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Nation/World

Bush asked Honduras to aid Contras

WASHINGTON (AP) - A document in the hands of Iran-Contra prosecutors indicates George Bush asked President Jose Azcona Hoyo of Honduras in 1986 to help secretly move guns to the Nicaraguan Contras, and assured him "it can be done with deniability."

It has been known that then-President Reagan made his vice president an emissary to Honduras in 1985 and 1986. But what hasn't been known is that Mr. Bush's mission in 1986 was specifically to get Mr. Azcona to "assure a supplied front" that

allowed military equipment and other material to reach the U.S.-backed Contras in their battle with the leftist Nicaraguan government.

That message was written on a note card titled "Special Talking Points-Azcona" summarizing the instructions Reagan administration officials gave Mr. Bush.

The memo shows that Mr. Bush, who has publicly maintained he was "out of the loop" for all of the Iran-Contra scandal, was deeply involved in the Reagan administration's effort to find secret ways to help the Contras

militarily after Congress banned such help. Iran-Contra prosecutors have had the document for years and questioned Mr. Bush about it extensively when they took his sworn deposition on Jan. 11, 1988. But its existence was not known publicly until Mr. Bush released a transcript of the deposition five days before he left office.

At the time of Mr. Bush's meeting with Mr. Azcona, Congress had banned U.S. military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. But it was later learned that White House aide Oliver North had been operating a clandestine

with secret network

time arms pipeline to the Contras through Honduras - a key element of the Iran-Contra scandal.

Mr. Bush has denied knowing about Mr. North's resupply operation until it was exposed. And the document which came to light this month does not contradict him.

In the deposition, prosecutors quote directly from the card.
"We, President Reagan and I, hope we can work very quietly and discreetly with you. It (the resupply network) can be done with deniability," the card said.

Mr. Bush told prosecutors that he didn't recall the card with the talking points, although "I can't deny I received" it.

He said he had several conversations with Mr. Azcona during the trip to Honduras, and acknowledged that he could have discussed resupplying the Contras.

He also defended the message he was to deliver.
"I don't think that I should be prohibited from telling a guy that I'd like to see him help somebody else," Mr. Bush told investigators.

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