

Belisario Betancur begins mop-up of narco-terrorism in Colombia

by Valerie Rush

The Kissinger scenario for the “Hong Kongization” of Ibero-America suffered an important reverse March 10 when special anti-narcotics squads of the Colombian National Police captured a cluster of modern cocaine processing laboratories the size of a small city and seized nearly 14 tons of refined cocaine, estimated at 25% of U.S. annual consumption of the deadly drug.

Not only does the cocaine crackdown promise dramatic repercussions in the world narcotics trade, but it also sends an unmistakable signal to the International Monetary Fund and Swiss banking houses that the immense flows of illicit wealth which have kept their debt scam afloat may soon be drying up.

Last November, the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* threatened Colombia that if it persisted in fighting the drug trade, it would “no longer be in a position to earn the foreign exchange necessary for its economy.” Colombian President Betancur has, however, persisted, and his recent warning to the international creditors that the continent must prepare to face its creditors as “one single great Latin American nation” suggests that the independent-minded Colombian leader has a strategy that could well be timed to coincide with the controversial late-March tour by Mexican President de la Madrid of Ibero-America’s major debtor nations and Colombia.

An end to ‘Tranquilandia’

The Betancur government’s dismantling of the immense jungle laboratory, known to its owners as “Tranquilandia” and to inhabitants of the region as “Villa Coca,” was reportedly assisted by a communications satellite whose powerful radar helped to pinpoint the world’s largest refining center, which had been sending clandestine transmissions to its suppliers in neighboring Peru and Bolivia. Other laboratories in the region have since also been seized and dismantled, 19 in all thus far.

In addition to the mountains of cocaine that were poured

into the Yarí River or incinerated, the anti-narcotics squads also confiscated entire flotillas of small planes and helicopters, trucks, cars, tractors and motorcycles, microwave ovens used to dry the cocaine base, sophisticated communications equipment, electrical generators, washing machines and refrigerators, and a variety of arms. The seizure of files and receipts of international drug transactions conducted at Tranquilandia is expected to lead to a record number of arrest warrants and extradition requests.

As important as the drug seizure itself is the fact that irrefutable proof was uncovered in the raids of extensive mafia/guerrilla collaboration, as *EIR* has charged. Dozens of guerrilla uniforms were discovered at Tranquilandia along with documents outlining a detailed business relationship between the cocaine traffickers and several regional fronts of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Even more conclusive proof was offered just days after the Tranquilandia bust, when a 100-man commando of the April 19 guerrilla movement (M-19) attempted to take over the city of Florencia, capital of the department of Caquetá where Tranquilandia was discovered. Although the M-19ers only managed to hold the city a few hours before the military dislodged them, the guerrilla assault—which left some 30 dead—was universally viewed as retaliation for the destruction of the cocaine labs.

The overt action of the M-19 commandos in defending the interests of their drug-trafficking colleagues has provoked a split in the M-19 ranks, with the central command of the guerrilla organization issuing a strong denunciation of the Florencia raid and expelling its leader, alias “Boris,” for unauthorized and provocative acts. “Boris” has nonetheless continued to lead his band of terrorists in raids throughout the area, with the military in hot pursuit.

Immediately following the Florencia assault, the Betancur government imposed a state of siege in the four departments of Caquetá, Huila, Cauca, and Meta—the stronghold

of the cocaine mafia as well as of the guerrilla bands—to allow security forces and the military to complete the job.

Reports that Tranquilandia and the other cocaine laboratories had been operating for several years suggest that the decision of the government to shut them down now was an intensely political one. Insiders have told *EIR* that part of President Betancur's decision to move had to do with the fact that his justice minister, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, had just survived a mafia-orchestrated scandal against him and emerged bolstered from the contest. The anti-drug efforts of Lara Bonilla, according to national police spokesmen, were a determining factor in the success of the Caquetá drug raids.

