

Thornburgh blocks the war on drugs

by Jeffrey Steinberg

A recurring sub-theme in the Bush administration's phony anti-drug effort is the role of Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, who has done perhaps more than any other government official to ensure that no genuine war on drugs ever gets off the ground. This is the view of a number of senior anti-drug officials—some active and some recently retired—who have been polled by *EIR*.

According to these officials, who spoke under the condition that their identities not be revealed, Thornburgh has played a particularly insidious role in blocking the efforts of drug czar William Bennett to get the National Anti-Drug Strategy off the ground. Bennett's efforts to launch even a watered-down anti-drug program have been blocked at every turn by the Attorney General, the sources say.

Among the cited examples of Thornburgh's anti-Bennett and anti-drug enforcement campaign are the following:

- From the time of Bennett's appointment as White House drug czar, Thornburgh issued across-the-board orders to all Department of Justice (DOJ) agencies to refuse all cooperation with Bennett's office. As a result, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which is formally under the DOJ line of command, and which has been significantly merged with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, played no role whatsoever in the preparation of the National Drug Control Strategy, the guiding document for the Bush administration's so-called war on drugs.

This non-cooperation edict created such a rift between Bennett's office and the DEA that senior drug enforcement officials were not even given draft copies of the Bennett drug strategy document in time to make comments and suggestions for improvement. The final document reflected this lack of cooperation by relegating the DEA to a relatively minor role in the international anti-drug effort. Ostensibly given the role of "lead intelligence agency" in the international arena, the DEA is ill-equipped, according to senior officials, given the recent years' pattern of key overseas DEA offices being either cut back or shut down altogether, in favor of near-total emphasis on domestic local law enforcement functions.

- After Bennett and President Bush both publicly identified Washington, D.C. as a priority target for increased anti-drug funding and enforcement, the DOJ set out to prepare a regional drug control plan. As of this writing, a copy of that plan has still not been presented by the DOJ to the drug czar's office, according to one senior official, despite the fact that the plan has existed for months and has been widely circulated inside the DOJ and the DEA.

- Within the DOJ-DEA command itself, critical areas of responsibility within the framework of the Bennett National Drug Control Strategy have been horribly neglected, according to several senior DEA officers polled. For example, the DEA's Strategic Intelligence Unit, a leading priority according to the Bennett plan, has been cut back to a skeleton staff. Critical areas of concern, such as the role of Syria in increased opium production and heroin processing in the Bekaa Valley, have been virtually erased from the map. According to one report, no "country report" has been prepared on either Syria or Lebanon for over two years.

The DEA's "country report" is the most comprehensive intelligence map of drug activity, including estimates of production and consumption, as well as identification of specific individuals suspected of involvement in the drug trade. Some officials say that there is a political embargo on any discussion of Syrian involvement in the drug trade, despite official DEA estimates that Syria earns over one billion dollars a year in illegal heroin proceeds, and that Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, is personally implicated in the narcotics trafficking.

Presidential ambitions

Thornburgh's notoriety as a chief saboteur in the war on drugs reached a peak early this month, when even the *Washington Post*, which has functioned as an unofficial mouthpiece for the drug legalization lobby in the United States, published a lengthy front-page exposé of Thornburgh's failure to competently serve as Attorney General. The *Post* story echoed comments by senior DEA officials to the effect that Thornburgh is campaigning for higher office—i.e., the vice presidency or the presidency—and has surrounded himself with a "campaign staff" of longtime loyalists who place the duties of the Department on a low priority and focus instead on the Attorney General's public image. Among the examples cited by the *Post* were several instances in which Thornburgh refused to share a podium with Bennett because he did not want to give Bennett equal billing in the anti-drug hierarchy of the Bush administration.

Although the Dec. 20 invasion of Panama and the attempt to impose a naval blockade on Colombia demonstrate that the Bush administration has absolutely no intention of conducting a viable war on drugs in league with America's hemispheric allies, such as that proposed by Lyndon LaRouche in March 1985, the fact that Attorney General Thornburgh has styled himself as a leading saboteur of any drug control effort certainly makes matters worse.