

Drug lord's death gives new chance for the war on drugs

by Our Special Correspondent

The myth of the impossibility of defeating the drug-trafficking cartels and the narco-terrorists who are ravaging Colombia vanished on Dec. 2, when three special agents from the National Police and three from the Colombian Army broke into the hideout of Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Colombia's most wanted criminal, and killed him.

The story of his pursuit and demise, contrary to the way it has been played in the international media, and especially that of the United States, not only testifies to the efficacy of a well-orchestrated military offensive, but should inspire the international community to finally prosecute a serious war on drugs, until that plague is eradicated from the planet.

The news was at first received by Colombians with incredulity; the capture of Escobar seemed as impossible as the fall of the Berlin Wall once had. Escobar was wanted for the assassination of a presidential candidate, a justice minister, a former justice minister, judges, police and Army officers, journalists, more than 500 victims of indiscriminate terrorist attacks, the blowing up of a commercial airliner in mid-flight, and for having kept the nation in terror and its politicians blackmailed for more than a decade. Now, Escobar was dead.

Activities in most of the country's businesses and offices came to a halt, while everyone waited by the radio to confirm or deny the rumor.

Judiciary taken by surprise

The office of the prosecutor general, headed by drug legalization advocate Gustavo de Greiff, had made a deal with Escobar, according to which the drug trafficker and mass assassin would surrender in exchange for a government pledge to provide a protected residence for his wife, María Henao de Gaviria, and two children, either in Germany or England.

The surrender was supposed to have occurred while his family was en route to Germany. When Escobar failed to turn himself in, the German government deported its unwelcome guests back to Colombia, where the Escobar family was once again placed under the protection of the prosecutor general's office.

The crack "Escobar Search Team," a joint Army/police special forces team which had been pursuing the cartel chieftain since his 1992 escape from jail, took full advantage of the Gaviria government's provision of a luxurious suite at Bogotá's Hotel Tequendama for the Escobar family, to monitor all calls coming in or out. At 3:00 in the afternoon, Pablo Escobar called into the suite; a Search Team agent notified his Medellín colleagues by radio, and sophisticated equipment was put to work tracing the call. In less than two minutes, the source was found to be a middle-class home which few would have suspected as the hideout of the multi-billionaire Escobar.

Without helicopters or the mass mobilization of Army troops and police, three police agents and three soldiers from the elite Search Team entered the house from front and rear. Escobar expected to do what he had always done, which was to have his bodyguards stall the police while he made his getaway. This time, unaware of other agents placed on nearby rooftops, Escobar took just one bodyguard with him to minimize detection, and fled by the window onto the roof of the house. The bodyguard was dead within the first seconds of the operation.

Minutes later, after firing 13 of the 16 shots he had in his two automatic pistols, Pablo Escobar lay dead.

The press came late

Unlike other operations of the Search Team, which were always transmitted by radio like a soccer game—with the

team's positions given in advance!—the press arrived late to this one.

Ten minutes after the shootout was over, the first reporters approached one of the agents who had mounted guard at the scene. "You may not pass," said the agent. "But I can tell you that the most wanted criminal in Colombia has fallen here." "Who? Who?" asked the incredulous reporters. "The head of the Medellín Cartel," was the answer. Still incredulous, the journalists asked if it was Pablo Escobar. The agent responded, "Gentlemen, tell Colombia and the world that this is the spot where Pablo Escobar, head of the Medellín Cartel and Colombia's most wanted criminal, fell."

One of the most surprised was Juan Gómez Martínez, governor of Antioquia province of which Medellín is the capital. Gómez Martínez had done everything in his power to "make peace" with the drug traffickers, and had spoken with Escobar and served as his messenger to the government on numerous occasions. Indeed, one of Martínez's estates was once raided by the Search Team, when a tip was received that the governor might be sheltering the cartel chieftain.

The next day, after Escobar's mother identified the corpse and the fingerprints of the dead drug trafficker were confirmed as Escobar's, the country breathed a huge sigh of relief. Medellín's inhabitants were perhaps the most relieved of all. That city had been the miserable hostage of the drug trafficker for nearly 20 years. Suddenly, it discovered that it was not some appendage of a gang of drug-trafficking assassins, and it remembered once again the era in which Medellín was known as Colombia's leading industrial center, a bustling, friendly, Catholic city, the "city of flowers" and of "eternal spring."

In acknowledging Escobar's demise, President Gaviria changed his usual rhetoric. During the award ceremony recognizing the members of the Search Team in Medellín for their victory, Gaviria declared, "Antioquia's values represent the best of Colombia's nationality. They are values which our parents and grandparents have inculcated in their families: loyalty, Christian faith, love for Colombia, honest work, and always fulfilling our duties. These values must be defended, must be recovered, now that the chapter on narco-terrorism has been closed."

Not a few Colombians squirmed at Gaviria's hypocrisy, given that his administration has been committed since day one to the elimination of Christian morality as the basis of social behavior in Colombia, and to its replacement with a supposed "lay ethic" premised on a pragmatic and temporary social consensus.