Two of the documented owners of the Tranquilandia laboratories—Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Evaristo Porras Ardila—were the key figures behind the scandal against Lara Bonilla. Porras had claimed that he had given Lara Bonilla 1 million pesos before Lara was appointed Justice Minister, allegedly to use his influence against the extradition of Pablo Escobar to the United States on drug-trafficking charges. The billionaire Escobar, along with a third prominent mafioso, Fabio Ochoa Restrepo, had been fingered last year by Lara Bonilla as founders of the right-wing death squad MAS.

Although press reports have made much of the narco-guerrilla link the raids have uncovered, none have dared to explore the implications of the evidence that both left- and right-wing terrorism has a common "mother" in the drug trade, as demonstrated by the alliance among factions, at least, of the FARC, M-19, and MAS.

This "Nazi-communist" nexus has been elaborated in some detail by *EIR* in recent publications. The collaboration of the Sendero Luminoso guerrillas in Peru, for example, with a drug trade dominated by old Nazi International networks exemplified by Klaus Barbie, was one of several indications that "right" and "left" had formed a symbiotic relationship with the drug trade.

United States Ambassador to Colombia Lewis Tambs traveled to Washington the week of March 19 to give a major briefing to the press, in which he stressed that the Caquetá raid was "the largest operation against drugs ever conducted anywhere in the world." He noted that the guerrillas "served as protectors and guards of the camp and took a percentage of the benefits."

Colombian Defense Minister Matamoros was explicit that the guerrillas and the drug traffickers were each working for their own interests, "but with the same dark designs." He added, "This 'Narcoguerrilla' alliance is a new threat to democracy and if we do not act rapidly and energetically our constitutional system could be in danger. . . . We will not surrender in this war that we have begun."

A 'no' to the IMF

As *EIR* has painstakingly documented over the years, the cultivation of drug-based economies in Ibero-America has

long been the gameplan of the International Monetary Fund. Violent opposition to industrialization, capital-intensive technological innovation and large-scale domestic or regional development projects has been the foundation of every IMF "restructuring program" and loan conditionality imposed on Ibero-America, with the result being economic shrinkage, population reduction, and a dramatic accumulation of unpayable debt. That is where Dope, Inc. and the narcodollar lure enter.

The blackmail against Colombia has been as much a question of the narcodollars which the economy has come to depend on, as the threat of triggering a new Central America-style "*Violencia*" civil war should Colombia seek the development path instead of drugs. Betancur's decision to go for a shutdown of the Colombian cocaine trade therefore occurs at a critical moment not only for Colombia but for the entire continent. The possibility of a March 31 debt default on the part of Argentina, with Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, and others likely to follow, poses a unique moment for joint action on a number of fronts.

It is in this context that Mexican President de la Madrid's Ibero-American tour to Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Colombia this month is becoming the center of everyone's attention. In anticipation of de la Madrid's visit to Colombia, Betancur has given a series of interviews to the Mexican press emphasizing the need for a new continental strategy to face the combined threat of economic collapse and social decomposition.

On March 10, the day of the huge cocaine busts, Betancur told Mexico's *El Universal* that "The visit of Miguel de la Madrid [to Colombia] is in no way ceremonial. . . . We have much to learn from Mexican know-how. . . . Above all, we want to learn how we can exploit our extraordinary electric energy potential . . . to construct energy infrastructure in Central America and extend it through Mexico. This could be achieved with the creation of binational companies."

On March 17, Betancur explained to the Mexico City daily *Excelsior* that Ibero-American unity was "indispensable and urgent" and that "we must be able to present ourselves before the international financial world as a single great Latin American nation that needs to refinance its foreign debt."

Ibero-America has much natural wealth, stressed Betancur, which must be exploited in new bilateral and multilateral trade arrangements and through the creation of new binational and multinational companies. This would be a major topic of discussion with his Mexican colleague, declared Betancur.

While much of de la Madrid's tour will focus on economic and trade questions, the war that Betancur has launched against the drug trade will necessarily put a second topic on the tour agenda: How can Ibero-America forge an alliance "as one single great Latin American nation" to defend itself from the International Monetary Fund and its junior partners in the drug trade.