a very high-risk gamble?” stated “Because I don't think a mistake was made. . . .And I don't see that it has been a fiasco or a great failure of any kind” (“The President's news conference,” 1986, p. 1590).

President Reagan and former National Security Director McFarlane, appealed to *precedent* to reduce the offensiveness of the arms sales. When using this strategy, the rhetor compared the Iran initiative to past, more favorable, foreign policy initiatives. For example, during the November 13 address, after acknowledging secret negotiations with Iran, Reagan claimed, “There is ample precedent in our history for this kind of secret diplomacy” and then proceeded to compare the Iran initiative to President Nixon's secret negotiations with China in 1971 (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560). During the November 19 news conference Reagan compared the Iran initiative to several other foreign policy initiatives: “There were risks when we liberated Grenada, when we went into Lebanon, when we aided the Philippines, and when we acted against Libya” (“The President's news conference,” 1986, p. 1583). McFarlane went so far as to author an editorial in *The Washington Post* in which he wrote, “My point here is not to assert the China experience as a perfect analogue to recent efforts toward Iran. But the basic issue was the same. Nurturing a strategic reorientation in a country's policy requires

discretion, judgment and patience. And it is never risk-free” (McFarlane, 1986, November 13, editorial, p. A21).

The last new variant of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategy is the *justification* strategy. When invoking this strategy, the rhetor claimed the Administration’s actions were justified on the basis of necessity or for a foreign policy gain. For example, during the November 19 news conference President Reagan said of the Iran initiative, “and this particular thing was, we felt, necessary” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1585). Soon after, Secretary of Defense Weinberger backed Reagan up saying, ““What we've been talking [about] right along is an attempt to change the policies of Iran, which we are all agreed have been extremely destructive in every way. Any attempt to try to change those policies, I think, can be well justified” (Moore, 1986, November 20, first section, p. A28).

Chronological Evolution of the Administration’s Defensive Discourse via Image Restoration Discourse Theory

Considered chronologically, the Administration’s crisis communication can be seen to have progressed in three phases (Appendix A, Table A-3; Appendix B, Figure B-1). These phases are delineated by the onset of the crisis on November 3, the President’s address to the nation on November 13, the President’s news conference on November 19, and the news conference on November 25. Therefore, phase 1 of the crisis response was November 3 through November 12, phase 2 was November 13 through November 18, and phase 3 was from November 19 through November 24. It must be noted that these phases emerged from the data analysis; they were not referenced by any member of the Administration. There is no indication that those involved in the crisis communication process conceptualized the response in terms of phases, but the data indicate that the response did in fact progress as such.

The Administration's crisis rhetoric shifted focus throughout the period of study, though certain themes remained constant. The *denial*, *acknowledgement*, and *speaking out* strategies were utilized throughout the entire crisis period. The crisis communication during phase 1 was characterized by a refusal to comment and attempts to reduce the transgression's offensiveness via the *attack the accuser* and *transcendence* strategies. Phase 2, was characterized by increased attempts to reduce the offensiveness of, and evade responsibility for, the arms sales. During this phase, the Administration abandoned the *no comment* strategy, though Reagan used the strategy during his November 19 news conference. In the third and final phase, increased attempts were made to reduce the offensiveness of the Iran initiative, while efforts to evade responsibility were decreased. Most notably, the President himself declared personal responsibility for the crisis and took corrective action to remedy the situation.

Both variants of the *denial* strategy identified by Zhang and Benoit (2004)—*simple denial* and *shift the blame*—were enacted throughout the crisis. The *shift the blame* strategy did not emerge until phase 3, on November 19 when Reagan blamed other countries for “major shipments” to Iran, and past presidential administrations for “the first ideas about the need to restore relations between Iran and the United States” (“The President's news conference,” 1986, p. 1584–1585). Initially the use of *simple denial* was relatively straightforward—Administration officials and the State Department denied reports that the recent release of American hostage David Jacobsen were tied to arms shipments (Hijazi, 1986, November 4; Gwertzman, 1986, November 4) As the crisis progressed, denials became more strictly qualified, and were often tied to the use of the *minimization*, *differentiation*, and *transcendence* strategies. These denials were highly nuanced and hinged on qualifications regarding the amount of arms sold, who the arms were sold to, and the motivation for the arms sales. For example, on November 13, Reagan

invoked a combination of the *simple denial*, *minimization*, and *differentiation* strategies in the following text: “The charge has been made that the United States has shipped weapons to Iran as ransom payment for the release of American hostages in Lebanon, that the United States undercut its allies and secretly violated American policy against trafficking with terrorists. Those charges are utterly false. The United States has not made concessions to those who hold our people captive in Lebanon. And we will not. The United States has not swapped boatloads or planeloads of American weapons for the return of American hostages and we will not” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559.).

At the same time Administration representatives denied the charge that arms were traded for hostages, they began to provide limited and qualified acknowledgement that the U.S. had negotiated with Iran. Thus, throughout the crisis, the Administration denied that it traded arms for hostages, while acknowledging that it had entered covert negotiations with Iran, shipped arms to Iran, and that hostage release efforts were ongoing. For example, Reagan claimed “we did not—repeat—did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages nor will we” a week after claiming the hostage release efforts had to “happen again and again and again until we have them all back” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1561; “David Jacobsen,” 1986, p. 1546).

Various Administration officials spoke out against the Administration throughout the crisis period. As described above, such speech either expressed explicit disapproval of the arms sales or contradicted previous Administration claims. For example, *The Washington Post* reported that former National Security Director McFarlane, the person who initiated the arms sales to Iran stated ““it was a mistake to introduce any element of arms transfers’ into dealings with Iran” and the Secretary of State said ““it’s a mistake for governments to get into the business of trading

something of genuine importance for hostages. . . .All you do is encourage the taking of more hostages and put more Americans at risk” (Hoffman & Ifill, 1986, November 21, first section, p. A1; Cannon & Pincus, 1986, November 18, first section, p. A1).

In phase 1, the primary strategy was to refuse comment. During this phase Administration representatives began to utilize the *attack the accuser* and *transcendence* strategies to reduce the offensiveness of the charge. The attack the accuser strategy was used to blame the press for damaging the Administration’s credibility, and to criticize the credibility of those who questioned the Administration’s credibility. For example, Administration representatives claimed press reports of the Iran initiative “had caused serious credibility problems for the United States with key countries around the world” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 9, section 1, p. 1). One exchange between a reporter and the President’s press secretary exemplified the use of the attack the accuser to undercut the credibility of the Administration’s critics: “Q. Even when the administration's credibility is called into question. . . A. Called into question by those who don't know what they're talking about” (Johnson, 1986, November 12, first section, p. A2). The Administration further blamed the press for endangering the hostages, thus integrating the *disclosure is dangerous* and the *attack the accuser* strategies. For example, on November 6 *The New York Times* reported that “President Reagan refused comment but said, ‘I suggest and appeal to all of you with regard to this, that the speculation, the commenting and all. . .to us has no foundation, that all of that is making it more difficult for us in our effort to get the other hostages free” (Sciolino, 1986, November 6, section A, p. 1). Shortly thereafter, Press Secretary Speakes stated ““Any and all reporting on this subject is very, very harmful. The reporting on this subject, which is uninformed and speculative, is running the danger of affecting the safety of the hostages and being detrimental to the long-term interests of the United States”” (Weinraub,

1986, November 8, section A, p. 1). Furthermore, the Administration's press statement issued on November 10 claimed the "the spate of speculative stories which have arisen since the release of David Jacobsen may put them and others at risk" (Joint Hearings, 100-10, 1987, DTR-40, p. 369).

In the second phase of the crisis, the Administration enacted a wide range of *reduction of offensiveness* strategies in conjunction with a limited set of *evasion of responsibility* strategies. Phase 2 began with the President's November 13 address to the nation; most of the defensive discourse offered during phase 2 was influenced by the national address. Reagan's November 13 address contained variations of the *bolstering*, *minimization*, *transcendence*, *attack the accuser*, *self defense*, and *precedent strategies*, as well as various attempts to evade responsibility. In this speech Reagan repeated the *transcendence* and *attack the accuser* strategies most frequently. During this speech he used the transcendence strategy five times and the attack the accuser strategy 3 times. Reagan repeatedly claimed that the arms negotiations transcended hostage release efforts and instead had much broader objectives. As one example, Reagan stated, "It's because of Iran's strategic importance and its influence in the Islamic world that we chose to probe for a better relationship between our countries. . . . Our goals have been, and remain, to restore a relationship with Iran; to bring an honorable end to the war in the Gulf; to bring a halt to state-supported terror in the Middle East; and finally, to effect the safe return of all hostages from Lebanon" ("Iran-United States relations: Address," 1986, p. 1560-1561). The President repeatedly attacked the press' credibility and blamed the press for endangering the hostages. For example, he contended, "the American and world press have been full of reports and rumors about this initiative and these objectives" and "due to the publicity of the past week, the entire

initiative is very much at risk today (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559–1560).

Reagan attempted to bolster the Administration’s image by reminding the nation that “some progress has already been made. Since U.S. Government contact began with Iran, there's been no evidence of Iranian Government complicity in acts of terrorism against the United States. Hostages have come home” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560). He differentiated the Iranian negotiators from the terrorist group Hezbollah: “The United States has not made concessions to those who hold our people captive in Lebanon” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559). He minimized the negative impact of the arms sales: “I authorized the transfer of small amounts of defensive weapons and spare parts for defensive systems... These modest deliveries, taken together, could easily fit into a single cargo plane” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559). He also appealed to precedent to reduce the offensiveness of the Iran initiative: “There is ample precedent in our history for this kind of secret diplomacy” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560). Reagan’s attempts to evade responsibility were limited to one statement describing the good intentions of the negotiations (“That [the Iran] initiative was undertaken for the simplest and best of reasons”), and one statement justifying the initiative due to Soviet provocation in the region (“the Soviet Union has sent an army into Afghanistan to dominate that country and, if they could, Iran and Pakistan”) (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559–1560).

The crisis communication offered by Administration representatives during the remainder of phase 2 buttressed Reagan’s claims as continued attempts were made to reduce the offensiveness of the initiative, though several staffers and officials continued to speak out. One White House aide undermined Reagan’s claims of transcendence by telling *The New York Times*

that the President “was so anxious to free the American hostages in Lebanon that he spent 50 percent of his morning briefings discussing the hostages and was willing secretly to reverse American law and supply Iran with American military equipment” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 14, section A, p. 1). Another “White House official” publicly expressed disapproval of the operation: “I’ve been sick about this [the Iran initiative] for days. It was a policy run by cowboys who had no effective policy guidance” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 14, section A, p. 1).

Almost all of the defensive discourse offered in phase 3 occurred during the November 19 news conference. Early in the news conference Reagan announced he was taking corrective action, and that he “directed that no further sales of arms of any kind be sent to Iran.” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583). During the news conference, the primary strategies invoked were the *denial* and the *reduction of offensiveness* strategies. The President reiterated his denials that arms were traded for hostages, and enacted the full range of *reduction of offensiveness* strategies. The use of the *denial* and *reduction of offensiveness* strategies was consistent with the November 13 address, though as stated above, it was on November 19 that Reagan first attempted to shift the blame for the transgression, and to justify the Iran initiative as necessary. Reagan reminded the audience of positive outcomes of the initiative via the *bolstering* strategy: “We got our hostages back —three of them” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583). He minimized the number of arms sold, the violation of the arms embargo, and the impact of the arms sales: “The mission was served that made us waive temporarily that for that really miniscule amount of spare parts and defensive weapons. . . .the modest deliveries. . . .could easily fit into a single cargo plane. . . .They could not, taken together, affect the outcome of the six-year war between Iran and Iraq—nor could they affect in any way the military balance

between the two countries” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1584). Reagan differentiated between official negotiations with Iran, and the negotiations that actually took place: “We were not negotiating government. We were negotiating with certain individuals within that country” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1584). He repeatedly blamed the press for endangering the hostages: “As a matter of fact, if there had not been so much publicity, we would have had two more [hostages released] that we were expecting. . . .we would have had all five of them by this last weekend, had it not been for the attendant confusion that arose here in the reporting room” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1584). The President again claimed the objectives of the Iran initiative transcended hostage release efforts: “Our purposes were fourfold: to replace a relationship of total hostility with something better, to bring a negotiated end to the Iran-Iraq war, and to effect the release of our hostages. . . . it was absolutely vital for the Western World and to the hopes for peace in the Middle East and all for us to be trying to establish this relationship” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583–1586). He appealed to precedent by comparing the Iran initiative to other initiatives undertaken in Grenada, Lebanon, Libya, and the Philippines: “There were risks when we liberated Grenada, when we went into Lebanon, when we aided the Philippines, and when we acted against Libya” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583). Invoking the *self defense* and *accepting responsibility* strategies, Reagan stated “I deeply believe in the correctness of my decision” and accepted responsibility for the initiative—“the responsibility for the decision is mine and mine alone” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583)

After November 19 the Administration offered very little defensive discourse regarding the arms sales to Iran. Former National Security Director McFarlane expressed public disapproval of the arms sales he initiated, while Secretary of State Shultz and Chief of Staff Regan claimed

personal defeasibility in the case. The Chief of Staff buttressed his claims of defeasibility by reiterating the President's statement of responsibility: "The president, however, as a very manly CEO [chief executive officer] said the ultimate decision was mine to make; I'll take the responsibility for that decision" (Cannon & Hoffman, 1986, November 22, first section, p. A1).

