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Deborah Tyroler

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## **Administration Spokespersons Refuse To Comment On Whereabouts Of Contra Training In U.S. Territory**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Nov. 20, the WASHINGTON POST reported that some 70 contra military officers are currently engaged in a six-week training course "somewhere" in the United States. At a press briefing the same day, White House spokesman Larry Speakes was asked to confirm whether the contras were being trained in US territory. Speakes said he had "nothing to comment." State Department spokesman Charles Redman was equally non-committal. In response to a similar question, he said, "As we've said before, we can't comment on operational questions such as where, by whom, training is being conducted, how aid shipments will be delivered. The most I could say is that those US government agencies charged by the President with implementing the Congressionally approved assistance to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance have begun to exercise that authority." Finally, Robert Sims, Department of Defense spokesman, told reporters he had nothing to say about contra training in the United States. When asked if he was aware of "any formalized training of the contras anywhere, by anyone," Sims responded that such was not a subject to be discussed "here," and that he had nothing on the topic. The spokesman then told the reporters to refer to the congressional bill approving assistance for the contras. He said that in terms of how the aid would be administered, what equipment is involved, and whether training "would be a part of that package, where it occurs," and who "might do it," the Pentagon had no details. Sims pointed out that the Department of Defense would not be charge of such programs. A frustrated reporter then asked that if the Department of Defense was not in charge of training the contras, "who else would?" Sims responded by once again referring the journalists to the legislation describing the aid program and appropriations. He added that he thought the leadership in discussing the aid program is "in the State Department." In its Oct. 27 edition, the WASHINGTON POST reported that the US government was seeking a suitable site to train the contras inside US territory, and preferably far from population centers which would provide possible protestors. Citing informed sources, CBS News reported on Oct. 27 that the Pentagon had plans to secretly train contras at the Eglund Air Force base in Florida, although the plan had not yet been formally approved. Other sites mentioned include Fort Bragg, Homestead Air Force Base, and Puerto Rico.

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