

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Kissinger buddies tied to drug cartel

The State Department admits the drug scene is as bad as ever. Will Bush oust strongman Ambassador Hinton?

The U.S. Department of State charged, in a report issued March 1, that drug money laundering in Panama is back up to the levels of 1989, when George Bush ordered the invasion of that country. That invasion, in which at least 4,000 Panamanians were killed, most of them civilians, was to "get Panamanian strongman Gen. Manuel Noriega."

The Panamanian leader was cast as evil incarnate by the Bush administration's psychological warfare apparatus. The removal of the "drug-trafficking" Noriega, we were asked to believe, would stop, or at least significantly slow down, the flow of drugs into the United States.

Not only is drug money laundering on the rise in Panama, but it is being done by the same people who did it before, and that includes most of the officials in the puppet government Bush installed in Panama to replace Noriega, including President Guillermo Endara himself.

And not just dirty money. "Statistics now indicate that since General Noriega's departure, cocaine trafficking has, in fact, prospered," according to an article in the British newspaper *The Independent* of March 5. "The departure of Noriega and his feared army appears not to have hindered the smugglers," writes David Adams. It "may even have encouraged them."

So, will Bush now order an invasion to seize Panama's new strongman, U.S. Ambassador Deane Hinton? After all, since the invasion, "Washington [has been] calling all the shots" in Panama, as the London *Financial Times* reported on Feb. 18.

That means, based on the standards used against Noriega, that the Bush administration is guilty of the increased drug flow.

Take the case of confessed Colombian drug trafficker Ramón Navarro. In 1986, Navarro masterminded a drugs-for-arms scheme to smuggle more than 700 pounds of cocaine into the U.S. aboard the luxury yacht *Krill*. The deal went sour when officers of Colombia's National Police boarded the *Krill*, confiscated the cocaine, and arrested the crew. The U.S. indicted the alleged conspirators.

What did Navarro get for his drug smuggling? Total immunity from prosecution and \$170,000 from the U.S. government. In exchange, he was to put the blame on Noriega.

Navarro will not get to testify, however, because he died in a traffic accident while driving his BMW in Miami on Feb. 27, two days after the start of the trial against two Noriega co-defendants.

In his opening statement at the trial, Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Sullivan charged that besides Noriega, the *Krill* conspiracy included Panamanian pilot César Rodríguez and Gen. Rubén Darío Paredes (ret.), Noriega's predecessor as commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). In fact, according to the prosecutor, it was General Paredes who sold the *Krill* to Navarro and to William Saldariaga, one of the defendants. The whole Paredes family is apparently implicated. Son Amet Paredes pled guilty and will testify for the prosecution, while Rubén Darío Paredes, Jr. was killed by the mafia in

1986.

Richard Sharpstein, attorney for defendant Brian Davidow, an American, charged that the case was cooked up "by the political enemies of Noriega" to settle a struggle for power in Panama. Noriega and Gen. Rubén Paredes had a falling out in the 1980s when Noriega replaced Paredes as head of the PDF, he said. "They never would have been partners in the drug deal."

Sharpstein's account is confirmed by one who should know: U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, the former president of Kissinger Associates, Inc. On Aug. 31, 1989, Eagleburger claimed that the U.S. had a right to go after Noriega, because Noriega had violated a "solemn compact," which established that once he assumed command from General Paredes, Noriega "should place the support of the military behind General Paredes's candidacy for the presidency." "We know what happened," added Eagleburger. "Once Paredes was out, Noriega worked against his candidacy." That upset Henry Kissinger, who was sponsoring Paredes's presidential bid. In 1984, this reporter observed Kissinger and Paredes huddled together in Washington, plotting strategy.

Noriega did more than spoil Kissinger's plans to put Paredes in Panama's presidential palace. As soon as he took over the PDF, he ordered the dismantling of a cocaine-processing lab installed by the Medellín Cartel, with Paredes's approval, in the jungle province of Darién.

So tied up with the drug mafias was Kissinger's protégé Paredes, that when his son Rubén, Jr. disappeared after the *Krill* deal went bust, Paredes, Sr. vouched for the innocence of the Medellín Cartel. He spoke to drug kingpin Jorge Ochoa, he said, and the Ochoas "have given me their word."