Analysis of Defensive Discourse Offered by the Various Administration Units

When considered as a single entity, the Reagan Administration's defensive discourse encompassed all of the broad image restoration strategies contained within IRDT, as well as all four of the defensive strategies previously not identified by IRDT: *no comment*, *speaking out*, *acknowledgment*, and *accepting responsibility* (Appendix A, Table A-4). Considered separately, and compared to the discourse offered by President Reagan himself, the response was varied. Although White House representatives offered essentially the same range of discourse as did the Administration as a whole, the National Security Council staff, State Department, Defense Department, and Central Intelligence Agency each offered a more limited variety of defensive discourse strategies in response to the charge that arms were traded for hostages. The National Security Council staff attempted to reduce the offensiveness of its actions and refused comment. The State Department denied the charges, attempted to evade responsibility on the grounds of defeasibility, refused comment, spoke out against the Administration, and made a minimal attempt to bolster the Administration's image. The State Department, National Security Council staff, and anonymous White House sources all spoke out against the Administration. Response on the part of the Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency was extremely limited.

The distinctions made between the various Administration units emerged from the data. These distinctions reflect the different roles the units played in the Iran initiative itself, and not officially delineated distinctions made by the Administration itself. For example, while the

National Security Council staff reports directly to the President, the National Security Council staff was the Administration unit primarily responsible for the development and implementation of the Iran operation. Therefore, the discourse offered by the National Security Council staff is considered separately from that of the White House.

President Reagan and the White House staff

The use of image restoration strategies by the Administration as a whole, the White House staff, and President Reagan was similar. The White House staff members who responded on behalf of the Administration were Chief of Staff Regan, Press Secretary Speakes, and various unnamed officials and staff members. For the most part, the communication originating from these staff members mirrored that offered by Reagan, though unnamed staff spoke out against Reagan on limited occasion (Gwertzman, 1986, November 14). The only strategies which appeared in the total discourse offered by the Administration which were not also used specifically by Reagan or the White House staff were the State Department's claims that it had been ordered not to comment by the White House (Gwertzman, 1986, November 8; Ottaway, & Hoffman, 1986, November 8).

Reagan denied the charge that arms were traded for hostages on multiple occasions. For example, Reagan contended "reports have surfaced alleging U.S. involvement. . .as far as we're concerned, not one of them is true" and "we did not—repeat—did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages nor will we" ("Iran-United States relations: Address," 1986, p. 1559,1561). These denials were supported publicly by previous statements made by anonymous White House officials and from Chief of Staff Regan. Anonymous officials stressed "that there had been no concessions by Washington to secure the freedom of David P. Jacobsen, the hostage freed on Sunday" (Gwertzman, 1986, November 4, section A, p. 11). The White House Chief of Staff claimed "We have never authorized, never allowed, never condoned large shipments by

anyone” (Engelberg, 1986, November 15, section 1, p. 1.). While the President’s simple denials were repeated by other staff members, his attempts to shift the blame were not. No one else in the Administration claimed that other countries were supplying major shipments of arms to Iran or implied that the initiative originated with previous administrations (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p.1584–1585).

Though Reagan and several members of his staff denied that arms were traded for hostages, they also acknowledged that negotiations in fact occurred. These acknowledgements took place on multiple occasions. Reagan himself acknowledged that “for 18 months now we have had underway a secret diplomatic initiative to Iran” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559). Press Secretary Speakes indirectly acknowledged the arms sales when he discussed Central Intelligence Agency involvement in the initiative (Engelberg, 1986, November 15). *The New York Times* reported that “a senior Administration official confirmed that the United States was working with other countries to try to free the hostages and refused to rule out that Iran might be one of them. . . . Donald T. Regan, the White House Chief of Staff, said that the United States was ‘using many different channels’ to gain the hostages’ release” (Boyd, 1986, November 6).

Both President Reagan and Chief of Staff Regan attempted to evade responsibility via the *defeasibility* and *good intentions* strategies. Reagan claimed defeasibility in regards to charges that arms were shipped via foreign intermediaries: “Now, I’ve seen the stories about a Danish tramp steamer and a Danish sailors [sic] union officials talking about their ships taking various supplies to Iran. I didn’t know anything about that until I saw the press on it” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1585). Chief of Staff Regan claimed defeasibility in regards to the entire initiative. *The Washington Post* reported that “Regan said questions about details of the

Iran operation should be directed to Poindexter. The Chief of Staff said he did not know whether the Central Intelligence Agency had taken over control of the operation in January but said he had ‘the impression’ that it had been directed throughout by the National Security Council staff under Poindexter” (Cannon & Hoffman, 1986, November 22, first section, p. A1). Both men described the good intentions guiding the Iran initiative, but in different manners. The President plainly stated “[the Iran] initiative was undertaken for the simplest and best of reasons,” and then listed reasons that transcended hostage release efforts (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1559). In contrast, the Chief of Staff used the good intentions strategy to relate the President’s concern for the hostages. According to *The Washington Post*, “Regan indicated yesterday how powerfully the President was influenced by his concern for the fate of the hostages” (Pincus, 1986, November 15, first section, p. A1). President Reagan also attempted to evade responsibility via claims of Soviet provocation; no one else in the Administration repeated this claim (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560).

The President and the White House staff offered a wide range of defensive discourse strategies in an apparent attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the transgression. The *bolstering*, *minimization*, *differentiation*, *transcendence*, *attack accuser*, *self defense*, *precedent*, and *justification* strategies appeared in the White House’s crisis communication. The use of these strategies will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Reagan and unnamed White House sources invoked the *bolstering* strategy by claiming that the initiative decreased Iran’s tendencies to support and engage in terrorist acts, and freed some hostages. Reagan said, “Some progress has already been made. Since U.S. Government contact began with Iran, there’s been no evidence of Iranian Government complicity in acts of terrorism against the United States. Hostages have come home” (“Iran-United States relations:

Address,” 1986, p.1560). Anonymous White House sources also claimed that “Islamic Jihad has not captured any Americans since the mid-1985 discussions began.” (Pincus, 1986, November 12).

The President, the Chief of Staff, and unnamed White House sources minimized the amount of arms shipped. Reagan said, “I authorized the transfer of small amounts of defensive weapons and spare parts for defensive systems. . . These modest deliveries, taken together, could easily fit into a single cargo plane.” During a breakfast meeting with reporters, Chief of Staff Regan said the President “agreed to send ‘a minimum amount’ of arms” to Iran (Gwertzman, 1986, November 15, section 1, p. 5). An anonymous “senior official” told *The Washington Post* “the amount of material that was shipped was minuscule” (Hoffman, 1986, November 14, first section, p. A1).

Reagan attempted to reduce the offensiveness of the arms sales to Iran via the *differentiation* strategy. He stated, “We weren't giving them [arms] to the Ayatollah Khomeini. . . it was not a meeting officially of the United States head of state and the Iranian head of state” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1588). While Reagan differentiated official negotiations between heads of state from unofficial negotiations between intermediaries, National Security Director Poindexter differentiated negotiations with Iran from negotiations with terrorists: “We have not had any direct contact with the captors. I think that's a very important point to keep in mind throughout this discussion of this project. Iran did not take the hostages; they are not holding the hostages. They do not have total control over the Hezbollah faction that apparently has the hostages” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1986, JMP-65, p. 646).

As described previously, the President repeatedly emphasized the fact that the negotiations transcended hostage release efforts. For example, during the November 13 address Reagan said,

“Our interests are clearly served by opening a dialog with Iran and thereby helping to end the Iran-Iraq war. . . .It's because of Iran's strategic importance and its influence in the Islamic world that we chose to probe for a better relationship between our countries” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560). White House Press Secretary Speakes also invoked the *transcendence* strategy by explaining, “the ultimate objective of the President's policy is to establish a normal relationship with Iran” (Cannon & Pincus, 1986, November 18, first section, p. A1). Likewise, *The New York Times* reported that, “The Administration, in justifying the opening to Iran, has said it was undertaken not to free hostages but to put the United States in a position to influence that country once Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini passes from the scene” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 12, section A, p.1).

The *attack the accuser* strategy was also utilized by Reagan and the White House staff to reduce the offensiveness of the arms sales. Such attacks portrayed the press as lacking in credibility, and bearing culpability for the fate of the hostages and the damage to the Administration's credibility. For example, the President asserted, “there has been unprecedented speculation and countless reports that have not only been wrong but have been potentially dangerous to the hostages and destructive of the opportunity before us. The efforts of courageous people like Terry Waite have been jeopardized. So extensive have been the false rumors and erroneous reports that the risks of remaining silent now exceed the risks of speaking out” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1561). *The Washington Post* reported that Chief of Staff Regan said, “because of the disclosures, ‘I don't think . . . we'll be able to pursue this avenue for any reason for quite some time to come’” (Pincus, 1986, November 15, first section, p. A1). Similarly, *The New York Times* reported that White House Press Secretary “Speakes said there was ‘no doubt’ that press coverage the last week had been a factor in the inability to free

other Americans” (Boyd, 1986, November 11, section A, p. 1). Blaming the press for the Administration’s credibility damage, “Administration officials” contended “the reports about Washington’s secret involvement in arms shipments to Iran had caused serious credibility problems for the United States with key countries around the world” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 9 section 1, p. 1.).

Reagan, Regan, and Speakes invoked the *self defense* strategy as a means of reducing the offensiveness of the transgression by asserting the inherent correctness of the decision to ship arms to Iran. For example, Reagan plainly stated, “I deeply believe in the correctness of my decision” and “I don’t think a mistake was made. It was a high-risk gamble . . . that I believe the circumstances warranted, and I don’t see that it has been a fiasco or a great failure of any kind” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583, 1590). He also said of the Iran initiative, ““What we were aiming for I think made it worthwhile”” (Weinraub, 1986, November 20, section A, p. 1). As noted previously, the White House Press Secretary argued, ““What we have done and what we will do is right and is in the best interest of this country”” (Johnson, 1986, November 12, first section, p. A2). Also invoking the *self defense* strategy, but betraying Reagan’s claims of *transcendence*, Chief of Staff Regan contended the American people would approve of the sales: ““when we can tell the story, the American public will appreciate the efforts of this president to get American hostages released””(Pincus, 1986, November 10, first section, p. A34).

Reagan also appealed to precedent to reduce the arms sales offensiveness. He claimed, “there is ample precedent in our history for this kind of secret diplomacy” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1560). He later compared the Iran initiative to past foreign policy

initiatives undertaken in Grenada, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Libya (“The President’s news conference,” 1986).

The only other official within the Administration to invoke the *precedent* strategy was former National Security Director McFarlane who compared the Iran initiative to China, and Reagan to Nixon in an editorial appearing in *The Washington Post*: “My point here is not to assert the China experience as a perfect analogue to recent efforts toward Iran. But the basic issue was the same. Nurturing a strategic reorientation in a country’s policy requires discretion, judgment and patience. And it is never risk-free” (McFarlane, 1986, November 13, editorial, p. A21).

President Reagan also used the *justification* strategy to engender a more favorable public perception of the arms sales. He argued the initiative was justified as necessary to improve relations with Iran: “This particular thing was, we felt, necessary in order to make contacts...that could lead to better relations with us” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1585). While the statement was not repeated by White House staff members, Secretary of Defense Weinberger provided public support for this claim. As noted previously in this text, Weinberger said, ““What we’ve been talking [about] right along is an attempt to change the policies of Iran, which we are all agreed have been extremely destructive in every way. Any attempt to try to change those policies, I think, can be well justified”” (Moore, 1986, November 20, first section, p. A28).

