

postscript

DarkAlliance

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'Dark Alliance' series leads to CIA probe

Agency chief orders investigation

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Central Intelligence Agency Director John Deutch has ordered the spy agency's inspector general to look into CIA connections to a Bay Area drug ring that helped touch off the "crack" cocaine epidemic of the 1980s.

In a letter to Senator Barbara Boxer, D-California, and Representative Maxine Waters, D-Los Angeles, Deutch said that in response to "[extremely serious charges](#)" by the Mercury News, he has asked for "an immediate and thorough internal review of all the allegations concerning the Agency published by the newspaper."

The Mercury News' three-part series, "Dark Alliance," detailed how a Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the street gangs of South Central Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to a CIA-run guerrilla army. The series traced the crack cocaine explosion to two Nicaraguan cocaine dealers, [Danilo Blandon](#) and [Norwin Meneses](#), who were civilian leaders of the Frente Democratica Nicaraguense (FDN), an anti-communist commando group formed and run by the CIA during the 1980s.

Blandon, who is now an undercover informant for the Drug Enforcement Administration, admitted in federal court recently that his biggest customer was a South Central crack dealer named "[Freeway](#)" [Rick Ross](#), who turned Blandon's cocaine into crack and distributed it to the Crips and Bloods street gangs. He told the DEA in 1995 that at the height of his business with Ross, he was selling 100 kilos of cocaine a week to the gangs.

Boxer, in an interview, called the CIA director's announcement "a big step" and expressed confidence that the Inspector General's review would be "thorough and complete."

But Deutch's letter makes it clear that, at the moment, he doesn't believe the CIA had anything to do with the FDN's drug pipeline.

"The review I ordered of Agency files, including a study conducted in 1988 and briefed to both intelligence committees, supports the conclusion that the Agency neither participated in nor condoned drug trafficking by Contra forces," Deutch wrote.

"In particular, the Agency never had any relationship with either Blandon or Meneses."

When the Mercury News filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the CIA last year asking about Blandon and Meneses and their relationship with the CIA, the agency replied that it could not provide anything about either man because of national security concerns.

According to a top DEA official in Washington who has read Meneses' intelligence files, DEA reports say that Meneses "either was or represented himself to be" a CIA agent.

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Biographical information on [Oscar Danilo Blandon](#), [Norwin Meneses](#), [Rick Ross](#) and [Enrique Bermudez](#)

The Mercury News found that Meneses and Blandon met with CIA agents [Enrique Bermudez](#), the military commander of the Contra forces, and Adolfo Calero, the FDN's political leader, both before and during the time Meneses and Blandon were selling cocaine in Los Angeles.

The CIA's past history of investigating itself has been criticized by many researchers and investigators who looked into allegations of a CIA-Contra-cocaine connection during the 1980s.

The 1988 study Deutch cited in his letter to Boxer, for example, "was part of the attempt to crap all over us," said Jack Blum, the former chief counsel to a Senate subcommittee that investigated Contra drug operations that year. Blum said the CIA study, which has never been released publicly, "was a quick whiz-by" to determine if the intelligence agency had ordered or approved of the sale of drugs.

"It was not (a question of) "Did we protect it?" or "Did we cover it up?" " Blum said. "With the agency, you have to watch every single word."

Boxer said that it was "understandable that people would be skeptical, given the fact that Deutch says that it's been studied and he doesn't believe it. But on the other hand, these investigations take on a life of their own and the Inspector General has a very clear mandate from the Congress to be independent from the agency. If they're not, they're going to hear from me about it."

CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield said he was uncertain whether the report of the Inspector General's investigation would be made public. Deutch said he would report back to Boxer within 60 days.

Waters said she was "very pleased" Deutch had ordered the investigation, but said, "We cannot dispel suspicions and doubt until and unless we have exhausted every effort to uncover the truth." Waters, who represents South Central, has [asked for a Congressional investigation of the matter](#) and has requested an [internal investigation](#) at the Department of Justice as well.



[Rep. Waters' letter to the Chairman of](#)

She was joined in that request Thursday by [Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, who asked Attorney General Janet Reno](#) to look into the Justice Department's handling of Bandon, Meneses and the recent DEA sting against Freeway Rick Ross.

[the House
Judiciary
Committee](#)

Bandon was the government's star witness against Ross at a trial in San Diego last March, after he lured Ross, a recently paroled crack dealer, into a government sting.



[Sen. Feinstein's
letter to the
Attorney General](#)

Waters said Reno has not yet responded to her request.

In his letter to Boxer, Deutch denied that the CIA had ever tried to keep information about Bandon and Meneses from defense lawyers in Ross' case, a reference to an unusual motion the Justice Department filed before the San Diego trial to prevent Ross' lawyers from questioning Bandon about his relationship with the CIA.

The [motion, filed by Asst. U.S. Attorney L.J. O'Neale](#), said that the government believed "at least one defendant will attempt to assert to the effect that (Bandon) sold cocaine to raise money for the Nicaraguan contras and that he did so in conjunction with, or for, the Central Intelligence Agency. This matter, if true, would be classified; if false should not be allowed." O'Neale's motion was granted by U.S. District Judge Marilyn Huff, who decided that whatever Bandon's involvement was with the CIA, it was irrelevant to the Ross case.



[Motion filed by
U.S. Attorney L.J.
O'Neale](#)

Ross is scheduled to be sentenced Sept. 13 in San Diego. He faces a possible sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

