

Contra Leaders Address Drug Allegations

CIA Role in Trafficking Denied; One Explains Gifts From Cocaine Dealer

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Former Nicaraguan contra leader Eden Pastora told the Senate intelligence committee yesterday that he accepted money and gifts from a friendly countryman without knowing the man was a cocaine dealer in the United States.

But Pastora and the onetime leader of the main anti-Sandinista contra group, Adolfo Calero, repeatedly denied during a sometimes tumultuous hearing that the CIA had supported or condoned drug trafficking to finance the war against the leftist government in Managua.

Calero testified that he had met another Nicaraguan, Norwin Meneses, two or three times but "I had no idea he was engaged in drug trafficking." He also said that Meneses had given "not one cent" to the contra cause.

Meneses and Oscar Danilo Blandon were described in a series of articles last August in the San Jose Mercury News as being financiers of the CIA-run contra army who were said to have raised millions in the 1980s through drug sales in South-Central Los Angeles. Yesterday, both contra leaders denied they knew of any connection between the CIA and Blandon and Meneses.

The hearing was repeatedly interrupted by hecklers, some of whom shouted "Coverup!" and called for the panel to hear witnesses who supported the main allegations of the Mercury News series. At one point, committee Chairman Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) asked Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), many of whose African American con-

stituents were in the hearing room, to join the committee's questioning.

Pastora said that he was unaware that Blandon trafficked in cocaine until he was "arrested in San Diego" in 1986. "I did not know before," Pastora said.

Once known as guerrilla leader "Commander Zero," Pastora said that before he knew Blandon was a drug dealer, he had twice accepted \$3,000 from him "toward the armed struggle." Then, Pastora said, when he was "in critical financial straits," Blandon gave him two used pickup trucks and free rental of a house in Costa Rica.

He said he met Meneses briefly and only twice, once in 1979 before the anti-Sandinistas were formed and again in 1987 or 1988, after his activities as a contra leader ended. Pastora said he had "no notion" that Meneses ever supported the contras and did not know he dealt in drugs.

Pastora said he had gotten the promise of two helicopters from Cuban residents in Miami, but only after the aircraft were received "discovered [the donors] were drug traffickers."

Asked about any CIA complicity in drug trafficking, Pastora said: "I have no knowledge of anything of the sort."

Pastora denied any of his top aides were involved in drug trafficking, as CIA officials charged publicly in 1984 when they cut off aid to the popular contra leaders. He accused the CIA of "trying to compromise us either directly or indirectly with drug traffickers."

Calero said he knew Blandon's par-

ents as "nice people" in Nicaragua but did not know of Oscar Blandon until this year when he read newspaper stories about him.

He said he met Meneses twice in the mid-1980s at contra fund-raising dinners in San Francisco. Calero said he was sure that Meneses provided "not one cent" to the contra cause and "had no idea that he was engaged in drug traffic."

Specter said the committee yesterday in closed session had questioned Blandon, now a paid confidential informant of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Blandon repeated what he has told a federal grand jury, that he sold his first drugs at the suggestion of Meneses in the early 1980s to raise funds for the contras but later found out the CIA was financing the rebel organization. Thereafter, Blandon sold drugs for his own profit, Specter said.

At the hearing, hecklers first interrupted the session when Calero described as "crap . . . unfounded, ridiculous" the allegation that the CIA was involved in promoting drug trafficking to raise money for the contras. One heckler called for Blandon to testify publicly and "not in secret."

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BY J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE—ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former contra leader Adolfo Calero testifies at a sometimes tumultuous Senate Intelligence committee hearing.