

Uproar builds over CIA role in drugs

by Carlos Wesley

Bush administration officials have recently been dashing off irate letters to the editors of several newspapers trying to deny the undeniable: that the Central Intelligence Agency—the agency that gave us George Bush—has been working with drug traffickers in Ibero-America.

One of those letters was sent on July 18 to George Joseph, editor of *The Nation*, a weekly newspaper published in the Caribbean country of Antigua. The letter, signed by Ann S. Syrett, acting chargée d'affaires of the United States embassy there, was in response to an article reprinted from the June 29 issue of *EIR*. The *EIR* investigative report traced how a shipment of Israeli weapons, purchased by Israeli Reserve Col. Yair Klein for a group of anti-Noriega mercenaries working for the CIA under Col. Eduardo Herrera, now chief of police in the U.S.-installed government of Panama, ended up on the ranch of Colombian drug kingpin Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha.

Because Israel initially claimed that the hundreds of weapons involved had been purchased for Antigua's 90-man security force, the Antigua government was forced to launch an investigation, and hearings were held.

The Nation's coverage of the *EIR* report appeared as the hearings were getting under way. The exposé also caused *The Nation*, which doubled its run for the occasion, to sell out as soon as it hit the stands.

CIA covers its tracks

In her letter to the editor, Syrett said, "It is with great disappointment that I read the lead article in the July 13th issue of *The Nation*, which alleged U.S. government—specifically Central Intelligence Agency—involvement in aiding Colombian narco-terrorists. In response to these charges, the CIA's Office of Public Affairs has issued the following statement: 'Allegations that the CIA provided arms to the Colombian drug cartel in exchange for financial support for the Contras are absolute nonsense. Such allegations are ludicrous.' "

In its rush to control the damage stemming from *EIR's* revelations, the CIA denied accusations no one had made—"that the CIA provided arms to the Colombian drug cartel in exchange for financial support for the Contras."

Syrett went on to say: "I would also note that the source of *The Nation* article, the *Executive Intelligence Review*, does not enjoy credibility in Washington or in any professional circles."

This view was not shared by "professional circles" in nearby Barbados. An article on the gun-running hearings published there on July 17 by the daily *Nation* (no connection to the Antiguan paper of the same name), noted: "*Executive Intelligence Review*, a Washington, D.C.-based publication, has added a new element to the entire equation, claiming in recent publications that the weapons were in fact intended to train anti-Noriega forces, as the United States sought to remove the Panamanian leader it accused of running drugs into the United States."

Charges of U.S. involvement in the arms diversion were also reported by the July 16 *Los Angeles Times*. "The U.S. government has shown a clear lack of interest in clarifying this scandal," the *Times* quoted an Antiguan official. "We have a good trail here that can actually be followed and perhaps open other trails to the narco-trafficker, yet it is not being pursued. Why?" The unnamed official, who also charged Israel with "dragging its heels" in the investigations, suggested an answer. "Is this just the tip of the iceberg?" he asked. "Where there other shipments? What else are they trying to cover up?"

Commenting on the embassy's letter, Antiguan editor George Joseph said July 19, "*EIR* circulates all over the world." He noted that his newspaper published *EIR's* report together with corroborating reports from other publications, including *Newsweek*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, all of which the embassy considers "reputable. So if they are correct, *EIR* has got to be correct," he said.

'Baseless allegations'?

The July 18 *Washington Post* also carried a letter from the CIA, in response to an article on July 16 reporting that official documents from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration show that the CIA provided protection for Mexican drug traffickers complicit in the 1985 torture and murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena!

Those are "baseless allegations," complained Joseph DeTrani, the CIA's director of Public Affairs. DeTrani denied claims in the *Post* that the CIA: ever used Mexico to train Nicaraguan Contras or Guatemalan guerrillas; ever used Mexican drug traffickers as a conduit for support to the Contras; or ever knew about the drug traffickers' monitoring of the DEA and did not inform the DEA.

DeTrani said: "We want to emphasize once again in the strongest possible terms that the CIA neither engages in nor condones drug trafficking. Nor did the agency participate in any coverup of the Camarena case."

But that's not how the DEA sees it, reported the *Post* article. According to DEA sources, the Mexican cartel that murdered Camarena in February 1985 "operated until then with virtual impunity—not only because it was in league with Mexico's powerful Federal Security Directorate (DFS), but because it believed its activities were secretly sanctioned by the CIA."