

Terry Waite and Ollie North: The Untold Story of the Kidnapping and the Release



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Six months after Terry Waite had been taken hostage I was in Washington doing the rounds. The visit took in the State Department, countless think tanks where former Administration officials reside in exile and those anonymous companies beyond the Beltway where erstwhile Pentagon and Intelligence officials turn former access into profit. Through these revolving doors of influence I sought information on what had befallen the envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The intention was to make a film for BBC Panorama but the omens were inauspicious. Waite had disappeared into the black hole of Beirut. By I

987 most Western governments had severed their links with the Western part of the Lebanese capital. What fragments of information emerged amounted to little more than rumour. The American Administration like its predecessor had nearly been brought down by the issue of hostages. By the summer after Waite's capture, hostages had been relegated to the back file. Initiatives were dead-buried by the revelation that the Reagan Administration had traded arms for hostages. The accepted wisdom was that hostages paid few political dividends. A silence had fallen on official Washington with no one seeming to know whether Terry Waite was dead or alive. I was concluding yet another fruitless conversation with a senior Administration official who had only seen me reluctantly when he said: Our treatment of Waite was shameful. Why? I asked with some surprise. Go ask Ollie North, he said with a rueful smile and without elaboration. North, that the time was the star witness of the Congressional enquiry into what had become known as the Iran-

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