

CIA Inspector General confirms Bush-North ties to cocaine Contras

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The long-awaited declassified report of the Central Intelligence Agency's Inspector General, "Allegations of Connections Between CIA and the Contras in Cocaine Trafficking to the United States, Volume II: The Contra Story," provides a devastating roadmap of Contra links to major Colombian drug-trafficking organizations. It thoroughly vindicates *EIR*'s September 1996 *Special Report*, "Would a President Bob Dole Prosecute Drug Super-Kingpin George Bush?" That report charged George Bush, Oliver North, Richard Secord et al. with racketeering conspiracy, for their role in fostering the 1980s cocaine epidemic on America's streets.

The CIA study is not a comprehensive exposé of cocaine trafficking by the Contras and their backers. But, in tackling even the limited mandate, to review evidence in the CIA's files, the Inspector General corroborated the essential thesis of the *EIR Special Report*: That George Bush and Oliver North oversaw a guns-for-drugs pipeline between Ibero-America and the United States to finance the Contra war in Central America.

If there was ever a case of "high crimes and misdemeanors" committed by a serving Vice President and President, it was the cocaine Contra program, run by George Bush under Executive Order 12333 and National Security Decision Directives 2 and 3, which placed Bush in charge of all Reagan administration covert operations in Central America and around the globe.

Top to bottom

The Inspector General's report establishes that every component of the Contra program was penetrated and heavily contaminated by the cocaine cartels.

- The Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) operated on the "southern front" out of bases in Costa Rica. The CIA received credible evidence that five leading officials of ARDE were "engaged in a drug-trafficking conspiracy with a known narcotics trafficker, Jorge Morales." Although the allegations prompted the CIA to cut off official contact with ARDE in October 1984, the IG found that four of the five ARDE traffickers remained in working contact with the CIA through 1987. The CIA received credible information that 16

other individuals, involved in support activities for ARDE, were linked to drug cartels.

- The 15th of September Legion was the military arm of the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ADREN), one of the first of the "Contra" organizations, founded by Enrique Bermúdez in 1980. ADREN merged into the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) in September 1981. At the time, according to CIA records, ADREN "decided to engage in drug trafficking to the United States to raise funds for its activities." The 15th of September Legion eventually split off as a separate military operation, which, according to CIA field reports, continued to be financed by drug trafficking into the United States, kidnapping, extortion, and robbery.

- The FDN remained the principal Contra organization operating on the "northern front," out of bases in Honduras. According to the IG, the CIA received information and/or allegations that nine Contra figures in the northern front operations were linked to drug trafficking. An additional five people were identified in CIA reports as drug linked, who were involved in northern front support operations.

- The Ilopango Air Base in El Salvador was a major supply center for Contra units backed by the CIA, and by what the IG report referred to as the "Private Benefactor Program," the White House-based covert support operation, linked to Oliver North, Vice President George Bush, and Bush-man Felix Rodriguez (a.k.a. Max Gomez). According to the IG, the CIA received information in 1985, 1986, and 1989 that drug traffickers were using Hangars 4 and 5 at the base. These hangars were staging areas, supply depots, and parking areas for the Contra supply programs of both the CIA and the Private Benefactors Program.

- The CIA received information that 14 pilots involved in supply runs for the Contras were linked to drug trafficking; and, three companies "that were used to support Contra activities from 1984 until at least 1988," were also tied to Colombian narcotics-trafficking organizations.

The southern front Contras

The bulk of the IG report consists of a series of incident reports, identifying the cocaine and marijuana trafficking alle-

gations against the Contra operatives and supporters.

In the case of the southern front Contras, headed by Eden Pastora, the CIA received information in October 1984 that “senior ARDE officials, including several of Pastora’s close associates—Adolfo Chamorro, Carol Prado, and Gerardo Durán—had established a working relationship with a Miami-based drug trafficker. . . . Adolfo Chamorro—Pastora’s second-in-command—had just consummated a ‘mutual assistance agreement’ with a Miami-based narcotics trafficker. . . . The trafficker ‘promised to pay ARDE \$200,000 per month once the narcotics operations were under way.’ ”

A follow-up cable to CIA headquarters, also dated October 1984, identified the Miami-based trafficker as Jorge Morales. Gerardo Durán was identified as one of the ARDE pilots, who was also on the payroll of Morales.

