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# CIA agent ordered to cover up — counsel

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**A** A former CIA station chief in Costa Rica was ordered to help cover up funding efforts for the Nicaraguan resistance, according to a memo written by Iran-Contra investigative committee Chief Counsel Arthur Liman.

**A** Joseph Fernandez — alias Tomas Castillo — is the first agency operative to appear before the hearings and the first Iran-Contra witness scheduled to appear in secret session. He was scheduled to give closed testimony this morning.

Mr. Fernandez ran the CIA office in Costa Rica until his recall to headquarters in January during the Iran-Contra probe.

**A** Mr. Liman, in a secret memo written before the congressional hearings began four weeks ago, wrote: "The [Chief of Station/Costa Rica], we believe, was told not to file official reports — although we believe that [CIA Director William] Casey knew."

"The State Department was told to keep its nose out of it — and so was the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]. Congress was given nothing but denials," Mr. Liman said.

In the memo, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Times, Mr. Liman does not identify who told Mr. Fernandez not to file official reports or who told the State Department to "keep its nose out of it."

When the memo was written, Mr. Liman conceded that some of Mr. Fernandez' testimony might need to be taken in closed session. That was an issue, he said, "we would expect to resolve satisfactorily with the intelligence agencies."

He wrote that Mr. Fernandez' tes-

timony, along with that of other intelligence agency officials, "reveals the whole secret government-within-a-government operated from the [Old Executive Office Building] by a lieutenant colonel, with its own Army, Air Force, diplomatic agents, intelligence operatives and appropriations capacity."

**A** Mr. Fernandez could show "that the whole operation was conducted secretly and with a cover of deniability," Mr. Liman wrote.

**A** Last week, Robert Owen, who was Lt. Col. Oliver North's courier in Central America, testified that Mr. Fernandez was his CIA contact in the region, beginning in August 1985.

Mr. Owen said in that month he went to Costa Rica to scout for locations to build an airstrip where private donations to the Contras could be landed. He said Mr. Fernandez showed him possible sites, loaned him a camera to photograph the area and helped him create a cover story that the strip would be used for an agricultural project.

The meeting took place while the CIA was banned from helping the Contras under the congressional Boland Amendment.

According to Mr. Owen, Mr. Fernandez, along with Ambassador to Costa Rica Lewis Tambo, worked with Col. North in helping the resistance develop a southern front.

Mr. Fernandez was part of the network of persons linked by encryption devices through which Col. North sent coded messages from Washington on operating the Contra supply chain, according to retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, who testified earlier in the hearings.

According to published accounts, Mr. Fernandez has recanted earlier

statements implicating CIA superiors in Col. North's arms network. Earlier this year Mr. Fernandez told investigators that at least three other agency officials, including **A** Clair E. George, deputy director of operations who is the agency's top covert operations official, knew of his work for Col. North.

**A** Alan D. Fiers, head of the agency's Central America task force, and **A** Duane Clarridge, a CIA counterterrorism expert, also were implicated by Mr. Fernandez.

But sources said Mr. Fernandez has since changed his account, saying he had no direct knowledge of the involvement of others.

That retraction reportedly leaves the Iran-Contra panel with no firsthand evidence that anyone in the CIA other than Mr. Casey, who died May 5, knew of Col. North's operation.

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