

George Bush's deal with Colombia's Medellín Cartel explodes in his face

by Andrea Olivieri

President Bush's alliance with the cocaine-trafficking Medellín Cartel, evidence of which has remained in the shadows of the Iran-Contra scandal for years, has now exploded onto the public scene. In a deal which has revolted even some of the more hard-bitten elements of the corrupt U.S. justice system, the federal prosecution in the Miami trial of Manuel Antonio Noriega has offered as yet unspecified terms of leniency to cartel founder Carlos Lehder Rivas. In exchange, Lehder—who is currently serving a life sentence in the U.S. without parole—is to give testimony designed to bolster the prosecution's blundering case against the first Ibero-American leader to launch a real war on drugs, who said “no” to Panamanian support for the Reagan-Bush Contra policy, and who insisted on full U.S. compliance with the U.S.-Panama Canal Treaties.

The prosecution's deal with a self-avowed Hitler worshipper who has publicly sworn to use cocaine as a “revolutionary weapon” to destroy the United States, has now blown up in George Bush's face. During Nov. 25 testimony in a Miami courthouse, Lehder was forced to admit under intense cross-examination by Noriega defense attorney Frank Rubino that the Medellín Cartel had passed at least \$10 million to the U.S.-spawned Contra rebels, through U.S. government intermediaries! In testimony several days earlier, Lehder had revealed that an unnamed U.S. diplomat had offered the Colombian trafficker a “green light” to smuggle cocaine into the United States, in exchange for aid in smuggling weapons to the Contras.

According to Nov. 26 coverage in the *Washington Post*, Lehder's admissions corroborate testimony that had been given to a Senate subcommittee hearing back in 1987, to the effect that CIA agent Félix Rodríguez (a.k.a. Max Góomez), with “close ties to Donald Gregg, then national security adviser to Vice President Bush,” had channeled \$10 million worth of Medellín Cartel drug profits into Contra supply operations run by North.

Although that testimony was buried in 1987, and despite the fact that this publication had documented these Contra drug links at least one year earlier, Lehder's revival of the story today is causing quite a scandal. Jack Blum, the chief

Senate investigator behind the 1987 hearings, claims that Lehder's admissions “leave the government in an astonishing position, [since] he's their witness, and they can't impeach him.” In fact, notes Blum, precisely because “it is against his interest” to say anything that undermines the prosecution's case, “you have to ask why he would put this out.” Noriega's current defense strategy rests on the claim that any “collaboration” by him with the drug cartels was *at the behest of U.S. government agencies*.

In statements made during ABC's Nov. 25 “Nightline” television program, Blum confirms that the U.S. Justice Department had deliberately buried the 1987 testimony, because “they were trying to keep the Contras clean and make sure that that didn't lead to a vote that would cut off any new assistance to the Contras. [The cover-up] was really quite political, and it is something of a vindication to hear Carlos Lehder testifying to this today.”

López Michelsen, the ‘Godfather’

Lehder delivered yet another bombshell when he revealed that former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen, the head of Colombia's ruling Liberal Party and long considered a friend to U.S. political interests, has been the “political godfather” to the Medellín Cartel for nearly a decade. Confirming information that *EIR* first made public in 1984, Lehder testified that López had accepted nearly \$1 million in cartel contributions to his (failed) 1982 presidential bid, was adopted as the traffickers' “political godfather” by cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar Gaviria, and that the highly influential ex-President had interceded repeatedly on behalf of the cartel ever since.

Noriega's defense lawyers immediately sought, and won, a subpoena to force López—who happened to be in Miami at the time—to testify at the Noriega trial. Colombian President César Gaviria rushed to contact the U.S. State Department and demand immunity for López, but the former President's diplomatic passport was blocked while the U.S. State and Justice Departments feuded over whether to let him leave the country. Noriega's defense team's efforts were thwarted when Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, an intimate

López Michelsen on the hot seat

On July 26, 1984, Colombian anti-drug fighter Patricia Paredes de Londoño was abducted on the streets of Bogotá, Colombia and subjected to druggings and "Patty Hearst-style" brainwashing techniques by figures linked to the drug cartels. Londoño, editor of the magazine *Guerra a las Drogas (War on Drugs)*, is married to Maximiliano Londoño, vice president of Colombia's National Anti-Drug Coalition. Following an intense mobilization from anti-drug forces worldwide, including the efforts of this publication, Mrs. Londoño was freed on Aug. 1.

