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Waters calls on Reno, CIA and Congress for investigation

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In the widest-ranging call yet for an official investigation, South Central Los Angeles Congresswoman Maxine Waters is requesting both federal and Congressional probes of the role U.S. government agencies may have played in sparking the crack cocaine explosion of the 1980s.

Waters, a Democrat, sent out a series of [letters Friday to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno](#), Central Intelligence Agency Director John Deutch and Republican and Democratic Congressional leaders citing the findings of a recent Mercury News investigation into the roots of the crack epidemic. The series, Dark Alliance, documented how a Bay Area drug network dumped thousands of kilos of cheap cocaine into L.A.'s black neighborhoods in the 1980s to fund a Latin American guerrilla army that was being run by the CIA.

"As someone who has seen how the crack cocaine trade has devastated the South-Central Los Angeles community, I cannot exaggerate my feelings of dismay that my own government may have played a part in the origins and history of this problem," Waters wrote. "Portions of this country may have been exposed, indeed introduced, to the horror of crack cocaine because certain U.S.-government paid or organized operatives smuggled, transported and sold it to American citizens."

Mark Mansfield, a spokesman for the CIA, said Deutch "is in the process of responding to these inquiries and (a written response) will be completed soon." Mansfield reiterated the CIA's belief that any suggestion that the spy agency was involved in drug trafficking was "ludicrous" and without merit.

The Mercury News, however, discovered that both before and during the time the drug ring was selling drugs in black neighborhoods, the drug dealers were meeting with the CIA operatives who were in charge of the guerrilla army, Enrique Bernudez and Adolfo Calero.

Myron Marlin, a spokesman for the Department of Justice, said, "We received the Congresswoman's letter and are currently reviewing the matter at this time."

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Waters, who represented South-Central Los Angeles in the California Legislature before her election to Congress, asked Reno to provide her with the government's files on the three men featured in the Mercury News' series: Nicaraguan drug smuggler Norwin Meneses; former Nicaraguan government official-turned-cocaine-broker Danilo Blandon, and former South Central crack king "Freeway" Rick Ross.

"The impact and the implications of the Meneses/Blandon/Ross Contra CIA crack cocaine connection cannot be understated," Waters wrote to Reno and Deutch. "We all have an obligation to get to the very bottom of the origin, development and implementation of this seedy enterprise."

[Meneses](#) and [Blandon](#) were civilian leaders in California of the CIA's army, formally known as the Nicaraguan Democratic Force but more commonly called the Contras. Blandon has admitted selling [Ross](#) thousands of kilos of cocaine during the last decade and said he began dealing cocaine in Los Angeles in 1982 to raise money for the CIA's army, which was trying to overthrow the revolutionary Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

[Waters](#), in an interview Tuesday, said she intends to ask the Congressional Black Caucus to conduct the hearings into this matter, saying she didn't want the probe "messed up" the way past investigations into CIA drug trafficking allegations have been.



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



[Rep. Waters' home page](#)

During the 1980s, a subcommittee headed by Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., explored an East Coast cocaine pipeline that was funding the Contras at roughly the same time. Though his investigation documented the drug network's existence and operations, Republicans on the committee refused to sign the report and its findings were largely ignored by the national media.

Though Waters has asked permission to do hearings through the traditional Congressional committee process, she said that was done mostly as a courtesy. Regardless of the response of Congressional leaders, she said, hearings will take place.

"You don't need permission from any damn body to do a hearing," she said. "We (the Congressional Black Caucus) did hearings on the church burnings. I don't want to have some sanitized hearings that won't do what we need to do."

On Tuesday, Waters went to the Metropolitan Correctional Center in San Diego to interview Rick Ross, who is currently awaiting sentencing on federal cocaine conspiracy charges. Ross said he spent two and a half hours speaking with Waters about his relationship with the Nicaraguans and the DEA sting that resulted in his arrest last year -- a sting run by his former cocaine supplier, Danilo Blandon.

Waters said she hoped the CIA and Department of Justice would turn over documents involving Meneses and Blandon voluntarily, but said the committee will issue subpoenas if necessary.

"We're in this for the long haul," she vowed.

When the Mercury News asked for the documents under the Freedom of Information Act, only one agency -- the National Archives -- complied. The CIA refused to release any records on national security grounds and the DEA said it didn't want to turn over documents because it was concerned about invading the privacy of the two convicted cocaine traffickers.

Waters said she was going to ask Reno Wednesday to safeguard the files until they can be turned over to Congressional investigators.

Meneses and Bandon have a long history of involvement with various agencies of the U.S. government, particularly the Drug Enforcement Administration. Bandon, in fact, is a full-time informant for the DEA, a highly sensitive job he was given when the Justice Department got him out of jail in 1994. Since then, Bandon has been paid more than \$166,000 by the Justice Department for his work with the DEA.

Waters is the second federal lawmaker to make an official request for an investigation into the drug pipeline. Last week, U.S. [Senator Barbara Boxer, D-California, asked CIA Director Deutch](#) to do an internal investigation of the relationship between the drug pipeline and the CIA.



[Sen. Boxer's letter to the CIA director](#)

