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19 November 1986

CIA zeros in on Mexico corruption

Wiretaps called confirmation of charges of dishonesty in police, elected officials

By Jon Standefer
and J. Stryker Meyer
Staff Writers

The CIA has been conducting a wiretap operation in Mexico that has corroborated allegations of corruption among law enforcement and political officials in that country, *The San Diego Union* has learned.

The CIA's cooperation in drug investigations is a recent departure from its traditional role of intelligence-gathering, sources say, and resulted from pressures generated by the kidnap-torture slaying of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena Salazar last year in Guadalajara.

Policy differences recently surfaced between the CIA, which began passing information relating to drug-related corruption to the DEA, and Department of Justice lawyers, who are planning future prosecutions.

The CIA passed along the incriminating conversations for "intelligence purposes only," said one source, while the Justice Department wants to use the wiretapped conversations as evidence in any court trials that arise from the current investigations.

The wiretap operation was done without the knowledge of the Mexican government, the sources said, because of fear that the operation would be endangered.

U.S. Attorney Peter K. Nunez was

called to Washington, D.C., last week to discuss the case, the sources said. Nunez would not comment on his trip, but other sources said the spy agency is no longer providing information to the DEA.

The extent of the wiretap operation could not be confirmed. Although one source in the intelligence community said it involved taps on the telephones of several high government officials, others said the information passed to the DEA came from a tap on the Mexico City telephone of a U.S. citizen in contact with numerous police officials, state officials and drug traffickers.

"If the CIA is doing more, they're not telling DEA," said a Justice Department official who would not speak for attribution.

A spokesman for the CIA yesterday had no comment.

The wiretap of the American citizen raises a legal question.

For wiretap evidence gathered in a foreign jurisdiction to be used in a U.S. court, a Justice Department source said, the wiretap generally must be in accordance with that country's laws. However, the source added, in the case of Mexico — where vast numbers of government officials are believed to be in league with drug traffickers — to apply for a legal wiretap might be tantamount to alerting the suspects.

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The source said there was no dispute between the CIA and Justice Department, but merely discussion about how far the CIA would be willing to go publicly, including possible disclosure of methods of operations, to authenticate the wiretaps. The Justice Department needs to know that information before any prosecution is undertaken, the source said.

Another source said the wiretapped conversations gathered in Mexico are notable for their candor.

"There's no pretense, no subtlety," said the source. "They just say, 'Bring 20 kilos of s--- (heroin) here by tomorrow or I'll have your b---s cut off.' No cute talk like in the U.S., where people might say, 'How many oranges do you want?'"

The cooperation of the CIA in a drug investigation has been a rarity until recently.

Many DEA field agents and supervisors who have worked in foreign countries relate stories about past cases where a drug trafficker has been targeted, only to have the CIA intervene and discourage the investigation on grounds that the trafficker was working for the spy agency.

That was possible because law enforcement agencies working in a foreign country must report the names of their foreign informants to the CIA station chief at the country's U.S. embassy.

This massive investigative effort was undertaken after the kidnapping and torture-slaying of DEA agent Camarena, who was seized on a Guadalajara street on Feb. 7, 1985.

"Operation Leyenda" is the name of the year-and-a-half investigation into the Camarena murder. "Leyenda" is Spanish slang for "lawman," a nickname by which the gung-ho Camarena was known to his colleagues. The investigation included presenting evidence before a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C., last year. The probe recently shifted to a federal grand jury in San Diego and is headed by two special prosecutors from Department of Justice headquarters.

Sources say U.S. investigators in Mexico reached and otherwise developed so many contacts that they did not keep the CIA fully informed of their activities.

After high-level discussions, the sources say, the DEA agreed to make the CIA aware of their informants and the spy agency, in turn, agreed to provide to the DEA information it developed pertaining to the Camarena killing or to drug-related corruption in Mexico.

The interagency cooperation comes nearly five years after President Reagan signed Executive Order 12333 on Dec. 4, 1981, authorizing the CIA to "collect, produce and disseminate intelligence on foreign aspects of narcotics production and trafficking."

But the order includes clear limitations on what the CIA can do when its surveillance involves a U.S. citizen in a foreign country.

It requires the CIA to use "the least intrusive collection techniques feasible" and expressly prohibits the use of such techniques as "electronic surveillance, unconsented physical search or monitoring devices unless they are ... approved by the attorney general."

The order states that such approval is not to be granted "unless the attorney general has determined in each case that there is probable cause to believe the (surveillance) technique is directed against a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power."

A Justice Department spokesman yesterday refused comment on this.

CIA spokesman George Lauder yesterday said the agency has a standing policy against discussing its operations and, therefore, would not comment publicly on the wiretap allegations.

