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Over the last two years, global attention has been focused on several crisis areas: the Balkans, the Middle East, and Somalia. With the exception of the Cambodian political transition, East Asia has been largely overlooked. But as 1993 came to a close, an increasingly tense standoff over inspection of North Korea's nuclear program has raised concern about the possibility of a new major Asian war. Against this strategic backdrop, Peter Woolley's essay on the future of Japan's armed forces is particularly timely. Woolley draws attention to the significant change in Japanese defence policy since 1991: Japan's willingness to deploy military forces overseas, under United Nations auspices, for the first time since the Second World War. Such deployments remain controversial, however, and the author suggests that Japan will continue to take a cautious, incremental approach to international military engagement. A major crisis or war on the nearby Asian mainland, however, could alter that anticipated pattern.

With the Reagan/Bush era over, the tempests of that period have ceased to make headlines and are becoming grist for historians. But, as Elizabeth Anderson points out, the Iran-Contra affair has contemporary relevance. By assessing the operation against clearly delineated criteria for successful covert action, she demonstrates in a convincing manner that the Iran-Contra operation failed because it broke all of the rules. By illuminating the Iran-Contra recipe for disaster, Anderson has demonstrated yet again what historians have always known: that there is as much (or more) to be learned from failure as from success. In doing so, she has done future covert action planners a great service.

As Stephen Blank's article points out, covert action by the Contras in Nicaragua was not the decisive factor in resolving that Central American crisis. Rather, he suggests that it was the Soviet Union's success in forging a new relationship with the United States, and in defining a new approach to third world conflicts. This allowed the Soviet Union to disengage from military and economic commitments to an area of marginal value to it, while retaining sufficient influence to play a role in conflict resolution there, as an accepted partner with the United States. The reasons for these changes are explored in detail in the article.

The opinions expressed in the articles, reviews and other contributions are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily represent those of the Centre for Conflict Studies or the University of New Brunswick.
