

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

More dope under U.S. occupation

If Noriega was the kingpin that Bush claims, why has drug trafficking increased, now that he's in prison?

Against the lies retailed by the establishment's liberal media and the Bush administration, *EIR* has been insisting that the Dec. 20 invasion of Panama was not really to fight drugs, but to make Panama safe for drug traffickers."

That's what this columnist wrote in March of last year. It was true then. It's even more true now.

U.S. administration officials admitted to Congress on April 17 that drug-related activities in Panama have "picked up to the level that existed" just before the invasion. That admission by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Michael Kozak is, if anything, an understatement.

According to the *Los Angeles Times* April 28, the levels of drug trafficking "in some cases exceed" what existed during the government of Gen. Manuel Noriega, and officials "say the trend is sharply upward and includes serious movements by the Colombian cartels into areas largely ignored under Noriega."

Those new areas, say U.S. embassy, military and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officials, include:

- The establishment of cocaine production facilities. "One U.S. military source said there are at least eight cocaine production plants in the jungle of Darién province that borders Colombia."

That is a new development. As the *Times* notes, "At the height of Noriega's rule, the Colombian drug bosses were unable to maintain production laboratories in Panama," because Noriega would not allow it. Now, "it has gotten so bad that there is even a small

cocaine lab in Paitilla," the *Times* reports, referring to Panama City's most exclusive neighborhood.

In fact, as this columnist has reported, the only cocaine laboratory set up in Panama previously, was *dismantled* by Noriega soon after he assumed command of Panama's Defense Forces (PDF) in 1984. That lab was installed in Darién by the Medellín Cartel with the approval of Noriega's predecessor at the PDF, Gen. Rubén Darío Paredes, a protégé of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Even after Paredes's role in drug trafficking was discovered, Kissinger and his business partners, Lawrence Eagleburger, who is Bush's undersecretary of state, and Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser, continued to defend him and to blame Noriega, despite the fact that U.S. drug enforcement officials had repeatedly said that Noriega was the best ally of the U.S. in the war against drugs in Ibero-America. Eagleburger, Scowcroft, and Kissinger all played key roles in shaping the Bush administration decision to invade Panama and to install partners of the drug cartels as the government.

- There has been a marked increase in drug consumption in Panama, particularly among high school and even elementary school children, which was unknown before the invasion.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "the retail sale and use of narcotics in Panama" is "more extensive now than under Noriega" and there is now "virtually open sale of cocaine in some of Panama City's busiest down-

town streets and the barely concealed use of drugs in bars and nightclubs, including several frequented by American military personnel."

- Traffickers "move their drugs freely into and out of the country," the article says. "The use of Panama as a way station for the shipment of drugs to North America and Europe has sharply increased in recent months . . . and is measured in tons and valued in millions of dollars."

- Foreign banks are laundering drug money, says the *Times*, quoting a U.S. drug enforcement agent: "If this isn't stopped . . . we are faced with hundreds of millions of dollars, even billions, clearing through through Panama banks and it will be almost impossible to trace them."

Although U.S.-installed President Guillermo Endara, most of his cabinet, his Attorney General, and members of Panama's Supreme Court are linked to drug-money laundering banks, U.S. officials told the *Times* "There is no evidence Endara is personally involved, but he has been naive in his private business and some of his associates are certainly questionable."

So who gets blamed for this increased drug trafficking? Certainly not the "naive" Endara, the corpulent U.S. puppet President, who is also known as "Sweetbread" and "Honey Bun"; nor Second Vice President Guillermo "Billy" Ford, a drug banker whom Eagleburger calls "my close personal friend." And most certainly not U.S. Ambassador Deane Hinton, who makes most major decisions of the Panamanian government.

There's only one person left to blame, and that's Noriega: "Noriega himself is still directing the drug operations in Panama" by telephone from his Miami jail cell, claims former police chief Ibrahim Asvat, who is loyal to First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderón. |