But a senior intelligence official said the U.S. intelligence community, including the CIA, collects information on narcotics and passes it on to other government branches, including the DEA.

The official, who spoke on the condition that he not be identified, said: "Narcotics in Mexico is not (the CIA's) cupcake. Other organs of the United States government are deeply enmeshed in it."

The State Department and DEA lead the U.S. anti-drug effort in Mexico, including the gathering of narcotics-related intelligence, the official said, adding that the CIA's role is to provide narcotics information that other agencies cannot get.

The official declined to say whether that includes information from wiretaps, electronic intercepts or other forms of surveillance.

An administration official familiar with U.S. intelligence activities in Mexico said yesterday, "You bet ... (the CIA) collects information on narcotics (there and in other nations). It's one of the agency's priorities." The administration official also declined to be identified.

White House spokesman Don Mathis said he is absolutely certain there is an exchange of drug-related information between the State Department, the National Security Council and the DEA. But he had no comment on any CIA role.

DEA Administrator John Lawn was in Palermo, Sicily, yesterday and could not be reached for comment. DEA Public Affairs spokesman William Alden said the agency would make no comment.

Contributing to this story were Copley News Service Washington correspondents Benjamin Shore and Marcus Stern.

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
19 November 1986

SAN DIEGO

A CIA spokesman Wednesday denied a published report claiming the intelligence agency listened in on the conversations of several high-ranking Mexican officials in order to find evidence of corruption.

The San Diego Union reported Wednesday that the CIA listened to the calls of Mexican officials without their knowledge in order to find evidence of corruption involving drug dealers.

Information collected was turned over to the Justice Department and Drug Enforcement Administration for use as they saw fit, The Union said.

In a statement issued in Washington, CIA spokesman George Lauder said the newspaper's story was false and misleading.

"The CIA doesn't normally comment on stories concerning alleged CIA activities," the statement said. "We are making an exception in this case because The San Diego Union's story is false and misleads the American public. "The suggestion that the CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotics trafficking is false."

The newspaper said one source believed the wiretaps were on the phones of the high-ranking Mexican officials. Another source said the taps were on the phone of a U.S. citizen who lived in Mexico City and that the government officials were heard talking on the lines. The unidentified American had contacts with drug traffickers and government officials.

The Union said it was not known if the operation was continuing.

An anonymous source quoted by The Union said some of the taped conversations were quite candid.

"There is no pretense, no subtlety," the source said. "They just say, 'Bring 20 kilos here by tomorrow . . .' No cute talk like in the United States where people might say, 'How many oranges do you want?'"

The investigation grew out of a probe into the murder of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena in Guadalajara, Mexico, last year. There were allegations that Mexican law enforcement and government officials were cooperating with the drug traffickers who allegedly tortured Camarena to death.

The unidentified sources told The Union that the DEA agreed to give the CIA a list of its informants in exchange for whatever drug-related information the agency came up with in foreign countries.

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The CIA and Justice Department had no comment on the matter and The Union said it was not known if the operation was continuing.

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Story on Mexico wiretaps prompts denial by CIA

By Michael Hedges
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A report in a San Diego newspaper that the CIA tapped the phones of Mexican police and government officials to gain information in the slaying of a U.S. drug enforcement agent has provoked an unusual official denial from the CIA.

"The CIA doesn't normally comment on stories alleging CIA activities. We are making an exception because the San Diego Union story is untrue, and misleads the American people," the CIA said in a statement late yesterday.

The story published yesterday quoted unidentified "intelligence

sources" as saying taps were placed on the phones of high-ranking Mexican officials and that the information gained confirmed charges of corruption among Mexican officials.

The newspaper said the operation was conducted without the knowledge of the Mexican government because of fears that would endanger the probe into the kidnapping and torture-murder of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena Salazar, whose body was found in March 1985 outside Guadalajara, Mexico.

"The suggestion that the CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotic trafficking is false," the CIA statement said.

State Department officials also denied the report, saying, "Any suggestion that we are targeting Mexican officials is untrue."

The Mexican Embassy in Washington said it was considering a response, but had not released a statement at press time yesterday.

The office of Karin Winner, managing editor of The San Diego Union, was contacted yesterday, but she did not return calls by early evening.

President Reagan signed an executive order five years ago authorizing the CIA to "collect, produce and disseminate intelligence on foreign aspects of narcotics production and trafficking."

It requires the CIA to use "the least intrusive collection techniques feasible" and prohibits the use of "electronic surveillance, unconsented physical search or monitoring devices unless they are . . . approved by the attorney general."