Reagan, and other members of the White House staff refused to comment about the reports of arms sales on a number of occasions (Weinraub, 1986, November 5, section A, p. 1). As noted previously, two varieties of the *no comment* strategy were utilized: *simple no comment*, and *disclosure is dangerous*. Early in the crisis, Reagan, the White House Press Secretary, and unnamed spokesmen simply refused to comment on the story, without providing explanation. For

example, *The New York Times* reported that “President Reagan. . .rejected demands that he disclose details of Administration dealings with Iran” (Boyd, 1986, November 11, section A, p. 1). Similarly, Speakes explicitly stated, ““We will provide a strict ‘no comment’ to all questions”” (Johnson, 1986, November 12, first section, p. A2). On other occasions, Reagan, Regan, Speakes, and anonymous officials claimed their refusal to comment was based on the assertion that public discussion of the hostage release efforts would endanger the hostages’ safety. For example, early in the crisis, Speakes explained the Administration would refuse to comment on ‘stories of this type from the Middle East, stories involving hostages. . .We just don’t think it serves the interests or the safety of the hostages”” (Drozdiak & Pincus, 1986, November 5, first section, p. A1). Reiterating the point, Speakes related a Presidential request to “his advisers to insure that their departments refrain from making comments or speculating on these matters” (Boyd, 1986, November 11, section A, p. 1.) Chief of Staff Regan said, ““I don’t want to talk anything about the Iran situation or go into any details of how we’re negotiating in order to get these hostages out... There are lives at stake here... Opportunities can be lost by premature disclosure”” (Pincus, 1986, November 6, first section, p. A1). At the November 19 news conference Reagan stated, “There may be some questions which for reasons of national security or to protect the safety of the hostages I will be unable to answer publicly” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583). An anonymous “senior White House official” supported the contention: “anything said at this stage runs the risk of affecting the hostages” (Boyd, 1986, November 6, section A, p. 10).

Reagan stood alone when accepting responsibility for the transgression and announcing corrective action to be taken. He explicitly accepted responsibility by stating, “the responsibility for the decision is mine and mine alone” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583).

Reagan was also the only person to announce corrective action would be taken. As noted previously, at the November 19 news conference he announced “I have directed that no further sales of arms of any kind be sent to Iran (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583).

The State Department

The State Department utilized a narrower range of defensive discourse strategies than did the White House when responding to charges that arms were traded for hostages. The State Department denied the charges, claimed individual defeasibility, made a limited attempt at bolstering, refused comment, and spoke out against the Administration. Only Secretary of State Shultz and anonymous State Department officials offered any public response to the charges that arms were traded for hostages.

The State Department simply denied the first reports of negotiations with Iran. *The New York Times* reported, “There was also a report today. . .that said the United States had sent spare parts and ammunition for American-built fighter planes and tanks that Iran bought from the United States. . . .This report was denied by the State Department in Washington” (Hijazi, 1986, November 4, section A, p. 1). The State Department did not repeat the White House’s *disclosure is dangerous* strategy.

The Secretary of State and anonymous State Department officials evaded responsibility for the arms sales by claiming personal defeasibility in the case. *The Washington Post* reported Shultz’s claim that “there was ‘a lot of what transpired that I don’t know about’” (Cannon, L. & Pincus, W. (1986, November 18). Reagan has 'no plans' to ship Iran more arms, but order still in effect. *The Washington Post*, first section, p. A1). *The New York Times* reported that “several top officials in the State Department said they were still in the dark on details” (Gwertzman, 1986, November 14, section A, p. 1).

The State Department's only attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the act occurred when Shultz enacted the *bolstering* strategy on national television. While on CBS' "Face the Nation" Shultz claimed the initiative had improved relations with Iran and decreased terrorism. Shultz claimed, "There is a certain amount of evidence that our ability to talk to Iran in a sensible fashion has improved, and a certain amount of evidence that their terrorist acts against Americans at least has improved" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-42, p. 597).

Like the White House, the State Department refused comment. Not only did the State Department simply refuse to comment, Shultz and his aides claimed they were directed not to comment by the White House, thus invoking the *no comment as per superior order* strategy. As noted previously, Shultz claimed that "The White House is in charge of the executive branch, and they have issued a statement that all questions shall be answered by the White House. . . . I don't particularly enjoy it. I like to say what I think about something" (Gwertzman, 1986, November 8, section 1, p. 1). This contention was repeated by Shultz's aides, and denied by the White House staff: "The aides also confirmed that he [Shultz] had been told not to discuss the Iran operation publicly. . . . The White House, in turn, denied on Friday that it had instructed Mr. Shultz to remain silent. Today however, a State Department official countered by saying the White House had sent written instructions limiting all comment on the subject to the White House" (Gwertzman, 1986, November 9, section 1, p. 1).

The State Department and the Secretary of State spoke out against the Administration on several occasions. Explicitly expressing disapproval of the Administration's actions, Shultz asserted on national television, "it isn't the right [illegible] to trade arms or anything else for hostages" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-42, p. 598). Anonymous State Department officials also expressed disapproval of the arms sales. *The Washington Post* reported, "State Department

officials who opposed the Iran arms-for-hostages program said privately yesterday that the White House has the responsibility not only to handle public questions about the program but to find a way to explain it to U.S. allies and Arab nations that have cooperated with Washington's public antiterrorism policies: (Pincus, W. (1986, November 9). Ex-captive Weir regrets 'arms for hostages' deal. *The Washington Post*, first section, p. A34). Shultz also contradicted the White House's claims that press coverage of the Iran initiative was dangerous to the hostages. On national television he stated, "all of the public discussion probably helped somewhat" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-42, p. 598).

National Security Council staff

As did the State Department, the National Security Council staff responded to the crisis with a more limited set of defensive discourse strategies than did the White House. While the State Department primarily attempted to evade responsibility for the transgression, the National Security Council staff attempted to reduce the offensiveness of its actions. The only members of the National Security Council staff to publicly respond to the crisis on the Administration's behalf were National Security Director Poindexter, and his former boss, former National Security Director McFarlane.

Unlike the White House and the State Department, the National Security Council staff did not publicly deny the charges. Instead, Poindexter and McFarlane attempted to reduce the offensiveness of the initiative they implemented. In doing so, they utilized the *minimization*, *differentiation*, *transcendence*, *attack the accuser*, and *precedent* strategies. Like Reagan, Poindexter minimized the amount of arms shipped and their potential military impact. He argued "the amount [of armaments] that was shipped, as the President said the other night in his speech, was extremely small, has no military significance in terms of the war along the border with Iraq" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-65, p. 647). As noted earlier in this text, Poindexter also

reduced the offensiveness of the transgression by differentiating between Iran, and the hostage takers: “Iran did not take the hostages; they are not holding the hostages. They do not have total control over the Hezbollah faction that apparently has the hostages” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-65, p. 646).

Like Reagan, Poindexter and McFarlane argued that the Iran initiative transcended hostage release efforts. Poindexter argued that arms were shipped to improve relations with Iran: “the items [arms] we felt would be the most significant in terms of demonstrating that they were indeed dealing with the U.S. government, and that we had not only our interests in mind, but we also had Iranian interests in terms of stopping the war. For example, we firmly believe that it's not only in our interests and the rest of the Persian Gulf area, but it's also in Iran's interest to stop the war” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-65, p. 647). McFarlane also invoked the *transcendence* strategy. *The New York Times* reported, “in what appeared to be an attempt to justify contacts with Iran, Robert C. McFarlane, Mr. Reagan's former national security adviser, said today that it was of ‘enormous importance’ for the United States ‘to engender a stable relationship with the Iranian Government’ . . . In his statement today, Mr. McFarlane said secret diplomacy was crucial in preparing for a new relationship with Iran if the leadership there was ready for it” (Boyd, 1986, November 11, section A, p. 1).

Also in agreement with the White House and President Reagan, McFarlane attacked the press’ credibility and appealed to precedent. *The New York Times* reported “Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security adviser to President Reagan, last night branded as fiction many of the bizarre details in Iranian accounts of his secret four-day mission to Iran last spring” (“Reagan Envoy Describes Trip.” 1986, section A, p. 9.). As noted previously, McFarlane invoked the *precedent* strategy when he authored an editorial in *The Washington Post* in which

he compared the Iran initiative to Nixon's secret initiative to China in the early 1970s (McFarlane, 1986, November 13, editorial, p. A21).

Like the State Department, and some of Reagan's staff, Poindexter and McFarlane spoke out against the Administration. *The Washington Post* reported McFarlane's disapproval of the arms sales thusly: "McFarlane said that 'it was a mistake to introduce any element of arms transfers' into dealings with Iran" (Hoffman. & Ifill, 1986, November 21, first section, p. A1). Poindexter, like Shultz, directly contradicted Reagan's use of the attack the accuser strategy. He claimed recent press revelations may improve the chance of freeing the hostages. *The Washington Post* reported a meeting between Poindexter and *The Post's* staff: "in an interview with reporters and editors of *The Washington Post*, Poindexter said. . .the unexpected revelation of U.S. arms deliveries to Iran might now 'expedite' the process of improving U.S.-Iranian relations and win release of more hostages" (Pincus, 1986, November 15, first section, p. A1).

Of the Administration units which publicly responded to the crisis, the Department of Defense offered the most limited range of defensive discourse strategies. The only strategies invoked by the Defense Department were the *no comment* and *reduction of offensiveness* strategies. Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, was the only official from the Department of Defense to respond publicly to charges of arms for hostage trades, and he did so on only two occasions. Weinberger's first public response was a combination of the *no comment* and *attack the accuser* strategies. Early in the crisis, while refusing comment, Weinberger implied the reports of the Administration's negotiations with Iran lacked credibility. *The Washington Post* reported, "Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger also declined comment in a meeting with reporters, except to say, 'I warn you to check with sources on some of this stuff'" (Pincus, 1986, November 7, first section, p. A1). As noted previously in this text, Weinberger also invoked the

reduction of offensiveness justification strategy to illustrate the importance of the Iran initiative to the achievement of foreign policy goals (Moore, M. 1986, November 20, first section, p. A28)

Image Restoration Strategies Appearing in the Administration's Internal Documentation

A wide range of image restoration strategies appeared in the Administration's internal documentation. Image restoration strategies appearing in the internal record include *denial*, *evasion of responsibility*, *reduction of offensiveness*, *corrective action*, *no comment*, and *accepting responsibility* (Appendix A, Table A-3, Table A-4). This discourse originated from multiple Administration sources: President Reagan, Chief of Staff Regan, National Security Director Poindexter, former National Security Director McFarlane, Secretary of State Shultz, Central Intelligence Agency Director Casey, and anonymous White House and National Security Council staff members.

The first of the image restoration strategies appearing internally did so in an exchange of memoranda between Secretary of State Shultz and National Security Director Poindexter in which the *no comment* strategy is referenced. Shultz wrote Poindexter to alert him of press inquiries into the arms for hostage trades. He assured Poindexter that, "in accordance with the agreed guidance I totally refused to engage with their questions saying that they will have to direct all their questions to the White House" but also argued "the best way to proceed is to give the key facts to the public" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-35, p. 563–564). Poindexter responded, "I do not believe that now is the time to give the facts to the public. . . .I therefore remain convinced that we must remain absolutely close-mouthed" because "speculation about our efforts to secure the hostages [sic] release only increases the danger to the hostages" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-27, p. 576). At the end of his response to Shultz, Poindexter attached the following press guidance for Shultz's reference: "Q: About McFarlane or spare parts or arms to Iran? A: We have no comment on these reports. As long as there are American

hostages being held in the Middle East we will not be responding to questions like this. A simple no comment will be made to all questions about talks or actions that might or might not be taking place. You should infer nothing to these responses” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-27, p. 576).

In two separate memos, McFarlane states he has refused to comment, and he invokes the *attack the accuser* strategy. In the first memo, to Poindexter, McFarlane wrote: “Having been out of town for two days and maintaining the no comment line, I returned today to find that Don Regan has backgrounded the weeklies and laid the entire problem at my feet. . . .I have made no comment (other than the 'fanciful and fictitious' line on my Cleveland Q&A) and will not” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-36, p. 363–364). In the second memo, to National Security Council staff member Oliver North, McFarlane wrote: “I replied that I could not comment but would welcome the chance to do so at the appropriate time in order to correct what have been ‘fanciful and largely fictitious’ stories” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-39, p. 368).

During a meeting held on November 10 to develop the communication strategy to address the burgeoning crisis, the *simple denial*, *disclosure is dangerous*, *transcendence*, and *differentiation* strategies were invoked. Defense Secretary Weinberger noted the President’s simple denial of the charge that arms were traded for hostages: “the President said we did not do any trading with the enemy for our hostages” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, 578). Reagan then invoked the disclosure is dangerous strategy. Weinberger noted that Reagan said, “we can't discuss the details of this publicly without endangering the people we are working through and with in Iran” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, 578). Chief of Staff Regan took slightly different notes: “No further speculation or answers so as not to endanger hostages. . . .Pres - Support Pres' policy but say nothing else due to danger to hostages” (*Joint Hearings*,

100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 387, 391). The transcendence strategy was invoked by Reagan, Shultz, and CIA Director Casey. According to the Chief of Staff's notes, Director Casey "read a prepared statement putting emphasis on long range relationship with Iran as reason for contacts" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 387). Shultz indicated he supported "Iran long range policy of contact Know [sic] support for weapons for hostages" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 391). Reagan said, "We should put out statement show we do want to get hostages back, but Iranian contacts were for long range" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 387). Similarly, Weinberger noted Reagan invoked a combination of the transcendence and differentiation strategies: "We must make it plain that we are not doing business with terrorists. We aren't paying them or dealing with them. We are trying to get better relations with Iran, and we can't discuss the details of this publicly without endangering the people we are working through and with in Iran" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, p. 578).

