

# The CIA Haitian Connection and the Cocaine Smuggling Operation

By [Dennis Bernstein](#)

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*The following articles on the CIA Haiti sponsored narcotics smuggling by Dennis Bernstein, Howard Levine and Jim Lobe were published in the 1990s and republished by Global Research 25 February 2004. They shed light on the history of US interventionism in Haiti, focusing on the 1991 CIA led military coup. The coup was led by general Raul Cedras, resulted in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of President Aristide.*

## **WHAT'S BEHIND WASHINGTON'S SILENCE ON HAITI DRUG CONNECTION?**

**by Dennis Bernstein**

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At stake in the U.S. confrontation with the Haitian military regime is a cocaine smuggling operation that earns millions of dollars for Haitian military officials while dumping tons of the deadly white powder on American streets. Yet while the country debates the merits of armed intervention in Haiti, the Clinton administration has remained mum on the Haitian "drug connection."

A confidential report by the Drug Enforcement Agency obtained by Pacific News Service describes Haiti as "a major transshipment point for cocaine traffickers" funnelling drugs from Colombia and the Dominican Republic into the U.S.-with the knowledge and active involvement of high military officials and business elites.

The corruption of the Haitian military "is substantial enough to hamper any significant drug investigation attempting to dismantle" illicit drug operations inside Haiti, the report states. Echoing the report's findings, exiled Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide recently blamed the military's role in the drug trade for his ouster.

Despite extensive DEA intelligence documenting Haiti's drug role, neither the Clinton administration, nor the Bush administration before it, have ever raised that role publicly. Now critics of U.S. policy on Haiti, including one Congressman, are questioning that silence, suggesting it reflects de facto U.S. support for the Haitian military and a reluctance to offer unqualified support for Aristide.

"I've been amazed that our government has never talked about the drug trafficking...even though it is obviously one of the major reasons why these people drove their president out of the country and why they are determined not to let him back in. We're talking hundreds of millions of dollars of illegal profits that are having disastrous consequences for the

American people,” says Rep. John Conyers (D-MI).

Larry Burns, head of the Washington, D.C.-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs, claims, “From the moment Aristide was overthrown two years ago, Washington has equivocated on whether it wanted him back or not...” To secure the military “as an anchor to Aristide’s sail,” Burns charges, Washington “turned a blind eye to the corruption charges, and pretended that it could be reformed through professionalization and U.S. training.”

A senior administration official at the National Security Council dismisses the charge but when asked why the administration has failed to publicize DEA allegations of drug trafficking, the spokesman had no comment.

The DEA first established a Country Office (CO) in Port-au-Prince to assist the Haitian government with its anti-narcotics activities in November 1987. Throughout Aristide’s brief tenure in office, DEA agents worked closely with Haitian military narcotics services, investigating an illegal cocaine network estimated to be moving some \$300-\$500 million worth of cocaine into the U.S. per year. Although the DEA office was shut down after the 1991 coup, it reopened in the fall of 1992. But soon after DEA intelligence prompted the arrest of a member of Haiti’s CIA-linked National Intelligence, DEA local agent Tony Greco received death threats from a man identifying himself as the National Intelligence member’s boss.

A Congressional source familiar with the DEA’s history in Haiti told PNS that Greco had also “connected (Lt. Colonel Michel) Francois to the drug trafficking operations in Haiti.” Francois, the current chief of police, is alleged to be behind the current campaign of terror.

What disturbs Rep. Conyers is that none of this information ever reached the public. “By turning a deaf ear to what is obviously a prime force behind Aristide’s ouster, we raise questions about our own involvement in drug activities,” Conyers says. He is currently investigating how it is that the ships and aircraft necessary to sustain such a large operation evade detection and interdiction, while the U.S. government has managed to spot, stop and turn back almost every ramshackle boat carrying refugees.

Indeed the DEA report shows that after the 1991 coup sent Aristide into exile, there were virtually no major seizures of cocaine from Haiti as compared to nearly 4,000 pounds seized in 1990.

