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Police gave the following account of Friday's fire: After an argument with Barbara Thoma, George Thoma Jr. started a fire at 7 p.m. in Sabrina Hart's bedroom on the second floor of the house and left. Minutes later, the rest of the family discovered the fire and went to a nearby grocery store, where they called for help. While they were walking back to the house, George Thoma Jr. tried to run them over with his car.

North made plans to call martial law

By ALPONSO CHARDY
Of Our Washington Bureau
WASHINGTON — Lt. Col. Oliver North helped draft a plan in 1984 to impose martial law in the United States in event of an emergency, inspiring a sharp protest by then-Attorney General William French Smith, according to government officials.



President Reagan's National Security Council until his dismissal last November, begins long-awaited testimony Tuesday before the Senate and House Iran-Contra committees.

The secret plan called for suspension of the Constitution, turning control of the government over to the little-known Federal Emergency Management Agency, appointment of military commanders to run state and local governments and the declaration of martial law in the event of such a crisis as nuclear war, violent and widespread internal dissent or national opposition to a U.S. military invasion abroad.

Investigators now believe that from 1983 to 1986 North's office, in the Old Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House, was the heart of an informal secret structure involved in far more than the sale of arms to Iran and the funding of the undercover war in Nicaragua.

North's influence within the secret structure was so great, the sources said, that he was able to have the orbits of sophisticated surveillance satellites altered to follow Soviet ships around the world, call for the launching of high-flying spy aircraft on secret missions over Cuba and Nicaragua and become involved in sensitive domestic activities.

Some of Reagan's closest friends and advisers, including former national security adviser William Clark, the late CIA Director William Casey and Attorney General Edwin Meese, were part of that informal secret structure, according to several congressional investigators and government officials who released the information on the condition they remain anonymous.

North's involvement in a proposal to radically alter American government by executive order in a time of crisis is evidence that he was involved in a wide range of secret activities, foreign and domestic, far beyond the Iran-Contra affair, according to the officials.

Arthur Liman, the chief counsel of the Senate Iran-Contra committee, has declared in an unreleased memo that North was at the center of what amounted to a "secret government-within-a-government."

North wrote prior to the current hearings that he expected to show that "a policy decision was made at the highest levels" to transfer U.S. support of the Nicaraguan Contra rebels to the NSC, where North operated. Thus, Liman wrote, "we favor examining how that decision was implemented."

"This is the part of the story that reveals the whole secret government-within-a-government, operated from the Executive Office Building by a lieutenant colonel, with its own army, air force, diplomatic agents, intelligence operatives and appropriations capacity," Liman wrote.

North helped draft the plan to impose martial law while serving as the NSC's liaison to FEMA, an executive agency with responsibility for the government's management of national crises.

Alarmed at the plan, Attorney General Smith dispatched a letter to William McFarlane, North's NSC boss at the time. The Aug. 2, 1984, letter expressed fear that FEMA was establishing itself as an "emergency czar."

"I believe that the role assigned to FEMA in the revised Executive Order exceeds its proper function as a coordinating agency for emergency preparedness," Smith wrote. "This department and others have repeatedly raised serious policy and legal objections to the creation of an 'emergency czar' role for FEMA."

The contingency plan was being written as part of an executive order or legislative package that Reagan would sign and hold until the NSC until such time as a severe crisis arose, an administration official said. It is not known whether Reagan signed the plan.

Officials consulted for this article — members of the CIA, State Department and Pentagon — said they do not have a full record yet of the secret government.

The White House has rejected Liman's notion of a secret government.

The News-Sentinel

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Update Nation

Man accused of setting fire to occupied house

By TAREK HAMADA

A man allegedly set a house on fire with five people inside, and when they escaped, tried to run them over with a car.

The family discovered the fire and went to a nearby grocery store, where they called for help.

Police gave the following account of Friday's fire: After an argument with Barbara Thoma, George Thoma Jr. started the fire at 7:57 p.m. in Sabrina Hart's bedroom on the second floor of the house and left.

He's in the Court County Jail, \$10,000 bond. He also is charged with driving without a license and obstructing car registration papers.

In December, the family lost a child in the 500 block of Walnut Street when one of the children playing with a disposable lighter started a fire. Sabrina Hart was rescued by firefighters after a 15-minute search. Dr. Rick Sobushinski said her lying in a crib.



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