By November 1984, the CIA had established that ARDE head Eden Pastora had travelled to Miami, along with Adolfo Chamorro and Roberto Chamorro, to meet with Morales and to further the ties between ARDE and Morales’s drug-trafficking organization. An October 1982 CIA cable to headquarters had already taken note of a meeting in Costa Rica involving Contra leaders, including Pastora, to discuss gun-for-drugs trafficking between the United States and Central America.

Reports of Pastora’s links to Colombian drug-cartel figures continued to arrive at CIA headquarters during 1985-87. An April 1985 cable reported that Alpa Airlines, a private charter company, was smuggling cocaine into the United States, hidden in yucca shipments. One of the owners of Alpa was Gerardo Durán.

During 1985-87, César Rodríguez, a Colombian drug trafficker, was identified as a source of funds to the ARDE. On July 31, 1987, Alan Fiers, the chief of the CIA’s Central American Task Force (CATF), testified to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. He told the Senators, “We have a significant body of evidence with regard to involvement of the former members of ARDE in the Southern Front—Pastora’s people being directly involved in cocaine trafficking to the United States.”

The CIA file on ARDE identified Adolfo Chamorro as the point-man for the dealings with Morales. According to the IG report, “Adolfo Chamorro had been instrumental in making the arrangement for drug trafficker Jorge Morales to supply monetary support and aircraft in exchange for the use of FRS pilots. Chamorro reportedly set up a bank account in Miami through which money from Morales could be transferred to FRS/ARDE.”

Another ARDE official identified in the IG report as linked to Colombian drug cartels was Mario Antonio Aguado, a former Sandinista pilot who defected to the Contras and became Pastora’s personal pilot until he was transferred to Ilopango Air Base, along with 15 other ARDE pilots. Enrique Miranda Jaime, a convicted drug trafficker, identified Aguado

as an associate of Norwin Meneses, a major California-based cocaine trafficker whose bankrolling of the Contras was the subject of a *San Jose Mercury News* serial exposé in August 1996. According to the IG report, Miranda claimed that “Aguado flew weapons to Medellín, Colombia, during the 1980s and returned with cocaine that he stored at Ilopango.” Although the IG report states that the CIA was unable to corroborate the charges, it does note that, in briefings to Congress, Fiers named Aguado as a member of the cocaine-trafficking team inside ARDE.

Octavio César was another leading ARDE official identified in the CIA report as an associate of Cuban-American cocaine trafficker Jorge Morales. In April 1987, César was interviewed by the CIA Office of Security concerning his ties to Morales and Marcos Aguado. Following the interview, on May 4, 1987, Alan Fiers informed Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams that the CIA was convinced that César was tied to narcotics trafficking. Abrams was, at the time, a member of the Restricted Inter-Agency Group (RIG) in charge of Central America, along with Oliver North.

Another important drug link to ARDE was described by the IG report as centering around René Corvo, a Cuban-American veteran of the Bay of Pigs, who created a small paramilitary group of Cubans and Nicaraguans to work with Pastora’s ARDE on the southern front.

A December 1984 cable to CIA headquarters was described by the IG: “René Corvo’s unit was supported by Frank Castro and Corvo might be involved in drug trafficking by Castro. According to a December 1984 cable to Headquarters, Frank Castro reportedly was installing, or attempting to install, a cocaine-processing laboratory in northern Costa Rica and was exploiting widespread paramilitary activities in northernmost Costa Rica as a cover for drug trafficking. Reportedly Frank Castro sent his middleman to Costa Rica to purchase a ranch with a landing strip. Corvo was reportedly involved with Frank Castro and his middleman in this operation, and Corvo had traveled to Colombia shortly after returning to Costa Rica from Miami in November 1984, with the implication that the travel may have been drug-related. Further, Cuban-Americans supporting the Contra movement resented the alleged use of military activities as a cover for drug trafficking and feared that discovery and public exposure of the alleged drug trafficking would discredit Cuban-Americans and the insurgency in general.”

The IG report noted that in August 1985, CIA headquarters was informed that a clandestine landing strip in Guanacaste Province was being investigated by Costa Rican Narcotics Division, and that the ranch was linked to two ARDE officials, Fernando Chamorro and José Robelo Ortiz, both of whom were associates of Corvo.

