



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6521

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 2, 1978

CONTACT: JANET ANDERSON
BOB DOWNEN

Senator Bob Dole said today that he has received further allegations that Panamanian General Omar Torrijos and members of his family have been involved in the narcotics trade in North and South America. Dole said that he received copies of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration files from an unknown source earlier this week, which appeared to be authentic. "Someone is trying to tell us something," Dole suggested, "and I intend to pursue the matter until the Administration agrees to cooperate in this investigation."

Senator Dole made the remarks on the Senate Floor today. A complete text of his comments follows:

"Mr. President, nearly four months ago I advised the United States Senate of certain allegations I had received of direct involvement by General Omar Torrijos and other members of his regime in drug-trafficking in the United States and elsewhere. On October 13, I suggested that these charges, if true, could prove relevant to the Panama Canal Treaty issue. I feel now, as I did then, that the credibility and the personal integrity of General Torrijos and his colleagues will bear upon their reliability as Panama's guarantors of the new Treaties.

"Furthermore, since ratification of these proposed Panama Canal Treaties would definitely strengthen the political and financial status of the Torrijos regime, I maintain that it is important for us to know in advance if we will be bolstering a corrupt government which facilitates transport of illegal drugs to our own shores.

"Mr. President, I think that any member of Congress who became aware of such allegations would feel a responsibility to call for full disclosure of relevant materials. This is what I have attempted to do during the last fifteen weeks, only to find those efforts frustrated by bureaucratic roadblocks. Two full months after filing a "Freedom of Information Request" on October 14, I received seventy-five pages of highly censored material from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. I was advised that additional DEA files, as well as the deleted portions of the files I received, could not be provided because it could "jeopardize" national security or U.S. foreign policy interests. In late December, I filed an appeal with the Department of Justice, which is currently reviewing the case.

"Despite the cloak of secrecy that the Executive Branch has wrapped around its files on the alleged Torrijos drug connection, the matter will not simply go away. To the contrary, materials relating to the allegations have continued to surface in recent months through unofficial channels-

"The latest development that I am aware of occurred on Tuesday of this week, when two copies of Drug Enforcement Administration files were delivered to my office in a plain white envelope by an unknown source. The documents appear to be authentic photostatic copies of DEA and Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs files. Both contain agent reports which refer by name to General Omar Torrijos or members of his immediate family, and implicate them in narcotics traffic through Panama.

-2-

"Mr. President, these documents raise more questions than they answer. Perhaps the reports contained within the documents are unfounded. Perhaps the documents themselves are forgeries. But when I sent similar documents to the DEA Administrator on October 21 asking for confirmation of authenticity, no response was received. This is typical of the lack of cooperation that the Executive Branch has demonstrated so far in my efforts simply to determine whether there is any substance to these allegations.

"Mr. President, I will not release the two documents which I received yesterday. I believe it is a responsibility of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to make a full disclosure of its files in this regard, and I intend to pursue the matter until they do so. At the moment, I am of the opinion that "someone is trying to tell us something" about drug-trafficking information that is in the possession of the Executive Branch of our Government. As a member of Congress who is concerned both about the drug traffic coming into this country and about the pending Panama Canal Treaties, I feel a responsibility to pursue the matter to its end.

"I can say with certainty that the particular items which were delivered to my office on Tuesday by an unknown source were not contained within the seventy-five pages of sanitized documents which I received from DEA in December, in response to my "Freedom of Information Request." If these documents are authentic then they were willingly and knowingly withheld from me by the DEA. It is for that reason that I raise the question: Just what else does the Executive Branch know about the Torrijos drug- trafficking operations, and why is it being withheld from Members of Congress who seek to learn the truth of the matter?"

possession of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Quite truthfully, I have considered that alternative, and have so far rejected it. That decision requires further explanation for those who may be unfamiliar with the ramifications of examining Intelligence Committee files.

"I have been advised by the Administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence "has copies of all D.E.A. files regarding this matter...[and] material from other agencies as well."

"Under the provisions of Senate Resolution 400, enacted by the 94th Congress to establish the Select Committee, confidential materials may be reviewed by any member of the Senate. However, no notes or copies may be made by the member during the review.

"What is most troublesome, however, is that Committee regulations thereafter prevent the member from doing or saying anything which might jeopardize the confidentiality of those materials. I can understand the reasons for this precaution. I can appreciate the rationale behind it. I do not argue with those restrictions, or with the penalties that enforce them.