The *reduction of offensiveness*, *corrective action*, *no comment*, and *accepting responsibility* strategies appeared in three documents generated in preparation for the President's news conference of November 19. One document, titled "Draft of Presidential Opening Statement, Dated November 18," contains examples of the *transcendence*, *solve the problem*, *disclosure is dangerous*, and *accepting responsibility* strategies. The document argues that the initiative transcended hostage release efforts: "Our purposes were fourfold: To replace a relationship of total hostility, with something better. To bring a negotiated end to the Iran-Iraq war that would protect Western interests in the Persian Gulf. To effect the release of our hostages; and to bring an end to terrorism and the taking of hostages" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-47, p. 408). It then outlines the rationale for the Administration's no comment policy, thus invoking the *disclosure is dangerous* strategy: "We knew this undertaking involved

great risks – especially for the hostages and for the Iranian officials with whom we were in contact. That is why information was restricted to Cabinet officers and officials with an absolute need to know” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-47, p. 408). Next, the *corrective action* and *accepting responsibility* strategies were invoked when Reagan directs that no more arms will be shipped to Iran and the President accepts personal responsibility for the decision to undertake the initiative (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-47, p. 409).

In preparation for the November 19 news conference the National Security Council staff provided Reagan with a list of anticipated questions and suggested answers. This document contains examples of three variations of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategies, *bolstering*, *minimization*, and *attack the accuser*. An example of the *bolstering* strategy is: “Q: Has this initiative with Iran had any positive effect? A: Yes, there have been a number of positive effects. . .we have seen a marked reduction in Iranian sponsored terrorism over the last 18 months” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-66, p. 652). An example of the *minimization* strategy is: “Although we do have an arms embargo in place against Iran, as President, I made a limited exception to that policy and authorized a small amount of defensive arms” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-66, p. 6526). An example of the *attack the accuser* strategy is: “The longer I'm here in Washington, the more I realize that in this room rumor and fiction seem to be more important than fact.” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-66, p. 657).

Also in preparation for the news conference, an example of the transcendence strategy appeared in a memo from McFarlane to Poindexter. McFarlane wrote, “But I guess I do believe that it is a point that you should stress in your pre-press conference brief so that he has it in his head to use as a Q&A. Just as long as it comes out on the record that any fool can well imagine a

number of reasons why Iranians would want to change the status quo” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-87, 1987, OLN-22, p. 127).

The transcendence strategy appeared in a memo written by Chief of Staff Regan on November 20. “Of even greater significance is the need to marshal bureaucratic resources— notably the State Department – to explain the rationale for our initiative and to dispatch a special emissary to key posts. The mission of the emissary (perhaps the Vice President with the Under Secretary Armacost) would be to explain not only the strategic rationale for our action, but also to place the initiative in the context of our broader regional objectives” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, DTR-51, 425).

On November 21, CIA Director Casey appeared before Congress to relate his knowledge of the Iran initiative. During his testimony he made multiple attempts to reduce the offensiveness of the arms sales using the *transcendence*, *minimization*, and *bolstering* strategies. His testimony contained several examples of the *transcendence* strategy. He recalled “McFarlane emphasizing that the purpose of such discussions would be the future relationships with Iran and Iran's great importance in the East-West and Middle East-Persian Gulf equation” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-35, 1327). He then described a December 1985 meeting between McFarlane and an Iranian intermediary: “At this meeting, Mr. McFarlane stated our goals of pursuing the relationship with Iran were these: —Devising a formula for reestablishing a strategic relationship with Tehran. —Ending the Iran-Iraq war on honorable terms. —Convincing Iran to cease its support for terrorism. —Helping ensure the territorial integrity of Iran and coordinating ways to counter Soviet activities in the region” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-35, 1329). He also described McFarlane’s meetings “with high-level Iranian officials” during which “McFarlane emphasized that our interests in Iran transcended the hostages” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987,

EM-35, 1334). Casey minimized the amount and impact of the arms shipped to Iran: “The judgment was made that providing a small amount of defensive weapons would give this faction some leverage in the internal struggle by suggesting that there were advantages in contacts with the West” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-35, 1337). Casey described the positive outcomes of the Iran initiative, thus invoking the *bolstering* strategy: “McFarlane and his team were able to establish the basis for a continuing relationship and clearly articulate our objectives, concerns, and intentions. The group was also able to assess first-hand the internal political dynamic in Tehran and the effect of the war on Iran” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-35, 1334).

During the course of the testimony, Casey made one attempt to evade responsibility via the *defeasibility* strategy. Casey testified that the CIA was unaware it had actually shipped arms to Iran. Casey explained, “CIA's involvement began when the Agency was asked to recommend a reliable airline that could transport bulky oil-drilling parts to an unspecified destination in the Middle East...Neither the airline nor the CIA knew the cargo consisted of 18 Hawk missiles. When the plane got to Tel Aviv, the pilots were told the cargo was spare parts for the oil fields and was to go into Tabriz” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, EM-35, 1328).

Poindexter also testified before Congress on the 21st. In his testimony, he invokes the *bolstering* and *attack the accuser* strategies. An example of the attack the accuser strategy is: “Because of disclosures the President now wants to tell the full story. However, he is concerned that these disclosures have intentionally jeopardized hostages [sic]. The President is also concerned about press speculation with respect to the Israeli connection” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-80, 782). The following text illustrates Poindexter’s attempts at bolstering:

Poindexter then went on to list what he believed to be accomplishments from these overtures to Iran: We now have a meaningful dialogue with key Iranian officials which, among other things, is yielding intelligence as to what's happening within Iran, (2) A channel has been opened by these discussions with pragmatists who may be in the

assendency [sic] within Iran...Poindexter in commenting further on positive benefits from the Iranian initiative indicated that we have succeeded in getting some of our hostages out, radical elements in Iran are being quieted and the Iranians are no longer thinking about a total victory in their war with Iraq (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, JMP-80, 788).

RQ3: What Insight Does Stakeholder Theory Yield Regarding the Defensive Discourse Disseminated by the Reagan Administration during the Crisis Period?

Stakeholder Theory-Based Defensive Discourse Strategies Appearing in the Public Record

Numerous statements were categorized as expressions concern for organization-stakeholder relationships, and expressions of concern for stakeholder groups (Appendix A, Table A-5, Table A-6). However, no Administration statements were categorized as expressions specifically identifying stakeholder groups affected by the crisis, or prioritizing stakeholder groups by stakeholder needs. The only stakeholder group the Administration explicitly expressed concern for was the hostages and those negotiating for their release. These concerns were offered consistently throughout the crisis. Such statements were made by President Reagan, White House Chief of Staff Regan, Press Secretary Speakes, and anonymous White House officials. Expressions of concern for organization-stakeholder relationships did not surface until November 13. These statements almost exclusively concerned the relationship between the United States and Iran. Such statements were offered by President Reagan on numerous occasions, and former National Security Director McFarlane once. On one occasion an anonymous official expressed concern for the Administration's relationships with Congress, the State Department, and overseas allies.

Throughout the crisis period, President Reagan and several members of the White House staff expressed concern for the well-being of the hostages and those negotiating on their behalf. Expressions of concern for the hostages emanated from White House Press Secretary Speakes, Chief of Staff Regan, and anonymous White House officials. For example, on November 5, the Chief of Staff said, "I don't want to talk anything about the Iran situation or go into any details

of how we're negotiating in order to get these hostages out. . . .There are lives at stake here” (Pincus, 1986, November 6, first section, p. A1.). On the same day, a “senior White House official” reiterated Regan’s claim: ““Our feeling is that anything said at this stage runs the risk of affecting the hostages”” (Boyd, 1986, November 6, section A, p. 10). Shortly thereafter, on November 7 at a news conference with recently-released hostage David Jacobsen, the President said, “There’s no way we can answer questions having anything to do with this without endangering the people we're trying to rescue” (“David Jacobsen,” 1986, p. 1545.). On the same day, Press Secretary Speakes echoed Reagan’s concerns: ““Where we say anything and whatever you report. . . in doing this, we all run the risk of endangering the process that could lead to the freedom for American hostages”” (Johnson, 1986, November 12, first section, p. A2). The content of these expressions remained consistent throughout the latest phases of the crisis. For example, on November 12, *The New York Times* reported, “Regan said they were worried about the other hostages – ‘that’s why we couldn't say anything; it would endanger their lives,’” (Weinraub, 1986, November 13, section A, p. 1). During the November 19 news conference, the President said, “There may be some questions which for reasons of national security or to protect the safety of the hostages I will be unable to answer publicly” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1583).

On occasion, these concerns were broadened to include not only the hostages, but also the persons negotiating for their freedom. On November 10, Speakes told reporters, “The President today met with his senior national security advisers regarding the status of the American hostages in Lebanon. The meeting was prompted by the President's concern for the safety of the remaining hostages and his fear that the spate of speculative stories which have arisen since the release of David Jacobsen may put them [the remaining hostages] and others at risk” (“American

hostages,” 1986, 1552). On November 13, Reagan more explicitly expressed concern for hostage negotiator Terry Waite and other persons attempting to free the hostages. He said, “there has been unprecedented speculation and countless reports that have not only been wrong but have been potentially dangerous to the hostages and destructive of the opportunity before us. The efforts of courageous people like Terry Waite have been jeopardized” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1561). On November 19, Reagan reiterated this concern: “there are still some parts of this that we cannot go public with because it will bring risk and danger [sic] people that are held and people that we have been negotiating with” (“The President’s news conference,” 1986, p. 1584).

Expressions of concern for the Administration’s relationships with stakeholders did not emerge until November 10. All but one these public statements (all but one) expressed concern for the relationship between the United States and Iran. Former National Security Director McFarlane offered the first public expression of concern for the relationship between Iran and the United States. *The New York Times* reported that McFarlane said, “it was of ‘enormous importance’ for the United States ‘to engender a stable relationship with the Iranian Government’In his statement today, Mr. McFarlane said secret diplomacy was crucial in preparing for a new relationship with Iran if the leadership there was ready for it” (Boyd, 1986, November 11, section A, p. 1). Reagan invoked this theme four times during the November 13 address to the nation. For example, he claimed the goal of the initiative was “to restore a relationship with Iran” and then posed the following rhetorical question: “But why, you might ask, is any relationship with Iran important to the United States?” He then responded, “it is in our national interest to watch for changes within Iran that might offer hope for an improved relationship” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1561). Reagan repeated this

theme three times during the November 19 news conference. He restated his contention that the desire to stabilize relations with Iran was the goal of the arms deals and emphasized the importance of such goals: “It was absolutely vital for the Western World and to the hopes for peace in the Middle East and all for us to be trying to establish this relationship” (“Iran-United States relations: Address,” 1986, p. 1561).

On only one occasion did any Administration official express concern for a relationship other than that between the United States and Iran. This anonymous official expressed concern for the Administration’s relationships with Congress, the State Department, and its foreign allies. On November 19, *The New York Times* reported, “A senior White House official said what was politically ‘dangerous’ about the Iranian situation was that it struck at the heart of the various relationships on which White House depends—relationships with Congress, with the State Department, with overseas allies” (Weinraub, 1986, November 19, section A, p. 10.).

Stakeholder Theory-Based Defensive Discourse Strategies Appearing in the Administration’s Internal Documentation

Several stakeholder theory-based defensive discourse strategies appeared in the Administration’s internal documentation. In various memoranda, press guidance documents, meeting notes, and a speech draft, Administration officials express concern for the welfare of the hostages, and the Administration’s relationships with Iran, Congress, and the American public (Appendix A, Table A-5, Table A-6). As with the analysis of the public record, no expressions specifically identifying stakeholder groups affected by the crisis, or prioritizing stakeholder groups by stakeholder needs, were identified.

In a memo dated November 5, 1986, to Secretary of State Shultz, Poindexter expressed concern for the welfare of the hostages as well as the Administration’s relationship with Iran. The memo begins with an expression of concern for the United States’ relationship with Iran: “I

share your desire to find a way to prevent further speculation and leaks about U.S. policy on Iran. Not only will such complicate our efforts to secure the release of other hostages, but may also undermine opportunities for eventually establishing a correct relationship with Iran and possibilities for an active U.S. role in ending the Iran-Iraq war” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-27, p. 575). In response to Shultz’s recommendations for full disclosure of details of the Iran initiative, Poindexter said, “I do not believe that now is the time to give the facts to the public. There are several factors to consider in addition to the need to get the other hostages out” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-27, p. 576). In the press guidance attached to the memo, Poindexter suggests the following response to a request about the arms sales: “As long as there are American hostages being held in the Middle East we will not be responding to questions like this” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-27, p. 576).