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CIA, DEA Reported at Odds on Mexico Wiretap

By RONALD J. OSTROW, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—Justice Department and CIA officials, in a case that could serve as a precedent on a key element of the Administration's anti-drug policy, are struggling to resolve differences over the use of narcotics evidence gleaned from a wiretap in Mexico, government sources said Wednesday.

The conflict marks the first time that officials have confronted the central question of how to use sensitive information from the CIA under a national security directive, issued last spring, ordering intelligence agencies and the military services to take part in the Administration's drug law enforcement campaign.

CIA officials are said to fear that an attempt to use the disputed information as evidence in court could "blow a source" that has been providing information for several years. The data at issue are recordings of a suspected trafficker who is a resident alien in the San Diego area, sources familiar with the matter said.

"Suppose they [the Justice Department and its arm, the Drug Enforcement Administration] want to put the agent on the stand," said one source familiar with the CIA's reservations. "He won't be of any use in Mexico from then on."

Meanwhile, addressing another question, the CIA issued a rare public denial Wednesday of a San Diego newspaper report that a CIA wiretap operation in Mexico had corroborated allegations of corruption among Mexican law enforcement and public officials.

"The San Diego Union story is untrue and misleads the American public," said George Lauder, the CIA's chief spokesman. "The suggestion that the CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotics trafficking is false."

Justice Department officials also denied the story and expressed concern that it might rekindle resentment in Mexico of DEA operations there.

Controversy involving U.S. dissatisfaction over lack of cooperation from Mexican law enforcement in prosecuting those responsible for the 1985 torture-slaying of DEA agent Enrique S. Camarena and charges of Mexican corruption drew protests from Mexico and raised fears that DEA agents would be banished from that country.

CIA and Justice Department officials would not comment on the current dispute over the CIA wiretap, which is understood to be unrelated to the Camarena investigation.

Knowledgeable sources said that the tap was installed after President Reagan, on April 8, issued a top-secret national security decision directive that enabled the government to use military surveillance and intelligence capabilities in its drug fight.

The directive, an unclassified version of which was disclosed by Vice President George Bush on June 7, for the first time said the international drug trade is a national security concern, because of its ability to destabilize democratic allies through the corruption of police and judicial institutions.

In Tijuana, Mexico, Mayor Rene Trevino Arredondo canceled a joint meeting of the Tijuana and San Diego city councils, scheduled for today, in the face of the reports that the CIA tapped the phones of Mexican police and government officials.

Luis Manuel Serrano, a spokesman for Arredondo, said Wednesday that cancellation of the meeting, which was to have been in San Diego, was to protest what he called a "violation of Mexico's sovereignty by the CIA."

Times staff writer H. G. Reza in San Diego contributed to this story.

CIA, Justice feud over using Mexico bugs to get kingpins

By Michael Hedges
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The CIA and Justice Department are feuding over whether information from a wiretap operation in Mexico should be used to prosecute top-level drug traffickers, officials of both agencies said yesterday.

Justice Department sources said wiretap transcripts supplied by the CIA referred to Mexican police and government officials involved in drug buys with traffickers who were being targeted by the CIA.

CIA officials denied that the information they passed to the Justice Department would link Mexican of-

ficials to crimes, but admitted they were concerned that Justice Department prosecutions will expose CIA agents and informants in Mexico.

"There are problems with Justice," a source said. "There is information they want to use in prosecutions that would blow sources." The CIA officials claimed the intelligence was intended to give investigators leads and not to be presented as evidence.

On Wednesday the CIA, in a rare formal statement, denied it had targeted Mexican officials with the wiretaps, as reported by The San Diego Union newspaper, but refused to elaborate. "The suggestion that

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CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotics trafficking is false," said the statement.

Yesterday, Justice Department officials said that while the wiretap operations had not targeted any Mexican police or government officers, "it is always possible to pick up things you didn't expect."

The CIA has been supplying the Justice Department with wiretap material as part of the Reagan administration's stepped-up war on drugs, said Justice Department officials.

The wiretap material was to be used in several drug prosecutions in

Southern California being prepared by the U.S. Attorney's Office there involving cocaine and heroin smuggling, officials said.

Peter K. Nunez, U.S. attorney in San Diego, came to Washington last week to discuss using the material with Justice Department officials, the officials said.

Mr. Nunez did not return a reporter's calls yesterday.

Federal officials are reluctant to use the information because corruption of police and government officials in Mexico is a politically sensitive issue, said Justice Department officials.

But a senior CIA official in Washington denied that any information passed by the CIA to the Justice Department on drug traffickers showed any corruption by Mexican officials.

The conflict has not been resolved, according to officials.

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