

A wimp, at best, in the war on drugs

by Scott Thompson

In 1982, President Reagan placed Vice President George Bush in charge of the showcase South Florida Crime Task Force. On March 23, 1983, the President again named Bush to head the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS), with major responsibilities in implementing the President's declared "War on Drugs."

The record shows not only that George Bush has been a dismal failure in the U.S. war on drugs, but that he deliberately botched the job. First, as sources report, Bush fears the banking collapse that would result from a serious crackdown on the laundering of \$500 billion in narcotics proceeds. A crash would ruin his chances for the presidency. Second, through the National Security Council and the Vice President's Task Force for Combating Terrorism, Bush diverted the efforts of the South Florida Crime Task Force and the war against narco-terrorism into a virtual front for the drug-running of Colombia's Medellín Cartel and the Nicaraguan Contras.

The war against drug-money laundering ground to a halt when Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Enforcement John Walker was forced out of his post in 1985. The last major bank to be prosecuted, back in February 1985, was the First National Bank of Boston, the flagship institution of the Boston Brahmins' Bank of Boston Corp. Then Boston U.S. Attorney William Weld collapsed 1,163 separate documented cases of criminal felony, involving \$1.2 billion, into a one-count indictment—fining the bank a mere \$500,000. Weld also overlooked the Bank of Boston's links to the Angiullo organized crime family.

The Reagan-Bush administration promoted Weld to assistant attorney general in charge of the Criminal Division.

Bush has personal ties to the bankers laundering the drug money, as *EIR* has documented (e.g., Jan. 22, 1988, "Bush-league sleaze: Who's who behind the VP's candidacy").

● **Max Fisher** is the co-chairman of the George Bush for President National Finance Committee. As the book *Dope, Inc.* documented, Fisher is the old crony of the Detroit "Purple Gang's" Moe Dalitz and syndicate bagman Meyer Lansky. Fisher built his Aurora Petroleum into a business portfolio that included chairmanships of United Brands (formerly United Fruit) and Fruehauf Trucking Company, and ownership of the Airborne Freight Corp. United Brands' banana

boats import over one-third of the cocaine entering the United States, according to Drug Enforcement Administration estimates.

● **Scott Pierce**, brother of Bush's wife Barbara, was president of the E.F. Hutton brokerage house in 1982 when Hutton was caught in a \$4.35 billion scheme to write checks in excess of funds in 400 U.S. commercial banks. On Nov. 15, 1984, Hutton chairman Robert Foman had a luncheon with Attorney General William French Smith and his assistant, **Stephen Trott**. Trott extended the grand jury six months. In the end, no corporate officer was indicted. The firm was given a slap-on-the-wrist \$2 million fine. Hutton's ties to heroin money-laundering, as in the "Pizza Connection" case, and to the New England Patriarcha mafia family, were ignored by the Reagan-Bush administration.

Bush's 'grandiose claims'

The South Florida Crime Task Force headed by Bush includes some 350 agents deployed by the FBI, DEA, the Army, the Navy, the Coast Guard, U.S. Customs, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, as well as local law enforcement, to stop the flood of cocaine entering the country from Colombia via Miami. By June 8, 1982, only six months after his appointment, Bush announced on the televised MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour, "Well, I think we've done a good job, and I think that we have reduced the flow of drugs from a torrent to a trickle."

But the General Accounting Office's latest report, *Controlling Drug Abuse: A Status Report*, shows that the flow of cocaine into South Florida remains "a torrent." Over 80% of all cocaine seizures in the United States occur in the Miami-South Florida area. Moreover, the price of cocaine, a prime indicator of availability, has dropped 50% over the last two years. While a record 8,000 pounds of cocaine were seized in the Miami area in 1987, local law enforcement officials estimate that at least 1,000-1,500 kilos move through the area each week.

When drug-runners began to seek other routes, Bush was appointed to head the NNBIS on March 23, 1983. Its mission is to coordinate multi-agency efforts. Almost from the outset, Bush's handling of NNBIS, which today subsumes the South Florida Crime Task Force, drew heavy criticism.

The chief of the DEA, Francis W. Mullen, Jr., wrote in a memorandum to Attorney General William French Smith:

"The grandiose claims of the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System are beginning to discredit and devalue the efforts of the Administration's numerous drug control programs. False credit claimed by NNBIS spokesmen, demoralizes the personnel working for a number of federal agencies whose bona fide accomplishments either go unrecognized or are relegated to second place by the unwise over-emphasis on NNBIS and the South Florida Task Force interdiction programs. As presently constituted, NNBIS activities range far beyond their stated mission to facilitate obtain-

ing military and intelligence community assistance for the interdiction functions of Customs, Coast Guard, and DEA. Beyond obtaining this assistance, NNBIS has made no material contribution to the Administration's interdiction efforts—nor should it. Yet the credits claimed by NNBIS create the impression that NNBIS is operational in virtually all aspects of drug law enforcement. . . .