Michael Levine, author of “Deep Cover” and a decorated DEA agent with 25 years of experience fighting drugs overseas, says what’s going on in Haiti is “just another example of elements of the U.S. government protecting killers, drug dealers and dictators for the sake of some political end that’s going to cost a whole bunch of kids in this country their lives.

“I saw the drug traffickers take over the government of Bolivia in 1980, ironically with the assistance of the CIA, and we (the DEA) just packed up our office and went home.”

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## **THE CIA'S HAITIAN CONNECTION**

**by Dennis Bernstein and Howard Levine**

San Francisco Bay Guardian, 11/3/93

Although the Clinton administration insists it is making every effort to return ousted Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, covert connections between Haiti's military junta and the CIA may be helping to keep the regime in place.

Confidential government documents obtained by the Bay Guardian show that the CIA helped establish and finance Haiti's powerful National Intelligence Service, which played a key role in the 1991 coup and continues to provide paramilitary muscle for the anti-Aristide dictatorship. As recently as February 1993, a confidential congressional report described the NIS as "working closely" with the CIA.

The documents-along with interviews with members of Congress, senior administration sources, and a high-ranking member of Aristide's cabinet-in-exile-raise troubling questions about Clinton's policy toward the tiny, impoverished Caribbean nation and provide strong evidence to support critics who claim the United States is giving little more than lip service to the cause of Haitian democracy.

Among other things, the Bay Guardian has learned:

Haitian Lt. Col. Joseph Michel Francois-the reputed kingpin behind the military junta-was trained at a clandestine U.S. Army combat facility known as the "coup school," whose alumni also include jailed Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and former Salvadoran president Roberto d'Aubuisson.

Paramilitary death squads controlled by Francois and Frank Romain, the former mayor of Port-au-Prince, are carrying out what some critics call a systematic attempt to wipe out Aristide's base of support, making it difficult if not impossible for the ousted president to reclaim political power. The death squads, known as attaches have been linked to roughly 4,000 murders since the coup.

Former Haitian officials and congressional sources link Francois and the NIS to a massive drug-smuggling and money-laundering operation that sends at least a billion dollars worth of cocaine a year to the United States. Aristide's attempt to crack down on the drug ring may have helped spark the coup-and since the military junta took power, cocaine exports have soared.

In fact, a U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency operative who was investigating an NIS officer allegedly involved in drug smuggling had to flee Haiti in 1992 after receiving death threats on a private telephone line with a secret number known only to a few top government officials.

At least two senior members of Congress, Rep. Charles Rangel and Rep. Major Owens, both New York Democrats, told the Bay Guardian they have enough reason to suspect CIA involvement in the Aristide coup that they are calling for a full congressional investigation.

## **HALF HEARTED EFFORTS**

As the crisis in Haiti drags on and the military junta refuses to relinquish power, critics have charged that the United States is making only token efforts to restore Aristide to office.

Larry Burns, an analyst at the Washington, D.C.-based Council on Hemispheric Relations, pointed out that the United States has not fully participated in the United Nations embargo of Haiti (unlike most other countries, the U.S. has exempted its own companies in Haiti from the embargo). It's also curious, he told the Bay Guardian, that the Clinton administration has failed to make a public issue of the military regime's role in drug trafficking—a tactic that the Bush administration used extensively to discredit Panama's Manuel Noriega.

"You would think that the White House would want, as one of its major points, to pin the drug tail on the military donkey in Haiti," Burns said. "It would be their best opportunity to rally the American people to a pro-Aristide position. Yet they never used it."

White House Deputy Press Secretary Don Steinberg told the Bay Guardian that "there's nothing halfhearted about our administration's commitment to returning democracy to Haiti and Aristide to power."

"We sent military trainers to Haiti, we've supported the embargo, and we've fully supported the Governor's Island accords," which were supposed to lead to Aristide's return, Steinberg said. "This administration has not for a second coddled Francois or Cedras." Lt. Gen. Raoul Cedras heads the military junta.

But Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) said he was worried that the administration's silence on the military's connection to the drug trade would only embolden the junta and tighten its grip on power.

"We have turned a very deaf ear to what is obviously a moving force," he said. "It leads you to wonder if our silence is because we knew this was going on and that our complicity in drug activity may parallel the accusations that were raised about our involvement in drug activities—that is, our government and the Central Intelligence Agency's—during the Vietnam conflict."

Although they admit they have no hard evidence, both Rangel and Aristide's exiled interior minister, Patrick Elie, told the Bay Guardian they see shadows of the CIA's hidden hand behind the September 1991 coup, which overthrew Aristide after only seven months in office.

"I don't have a specific answer as to whether the CIA was involved," Rangel said. "But I do know that our feelings against Aristide were made pretty clear before the coup."

Rangel was referring to the Bush administration's open backing of former World Bank official Marc Bizan against Aristide. But in a show of popular support that caught the Bush administration by surprise, Aristide received 67.5 percent of the vote, while Bizan captured only 13 percent.

Elie told the Bay Guardian that the relationship between the CIA and Haiti's National Intelligence Service went far beyond mere cooperation.

"In fact," he said "the NIS was created by the Central Intelligence Agency. It was created by it and funded by it."

Elie, whose job included oversight of the NIS, launched an investigation shortly after taking office that revealed that the CIA had covertly given the NIS \$500,000—twice what the U.S. government was providing Haiti overtly for drug interdiction.

He said that although the NIS was supposed to be used to combat drug smugglers, “in fact, all the NIS has done has been political repression and spying on Haitians.”

Records of the Drug Enforcement Administration confirm that the NIS operates with CIA assistance. According to a confidential DEA document titled “Drug Trafficking in Haiti,” presented to members of Congress in February 1993 and obtained by the Bay Guardian, the NIS “is a covert counter-narcotics intelligence unit which often works in unison with the CIA.”

On Sept. 26, 1992, the report states, the DEA itself was driven from Haiti when its main agent was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats. DEA attaché Tony Greco received the threats on his private line in the U.S. embassy, “given out to only a few trusted individuals,” the memo says, within a week of his providing information that led to the arrest of a NIS officer for drug trafficking. “The unidentified threat,” the report states, “came from an individual who claims to control many Haitian soldiers in the narcotics distribution trade.”

Rep. Major Owens (D-N.Y.), who chairs the Congressional Black Caucus task force on Haiti, told the Bay Guardian: “I worry about the CIA having had a role in the overthrow of the Aristide government. The Congressional Black Caucus has joined with congressman Joseph Kennedy (D-Mass.) in calling for a full-scale investigation. “

Bay Guardian phone calls to the CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., were not returned. Steinberg said he knew nothing about possible CIA involvement in the coup and was “hearing about it for the first time.” He refused to comment on the allegations of drug smuggling.

## THE SCHOOL OF COUPS

Rangel, who has traveled several times to Haiti and is close to the deposed administration of Aristide, told the Bay Guardian that although Cedras heads the junta, Francois, who is also Port-au-Prince’s chief of police, wields the real power.

Francois, Rangel said, “has been targeted as being directly responsible for the recent murder of [Justice Minister] Guy Malary,” who was dragged out of church, beaten, and killed on Oct. 14.

Michel Francois learned some of his skills right here in the United States. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas (SOA), which Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of SOA Watch in Columbus Georgia, described as a “combat and counterinsurgency training facility for soldiers from Central and South America and the Caribbean.”

White House spokesperson Steinberg didn’t deny that Francois had attended the Army training school. “But just because he graduated from SOA doesn’t mean he has U.S. government intelligence connections,” Steinberg said. “A lot of people graduate from that school.”

Bourgeois said SOA was founded in 1946 and operated in Panama until it was kicked out in 1984 as part of the canal treaty. It was reestablished in Ft. Benning, Ga.

