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Memo Suggests Gates Knew More About Aid to Contras

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WASHINGTON — An internal White House memo indicates that Robert Gates, President Reagan's nominee for Central Intelligence Agency director, may have known more about the private Contra supply network than he has indicated in Senate hearings.

The memo, included in the Tower Commission report, was written last summer by then-National Security Adviser John Poindexter. It describes a conversation with Mr. Gates regarding the phasing out of the private supply network.

Former National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver North had been lobbying for the CIA to buy millions of dollars in assets held by the private network. In response, Adm. Poindexter mentioned his talk with Mr. Gates, then deputy CIA director. "I did tell Gates that I thought the private effort should be phased out," Adm. Poindexter wrote to Lt. Col. North. "Please talk to (CIA Director William) Casey about this. I agree with you."

The memo is certain to be raised by senators when hearings resume on Mr. Gates's nomination next week. In appearances this month, Mr. Gates has said that he knew very little about the private network and in fact avoided information on its operations because of the congressionally imposed limits on CIA involvement with the insurgents.