ARDE pilot Carlos Alberto Amador was also identified as a regular trafficker of cocaine, using Ilopango Air Base Hangar 4. In April 1986, the CIA received this information

from the Drug Enforcement Administration; it noted: “DEA source stated that Amador was probably picking up cocaine in San Salvador to fly to Grand Cayman and then to south Florida.”

A CIA officer, who apparently was on the ground at Ilopango, responded defensively to the DEA allegations against Amador in his own April 1986 cable, which asserted that “the only thing Amador . . . transported during these flights [from Ilopango in late 1984] was military supplies. [It has been] reported that Amador did fly into Ilopango several times during 1985 in light twin engine aircraft on trips from [the U.S.] to either Costa Rica or Panama. [There were suspicions that] . . . Amador was involved with narcotics.” Nevertheless, the cable from the unnamed CIA officer stated that he “would appreciate Station advising [DEA] not to make inquiries to anyone re Hangar no. 4 at Ilopango since only legitimate . . . support operations were conducted from this facility.”

Good golly, it’s Ollie

When the CIA officer in question was interviewed by investigators from the IG office, he acknowledged that “another entity conducted operations from Hangar 4. He says he is not certain about the nature or affiliation of that entity, but surmises it may have been associated either with Oliver North, the Private Benefactors, or the Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office (NHAO).”

In fact, as the final report of Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh indicated, the NHAO program and the Private Benefactors operation were “virtually indistinguishable.” The CIA’s Fiers referred to the North-Secord air crews as “NHAO by day, private benefactors by night.” This meant, Walsh says, that “a U.S. government program unwittingly provided cover to a private covert operation.”

While the on-the-ground CIA man was clearly scrambling to cover for the North operations at Ilopango, CIA headquarters had a more ominous comment on Amador in a June 1986 memo, which reads, in part, “In April 1986, Amador, described as a former ARDE member, flew a Cessna 402 from Costa Rica to San Salvador where Amador has access to Hangar no. 4. It is believed that Amador was picking up cocaine in San Salvador to fly to Grand Cayman and then to south Florida. Amador has a valid Salvadoran government I.D. that allows Amador to operate freely in that country.”

Moises Nuñez was another ARDE affiliate suspected by the CIA of drug trafficking. A Cuban-American, Nuñez was a part owner and/or senior manager of a number of companies employed by the State Department-housed, but North-run NHAO. The companies, including Productos Del Atlantico, Ocean Hunter/Mr. Shrimp, and Frigorificos De Puntarenas, were the subject of investigation by the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee chaired by John Kerry (D-Mass.), which published detailed evidence of Contra cocaine links in a 1989 public report.

According to the IG report, “On March 25, 1987, CIA questioned Nuñez about narcotics trafficking allegations against him. Nuñez revealed that since 1985, he had engaged in a clandestine relationship with the National Security Council (NSC). Nuñez refused to elaborate on the nature of these actions, but indicated it was difficult to answer questions relating to his involvement in narcotics trafficking because of the specific tasks he had performed at the direction of the NSC. Nuñez refused to identify the NSC officials with whom he had been involved.”

Later, in response to written questions from the Office of Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh about Nuñez, CATF Chief Fiers wrote, “My recollection is that because of the NSC connection and the possibility that this could be somehow connected to the Private Benefactor program (otherwise known as the Iran-Contra affair) a decision was made not to pursue this matter, but rather to turn it over to Judge Walsh.” Judge Walsh’s mandate did not include any investigation of Contra cocaine-trafficking.

EO 12333 and the Contra drug-running cover-up

by Edward Spannaus

Executive Order 12333, entitled “United States Intelligence Activities,” and signed by President Reagan on Dec. 4, 1981, has been characterized by Lyndon LaRouche and *EIR* as the charter of the “secret government” established by Vice President George Bush in the early years of the Reagan-Bush administration.

EO 12333 designated the National Security Council as “the highest Executive Branch entity” for review, guidance, and direction of *all* foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and covert operations — effectively putting the NSC in charge of the CIA, military intelligence, and special operations. And, for the first time, it permitted covert operations to be assigned to the NSC staff. It also permitted U.S. intelligence agencies to enter into secret contracts for services with “private companies or institutions” — thus paving the way for the privatization of intelligence operations.

Under other National Security Decision Directives and Executive Orders, George Bush gradually took control of the “crisis management” structure and counter-terrorism programs, so that within a few years, he had effective control over all intelligence and covert operations of the U.S. government, whether run through “official” or private channels.

Now, yet another element of the damage wrought by