“In Latin America,” he said, “it’s known as La Escuela de Golpes, the school of coups,” because of the achievements of some of its 55,000 graduates, including d’Aubuisson; Noriega, who is serving 40 years in federal prison for drug trafficking; Gen. Hugo Banzer, who ruled as Bolivia’s dictator from 1971 to 1978; and Hector Gramajo, Guatemala’s former defense minister who helped oversee years of

brutal repression in that country and was the guest speaker at SOA’s graduation in December 1991.

On March 15, 1993, the United Nations Truth Commission released its report on El Salvador and, Bourgeois said, “about 75 percent of the officers cited in the most serious massacres, including the killing of six Jesuit priests, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, and the rape and murder of four U.S. nuns, were SOA graduates.”

Bay Guardian calls to SOA were not returned.

## **DRUG MONEY**

The coup and resulting embargo may have left thousands of Haitians dead and created terrible hardship for many thousands more, but it’s apparently been quite profitable for the drug traffickers.

According to a Feb. 10, 1993, memo from one of Conyers’ congressional staffers, a copy of which was obtained by the Bay Guardian, “the wholesale value of Haiti’s drug industry on the U.S. market is now equal to \$1 billion a year, which equals the entire revenue of Haiti’s population of six million.

“Haiti has become the second most important transshipment point, after the Bahamas, for cocaine shipments from Colombia to the U.S.,” the memo states.

The DEA’s “Drug Trafficking in Haiti” document also says that Haiti is believed to be a main center for laundering of drug money.

One of Elie’s key tasks was to have been overseeing the drug interdiction efforts, and he had developed an extensive program that included close cooperation with U.S. agencies. But the program was barely off the ground when the coup drove him into hiding in Haiti-and five months later, into the United States. (He has since fled the U.S., fearing for his life, and called the Bay Guardian from an undisclosed location because he was told there is a \$750,000 contract on his head. Three pro-Aristide radio broadcasters have been murdered in Florida.)

“While I was in hiding,” he said, “I monitored Michel Francois over the airwaves directing the landing of a [drug smuggling] plane right in the middle of Port-au-Prince. I immediately notified the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince. I was in touch with the CIA main agent there at the time, and I gave him the time and date of that landing.

“I don’t know if he did anything with it. Since the coup, despite our repeated attempts to continue this collaboration with the U.S. as the legitimate government of Haiti, we were met with stonewalling.”

Elie’s account is supported by the memo to Conyers, which stated that after the coup, “all those jailed for drug-trafficking have been released and...Michel Francois has personally



supervised the landing of planes carrying drugs and weapons.”

And a September 1992 State Department report titled “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Mid-Year Update” noted that “although President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was planning new policies and institutions to combat narcotics trafficking, his ouster...crippled narcotics control efforts in Haiti.”

Meanwhile, observers say, the violence continues-targeted largely at the popular organizations that helped bring Aristide to power. As part of the reign of terror, death lists are being posted in small Haitian villages, Liam Mahoney, an independent human rights monitor in Haiti, told the Bay Guardian by phone on Nov. 3.

The military regime so far has ignored the Governor’s Island accords that on Oct. 30 called for Aristide’s return to power, leading some to speculate that the junta wants to completely destroy Aristide’s power base before they allow him to return-if they allow him to return at all.

“If something is not done soon, there will be no Aristide supporters left,” said Rep. Owens. “They will all be destroyed.”

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## **HAITI-US: CIA CALLS ACCOUNT OF MALARY KILLING UNRELIABLE**

**By Jim Lobe**

**IPS, 11 Oct 1996**

An account naming three leaders of a Haitian paramilitary group, including a former paid agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) , as conspirators in the 1993 assassination of Haiti’s Justice Minister is “unreliable,” according to a senior U.S. intelligence official.

