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EXCERPTED

WOODRUFF: All right. Let me turn now to Central America. Ah, the administration, of course, has repeatedly denied that these Americans who were killed in this helicopter incident in, ah, Nicaragua were CIA. And yet the, the helicopter apparently took off from an American landing strip, ah, in Honduras. They apparently had had contact with the American embassies in Honduras and El Salvador. At least there are reports to that effect. What was the U.S. role in endorsing the mission of these men, these mercenaries, if that's what they were? MCFARLANE: Judy,

the United States neither sponsored nor condoned nor endorsed, as you put it, the private effort that was taken on this past weekend. The, ah, Defense, State departments and CIA have looked exhaustively at any history of association with these private citizens and haven't found any. You make a point about their having been in touch with the embassy there. As best we can tell, the questions of the embassy in Honduras early this year concerned how they could be in touch with, ah, governmental officials there about providing assistance. We pointed them, as we would to any American citizen, to the local officials. But we surely didn't endorse nor approve nor make possible this kind of effort.

WOODRUFF: Well, now it turns out that they were in the process of, of transferring arms that they obtained apparently in this country to the, ah, rebel groups in Nicaragua, ah, and, ah, the government-supported groups in El Salvador. Do we, is that the sort of activity that we condone? I mean, we're now investigating to see whether they broke the law in doing this. MCFARLANE: Well, I think there are three points to be made here. First of all, I don't believe, as nearly as I can tell, no one says nor has evidence that there was any ordinance or munitions ever transferred by these people. I have heard reports about clothing, ah, other nonordinance kinds of things. Secondly, I think you'll recall that when the United States, ah, was prevented by the Congress from providing any further assistance in this program area that you could expect the United States to lose influence with the parties. And they will naturally turn elsewhere, to third countries, to other Latin American countries. But I think one thing that's being missed here is this. I've seen reports today that the people involved, indeed there were casualties in this episode, were Cubans. Now if we're gonna talk about foreign presence and violence, it's curious to me that no one has pointed out that the Cubans were there. Why?

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WOODRUFF: But... MCFARLANE: What possible justification?

WOODRUFF: Well, whether it was or wasn't, are you saying the administration, it's all right with the administration for this sort of activity to continue? MCFARLANE: No, I don't. In fact, I said earlier just the opposite, that we do not condone, encourage, endorse nor facilitate this kind of thing. I'm simply pointing out that when we are prevented from exercising control over whatever happens down there by a cutoff of our funds that one can expect the people involved to go elsewhere. And this kind of thing can happen, but it surely is not with the encouragement of the U.S. government.