

Drugs and terrorism in Colombia: how the two combined into one

On Nov. 6, 1985, an M-19 terrorist squad assaulted the Colombian Justice Palace in downtown Bogota, seized and systematically murdered 12 of the Supreme Court's 24 magistrates, and burned extradition petitions and documentation on numerous drug traffickers, both fugitive and imprisoned. In the ensuing battle for the Palace, the building was gutted, the nation's legal archives burned, and 100 people killed, including the 40 terrorists.

Most Colombians branded the act a clear case of "narco-terrorism." *EIR* published a dossier on the event, identifying it as a "narco-terrorist" assault run jointly by the Gnostic Church and the Soviets. Months later, evidence came to light that the M-19 had been paid millions by drug traffickers to murder the magistrates, who were in the process of debating a challenge to the U.S.-Colombia extradition treaty, and to burn the extradition documents.

Yet, not one of the U.S. news media covered the mafia-terrorist link, and even as late as Feb. 13, 1986, U.S. FBI director—now CIA director—William Webster was publicly denying the drugs-terrorism link. In an interview to the *Los Angeles Times* that day, Webster declared, "Words like narco-terrorism tend to exacerbate the realities as we know them. I also do not believe that the hard evidence links the two. . . ."

On June 30, the Colombian press reported on the result of a Catholic Church poll in that country, which determined that the guerrillas were active in 80% of the national territory, and that their presence "is combined" with the drug traffickers in many of those areas.

Formation of the narco-terrorist army

The competing Colombian guerrilla movements—the "socialist" M-19, Maoist EPL, the Moscow-linked FARC, and Cuba-linked ELN—began to clearly emerge as a narco-terrorist army in 1985, when they joined with the "indigenist" Quintín Lamé Brigade under the umbrella National Guerrilla Coordinator. Quintín Lamé was founded and led by Nazi-Communist cocaine czar Carlos Lehder Rivas, who had publicly pledged to create a "half-million army" to "liberate" the continent. In 1986, the Americas Battalion surfaced, incorporating the Colombian terrorists into a larger Andean-based

army including Peru's MRTA, the Venezuelan Brigada Roja, and the Ecuadorian Alfaro Vive Carajo.

- In March 1984, "Tranquilandia," the largest cocaine-processing facility in the world to that date, was discovered in the Colombian jungles of Caquetá province. Evidence was found that M-19 guerrillas were serving as the security guards for the "coca city." Within the month, several hundred M-19 narcoterrorists seized and bloodily occupied Florencia, the state capital of Caquetá, in retaliation for the Tranquilandia bust.

- Nov. 2, 1986: Hermil Lozada, commander of the FARC's seventh front near the border with Venezuela, told the daily *El Espectador*, "We have no problems with people growing coca. It is not a vice or problem for the people, but for the government." In March 1987, *Semana* magazine carried an interview with the head of the FARC, Jacobo Arenas, who responds to charges that his guerrillas finance themselves through the drug trade: "What we are telling the [coca] growers is: 'Comrades, we are not going to prohibit you from sowing, because it is generalized, and besides, we are not the government. Grow it.'"

- Nov. 13, 1986: The National Liberation Army (ELN), trained by Castro's Cuba, clashes violently with Venezuelan national guardsmen in Sierra de Perija, along the border with Colombia. Sierra de Perija is identified by Venezuela's national guard commander in the state of Zulia as the largest marijuana-producing center in the world. Sierra de Perija is also part of a contested oil-rich region between Colombia and Venezuela known as the "diferendo," an historic source of friction between the two countries.

- November 1986: The ELN dramatically escalates its sabotage campaign against Colombia's oil industry, begun in early 1985. Financed by the Soviet-linked Occidental Petroleum Co. of Armand Hammer, and by the Mannesmann Co. of West Germany, to the tune of millions of dollars in both kidnap ransoms and protection money ("war taxes"), the ELN targeted Colombia's 1,500-kilometer pipeline, the Cano-Limón-Covenas line, for sabotage, simultaneously aggravating tensions between Colombia and Venezuela over the "diferendo." In December 1986 statements to the Colombian Congress, Defense Minister Samudio declared that the

pipeline had been blasted 21 times, eight helicopters of the oil companies destroyed, and at least 26 oil company employees kidnapped over the previous 18 months.

- Nov. 25, 1986: The magazine *Hoy por Hoy* reports that fugitive narco-banker Jaime Michelsen Uribe, first cousin to former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen, had paid the ELN \$3.5 million in ransom money to try to get his daughter Camila, kidnapped 14 months earlier, back. Another seven months, and possibly millions of dollars later, Camila is still not home. It is revealed, however, that Michelsen had deployed his cousin Alfonso López and Senator Mestre Sarmiento to personally plead with Fidel Castro, acknowledged controller of the ELN, to intercede in the affair. Senator Mestre, currently one of five executive members of the ruling Liberal Party in Colombia, had earlier been denied the post of “designado” (vice president) because of his business relations to notorious drug-trafficker Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela.