Notes taken during the November 10 staff meeting contain expressions of concern for the Administration’s relationship with Iran, and the safety of the hostages. Regan and Weinberger both noted statements of concern for the relationship with Iran made by Poindexter. Regan noted, “[Poindexter] indicated Iranians [sic] happy with our no comment” (100th Congress, 1st Session (1987). *Joint Hearings Before the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions With Iran and Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition*. (U.S. Government Printing Office) Washington, D.C., 100-10, Donald T. Regan, 383. DTR-41A. Regan Notes, Dated Nov. 10, 1986). Similarly, Weinberger noted, “Admiral Poindexter pointed out that we do want a better relationship with Iran” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, p. 578). Weinberger’s notes indicate the President was concerned with both the relationship with Iran, as well as the welfare of the hostages and negotiators. For example, Weinberger noted Reagan said, “We can discuss that publicly, but no

way could we ever disclose it all without getting our hostages executed. . . .We are trying to get better relations with Iran, and we can't discuss the details of this publicly without endangering the people we are working through and with in Iran. . . .The President said we need to point out any discussion endangers our source in Iran and our plan, because we do want to get additional hostages released” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, p. 578).

A memo written by McFarlane to Lieutenant Colonel North indicated concern for the Administration’s relationship with Congress. McFarlane wrote, “I think the President's tone toward the Hill generally ought to be to reach out and seek cooperation. Any other approach will be suicidal. They control both houses. If he is serious about trying to accomplish something, he will need to try to build a core of Demos who will support. . . .So one point is the President's public remarks toward the Hill ought to be conciliatory, not confrontational on all issues, not just this one” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-46, p. 394).

The draft of the President’s opening statement for the news conference of November 19 contained an expression of concern for the safety of the hostages, and an expression of concern regarding the relationships between the Administration and Congress, and the Administration and the American public. The expression of concern for the hostages and negotiators was stated thusly: “We knew this undertaking involved great risks—especially for the hostages and for the Iranian officials with whom we were in contact. That is why information was restricted to Cabinet officers and officials with an absolute need to know” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR -47, p. 408). The expression of concern for the Administration’s relationships with the American public and Congress was stated as follows: “If we are to be successful in this and other foreign policy initiatives, it will require the support of the American people and the Congress – Democrats and Republicans... Well, Mr. Wright, we can work together. The Congress will have

my full cooperation in pursuing this and other foreign policy initiatives. Toward that end I have directed that all [original emphasis] information relating to our initiative be provided to the appropriate Members of Congress” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR -47, p. 410).

A statement of concern for the United States’ relationship with Iran appeared in a press guidance memo prepared by the State Department on November 18. The State Department wrote: “It is still in America's long-term interests to seek better relations with Iran” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, GPS-44, p. 603).

RQ4: Did Administration Officials, Publicly or Privately, Make Any Additional Statements that Indicate an Emphasis on the Maintenance of Either Symbolic Resources or Organization-Stakeholder Relationships?

Analysis of the data indicates that on several occasions, various Administration officials expressed concern for the Administration’s credibility and acknowledged their attempts at damage control (Appendix A, Table A-7, Table A-8). Such statements were made publicly and privately. Expressions of concern about the crisis’ effect on the Administration’s credibility surfaced on limited occasions throughout all three phases of the crisis response described previously in this paper. Acknowledgement of damage control efforts emerged during phase 2 of the crisis communication effort, and continued through phase 3. To reiterate, Busby (1999) defines damage control as “the often frantic effort to play down and suppress information which could have an adverse effect upon the credibility of an administration” (1999, p. 24).

Administration officials and staff made numerous statements of concern for the Administration’s and (the President’s) credibility, both publicly and privately. While Reagan and anonymous White House sources were the only Administration representatives to express public concern about the Administration’s credibility, several White House staff members, the Secretary of State, the National Security Director joined Reagan in doing so privately.

The first expression of concern for the Administration's credibility appeared on November 8. According to *The New York Times*, "Administration officials said today that the reports about Washington's secret involvement in arms shipments to Iran had caused serious credibility problems for the United States with key countries around the world" (Gwertzman, 1986, November 9, section 1, p. 1). Two days later, White House Communications Director Patrick Buchanan appealed to the Chief of Staff to disclose appropriate details of the Iran initiative to avoid damage to the President's credibility—in Buchanan's words, his "reputation for principle":

We face a grave communications problem over this Iranian/Hostage Issue. The appearance [original emphasis] of things is that we have negotiated with a terrorist regime more detested by the American people than the Soviet Union...Not since I came here has there appeared such an issue which could do such deep and permanent damage to the President's standing...we have already witnessed some jubilant assaults upon Ronald Reagan's reputation for principle...the best response on this, I should think, would be earliest and fullest disclosure of what we did, what we attempted, why, etc. (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42, 394-395).

The Chief of Staff responded, "I agree, and have so advocated for a week, [sic] we are going to do something on Thurs (tmrw)" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42, 394).

Concerns of credibility surfaced during the November 10 staff meeting held to determine the Administration's response to the crisis. Notes taken by Chief of Staff Regan and Defense Secretary Weinberger relate some of the concerns voiced during this meeting. According to Regan's notes, the President said, "Must say something because I'm being held out to dry", and Regan agreed: "DTR - Must get a statement out now, we are being attacked, and we are being hurt. Losing credibility" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, 389). Weinberger's notes also relate the concern voiced over the Administration's credibility at the meeting, with a slight disagreement: he attributed the statement about being hung out to dry to the Chief of Staff, not the President. He wrote, "Mr. Regan said we are begin hung out to dry, our credibility is at stake, and we have to say enough" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, CWW-28, 580).

The next concerns about the Administration's credibility appeared on November 13, and were voiced by anonymous Administration sources. *The Washington Post* reported, "Administration officials said the Iran operation has created a large credibility problem for the White House. . . .The Administration also is concerned that it faces a severe credibility problem with other allies and a host of moderate Arab nations" (Hoffman & Pincus, 1986, November 13, first section, p. A1). Similar concerns appeared in *The New York Times* on the same day: "Earlier in the day, Mr. Regan met privately with several White House officials and was told that the Administration faced 'a serious perceptual problem' because of revelations about United States dealings with Iran" (Weinraub, 1986, November 13, section A, p. 1.).

In preparation for the November 19 news conference, Poindexter developed a list of questions and answers to prepare Reagan for the questioning he was likely to face. The following sample question refers to concerns over the Administration's credibility: "Q: What are you going to do about the credibility gap that this episode has created for you and your administration? A: I can only do what I am doing now and what we have always done and that is to give the American people the facts and let their good judgment and trust in the Presidency guide our actions" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, JMP-66, p. 657). The following night during the news conference Reagan was in fact questioned about his Administration's credibility by ABC television news reporter Sam Donaldson. In his answer, Reagan indicates he is in fact concerned with protecting his credibility: "Q. . . your credibility has been severely damaged. Can you repair it? The President. Well, I imagine I'm the only one around who wants to repair it, and I didn't have anything to do with damaging it" ("The President's news conference," 1986, p. 1585).

On the 19th, prior to the news conference, several statements attributed to anonymous Administration sources indicated the Administration's concern over damage to its credibility. A

“senior White House official” told *The Washington Post* the Iran initiative, “weaken our credibility, really for the first time, and puts us on the defensive” (Weinraub, 1986, November 19, section A, p. 10). The same article also reported that, “White House officials and Republicans close to the President concede that what is largely at stake is the continued effectiveness of Mr. Reagan's leadership. They have been particularly shaken by the realization that the hallmarks of Mr. Reagan's personal popularity over the last six years—his adherence to certain fixed principles in foreign and domestic policy, his shrewdness in dealing with Congress and his credibility with the nation—appear to have been undermined” (Weinraub, 1986, November 19, section A, p. 10). On the same day, *The New York Times* reported, “White House officials have acknowledged during the past week that disclosure of the secret dealings with Iran was the latest and most serious in a number of issues that have raised broad questions about the administration's credibility” (Cannon, 1986, November 20, first section, p. A1).

A memo dated “November 1986,” apparently authored by Secretary of State Shultz, indicates the degree to which the author was concerned about damage to the Administration's credibility. Shultz wrote:

Credibility. . . This leads to the third—and maybe the most important—part of the problem. . . There is a real danger of spinning a web of misleading if not incorrect statements that won't stand up to press and Congressional investigation. . . In the eyes of the American people the most important achievement of the Reagan Administration has been the restoration of the stature and dignity and credibility to the Presidency. Ronald Reagan is a guy who stands by his statements and doesn't mislead. He has reestablished the people's confidence in the office of the Presidency. That has to be maintained, or every achievement of this Administration will be at risk (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, GPS-40, 583-584).

Beginning on November 14, Administration officials began to acknowledge the Administration's focus on damage control. The first such indication appeared when the Chief of Staff boasted of past damage control successes to *The New York Times*. Regan said, “Some of us are like a shovel brigade that follow a parade down Main Street cleaning up. We took Reykjavik

and turned what was really a sour situation into something that turned out pretty well. . . .Who was it that took this disinformation thing and managed to turn it? Who was it took on this loss in the Senate and pointed out a few facts and managed to pull that? I don't say we'll be able to do it four times in a row. But here we go again, and we're trying” (Weinraub, 1986, November 16, section 1, p. 16). The author of the article then wrote, “The remarks point up [sic] one aspect of the Reagan team that has been compared unfavorably by some current and former officials to the group led by James A. Baker 3d, the chief of staff in the first term. In this view, the present team is seen as having spent a lot of time on ‘damage control,’ while Mr. Baker and his staff seemed better able to avoid damaging situations.” (Weinraub, 1986, November 16, section 1, p. 16).

Soon after, Poindexter disputed, yet simultaneously acknowledged a focus on damage control. Poindexter made the comment on NBC News’ “Meet the Press” on November 16. At first Poindexter disputes the view that the response to the disclosures of arms sales was damage control: “MR. KALB: Okay, but on the area of foreign policy, there is certainly the impression that you were involved primarily in damage control, not in bold initiatives. ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: No, I don't think that's true at all” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, JMP-65, 649-650). But then when asked if the Administration’s damage control efforts have been effective, he claims they have: “MR. WOODWARD: Okay, in terms of damage control. Do you think you’ve done an effective job in explaining what's going on on this and disinformation, what happened in Iceland? ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: Yes, I think so. We try very hard to get all the facts out” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, JMP-65, 649-650).

On November 17, a White House aide referred to efforts to address the crisis as damage control. *The New York Times* reported, “Continuing with what one White House aide termed ‘major damage control,’ Mr. Reagan and his spokesman, Larry Speakes, insisted today that there

were no further plans to ship weapons to Teheran and that speculation that Mr. Shultz might resign was unfounded” (Weinraub, 1986, November 18, section A, p. 16). Also on November 17, a statement made by President Reagan implied that he approved of Regan’s use of the term “shovel brigade.” *The Washington Post* reported, “At the picture-taking session yesterday, reporters mentioned Regan’s remark and asked the president how ‘the shovel brigade’ was doing. ‘I’ll be trying to do that on Wednesday night when I meet with you,’ Reagan replied.” (Cannon. & Pincus, 1986, November 18, first section, p. A1).

RQ1: Did the Reagan Administration Prioritize its Symbolic Resources, Its Stakeholder Relationships, or Some Other Concern when Communicating a Response to the Iran Arms Crisis of November 1986?

In response to the over-arching charge that arms were traded for hostages, the Reagan Administration invoked all of the broad defensive discourse strategies identified by image restoration discourse theory (IRDT) except mortification. The variety of defensive discourse strategies was much more limited for the various sub-charges leveled at the Administration (e.g., the staff was divided over the arms policy, the Administration’s terror policy had been violated, the Administration’s actions violated U.S. law, information was withheld from Congress, and the Administration’s actions benefited Iran in the Persian Gulf war). Similarly, most of the officials involved in the crisis communication process invoked at least one of the image restoration strategies in response to the primary charge. When the subsidiary charges are considered, staff participation in the crisis response was limited. Furthermore, analysis of the data led to an identification of several broad defensive discourse strategies not identified by image restoration discourse theory, and three varieties of the reduction of offensiveness strategy not previously identified by IRDT.

Rhetorical components of stakeholder theory were invoked by Administration representatives on a limited basis. Use of these discourse strategies was relatively consistent

throughout the crisis period. Of the four components of stakeholder theory operationalized for this analysis, only concerns for organization-stakeholder relationships and concerns for stakeholder groups were verbalized. At no time did any Administration official verbally identify or explicitly prioritize the stakeholder groups affected by this crisis. The only indications of stakeholder group identification or prioritization are those that may be implied by statements of concern for the stakeholder groups and organization-stakeholder relationships.