The official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified, said the account, which was included in a secret Oct. 28, 1993, report entitled “ Haiti’s Far Right: Taking the Offensive,” was based on only one source who was dropped by the CIA shortly after providing the information.

“The source was let go because of the questions about the reliability of information he was providing,” said the official. “Moreover, there was no information to corroborate his statement,” he added.

In a subsequent CIA report on the assassinations of three prominent supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, including that of Justice Minister Guy Malary, “that information was not repeated because the source was discredited,” according to the official. He said the second report, which was finished in December 1995, remains under wraps.

The intelligence official’s account was provided to IPS this evening, several hours after reporters asked spokesmen at the White House and State Department for an explanation of the October 1993 report which had surfaced in connection with a lawsuit against the Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advancement and Progress (FRAPH).

The lawsuit concerns Alerte Belance, a 32-year-old woman who was severely maimed in October, 1993, when FRAPH members broke into her home in Haiti and attacked her with machetes. Represented by the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), Belance has sued FRAPH under the Alien Tort Claims Act, a law that allows non-U.S. citizens legal recourse for the abuse of their rights abroad.

In pursuing the case, CCR has subpoenaed documents on FRAPH from a number of U.S. agencies, including the CIA which recently handed over the heavily censored October 1993 report by the Directorate of Intelligence, the CIA's analytical wing.

"In early to mid-October, (Brig. Gen. Philippe) Biamby and his associates coordinated the murder of Justice Minister Guy Malary, which took place on 14 October, with members of the Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advancement and Progress (FRAPH)," states the memo.

After a half-line of text blacked out by CIA censors, the document goes on: "FRAPH members Jodel Chamblain, Emmanuel Constant and Gabriel Douzable met with an unidentified military officer on the morning of 14 October to discuss plans to kill Malary."

Gunmen shot and killed the 50-year-old Malary and two aides later that day in a bloody ambush, just as they were leaving the ministry in downtown Port-au-Prince. His assassination effectively scuttled the U.S.- and U.N.-sponsored Governor's Island accord which was to have ensured Aristide's restoration by the end of October, 1993.

After Malary's assassination, FRAPH, backed by the military regime which seized power and exiled Aristide in September 1991, intensified what became a reign of terror against suspected Aristide supporters and their families.

The intelligence official who spoke with IPS says that the blacked-out portion of the sentence states: "An untested source reported..."

He said it was unclear why the censors had decided to delete this. Normally, the censors are instructed to black out information which could reveal the agency's "sources and methods," invade the privacy of U.S. citizens, or otherwise jeopardize U.S. national security. But "an untested source" appears to fall outside all of those categories.

If the source's account were true, the implications are potentially explosive, because Constant, who says he founded FRAPH at the suggestion of U.S. intelligence officials, has stated frequently that he was paid \$ 500 a month by the CIA between 1992 and 1994. The CIA has never denied a relationship with Constant.

Constant fled to the United States in December 1994, three months after a U.N.-sanctioned intervention by mainly U.S. forces helped restore the exiled Aristide to power. In May, 1995, his visa was revoked by Secretary of State Warren Christopher on the grounds that his presence here constituted a threat to U.S. foreign policy interests.

But U.S. officials refused to deport him to Haiti despite an extradition request by the Haitian government which has filed charges of arson, kidnapping, murder and torture. Instead, he was released from a U.S. Immigration Service jail last June and is reportedly living with relatives in New York.

Washington, which has also reportedly agreed to deport him to a third country if he so chooses, says the judicial system in Haiti is too weak to handle his prosecution at this time.



Disclosure of the document's existence and contents, if true, would likely increase pressure on Washington to return Constant to Haiti.

The intelligence official who spoke with IPS said the CIA's December 1995 study covered the assassinations of Antoine Izmerly, who was also slain in 1993, and of Father Jean-Marie Vincent, who was machine-gunned to death in Port-au-Prince in Aug, 1994, as well as that of Malary. But he said he could not discuss the findings in those cases.

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