

Did Bush's CIA run drugs from Colombia?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Reports have recently appeared in the Panamanian daily newspaper *La Prensa* about an operation run by the CIA, code-named "Watch Tower," through which the CIA and the Israeli Mossad allegedly helped run over 70 plane-loads of cocaine from Colombia to the United States in 1975 and 1976, overlapping the time when George Bush was the Director of Central Intelligence (1976-77).

The U.S. government has denied that any such program existed, but the publication of the story, first on July 17 and again on the eve of the Miami trial of Gen. Manuel Noriega, raises nagging questions. For one thing, the operation allegedly involved several people who later played a role in the Iran-Contra shenanigans, amid growing demands for clarification of Bush's role in that scandal.

In a word: Where was George?

EIR has recently obtained hundreds of pages of documents relating to Operation Watch Tower and to the 1979 murder trial of U.S. Army Green Beret Pfc. William Tyree, and is presently investigating the authenticity of the claims of covert CIA-Mossad dope smuggling.

Mysterious deaths

Two documents are at the center of the Watch Tower controversy. The first is an affidavit dated March 11, 1980, signed by Edward P. Cutolo, who was at the time the commander of the 10th Special Forces Group headquartered at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Cutolo died in a mysterious automobile accident in England shortly thereafter. The second document, a letter written by National Security Agency officer Paul Neri to another retired Green Beret colonel, Bo Gritz, appeared in 1990, shortly after Neri's death.

All told, six career U.S. military officers and one U.S. congressman who were probing the Watch Tower allegations died under mysterious circumstances between 1980 and 1989.

According to the Cutolo affidavit, between December 1975 and March 1976, the CIA and the Mossad employed a hand-picked group of Green Berets to set up a series of makeshift beacon towers in Colombia that enabled over 70 plane-loads of cocaine to be flown covertly from the Bogotá area into Albrook Air Station in Panama City. According to the Cutolo affidavit and a subsequent affidavit by William Tyree, the Watch Tower program was directed by then-CIA officers Edwin Wilson and Thomas Clines (later indicted and convicted of Iran-Contra crimes), along with two Mossad

men, later identified as David Kimche and Michael Harari. Kimche was the director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry during the Reagan era and was a principal figure in Iran-gate. According to one eyewitness account, the man using the name Edwin Wilson does not fit the physical description of the rogue CIA agent now in federal prison in Marion, Illinois. However, the description does match that of another associate of the CIA's Thomas Clines, who was active in Panama at the time.

After the operation terminated, Colonel Cutolo, according to his purported affidavit, began privately probing the mission to determine whether the smuggling of large volumes of cocaine into the United States had indeed been officially sanctioned by the U.S. government. He enlisted the aid of several Green Beret colleagues, including Col. Bob Bayard and Col. James Rowe, in the effort to identify the Israeli Mossad officials and to determine whether the U.S. Army or the CIA had approved the cocaine-smuggling program.

Colonel Bayard was killed in 1977, in what police described as an armed robbery attempt. Colonel Rowe was assassinated in April 1989. U.S. Rep. Larkin Smith (R-Miss.), who had agreed to probe the Watch Tower story at the behest of Rowe, died in a plane crash on Aug. 13, 1989.

Domestic spying and blackmail?

The Cutolo affidavit also described a U.S. Army secret surveillance and blackmail program directed against a number of American politicians whom the Watch Tower sponsors feared might uncover the government's secret drug trafficking. Private Tyree, who had participated in the three Watch Tower missions in Colombia, was involved in those surveillance efforts while stationed at Fort Devens, according to both the Cutolo document and his own later affidavits. On Jan. 30, 1979, Tyree's wife Elaine was found stabbed to death. Tyree claims that she was murdered by Green Beret soldiers on the base because she had been keeping secret diaries which contained details of Watch Tower and the secret surveillance program. Although another soldier named Earl Michael Peters was initially indicted for the murder, he was later released and William Tyree was tried and convicted of the killing. He is presently serving a life sentence in Massachusetts State Prison in Walpole.

The U.S. Army denies that Operation Watch Tower ever took place, and Noriega's Justice Department prosecutors claim that the entire story was hatched by Private Tyree from his jail cell to beat the murder rap.

At the time of their deaths, Neri and Rowe were both apparently convinced that elements of the Watch Tower story were true. They reportedly believed that the U.S. Army was not officially involved in the scheme, but that senior officials of both the CIA and the Mossad, with or without official approval, did participate. If these conclusions were accurate, the Army and the Noriega prosecutors' denials are of little consequence.