On numerous occasions the President and other Administration officials made statements in which they expressed concern for the Administration's credibility. Similarly, on several occasions, the President and other Administration officials made statements that indicated a focus on damage control in the crisis communication process. The analysis did not reveal any analogous statements related to a relational approach to crisis management.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

Summary

Image restoration discourse theory provided a wealth of valuable insight into this case. The theory categorized much of the Administration's rhetoric. Throughout the crisis period all of the broad strategies of image restoration discourse theory were invoked except the *mortification* strategy. The theory described the evolution of the Administration's crisis communication throughout the period of study, and illustrated the degree to which the Administration's response lacked coherence. Based on this study, it appears image restoration discourse theory may be applicable to other cases of presidential crisis, though, as will be discussed, modification may be required.

The stakeholder theory-based typology provided insight into this case as well. The theory served primarily as a cross-reference to image restoration discourse theory, though it did illuminate the fact that the Administration's overriding concern, at least initially, was the initiative itself. Though useful in this case, further testing will be required if this typology is to be applied to other crisis cases.

The author found that dual priorities underlay the Administration's actions amidst the Iran arms crisis, concern for the viability of the Iran initiative and concern for the Administration's credibility. Though the crisis occurred in a complex environment with multiple stakeholder groups, there is no indication that the Administration was concerned with any stakeholders other than the hostages, or with any of its stakeholder relationships other than that with the government of Iran.

The Administration's crisis rhetoric evolved throughout the crisis period, from an initial refusal to comment to the provision of partial disclosure of the details of the Iran operation.

Despite this fact, the response remained consistently ambiguous throughout the crisis period. Not only did the Administration intentionally withhold information, and provide only partial disclosure of its interaction with Iran, various Administration officials offered differing accounts of the transgression, leading to a highly disjointed and contradictory response.

This analysis indicates image restoration discourse theory may need to be extended to account for the defensive discourse offered by the accused in this case. During the course of the analysis, several defensive discourse strategies not identified by image restoration discourse theory appeared in the data. Some of these statements are variants of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategy described by image restoration discourse theory. Others are examples of Administration representatives speaking out against other representatives claims in apparent shows of self-interest. Still others appear to be varieties of ambiguous discourse. The theory does not currently account for ambiguous discourse, though the strategy may be argued to be a valid form of defensive discourse depending on the context of the crisis (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Tyler, 1997). Given the complexity of the environment in which presidential crises occur, with diverse stakeholder group affected worldwide, ambiguity may be assumed to be a reasonable, though potentially damaging, crisis response in the realm of national executive governance.

Image restoration discourse theory provides insight into the reasons for the failure of the Administration to manage this crisis. The theory outlines three criteria which must be met in order to effectively guard against image threats. Two of the criteria for crisis communication effectiveness outlined by the theory were not met, and thus the theory accurately predicts a failure outcome. Despite this fact, at least one of the criteria is ripe with ambiguity and the theory should be modified to correct for this fact.

Findings

The Administration's Priorities

Two priorities guided the Reagan Administration throughout the Iran arms crisis: the protection of the continued viability of the Iran initiative and the protection of the Administration's symbolic assets. There is no indication that relational concerns guided the crisis communication response, despite the fact that concern was expressed for the hostages and the United States' relationship with Iran. Instead of indicators of relational concerns, these statements were indications of the degree to which the Administration prioritized the Iran initiative itself.

When the Administration is considered as a single unit, the dual priorities emerged in two phases. Early in the crisis the continued viability of the Iran initiative itself was the Administration's highest priority. Once threats to the Administrations' credibility reached a critical threshold, the Administration attempted to address these threats, and concerns for credibility became paramount. Despite the fact that these dual priorities shifted during the time period, both were issues of concern throughout. Statements of concern for the Administration's credibility emerged early in the crisis, and the operation itself was maintained beyond the crisis period (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 157).

Testimony offered in the wake of Iran-Contra corroborates the assertion that two priorities guided the Administration's crisis response. During the Joint Hearings in the summer of 1987, National Security Director Poindexter testified that he and the President intentionally withheld "as much information as possible about the project because we still felt at that point that we could salvage something out of it" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 244). The Chief of Staff also testified that the President and Poindexter explicitly stated the need to withhold comment out of concern for the hostages (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan

testimony, p. 21-22). According to the analysis and Poindexter's testimony, the critical point when priorities shifted was November 13, 1986. Poindexter testified that by the 13th, "[i]t became obvious that the President needed to go before the American public and explain in broad, general terms what it was we were trying to do" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, Poindexter testimony, p. 244). Throughout the remainder of the crisis, the Administration's communication response continued along this trajectory. Ambiguous explanations were offered which served to anger and confuse the public, Congress, and the press.

The situation is more complex when the various Administration units and individual representatives are considered separately, due in part to the fact that different units had disparate priorities. The National Security Council staff and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency prioritized the success of the Iran initiative itself and only begrudgingly acknowledged the threats to the Administration's credibility as the crisis wore on. The National Security Council staff was carrying out the Iran initiative when the crisis broke, and thus sought to maintain operational secrecy well into the crisis. Conversely, Secretary of State Shultz and the White House Chief of Staff Regan prioritized the Administration's credibility at the outset of the crisis. Although aware of at least some of the details of the operation, neither of these parties were involved in the operation. Thus, the crisis adversely impacted their credibility, though neither man was directly involved in the operation. Regan, who likened his role in the Administration to a custodian following a parade shoveling horse excrement, sought to quickly contain the damage caused by the crisis (Canon & Pincus, 1986, November 18; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42). Shultz had a personal interest in protecting the Administration's credibility. As soon as the crisis hit, he lost credibility with foreign governments worldwide because the initiative violated the arms embargo for which he was directly responsible.

Significance of a Lack of Prioritization of Relational Concerns

The fact that relational concerns were ignored in the crisis response may help to explain the causes of the Administration's failure to manage this crisis. The Administration responded to the crisis in order to protect its credibility. Though credibility is a perception formed in the minds of stakeholders, and thus a symbolic asset, it is informed in large part by an organization's actions. Therefore, to the extent stakeholders have access to information about an organization's actions, perceptions of credibility will be based, in part, on these actions. The image an organization projects only informs perceptions of credibility to the extent that contradictory information regarding these actions is unavailable.

The Administration ignored the fact that its behavior affected stakeholders' perceptions of its credibility. Its representatives attempted to restore its credibility by projecting an image which contradicted information readily available to stakeholders. No honest attempt was made to address stakeholder concerns or to modify the Administration's actions to prevent further damage to the Administration's stakeholder relationships. Even after the President declared that no more arms would be sold to Iran, the negotiations continued (Draper, 1991; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Weinberger testimony, p. 157; "The President's news conference," 1986).

At least one member of the Administration understood the hazards of neglecting stakeholder relationships during crisis. The statement also illustrates the link between credibility and relationship maintenance. *The New York Times* reported

"a senior White House official said what was politically 'dangerous' about the Iranian situation was that it struck at the heart of the various relationships on which White House depends—relationships with Congress, with the State Department, with overseas allies. . . .It weakens our credibility, really for the first time, and puts us on the defensive,' the official said" (Weinraub, 1986, November 19).

An Administration official from Reagan's first term also acknowledged the importance of maintaining stakeholder relationships throughout crisis in *The New York Times*. The official also provided insight in the Administration's crisis management approach:

“A member of the White House team during the first term said, ‘There seems to be little understanding now of the fact that in Washington it is important to have allies, and your most critical allies need to be brought into the process as early as possible’A White House official who has long worked for Mr. Reagan said, ‘One of the advantages they saw in Don Regan's style at the beginning was a kind of strong, fighting confrontational approach that everyone expected to be healthy in terms of promoting the second-term agenda and preventing lame-duck status’” (Weinraub, 1986, November 16).

Previously Unidentified Defensive Discourse Strategies

Image restoration discourse theory as measured in this study did not account for all of the defensive discourse offered by the Reagan Administration, particularly statements that appeared to reflect strategic ambiguity. The fact that image restoration discourse theory proved useful in categorizing the defensive discourse offered by the Administration after November 13, indicates such discourse aimed to protect the Administration's credibility, or symbolic assets. However, categories derived from image restoration discourse theory did not account for instances in which Administration officials spoke out against the official messages being disseminated, statements in which the accused accepted responsibility for the transgression, and for additional variants of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategy. The author proposed two categories to extend the theory to fully capture all of the discourse offered in this case study.

Statements reflecting ambiguity that were not covered by the image restoration discourse theory categories included refusals to comment and statements in which partial acknowledgement of the details of the transgression was provided. Refusals to comment were left unexplained, or justified in terms of protecting the safety of the hostages, or justified as being directed by superior order.

Image restoration discourse theory fails to account for instances in which members of the Administration spoke out against the official party line. On several occasions these representatives expressed explicit disapproval of the Iran initiative. At other times these people directly contradicted previous statements made by the President, and placed responsibility for the no comment stance on the White House.

Image restoration discourse theory also fails to account for instances in which the accused accepts responsibility for a transgression. In this case, the President accepted responsibility for the decision to ship arms to Iran, and for the resulting crisis.

The author contends that all of the unidentified strategies described in the preceding paragraphs represent potential shortcomings to image restoration discourse theory. The use of such strategies is not likely to be anomalous to presidential crisis and instead may represent common responses to more general crises. If this is the case, image restoration discourse theory requires modification. It has been established that strategic ambiguity is a response option for entities faced with a crisis, presidential or otherwise (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Tyler, 1997).

In summary, image restoration discourse theory did not account for ambiguous discourse, statements which spoke out against the Administration's official messages, or statements in which the President accepted responsibility for the transgression. Ambiguous statements included refusals to comment and partial acknowledgements of the Administration's actions.. Statements in which Administration representatives spoke out against the Administration included statements of disapproval of the arms deals, and statements which contradicted previously issued Administration claims.

The emergence of the three previously unidentified varieties of the reduction of offensiveness strategy represents less of a threat to the validity of the theory. Image restoration discourse theory's categorization scheme appears to allow for modification (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991). The authors relate a key insight that implies a certain degree of flexibility to image restoration discourse theory: "The general strategies for image restoration are useful for focusing the critic's attention, for guiding critical analysis of the discourse. Yet the strategies as actually embodied in the discourse remain more important than the abstract categories themselves" (Benoit, Gullifor & Panici, 1991, p. 291). Therefore, the three previously unidentified variants of the *reduction of offensiveness* identified in this study may be tentatively considered part of the suite of image restoration strategies described by image restoration discourse theory. If this is the case, only minor modification of the theory may be necessary. Further testing is required to determine if the appearance of these strategies was an anomaly, or if these strategies are commonly enacted in response to crisis and should be included in the image restoration discourse theory typology.

Criteria for Crisis Management Success

Image restoration discourse theory provides insight into some of the possible reasons for the Administration's failure to calm the crisis using defensive discourse. Image restoration discourse theory states three criteria will ideally be met for crisis communication efforts to repair damage to an organization's symbolic assets: (a) the rhetorical strategies employed are appropriate to the crisis threat, (b) the message strategies are subsequently embedded in discourse regarding the crisis, and (c) the response is persuasive (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). The Reagan Administration's use of rhetorical strategies was generally not appropriate and not persuasive. The Administration offered multiple discourse strategies which often conflicted with

each other. Indeed, several of the individual strategies employed were inappropriate response choices on their own terms.

The Administration's use of the *reduction of offensiveness* strategy appears appropriate given that Reagan and various members of his staff frequently acknowledged that the negotiations had taken place. Use of the *denial* strategy in conjunction with the *evasion of responsibility*, strategy may be considered an appropriate rhetorical strategy as well. However, the Administration's simultaneous use of these four strategies is not appropriate to this crisis. By offering all of these strategies at once, the Administration was asking its stakeholders to accept its claims that the transgression did not occur, while providing fragmented acknowledgement that it did. By the end of the crisis period, the Administration's choice of image restoration strategies was slightly more coherent—attempts to evade responsibility were discontinued while acknowledgement of the transgression increased—but Reagan still denied arms were traded for hostages, thus undermining his credibility.

In addition, several of the individual strategies offered were not appropriate on their own terms. The Reagan Administration's repeated attempts to illustrate that the initiative transcended hostage release efforts did not sway audiences. This fact is supported by an ABC poll which indicted the American public disapproved of the Iran initiative regardless of the strategic motivations ("Survey by ABC News," 1986, November 13; Taylor, 1986, November 21). Additionally, the Administration's claims of *transcendence* were refuted by foreign policy experts (Sciolino, 1986, November 20). Likewise, the use of the *attack the accuser* strategy directed at the press did not do anything to squelch press criticism. The enactment of the speaking out strategies, though perhaps appropriate for individual self-preservation, were not appropriate organizational responses if the goal was to present a coherent response.