“DEA's mandated overseas mission is being duplicated and circumvented, causing great confusion among foreign counterparts. . . . The fact that NNBIS, an interdiction program, is being run out of the Vice President's office (OVP) skews the priorities of the overall Federal strategy for control of illegal drugs. The accomplishments of our interdiction programs are overemphasized, building unrealistic expectations among the American people that this strategy is the primary means of reducing the availability of illegal drugs. . . . Location of NNBIS in the OVP fragments the coordination of drug law enforcement presumed to belong to the Attorney General.”

Warning that an “unchecked” NNBIS “will discredit other Federal drug programs and become this Administration's Achilles' heel for drug law enforcement,” Mullen concluded his memo with the statement: “Like the South Florida Task Force, NNBIS needs to be phased down over the next several months.”

Congress and the General Accounting Office (GAO) agreed with Mullen's assessment. On April 28, 1985, the Mullen memo was raised in hearings of the House Government Operations Subcommittee. “NNBIS is a brilliant political stroke, but a lousy agency,” said a congressional investigator. “Instead of helping to coordinate drug agencies working the borders, this agency has caused them to splinter.” On July 18, 1985, William J. Armstrong, who headed a GAO study of NNBIS, told the same House committee, “The price of cocaine is continuing to drop and the number of drugs coming into the country continues to go up.” He found that of 2,289 drug interdiction cases between June 1983 and June 1984 along the southern border, NNBIS played a significant role in only 39. “At least for that period of time, it appears as though NNBIS did not make much difference,” said Armstrong.

On May 28, 1984, Adm. Daniel Murphy, then Bush's chief of staff and coordinator of NNBIS, admitted: “I don't see where we are winning the war on cocaine.” Bush immediately denounced the statement.

The Narcontras

One of the main actions of the Vice President's Task Force on Combating Terrorism was to enhance the role of the National Security Council in this area. This led to the creation of the Operations Sub-Group (OSG), chaired by Bush and co-chaired by Lt. Col. Oliver North, who made the war on terrorism into a front for Iran-Contra operations. During the course of his work, North kept Bush regularly briefed. Two

members of the staff of Bush's Task Force were detailed to work with North.

The Contras Bush and associates were backing have been involved in running the drugs into the United States that Bush and associates were supposed to be stopping.

- In a statement released to Congress on April 16, 1986, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs **Elliott Abrams** acknowledged that “some” Contras “may have been engaged in such activity.” He excused the “limited number of incidents” that had occurred, pointing to the 18-month period when the Contras were receiving no U.S. assistance, leaving them “particularly hard-pressed for financial support.”

- In a highly unusual 95-page affidavit filed with the court on Dec. 12, 1986, Christie Institute general counsel Daniel Sheehan presented the results of a three-year private investigation into the Contras, drawing upon 78 separate witnesses, including a dozen unnamed former and active top CIA and Pentagon officials. Among the allegations detailed is the use of a ranch in Costa Rica belonging to **John Hull**, a contract agent for the NSC in Contra support activities, as a transshipment point for Colombian cocaine bound for the United States, and for U.S. and other arms going to the Contras. **Felipe Vidal** and **Rene Corbo**—both Cuban-American veterans of the Bay of Pigs—are named by Sheehan as the architects of the cocaine-for-arms activities, acting on behalf of **Pablo Escobar Gaviria** and **Jorge Ochoa** of Colombia's Medellín Cartel of cocaine traffickers.

- Cuban-American **Ramon Milian Rodriguez**, the principal money-launderer for the Medellín Cartel until his arrest and conviction, testified before a closed-door session of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Terrorism and Narcotics that he had supplied \$10 million to the Contras from the Medellín Cartel, according to Newt Reuss of *Newsday*. The money allegedly was transferred to the Contras by **Felix Ismad Rodriguez**, a.k.a. **Max Gomez**, a Cuban-American former CIA official, who had frequent meetings with George Bush and regular meetings with Bush's national security adviser, **Donald Gregg**, during the period of the money transfer from the Medellín Cartel. Gregg served with the CIA in Vietnam, where he first met Felix Rodriguez. He was later CIA station chief in Seoul, Korea. He has been described as “pivotal” in the Contra support operation. Gregg obtained a post for Rodriguez as coordinator of the Ilopango, El Salvador supply operation for the Contras.

- Pilot **Michael Toliver** claims that he flew arms to the Contras, and also, that on two flights, he returned to the United States with cocaine and marijuana aboard, loaded at Contra airfields. On one return flight, says Toliver, he flew 20 tons of marijuana into Homestead Air Force Base in Florida. Toliver said that two men hired him to fly weapons to the Contras. One was **Rafael Quintero**, like Rodriguez, a CIA veteran. The other was Felix Rodriguez, George Bush and Donald Gregg's associate.