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WHITE HOUSE, CIA WON'T CONFIRM EXISTENCE OF COMMITTEE ON COVERT ACTION
WASHINGTON

A White House official said he could not confirm a published report Sunday that said the Reagan administration has set up a secret committee to coordinate U.S. covert military activities around the world.

The committee was activated in recent months in part to make sure the White House and State Department, rather than the CIA, have the ultimate control over U.S. secret diplomacy, the Washington Post said in Sunday's editions.

White House spokesman Ed Djerejian said Saturday night he had no information about the alleged committee. "I haven't heard of it before," he said in a telephone interview.

The committee, sometimes calling itself the "208 Committee" because it meets in room 208 of the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House, keeps track of a variety of local conflicts worldwide where U.S. and Soviet interests clash, the newspaper said.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson also said she could not confirm the existence of the 208 Committee.

The Post said the CIA's annual budget for secret military operations far exceeds \$500 million, a figure higher than at any time since the Vietnam War.

U.S. covert involvement in third-world struggles has been part of the nation's foreign policy for many years. Such operations under the Reagan administration have been reported in Afghanistan, Nicaragua and other countries.

The most recent target of the 208 Committee has been the Libyan government of Col. Moammar Khadafy, the Post report said.