The Administration's crisis communication response was not persuasive, neither to the public, Congress, or foreign governments. Attempts to minimize the quantity of arms shipped were quickly proven false (*Joint Hearings*, 100-9, 1987, Shultz testimony, p. 45, GPS-CHRONOLOGY-C, GPS-45; Wallison, 2003). ABC news polls taken after the President's national address and the President's news conference indicated that the American public did not believe his claims ("Survey by ABC News," 1986, November 13; "Survey by ABC News," 1986, November 19). News reports following both events indicated Congress did not believe Reagan either (Fuerbringer, 1986, November 14; Fuerbringer, 1986, November 20; Hoffman, 1986, November 14; Hoffman & Pincus, 1986, November 20; Weinraub, 1986, November 14).

Although many of the rhetorical strategies offered by the Administration were embedded in the public discourse, these messages were often contradictory. The fact that the Administration's messages were embedded in the discourse actually appeared to have exacerbated the crisis. This is due to the fact that these messages often contradicted each other and alerted stakeholders to the fact that they were being provided with incomplete and, at times, false information. In addition, multiple, conflicting messages that criticized the President and his Administration were reported in the press reports. Therefore, it is not likely that the fact that messages were embedded was of any aid to the Administration.

Implications and Future Research Questions

The Potential Applicability of Image Restoration Discourse Theory to Other Crises

Based on this analysis, image restoration discourse theory appears to be applicable to other cases of presidential crisis, though theoretical shortcomings may need to be addressed. Despite the fact that image restoration discourse theory does not account for all of the discourse strategies invoked in this case, the theory did categorize much of the Reagan Administration's defensive discourse. The theory helps to explain the priorities underlying the crisis response

efforts, the evolution of the Administration's defensive discourse over time, the complexity of the response offered by various units within the Administration, and the reasons for the failure outcome. As such, it seems likely that the theory may yield insight into the defensive discourse offered by other presidents in cases of crisis. Additional research will be required to make this assertion with validity.

At this time the author does not contend that image restoration discourse theory may be applied to more general political crises, though such a scenario may be likely. More general political crises, such as those related to political campaigns, political party malfeasance, or lower-level political crisis, may involve fundamentally different dynamics than this particular crisis. If future research addresses these issues though, image restoration discourse theory may prove to be applicable to a much wider-range of crises than has been the case so far.

To address the issues discussed above, the following research questions are posed for future consideration:

- Is image restoration discourse theory applicable to other cases of presidential crisis?
- Is image restoration discourse theory applicable to a wide-range of political crises?
- In what ways do presidential crises differ from more general political crises, and what effect do these differences have on the potential application of image restoration discourse theory?

Possible Theoretical Shortcomings

This analysis illustrates several theoretical shortcomings to image restoration discourse theory. The theory does not acknowledge the role of factual veracity in crisis communication effectiveness but simply claims an organization's crisis response must be believable to be effective. The theory does not differentiate between discourse offered honestly as a reflection of fact or operational concerns and discourse contrived simply to restore an image. This fact illustrates that the assumptions underlying image restoration discourse theory may be flawed.

The theory assumes communication is a goal-oriented activity utilized to address image threats. The fundamental finding of this case is that communication was utilized with the goal of preserving the operation, not image threats. Thus, not all crisis communication seeks to address image threats, and it is plausible that not all communication is goal-oriented.

To address these issues, the following research questions are posed for future consideration:

- What impact does factual veracity play on crisis communication outcomes?
- Are the assumptions underlying image restoration discourse theory flawed?

Image restoration discourse theory also suffers the shortcoming of not being exhaustive. The theory may require extension to fully categorize all defensive discourse offered in response to charges leveled at an organization in crisis. Although image restoration discourse theory as currently conceptualized did yield a great deal of insight into this case, it did not capture all of the discourse offered by the Administration in response to the charge that arms were traded for hostages. Future research is needed to determine whether the unidentified discourse strategies were endemic to this particular crisis, or whether these strategies are commonly offered in response to crises--presidential, political, or otherwise.

To address these issues, the following research questions are posed for future consideration:

- Are the unidentified strategies which appeared in the data anomalies, or are they common to other cases of presidential crisis?
- Are these strategies commonly offered responses to crises in general?
- Can the unidentified individual strategies be grouped into broader response categories?
- Are the no comment and acknowledgement strategies variants of strategic ambiguity?

Ambiguous Discourse

The Administration's crisis response was characterized by ambiguous discourse throughout the entire crisis. Even after the Administration began to enact various image restoration strategies, the response remained ambiguous. This is evidenced by the multiple refusals to comment, the repeated provisions of partial acknowledgement of their actions, the dissemination of half-truths, and the multiple contradictions voiced. This contention is supported by notes taken during the critical November 10 staff meeting which record President Reagan's views regarding disclosure thusly: "We should put out statement. . .but cannot get into q&a re hostages so as not to endanger them. . . .we must say something but not much" (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, p. 387-388).

In the realm of executive governance and foreign policy, presidents may be forced into engaging in ambiguous communications out of concern for national security or, as in this case, the continued viability of an unfavorable foreign policy operation. In describing a fundamental cause of foreign policy crises, Busby (1991) claims foreign crises will continue to occur as long as the disparity between national security concerns and public expectations is not resolved. In this case, the American public expected Reagan to both free the hostages and to act in accordance with his stated public policy, previous rhetoric, and legal constraints. Thus the public's expectation that Reagan free the hostages of Reagan were not compatible with his stated foreign policy of not negotiating with terrorists. Furthermore, the operation was not compatible with attempts to maintain credibility. The initiative violated stated public policy, and potentially, U.S. law. In attempting to meet all of these expectations, Reagan was forced to explain his actions ambiguously. There appears to have been no way for Reagan to free the hostages and simultaneously engage in behavior that would not violate other expectations placed on him. This

case illustrates both the necessity of engaging in strategic ambiguity and the dangers of basing a crisis communication response on such a strategy.

The environment in which President Reagan attempted to communicate a response to this crisis was complex. Because of a president's role as executive officer of the United States, a nation whose actions impact the entire globe, a presidential administration's actions impact and are impacted by, a diverse group of stakeholders. This was the case with Reagan and the Iran arms crisis. A comprehensive review of data generated during the crisis period indicated the Administration's stakeholders included the government of Iran, the hostages and negotiators, foreign governments around the globe, the American electorate, Congress, the domestic and foreign news media, and various departments and individuals within the Administration. These stakeholder groups can be sub-divided to greater levels of specificity. For example, Congress may be further sub-divided into Democrats and Republicans, and these groups could be divided into pro- and anti-Administration stakeholders. Iran could be further sub-divided into groups friendly, antagonistic, and ambivalent towards the United States.

Some scholars have challenged traditional recommendations regarding candor and openness. Eisenberg and Witten (1987) and Lyon and Cameron (2004) argue that in complex crisis environments open communication may harm an organization as they attempt to address the potentially disparate needs and values of a wide range of stakeholders. These authors advocate for the use of strategic ambiguity when responding to crisis in a complex environment in which different stakeholders have differing information needs .

Though the context and environment in which the Administration attempted to respond to the crisis may have required the use of ambiguous discourse, the strategy exacerbated the crisis. Throughout the crisis period the Administration was criticized by the press, the American public,

and Congress for its inability to provide an honest account of what had actually transpired. The ambiguous nature of the Administration's claims led many to doubt the explanations offered, thus damaging the Administration's credibility. Though the Administration blamed the press for threatening its credibility, all indications are that its representatives' inability to provide a coherent, believable account of their actions was the fundamental cause for the degradation of the Administration's credibility.

Future investigation of this case may determine the degree to which Administration representatives used ambiguity and candor in the crisis response. Once this is determined, researchers may gain insight into the causes of success or failure outcomes of this case.

This case raises several issues about the use of ambiguous discourse:

- In what other cases has the tension between public expectations regarding presidential behavior and national security concerns led other administrations to respond to crisis with ambiguity?
- How can a president reconcile the disparity between public expectations and national security concerns without relying on ambiguity?
- How may a president, or other crisis managers, determine whether it is in their best interests to engage in ambiguous discourse or to fully disclose their actions?
- Can unfavorable foreign policy operations be explained in unambiguous terms without jeopardizing the operations themselves?

The Potential for Managing Presidential Crises from the Relational Perspective

This case illustrates the danger of wholly ignoring relational concerns when managing crisis. It also raises questions about the potential applicability of the relational crisis management perspective to presidential crises. It is impossible to know whether the Reagan Administration would have managed the crisis more effectively if stakeholder relationships were prioritized over symbolic or operational concerns. Given national security considerations, it is uncertain whether the relational perspective is an appropriate management tool for presidential crises. However, the

crisis impacted multiple stakeholder groups which in turn negatively impacted the ability of the Administration to govern and carry out its political agenda in the remaining years of the Reagan presidency. Broadly delineated, these stakeholder groups included foreign allies, Congress, the press, and the American public. These groups exerted considerable pressure on the Administration and were highly critical of its actions. Though at least one member of the Administration publicly proclaimed the importance of maintaining relationships with Congress, the press, allies abroad, there is no indication that this mindset influenced the crisis management process.

The first set of questions raised regards the possibility of applying a relational management approach to presidential crisis:

- Have president's prioritized stakeholder relationships in crisis in other cases?
- What barriers inherent in presidential politics may inhibit the prioritization of stakeholder relationships amidst crisis?
- Given national security concerns inherent in presidential crisis, is the relational management perspective applicable to presidential crisis?
- In cases where ambiguity is required, can a president and his Administration actually attend to stakeholders' informational needs?

This case also raises questions regarding the potential impact of the relational management approach on American politics and the electorate:

- What would be the impact on American politics if the relational management perspective was a widely adopted crisis response measure?
- Does the adoption of the relational management approach to presidential crisis hold the potential to repair the American electorate's loss of faith in government which has resulted from the numerous presidential crises which have occurred since Watergate?
- Can the relational crisis management approach potentially ease friction between the executive and legislative branches of government?
- Can this approach improve relations between the press and the president in crisis?

- Can the adoption of a relational management approach improve a president's ability to enact his or her agenda after the crisis subsides?
- By enacting a relational crisis management approach, is it possible that a president may actually turn a crisis into an opportunity?

The Perils of Ignoring Crisis Threats

This case illustrates the potential perils of prioritizing operational concerns and ignoring the onset of crisis. The Administration prioritized the viability of the Iran initiative over crisis management strategies well after the crisis surfaced. Initially the crisis was all but ignored. Administration representatives failed to recognize the potential damage the crisis could cause the administration and instead attempted to maintain the initiative. Criticism of the Administration's actions increased exponentially throughout the crisis, yet at the November 10 staff meeting Poindexter incorrectly assessed that press interest had peaked and that interest in the story would soon die (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-41A, CWW-28). He was proven wrong as press interest in the story continued to increase throughout the crisis period and on through the progression of the Iran-Contra scandal.

When assessing actions taken in historical context, one must be careful not to impose present understandings of the situation on past contexts. From the author's current vantage point with the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that the crisis threatened substantial damage to the Reagan presidency. It cannot be assumed that Administration officials should have recognized the severity of the threat. But, the documentary record indicates the threat was recognized by at least two members of the Administration. Soon after the crisis emerged, Reagan's Secretary of State and Communications Director warned the President of the grave danger the crisis presented. They urged the President to acknowledge the extremity of the crisis, and to fully disclose the details of the Administration's actions (*Joint Hearings*, 100-8, 1987, GPS-35; *Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, DTR-42). Yet these concerns went unheeded. By the time the

Administration attempted to formally respond to the crisis, the crisis had grown. Its representatives were forced to do so in a hostile environment in which their critics had substantial amounts of time to state their case against the Administration.

Additional Questions Raised by this Case

This case is especially rich and may offer insight into a wide variety of crisis communication concepts. Although some of these questions are related to the current study, it is beyond the scope of this research project to address them. It is hoped that future communications scholars will revisit this case to explore these questions.

Which staged models of crisis development best describe this case in the broader context of the Iran-Contra scandal? Various crisis communication scholars conceptualize the development of crisis situations in terms of sequential stages (Coombs, 1999; Fink, 1986; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005). An analysis of this case indicates it was the initial crisis which spawned a much larger crisis. It would be interesting to see how this progression is explained, or defies explanation, under the three- and four-stage models presented in the literature. Such an analysis may determine whether the crisis period analyzed by this study – when considered in the context of Iran-Contra – is actually part of the pre-crisis phase described by a three-stage model, if the period is better explained by Fink's (1986) four-stage model, or if a new model must be proposed.

