

RS#06: Source 5 – Oliver North Email to John Poindexter, August 23, 1986

The following source is an internal email sent by Oliver North to President Reagan’s national security advisor, John Poindexter, describing a meeting with Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian dictator who trafficked drugs into the United States during the 1980s.

Examine this historical source and summarize the information it provides. Does the source support a view of Oliver North as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw?

NOTE FROM: Oliver North
Subject: Iran

NICARAGUA: You will recall that over the years Manuel Noriega in Panama and I have developed a fairly good relationship...Last night Noriega called and asked if I would meet with a man he trusts...He flew in this morning and he outlined Noriega’s Proposal: In exchange for a promise from us to “help clean up his (Noriega’s) “image” and a commitment to lift our ban on FMS sales to the Panamanian Defense Force [and he would]...undertake to “take care of” the Sandinista leadership for us. I told the messenger that such actions were forbidden by our laws and he countered that Noriega had numerous assets in place in Nicaragua that could accomplish many things that would be essential and that after all, Noriega had help us with the operation last year that resulted in the EPS arsenal explosion and fire in Managua and that without many more of these kinds of actions, a contradictory was out of the question. I thanked the emissary for his message and told him that we would get back to him. The emissary told me that I should go directly to Noriega if there were any messages back, that his instructions were limited to delivering the message to me. I have checked with our friends who ran the Managua Op and they now inform me (but had not at the time) that they did indeed use a Panamanian civilian ordnance expert as the means of access to the storage facility. Interesting, my sense is that this is a potentially very useful avenue, but one which would have to be very carefully handled. A meeting with Noriega could not held on his turf –the potential for recording the meeting is too great...Noriega travels frequently to Europe this time of year and a meeting could be arranged to coincide with one my other trips. My sense is that this offer is sincere, that Noriega does indeed have the capabilities proffered...we might have available a very effective, very secure means of doing some of the things which must be done if the Nicaragua project is going to succeed....