
Interview: Félix Jiménez

If properly informed, the people of Puerto Rico will support the radar

Mr. Jiménez is the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent in charge of the Caribbean region, which has its headquarters in Puerto Rico. He was interviewed on Nov. 28, 1995, at the DEA offices in San Juan, Puerto Rico, by Iván Gutiérrez del Arroyo. The interview has been translated from Spanish.

EIR: In the context of President Clinton's war on drugs, what is the strategic value of the anti-drug radar which is planned to be built in Puerto Rico?

Jiménez: The radar in Puerto Rico will complement two other radars which are functioning in Virginia and Texas. The Puerto Rican one will be the radar which would cover the producing area, where coca is harvested and cocaine is processed, with the final destination of the United States via the Caribbean. . . .

EIR: If the installation is blocked, what will be the effect with respect to drug trafficking on the island and to the United States?

Jiménez: Radar is an instrument which is going to aid our cause and mission, which is to stop these international drug-trafficking organizations, whose aim is to introduce drugs into the United States. The radar is definitely going to be a help, because we will be able to identify suspicious planes, and also we will develop intelligence which will help us in the not-too-distant future, to be able to identify the points of operations of these organizations in South America. And, if the radar can be established in Puerto Rico, we would have a piece of the puzzle which we are missing.

EIR: Is the island the best place to install the radar?

Jiménez: Based on the studies I know, there can be no doubt that Puerto Rico would be the most strategic point. This radar is in two phases: the transmitter on the island of Vieques and the receiver in the village of Lajas, and there had to be a certain distance between the two.

EIR: I would like to discuss with you the general campaign against drugs in Puerto Rico. Has the island been turned into one of the major drug-money-laundering centers?

Jiménez: Puerto Rico definitely is a bridge for drugs and

money; the island is being used to bring money from the United States into South America. At present, the traffickers use many different mechanisms: Huge amounts of money have been captured in the international San Juan Airport coming from Santo Domingo, New York, the Caribbean islands.

In Santo Domingo, the criminal organizations are using the major exchange houses to move this money. Later, this money returns to Puerto Rico on its way northward or southward. Puerto Rico is not only a cocaine bridge from south to north, but also a bridge for money derived from drug trafficking, from the United States to Puerto Rico, and, finally, to South America.

EIR: When President Clinton spoke at the United Nations, he named a series of entities and companies which launder drug money in Colombia. Do any of these companies work on the island?

Jiménez: We have identified a number of organizations which not only work in Puerto Rico, but in the Caribbean. These organized-crime groups are in contact with financial organizations, such as banks or exchange houses, to launder their money.

EIR: Do the DEA and other governmental organizations have the capacity to detect the laundering of money on a large scale here in Puerto Rico?

Jiménez: Keep in mind that Puerto Rico is part of the United States, and the banks here have to follow regulations. These traffickers and these criminal organizations prefer to use banks which are outside the control of the United States, because those banks are not regulated by the Internal Revenue Service, by certain federal laws which the [U.S.] banks have to comply with concerning deposits and monetary transactions. Once this money leaves the United States, it no longer has to comply with federal regulations, and, then, it is easier to be laundered and arrive already clean in Colombia. . . .

The focus of money laundering is the Dominican Republic. Let's not look at [the banks in] Puerto Rico as foreign banks; the banks here have to follow federal regulations. And so, the traffickers use Puerto Rico because Puerto Rico is a bridge with access to the north and the south. Why? Because of the facilities and the numbers of flights that exist between

the United States and Puerto Rico, and from Puerto Rico to South America.

EIR: In Puerto Rico, is a lot of money laundered through the building of shopping centers and other kinds of investments?

Jiménez: These kinds of transactions used to be done earlier in the 1970s when the major Colombian organizations started to accumulate huge amounts of money, and then, they would invest this cash in the United States. The problem was that the laws of the United States changed, and then, we—the federal agencies—were given the authority to confiscate all the properties which we could identify that were the products of a drug-trafficking transaction. And so we were able to confiscate a number of shopping centers, banks, organizations, hotels, urban developments, houses, cars, yachts, planes, etc., which we were able to identify as having originated from cocaine to money, money to a bank, bank to another bank, and bank to a loan to a trafficker, who then invested it and knew that this money came from drugs.