"But by the same token, I do not wish to compromise my freedom to speak out on this issue and to pursue the public's right to know about this matter. It is my understanding that, were I to look at Intelligence Committee files, I would not be at liberty even to acknowledge publicly whether earlier allegations were confirmed or disproven by that review.

COMMITTEE BRIEFING OFFERED

"Mr. President, on Tuesday I was invited to attend an Intelligence Committee briefing on this sensitive matter by my good friends, the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Committee. I appreciate very much their courtesy and helpfulness in this regard, and I believe they understand this Senator's desire to learn the full truth about the drug charges leveled against the Panamanian regime, and how they might relate to the pending Panama Canal Treaties.

"However, realizing that the full briefing would entail a commitment on my part to remain silent on the matter in the future, I declined to accept the offer.

WILL PROVIDE DOCUMENTS TO COMMITTEE

"About one week ago, I received two photocopies of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration files directly implicating General Omar Torrijos and members of his family in narcotics operations within Panama. The files were delivered to my office by a source unknown to me and, as I advised my colleagues in a Floor statement last week, I will not make these confidential files public.

"However, in response to a specific request from the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I have agreed to provide them with these two file copies. It is my understanding that they wish to examine the documents to see whether or not they are already in their possession. I am happy to cooperate with the Committee in this regard, for I believe they should continue to pursue an investigation of this matter.

"Insofar as the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration has assured me on numerous occasions that the Intelligence Committee has copies of "all D.E.A. files" on this matter, it can be assumed that the Committee will find that they have already seen the two documents. If not, I think it would raise a very serious matter which the Committee should pursue immediately, and to its fullest extent. I feel certain the members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence will act in the public interest in this regard.

ADMINISTRATION COMMUNICATION

"Mr. President, so that the record on this point can be complete, I will ask unanimous consent that the text of a letter I sent to D.E.A. Administrator Bensinger on February 3 be printed in the record at the conclusion of my remarks, along with a copy of his response to me dated February 7.

Mr. Bensinger advises me in his letter that both he and the United States Attorney General briefed the Senate leadership on the Panama drug issue on October 6, 1977. At their "specific request and direction," Mr. Bensinger states, all files regarding Panamanian officials were given to the Senate Intelligence Committee. That is fine. I do not quarrel with that action, and I commend the Administrator for his cooperation with the distinguished majority and minority leaders last October.

"But is that supposed to be the end of the matter? What about the very legitimate questions raised by this Senator, by other Senators, and by the general public? Are the rest of us to be kept in the dark, assuming that the drug trafficking allegations have no bearing on the general Treaty debate? Are we to drop the matter and forget we ever heard of it? If so, I reject that contention on behalf of myself and others who demand that the full story be told.

"I filed the Freedom of Information request last October. I followed the prescribed course for gaining public access to the facts. I ran into a stone wall. Someone somewhere -- at D.E.A., at the State Department, perhaps elsewhere -- decided that the answers I sought were too "sensitive." Perhaps it is the current context of events that makes them so.

"In any case, if the only option left to this Senator is to call for a closed session to discuss the matter, then that is the course of action this Senator will take. The record should be clear in years to come that we did not sidestep this issue. I hope the record will show that the Senate reached a consensus on the relevance of the drug issue early in the Treaty debate, after having access to all the facts. That is my intention, and my objective."

The Honorable Peter Bensinger
Administrator
U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration
1405 I Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20537

February 3, 1978

Dear Mr. Bensinger:

I was recently provided with certain documents which appear to be copies of DEA Investigation Reports. These documents contain specific reports alleging involvement by General Omar Torrijos of Panama in drug-trafficking operations in the Western hemisphere. As a member of the United States Senate who will be requested to pass judgment on ratification of a new Treaty with the Government of Panama, I feel a responsibility to my constituents and to the national interest to make a formal inquiry concerning this information.

On October 14, I formally submitted a Freedom-of-Information request for specific DEA files which I understood contain information on this matter. The selected materials which I subsequently received from DEA on December 16 did not include the attached documents.

In particular, I want to know if you can confirm the authenticity of these documents and, further, I would like to know if the allegations contained in these documents have been verified or disproven by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

In my opinion, these reports, if authentic and verified, raise serious doubts about the personal integrity of the government leader with whom we have been dealing on a basis of mutual trust. They raise questions about the advisability of enhancing the financial and political base of General Torrijos through our ratification of the proposed Canal Treaties.

In view of these concerns, I respectfully request your assessment of the accuracy and validity of the allegations contained in these reports. I will look forward to hearing from you at an early date, and would appreciate a written response for my files.

Sincerely yours,

BOB DOLE
United States Senator