What role did the Reagan Administration's organizational culture play in failure to manage this crisis effectively? An organization's culture has been argued to be a critical factor in effective crisis communication response (Belcher, 1995; Coombs, 1999; Fink, 1986; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005; Haney, 1998; Kauffman, 2005; Lauzen & Dozier 1994; Marra, 1998; Mitroff, 1988; Penrose, 2000; Wise, 2003). Some authors characterize organizational culture as either authoritarian or participative (Lauzen & Dozier, 1994), whereas others discuss culture in

terms of either facilitating or inhibiting the transfer of information in an organization (Coombs, 1999; Marra, 1998; Penrose, 2000). Haney (1998) described organizational culture in the specific context of presidential administrations and outlined three types of models of group structures: formalistic, competitive, and collegial. The author characterizes the Reagan Administration structure as collegial, and therefore prone to group think.

Busby (1999) and Wallison (2003) both argued that the Reagan Administration's organizational culture contributed to its inability to calm the Iran arms crisis. Wallison (2003) portrayed Reagan as disengaged from his staff and uninterested in the specifics of their activities. The results in this case show that the infighting and internal rivalries led to public contradiction and undermining of the President.

Future research could provide detailed analysis of the Administration's organizational culture and the effect this culture had in this particular case. Once established, understanding about the role of organizational culture in the outcome of this crisis could be compared to past crises managed by the Reagan Administration to hone in on the factors that contributed to the failure outcome in this case. Then, similar cases involving a President, a crisis, and his Administration's organizational culture could be compared to this one to see if any patterns in success or failure outcomes emerge.

Did this crisis present opportunities for the Reagan Administration? Although crises are generally characterized as threats, several authors discuss the potential for positive outcomes from crisis (Fink, 1986; Penrose, 2000; Seeger 2002; Sturges 1994; Ulmer 2001; Ulmer & Sellnow 2002; Ziaukas, 2001). Penrose (2000) contends that if crisis managers view the situation as presenting opportunities, they will have a greater likelihood of effectively managing the crisis. This crisis has been discussed primarily as a threat to the Administration, but there is some

indication that members of the Administration viewed the situation as an opportunity. For example, Chief of Staff Regan wrote, “when we can tell the story, the American public will appreciate the efforts of this president to get American hostages released” (Pincus, 1986, November 10). Later testimony indicates the optimism with which Regan viewed the crisis, “I thought all we had to do was get out the facts” (*Joint Hearings*, 100-10, 1987, Regan testimony, p. 57). As such, it may be worthwhile to investigate the potential for positive outcome and opportunity inherent in this case, as well as what role the optimism held by the Administration played in the failure outcomes of the Administration’s crisis communication efforts. Additionally, if crises can be viewed as opportunities, and given that the relational approach to public relations entails relationship development, and does crisis present opportunities for forging new organization-stakeholder relationships?

What role did crisis communication plans, or the lack thereof, play in this case?

Would planning have increased the chances of crisis management success? Draper (1991) noted that there were no plans in place to deal with disclosures of the Administration’s negotiations with Iran. Authors proposing traditional approaches to crisis management often recommend the development of crisis management plans. Future research could investigate the role the lack of planning played in the failure of the Administration to manage this crisis.

Did the Administration’s defensive discourse squash the rally round the flag effect?

The rally round the flag effect predicts foreign policy crises will often inspire a surge of public support for a president (Brody & Shapiro, 1989; Busby, 1999; Callaghan & Virtanen, 1993; Norrande & Wilcox, 1993; Allen, O’Loughlin, Jaspersen & Sullivan, 1994). The Iran arms crisis produced no such (Brody & Shapiro, 1989).

As described by Allen, O’Loughlin, Jasperson and Sullivan (1994) the rally phenomenon generally develops as follows. Initially, the White House controls relevant information about the crisis. Lacking their own information, opposition elites tend to abstain from publicly disagreeing with the President. Due to a lack of elite criticism the general public perceives that elites support the President. In the absence of elite criticism, journalists tend to convey the Administration’s messages. The public then consumes only favorable information the Administration, and public support for the President increases.

Some authors see the absence of elite criticism of a president as the key factor leading to the enactment of the rally phenomenon.(Brody & Shapiro,1989; Callaghan & Virtanen, 1993; Allen, O’Loughlin, Jasperson & Sullivan, 1994). Some see the emergence of public nationalism another driver of the rally effect (Callaghan & Virtanen, 1993). None of these authors explicitly discuss the role of the Administration’s crisis communication on the rally effect, though it seems intuitive that the rhetoric offered in crisis will be directly related to elite criticism of the Administration.

Future research should investigate the interplay between the Reagan Administration’s defensive discourse and the rally effect.

- What role did the Administration’s choice of image restoration strategies play in the failure of the Administration to inspire a rally of support?
- In what ways did the Administration’s choice of discourse inspire elite criticism, thus negating the rally effect?
- Does it appear that different discourse decisions could have decreased elite criticism, thus inspiring the rally? Does the potential for a rally indicate a potential for positive outcome during a political crisis?

Several authors contend American public memories of the Iran hostage crisis of 1979, and Watergate constrained the Reagan Administration’s ability to respond to the Iran arms crisis (Schudson, 1992, 2004; Busby, 1999; Wallison, 2003). As such, a comparative analysis of the

use of image restoration strategies in by the Reagan, Carter, and Nixon administrations is suggested as a future research project. This analysis should focus specifically on the Iran arms crisis of 1986, the crisis resulting from Carter's failed attempt free the hostages militarily in 1980, and Watergate. Because of the constraints the crises occurring during the Nixon and Carter presidencies placed on the Reagan Administration, it will be worthwhile to compare and contrast the three crises to see if broad insights regarding Presidential crisis communication emerge. The following question is thus posed: what insights about Presidential crisis communication will comparative analyses of the use of image restoration strategies by the Reagan, Carter, and Nixon Administrations yield?

Conclusion

Two priorities guided the Reagan Administration's response to the Iran arms crisis. The initial priority was the continued viability of the Iran initiative, the root of the crisis. Once threats to the Administration's credibility reached a critical level, the Administration's priority became the restoration of its credibility. Instead of restoring its credibility by modifying its actions, attending to the needs of its stakeholders, or honestly explaining its actions, the Administration sought to use multiple image restoration strategies to restore its credibility. Thus, the Administration sought to address threats to its credibility by projecting an image.

The current study illustrates that crisis communication theory developed by communication scholars may provide insight into presidential crises. Such insight can augment political science theory, providing richer understanding of presidential crisis than would be possible if these cases were analyzed solely from the perspective of political science. Thus, this study illustrates that communication scholarship has relevance outside the bounds of the field of communications studies. Further testing of image restoration discourse theory is necessary to account for the potential theoretical shortcomings identified during the course of this study. If

image restoration discourse theory is to be applied to presidential crisis, the theory must account for ambiguous discourse and the other unidentified discourse strategies encountered in this case.

This study illustrates the role of ambiguous discourse in presidential crisis. In crisis, presidents may be forced to use ambiguous discourse strategies in order to both address national security concerns and the public's desire that a president honestly, and completely, explain the actions of his or her Administration. Because "the public" is not a homogenous group of persons, but a highly diverse group of stakeholders with differing interests and values, presidents may also be forced into an ambiguous rhetorical stance as they attempt to navigate the complex environments in which presidential crises occur. Further complicating the situation is the fact that the global impact of the United States means presidential crises may affect an even larger, more diverse collection of stakeholders worldwide.

As the United States' global impact increases, as the worldwide media environment becomes increasingly connected, and as information more easily crosses international and ideological boundaries, political communicators must understand the factors that affect the success of presidential crisis communication. These communicators must understand the difficulties inherent in attempting to balancing national security considerations with stakeholders' demands for transparency. Though crisis communication cannot prevent the transgressions themselves that spawn crises, skilled communicators should be able to prevent crisis communication itself from exacerbating crisis situations.

APPENDIX A
TABLES

Table A-1. Typology of image restoration strategies

Strategy	Key Characteristics		Example
Denial	Simple denial	Did not perform act	Did not trade arms for hostages
	Shift the blame	Another performed act	Other countries shipped large quantities of arms, not U.S.
Evasion of responsibility	Provocation	Responded to act of another	Arms shipped to Iran in response to Soviet encroachment in the region
	Defeasibility	Lack of information/ability	State Department was unaware of details of the Iran initiative
	Accident	Mishap	Arms shipped to Iran by accident
	Good intentions	Meant well	Administration actions guided by good intentions
Reducing offensiveness of event	Bolstering	stress good traits	Arms negotiations had favorable outcomes
	Minimization	Act is not serious	A miniscule amount of arms was shipped
	Differentiation	Act is less offensive	We were not negotiating with the hostage takers
	Transcendence	More important values	The goal of the initiative was developing a strategic relationship with Iran, not arms for hostages trade
	Attack accuser	Reduce accuser's credibility	Press reports of the Iran initiative are based on rumor and speculation
	Compensation	Reimburse victim	Persons harmed by the initiative will be compensated
Corrective Action	Plan to solve/prevent recurrence of problem		No more arms will be shipped to Iran; the responsible parties have resigned
Mortification	Apologize		The Administration apologizes for violating foreign policy

Source: Zhang, J. & Benoit, W.L. (2004). Message strategies of Saudi Arabia's image restoration campaign after 9/11. *Public Relations Review*, 30, 161-167.

Table A-2. Typology of stakeholder theory-based rhetorical strategies

Strategy	Example
Statement of concern for organization-stakeholder relationship	The United States' relationship with Iran is important
Statement of concern for STK group	Public discussion may harm hostages
Identification of stakeholder groups	Congress is one of the Administration's stakeholder groups
Prioritization stakeholder groups	Our priority is meeting the information needs of Congress

Table A-8. Statements Made by the Individual Members of the Reagan Administration
 Indicating a Prioritization of Symbolic Concerns

STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO	statements of concern for Administration credibility	statements indicating a symbolic management approach
REAGAN ADMINISTRATION IN TOTAL	B	X
WHITE HOUSE	B	X
President Reagan	B	X
Chief of Staff Regan	O	X
Communications Director Buchanan	O	
anonymous White House sources	X	X
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL STAFF	B	
National Security Director Poindexter	B	
STATE DEPARTMENT	O	
Secretary of State Shultz	O	
	X = strategy invoked publicly	
	O = strategy invoked in internal documentation	
	B = strategy invoked both publicly and internally	

APPENDIX B
FIGURES

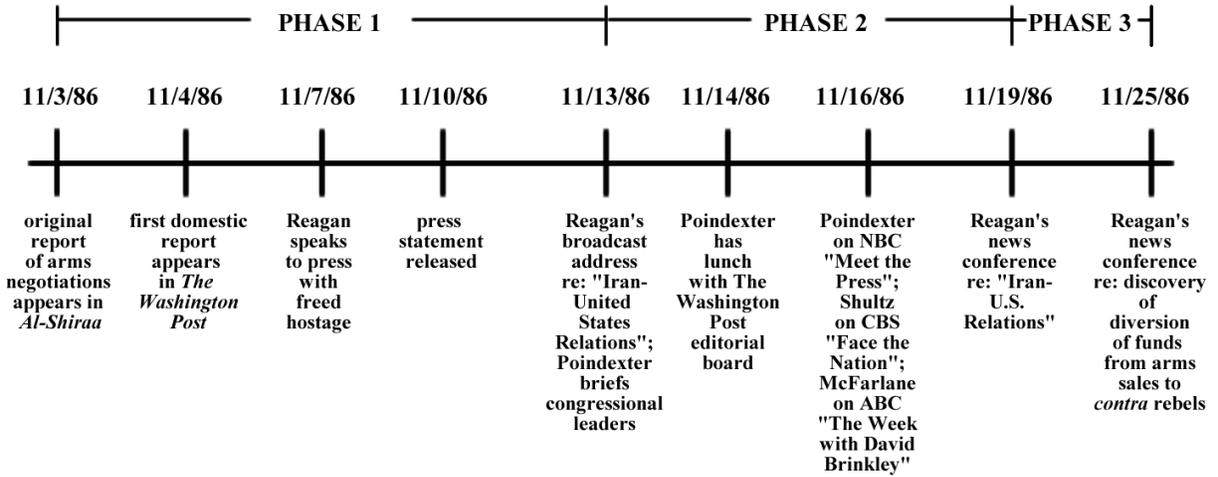


Figure B-1. Timeline of events in the Reagan Administration's crisis response

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jesse Daniel Rigby earned a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications in 1994. In 2001 he was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Sciences from the University of Florida College of Natural Resources and Environment in 2001. This thesis projects marks the completion of the author's graduate studies in mass communications. He was awarded a Master of Arts in Mass Communication from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications in August 2007.

The author's interest in this case originated shortly after Iran-Contra erupted. One evening while watching the network news, his mother pointed at the television and said, "Ollie's in trouble." Rigby's father, a retired United States Marine Corps officer, attended basic officer training with Oliver North in 1968. The two Marines were awarded with leadership roles while in training, and left for Viet Nam a month apart. They remained acquaintances and colleagues throughout the following decade.