It was also revealed that Michelsen’s intermediary with the ELN is one Juan José Echeverría, also known as “Mr. Johnny,” a former security minister for an ex-president of Costa Rica and an intimate of Castro and his “guest,” Robert Vesco, and of Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega. Mr. Johnny had mediated earlier ransoms of Mannesmann Co. employees kidnapped in Colombia by the ELN.

- Jan. 19, 1987: A march of 23,000 peasants is organized by the Colombian Communist Party in Guaviare, to protest militarization of the region as a violation of the government-FARC truce. In fact, the military is there on anti-drug operations. Colombia’s agriculture minister charged that the march had been organized by the drug-traffickers to force a military retreat, and even presidential peace adviser Carlos Ossa Escobar—who had previously denied that narco-terrorism existed—insisted, “If the guerrillas don’t rapidly split from the narcos, they will be corrupted by it and lose.”

- April 10, 1987: Following repeated terrorist attacks along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, Venezuelan Defense Minister Cardoso Grimaldi places troops in a state of alert in three border states to prevent the transfer “of Colombian guerrilla action to Venezuelan soil.”

- June 12, 1987: 100 heavily-armed ELN terrorists assault a sleeping contingent of Venezuelan national guardsmen in Sierra de Perija and slaughter nine of them. The guardsmen had been involved in eradicating coca and marijuana plants in the area. The Venezuelan press responds by publishing a stream of accusations against the Colombian government and armed forces for “harboring” narco-terrorism. One newspaper published a map purporting to show that 30% of Venezuelan territory had been stolen by Colombia in decades past.

- June 16, 1987: 200 FARC terrorists in the Colombian jungle province of Caqueta use land mines to blow up two army convoy trucks, killing 32 soldiers and officers. Presidential counselor Ossa Escobar tells the press, “In Caguan,

the region of Caqueta where the army suffered its ambush, the FARC totally controls production of coca. . . . The hypothesis, that they fear an operation similar to that in Putumayo [army raids on vast coca crops the previous week], and are therefore trying to divert attention with attacks like those of Caqueta, is very probable.”

- June 25, 1987: the Colombian Communist Party newspaper *Voz* fully defends both the FARC assault on the military patrol in Caqueta and, it appears, the ELN assault on Venezuelan troops, by insisting that the FARC “cannot be led to slaughter like tame sheep,” but must “defend itself and repel the monstrous siege that generals from Colombia and Venezuela, on orders of the U.S. mission, are running against the brother peoples of our two countries.” The same issue of *Voz* announced a unity meeting between the communists and the ELN.

War over the extradition treaty

The U.S.-Colombian extradition treaty has been repeatedly identified by the drug-traffickers as the number-one threat to their bid for power. Through corruption, threats, and murder, the mafia finally succeeded on June 25 in forcing the highest court in the country to overturn the treaty. They had the help of the guerrilla movements as a combination “big stick” and public relations voice for their anti-extradition efforts.

- Dec. 5, 1984: M-19 chieftain Iván Marino Ospina held a Mexico City press conference to announce M-19 support for mafia threats to “kill one American for every Colombian extradited.” Said Marino Ospina, “These threats should be carried out throughout the world against the representatives of rapacious imperialism . . . and will serve as the basis for negotiations if some day these traffickers, who are also Colombians . . . use their money to build the nation.” Several weeks later, cocaine czar Lehder declared: “The M-19 is the only movement that has declared itself against extradition. Iván’s call in Mexico is a call for the guerrilla movements to join in the [drug] bonanza.”

- Nov. 10, 1985: Excerpt of press conference by then Justice Minister Enrique Parejo González: “The day the guerrilla movement took the Palace of Justice, the four judges of the constitutional court were meeting to decide upon the request to declare the extradition treaty [unconstitutional]. . . . One cannot have many illusions about the fate the judges were to suffer.”

- Dec. 12, 1986: The Colombian Supreme Court overturns the U.S.-Colombian extradition treaty as unconstitutional. It is reinstated—temporarily—by President Barco. Hector Hurtado, executive member of the Colombian Communist Party, praises the Court’s decision: “It is a matter of sovereignty; we can’t let foreign courts decide our affairs.” The daily *El Espectador* editorially denounces the court decision as cowardice.

- Dec. 17, 1986: *El Espectador* director Guillermo Cano is killed by mob assassins on the streets of Bogotá.