In these kinds of cases, the individual, and not the government, has to prove where the money came from.

EIR: People complain that the authorities never arrest the big fish, the executives who neither consume nor sell drugs. Is this assertion valid?

Jiménez: This complaint, which you hear as a reporter, I hear as the chief of the agency here in Puerto Rico. The problem is not that we don't know "who's who," but that we need sufficient evidence to be able to take a case to court and be able to convince a jury that this person is guilty of some charges or crimes. And this is our mission: to investigate to the point that we can arrest someone and that this person can be convicted of the crimes he is accused of. We do not arrest him nor suggest to the prosecutor that arrest warrants be sworn out, when the case could fall apart in court for lack of evidence. When the cases collapse in court, they are disastrous for the agency and the society. . . .

It is a question of time; these people fall, but it takes time. The big families of the cartel have all fallen. Here in Puerto Rico, bankers are being arrested, who are laundering money, countless persons are being arrested. . . .

EIR: Some legislators and politicians, such as Carlos Romero Barcelo, the Resident Commissioner in Washington, D.C.; Sen. Vélez Barlucea; and the president of the College of Engineers, have mentioned that drug traffickers are financing the campaigns against the radar.

Jiménez: I have no knowledge of this. I have heard these rumors that the drug traffickers are financing all of these organizations, but I have no evidence that it is so.

In my opinion, I believe that the Puerto Rican people are not correctly informed about the functions and capacity of this radar, and that is what has to be done. I think that when the Puerto Rican people get a clear explanation of what this

radar is going to do, and how it works, and what its environmental impact is, they will give 100% backing to it, because the drug problem has reached our family and it has to be stopped in some way. We have to unite in order to carry out a hand-to-hand fight against these people, including using radar.

EIR: What percentage of crime is linked to drug trafficking?

Jiménez: I would say that 90% or slightly more of the crime in the island and the United States is linked to drugs. . . .

EIR: In Puerto Rico, articles have already appeared in the press proposing the legalization of drugs because the war on drugs has been a failure. How do you in the DEA view this proposal?

Jiménez: The DEA is totally opposed to the legalization of drugs. I am going to answer your question with another question: What drugs would be the ones to be legalized—cocaine, heroin? What age would be the average age for a person to consume this legally? If these drugs were legalized, do you think that crime would be reduced? These are the questions that the people have to ask, because then all the means that exist at the present time to report crime, maintain statistics on crime, and keep a barometer of where we stand with crime would all go out the window.

These people propose that legalization would regulate the drug trade, but they don't say how it would do it. . . . These persons propose, as an example, the legalization of alcohol, but alcohol, although it is a drug, is an almost inoffensive drug. What we are talking about is cocaine, a drug which turns [people] violent because it is a stimulant. Heroin, if used with alcohol, has a powerful impact, which would cause some incredible results in this society. The personality of individuals would drastically change and the incidence of crime would double or triple.

Today we have controls so that people don't use drugs, and look at the crime rate we have. Just imagine if people were authorized by law to use drugs. It would be devastating. It is easy to talk about decriminalizing drugs, but how will it be enforced? . . .

EIR: Have you had important successes in Puerto Rico against drug trafficking in the last few years?

Jiménez: Definitely. We are hitting hard and relentlessly at the organizations that use Puerto Rico as a bridge and are trafficking here in Puerto Rico. . . . The federal and state agencies are working jointly against the organizations of international drug trafficking. . . . I feel absolutely optimistic about this battle and I will not rest for a moment until these organizations are put out of circulation. This has been my mission from my first day on the job. I feel very positive because I understand that we can do a great work in penetrating these organizations and destroying them, and I am convinced that we are going to do it.