

Bush gives new version of role in hostages deal

Final (M-10/3) 92

RACINE, Wis. (AP) - President Bush on Friday denied that a new indictment on the Iran-Contra affair contained a "smoking gun" on his role.

Still, in comments on "Larry King Live," the president offered a somewhat different version of his role in a January 1986 meeting at which an arms-for-hostages deal was discussed.

Mr. Bush was asked by Mr. King whether he at the time understood that the deal under consideration involved trading arms to Iran for the release of U.S. hostages.

"In retrospect, perhaps," Mr. Bush said.

A new indictment of former Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger on Friday contradicted Mr. Bush's claim he never knew that arms were being traded for hostages or that two Cabinet members were opposed to the deal.

A memo from Mr. Weinberger said

that Mr. Bush was at a December 1986 meeting at which the arms-for-hostages deal was discussed, and that the then-vice president supported the deal.

Mr. Bush said Friday night that he realized that Mr. Weinberger and then Secretary of State George Shultz opposed the deal, but he said as vice president "I supported the president."

Mr. King asked Mr. Bush flat-out if he supported an arms-for-hostage deal in January 1986, nearly a year before the December 1986 session at which he said he received his first full briefing.

"Yes, and may I put this in perspective," Mr. Bush said.

Mr. Bush said the January meeting was on the question of "shipping the arms... Yes, if the hostages came out, fine."