

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Did Bush know U.S. helped arm narcos?

Israeli weapons found at a Colombian drug lord's ranch can be traced back to White House decisions.

Last Aug. 25, this news service broke the story that Israeli Col. Yair Klein (ret.) was working with former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams in a covert operation to topple Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega. Klein was training a mercenary anti-Noriega force led by Col. Eduardo Herrera, who was on the payroll of the CIA, we reported. Herrera is now the chief of police in the U.S.-installed Panamanian government.

Earlier this year, a cache of Israeli weapons was found at a ranch owned by Colombia's cocaine cartel kingpin Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha. Those weapons have been traced back to Klein, who purchased them for Herrera's anti-Noriega forces.

Elliott Abrams provided the funds that paid for the weapons. According to a U.S. General Accounting Office report, Abrams improperly diverted \$1 million from monies stolen from Panama by the administration under the International Emergency Economic Act and the National Emergencies Act. Those economic sanctions were first adopted by the Reagan administration in March 1988, and renewed by President George Bush in March 1989.

Some of the Panamanian funds were used to establish an account to support a fictitious "government of Panama" headed by former Panamanian President Eric Delvalle, operating out of Coconut Grove, Florida. Using this fictitious entity, the White House conducted money to its cronies and financed the covert operations ordered by both Reagan and Bush against Panama and Noriega.

John Zagame, former aide to Re-

publican Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), was involved in arranging for the Israelis' participation. In a Jan. 23 interview with the *Washington Times*, Zagame said that, for a "significant" amount of money, the government of Israel provided a consultant for Herrera. "What we got was a very detailed intelligence-military-political blueprint on what to do to destabilize and oust General Noriega," said Zagame, who was hired as an adviser to the Panamanians in the spring of 1989, with the Panamanian funds conducted through Delvalle.

At that time, Zagame was sharing an office in Alexandria, Virginia with Bond and Donatelli, another consulting firm owned by cronies of the administration that was also the beneficiary of the administration's largesse with the Panamanian funds. Partner Richard Bond was Vice President George Bush's deputy chief of staff and deputy chairman of the Republican Party, while William Donatelli was the political director of the Reagan White House.

Besides Herrera's forces, Klein also trained killer squads for the Colombian cocaine cartels and the Nicaraguan Contras. Abrams was one of the chief architects of the drugs-for-arms Contra policy.

During the 1988 congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra scandal, Abrams admitted that he had lied to Congress. He also said that he had received high marks for his performance from his superior, Secretary of State George Shultz.

The discovery that the weapons, bought through an operation sanctioned by the government of the Unit-

ed States for Herrera and his CIA-sponsored forces, ended up in the hands of one of the world's top cocaine traffickers, shows that the administration was not and is not conducting a war on drugs, but a war for drugs.

An estimated 7,000 people have been murdered in Colombia this year in the campaign of terror launched by the cocaine cartels, with the ultimate aim of forcing the legalization of drugs. Much of that killing has been done with arms provided through U.S. covert programs, such as the Klein-Herrera operation.

Colombia's narco-terrorists possess sophisticated equipment that is supposed to be available only to elite U.S. units, such as infrared nightscopes. These weapons are not generally available on the international black market. So, where do they get them?

In the spring of 1989, when Klein sought to move his Spearhead, Ltd. mercenary training school to Antigua, because Colombian authorities were going to put him in jail for training the narcos' killer squads, the CIA told Antiguan officials they had no objections. Antigua's former defense chief, Clyde Walker, consulted the local CIA agent, Robert Hogan, and the CIA station chief for the Eastern Caribbean, Robert Kenning, then at the U.S. embassy in Barbados. Kenning told Walker that Klein's school "appears to be all right."

This April, when it became public that the weapons Klein and his partner, Maurice Sarfati, had obtained for Herrera had been passed along to Rodríguez Gacha, U.S. chargé d'affaires Roger Gamble complained to Wilfred Jacobs, Antigua's governor-general, that publicity about the case was "embarrassing the American government," and it should stop, according to an Antiguan official.