In mobilizing to win Londoño's release, anti-drug forces targeted the so-called "citizens above suspicion" who stand behind the drug cartels, such as former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen. It was perhaps no accident that just prior to Londoño's kidnaping, López had given a major press interview revealing his role as "political godfather" to the cocaine cartels. In that interview, López was asked why the country's drug traffickers had sought him out as a mediator for conducting negotiations with the government, to which López revealingly responded: "Ex-Presidents . . . are a kind of mailbox. I get all kinds of tragedies and people's problems here. *From a woman who quarrels with her husband, to some-*

one whose home is about to be auctioned at the bank" (emphasis added).

Significantly, Londoño's captors later told the police that she had willingly gone with them following "a quarrel with her husband." López was to repeat that formulation.

Immediately following Londoño's release, López announced that he was leaving Colombia for an extended stay of at least three months in Europe. On Aug. 21, 1984, then-President Belisario Betancur made public the text of a telegram sent to him by López Michelsen from Paris:

"In Panama, New York, Copenhagen, and presumably all over the world, an *Intelligence Executive Review* [sic] story is being circulated, according to which I have been in the service of the drug mafia, threatening Your Excellency, and sponsoring the so-called kidnaping of Mrs. Paredes de Londoño, who is supposedly married to the president of the Andean Labor Party and the Anti-Drug Coalition, and who has emerged to explain her absence as a dispute with her husband. . . .

"I think that I—as an ex-President of Colombia and friend of your Excellency . . . have the right for my honor not to be so damaged universally and in newspapers such as *ABC* of Madrid, in the face of the indifference or silence of the agents of the Colombian government, whatever their political affiliation might be."

López today is protesting that his honor is being damaged by Carlos Lehder. Perhaps no one has told him there is no honor among thieves?

of López Michelsen and vice president of the Socialist International, sought and received George Bush's permission to whisk López out of the country on a Venezuelan jet.

But not before López issued a furious denunciation of the U.S. plea-bargaining system: "What is inexplicable is how U.S. justice encourages these kinds of statements, offering reductions of sentences for people who break the record for slanderous allegations . . . criminals in the process of saving their skins." Ironically, López was personally instrumental in the Colombian government's adoption of a U.S.-modeled plea-bargaining system earlier this year, through which Lehder's former associates—Pablo Escobar, the Ochoa brothers, and others—were induced to "surrender" to Colombian authorities, *under terms they themselves have dictated!*

Although President Gaviria was quick to issue an official statement decrying the "false charges" against López, and describing the former President as a "fervent partisan of social justice and untiring worker for Latin American unity," the Colombian population knows otherwise. During his 1974-78 presidency, López established the banking and tax "reforms" which opened the Colombian economy to the drug trade. When he departed from the presidency, he left behind

a political machine inside the Liberal Party which has fought "untiringly" for more than a decade to legalize drug trafficking.

In 1984, *less than one week* after the Medellín Cartel stunned the nation by sending assassins to murder justice minister and anti-drug warrior Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, López Michelsen traveled to Panama to meet with the fugitive chieftains of the cartel, and to convey their offer of billions of dollars in drug profits in exchange for an amnesty by the Colombian government. According to Lehder's recent court testimony, Lara Bonilla was murdered precisely to prevent him from revealing López's relations with the cartel.

