

CIA worked with suspected drug traffickers

Diamond, John

Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001); Jul 21, 1998; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Philadelphia Tribune
pg. 3A

CIA worked with suspected drug traffickers

By John Diamond
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A second volume of a CIA study into agency connections to Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s supports earlier conclusions that the agency continued to work with individual rebels suspected of drug trafficking.

Growing out of a hotly disputed newspaper account about the spread of crack cocaine in American cities, the CIA inspector general's report confirmed earlier conclusions that there was no evidence any CIA officials engaged in drug trafficking with Contra rebels, a U.S. intelligence official said Friday.

Both findings were contained in the first volume of the report released in January and stemming from a 1996 series in *The San Jose Mercury-News* that alleged a "dark alliance" between the CIA and Contra-connected drug dealers. The series created an uproar, particularly in black communities, over the suggestion that the

CIA allowed its Contra contacts to engineer the spread of crack cocaine in poor urban neighborhoods.

The newspaper later stated that the series was flawed and reasigned the reporter.

The 500-page second volume of the CIA inspector's report remains classified because it contains detailed information about CIA contacts and sources who helped the agency through much of the civil war against the communist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. It has been reviewed by the House and Senate Intelligence committees.

The New York Times described the report's findings in Friday's editions.

A U.S. intelligence official, who spoke today on condition of anonymity, said while the first volume focused on — and debunked — the so-called California connection, the second volume goes into greater detail on the agency's contacts in Nicaragua.

The study found that the CIA

occasionally received reports and allegations, some of them originating in newspapers, of drug trafficking by Contra rebels or supporters. In all, 50 of these people came under suspicion and the agency continued to work with about two dozen of them.

The inspector general's report criticizes the CIA for poor record-keeping; the report was unable to determine how many of the 50 individuals were further investigated by the CIA after allegations surfaced. The report also notes

that more recent CIA regulations governing dealings with potentially unsavory sources would require such inquiries and better record-keeping.

The intelligence official said no one should be surprised that some of the guerrilla operators with whom the CIA had to deal in Central America in the early 1980s were unsavory. The official added that records are less than perfect on whether inquiries were done on some of those people.

Much of the substance of the

inspector's report was also brought to light in 1987 by a Senate committee investigation.

Despite frequent criticism about some of its sources and contacts, the CIA insists, as a matter of policy, on the right to gain information from potential or even known lawbreakers.

You may choose to maintain a relationship with them because of the high value of the intelligence you receive," the intelligence official said.

CIA regulations require

detailed reporting to congressional oversight committees. In some cases, the CIA relationship with suspected Contra drug traffickers was reported to Congress at the time, the official said.

CIA Director George Tenet has not made a decision on whether to release a declassified version of the second volume. The report is so filled with references to confidential sources and methods that agency officials are concerned the redacted version "may look like Swiss cheese."