In February 1987, López called on then-President Virgilio Barco to begin negotiations with the cartel. Again, in 1989, López charged that it was the Barco government's refusal to negotiate a deal with the cartel that was responsible for the narco-terrorism ravaging the country. In a Nov. 3, 1989 address, just a few months after the cartel assassination of front-running anti-drug presidential candidate and López nemesis Luis Carlos Galán, the Godfather argued, incredibly, that "the so-called war against drugs [constitutes] a new element of destabilization" against Colombian society. And

in February 1990, López formed a group of influentials calling themselves “the Notables,” to offer themselves as a vehicle for negotiating the “surrender” of the cartel chieftains, while publicly promising the cartel “benevolent treatment.”

In May 1990, several of López’s closest accomplices were arrested by the Colombian military on charges of “aiding and abetting narco-terrorism.” It was simultaneously reported that the Army was in possession of a tape-recording implicating López himself. That tape-recording never made it into the courts, nor did López, despite a May 22, 1990 subpoena issued by a judge investigating “accessories to

narco-terrorism.”

The courts may have been bought, but the Colombian people were never fooled, and they certainly don’t need Carlos Lehder to tell them now what they’ve known all along. For years, anonymous patriots have been splashing the walls of Bogotá and other Colombian cities with the painted slogan “López, El Padrino” (“López, The Godfather.”) Visitors to Colombia may well be perplexed by another commonly appearing slogan: “El Pollo Pone Huevos de Coca” (“The Chicken Lays Coca Eggs”). However, every Colombian knows that *El Pollo* is López Michelsen’s official nickname.

You read it first in EIR

It is not necessary to rely on the tainted testimony of a crazed cocaine trafficker like Carlos Lehder to learn the facts about either the “narc-Contras” or Alfonso López Michelsen. The truth on both counts has been in the public domain for years, thanks to EIR. The coverage is from EIR unless otherwise indicated.

Narc-Contras

July 1986: *EIR White Paper: Who Wants to Destabilize Panama and Why?*: “Thus, [Elliott] Abrams has adopted the role of ‘Mr. Contra’ for the Reagan administration. Despite the widespread discrediting of the Nicaraguan insurgents for being up to their necks in drug trafficking, Abrams has not only been their fanatic defender, but has devoted the past few months to a series of personal meetings with the ‘Contra’ leadership to try to force through a ‘reorganization,’ or face-lift, of the motley crew.”

Dec. 19, 1986: “From the beginning, the Contras policy was designed to provide a ‘conservative’ cover for the sellout of Central America to Soviet-run narco-terrorists struck with the Soviet Union by Jimmy Carter’s Trilateral Commission government. Carter administration officials spoke of perpetual warfare in Central America, and argued that the United States could not allow any faction—‘left’ or ‘right’—to win. Central America’s militaries were cut off from U.S. assistance, and control handed over to Israeli arms- and drug-running networks under the Carter administration—*policies continued under the Reagan presidency by means of the Contras policy.*”

Jan. 23, 1987: “Long before ‘Irangate,’ *EIR* warned that President Reagan risked the biggest scandal of his presidency, if he continued with his ‘I’m a Contra’ policy. Even in the absence of the now voluminous evidence in the possession of the government, *EIR* characterized the



Contra-Sandinista struggle as an internal fight within the Central American branch of Dope, Inc., and urged that Reagan drop the Contras before his entire War on Drugs wound up in shambles.”

López Michelsen

September 1984: *EIR White Paper: Narco-Terrorism in Ibero-America.* “Patricia Londoño’s abduction came in the midst of an all-out war by Colombia’s drug traffickers, who are getting political leadership from former President Alfonso López Michelsen, against the government of President Belisario Betancur.”

April 1986: The second edition of the book *Dope, Inc.*, by the editors of *EIR*, is published. “As President of Colombia from 1974 to 1978, López virtually organized the expanding narcotics traffic from the top. . . . Despite significant funding from such known, convicted dope traffickers as Carlos Lehder—whom we will meet later as Robert Vesco’s and Fidel Castro’s business partner—López’s 1982 attempt at a political comeback failed.”

June 1, 1990: *EIR* cover story, an updated exposé of Alfonso López Michelsen’s role in sponsoring the drug trade in Colombia, is entitled “Wanted: The Godfather of Colombia’s Drug Cartels.”