The enemy has many faces

Escobar's death occurred after a purge of narco-terrorism's spies from the prosecutor general and attorney general's offices, which was begun largely on the initiative of police colonel Alonso Arango Salazar.

Arango became famous after the secret service intercept-

ed a telephone call to Deputy Attorney General Guillermo Villa Alzate, in charge of monitoring the judicial police (DIJIN), by the Cali Cartel's Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela. Rodríguez demanded that Villa order disciplinary sanctions against Colonel Arango, the DIJIN's director, for having included the Cali Cartel in an intelligence report on the drug trade.

That Villa carried out "favors" for both the Cali Cartel and Medellín Cartel is no contradiction. Despite all the rivalries and internecine violence, there has always existed but one cartel. In fact, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela and his brother Miguel had been Escobar's partners for years. Despite all the U.S. media claims that the Cali Cartel is made up of "businessmen" who eschew violence, it is known that Rodríguez had participated in several political assassinations, along with Escobar.

The first such murder, the assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, was financed by circulating a purse among all the cartel druglords, including at the time Carlos Lehder Rivas, Gilberto Rodríguez, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, Evaristo Porras, and others. The objective was to collect money from everyone, so that later, no one trafficker could denounce the others. The same system was used in the assassinations of newspaper editor Guillermo Cano and many of the politicians and magistrates who supported the extradition of traffickers.

Fortunately, Deputy Attorney General Villa Alzate was exposed and purged before he could carry out Rodríguez's demand. It was learned that Villa kept an army of 20 lawyers on duty for the task of hamstringing any Search Team offensive by putting together "abuse dossiers" on Search Team members, and by leaking information to Escobar.

Immediately after Villa's purge and the scandal that the attorney general's office was infiltrated by the cartels, the Search Team picked up Escobar's cold trail and pursued it to its end on Dec. 2.

It was during this same time that the Search Team's intelligence personnel discovered that personal bodyguards of Attorney General Carlos Gustavo Arrieta belonged to the narco-terrorist FARC guerrillas, while personal bodyguards of Prosecutor General de Greiff were in contact with cartel chieftains. It came as no great surprise; after all, if the attorney general himself is negotiating with the cartels, why not his subordinates?

Despite Gaviria's appeasement

Escobar's death took place despite Gaviria's appeasement policy. In fact, just one month earlier the legislature approved a new penal code—drafted in concert with the Cali Cartel's lawyers—offering such concessions as house arrest, waived or drastically reduced sentences, retention of assets, and so forth, as a reward for the drug traffickers' surrender. And yet, despite these generous offers, dubbed by some analysts "the legalization of the drug traffickers," the cartel

bosses had failed to surrender. Only police/military action against the cartels has brought any successes to date.

The fact remains that even should Gaviria be forced to order a military/police mop-up of the Cali Cartel and their Marxist narco-terrorist partners, the drug-trafficking hydra will continue to regenerate itself as long as the political godfathers of the drug trade remain at large. If the war on drugs is going to be won, it is the likes of former President Alfonso López Michelsen, who has repeatedly advised the cartels on how to impose their will in Colombia, who must be prosecuted. And the list is a long one, including Antioquia Gov. Juan Gómez Martínez and federal prosecutors Carlos Gustavo Arrieta and Gustavo de Greiff, who continue to use their positions to promote appeasement and legalization.

Chronology

Pablo Escobar's reign of terror

Mid-1970s: Pablo Escobar steals and resells cemetery tombstones in the city of Medellín, moves on to stealing cars. Arrested for car theft in 1974, he has the witnesses killed, and escapes. By 1976, he is running cocaine into the United States through Ecuador.

June 1976: Pablo Escobar and cousin Gustavo are arrested for cocaine trafficking and attempted bribery, and jailed. Eight months later, the Escobars are released from prison after all witnesses against them are killed.

The United States has accumulated a crime dossier on Escobar, which it provides to Colombian authorities. Escobar is linked to a ring of assassins-for-hire.

December 1979: The Colombian Anti-Drug Coalition is founded, dedicated to exposing the political and financial networks protecting the drug cartels.

1981: Escobar and his partners in the Ochoa clan join forces with trafficker Carlos Lehder—a partner of fugitive banker Robert Vesco—to forge a global trafficking cartel that comes to control 80% of the world's cocaine trade: the Medellín Cartel.

Over the next decade, Escobar amasses a personal fortune estimated at \$3 billion, and builds an army of assassins and terrorists. He acquires vast properties, purchases politicians, priests, and informants in the security forces, and buys himself a fanatic following in the Medellín slums.

1982: Escobar “wins” an alternate congressional seat, plus a multiple-entry U.S. visa and temporary parliamentary

immunity. He is expelled from Congress later that year, after a debate promoted by Sen. Rodrigo Lara Bonilla.

August 1983: Lara Bonilla is appointed justice minister by President Belisario Betancur. Over the next eight months, he begins to investigate the cartel's penetration into politics, sports, business, and finance, and starts to build up the first real intelligence dossiers on the drug trade and drug traffickers. He urges use of extradition against the cartel; conducts the first major bust of the cartel, and uncovers irrefutable evidence of collaboration between communist guerrilla groups and the cartel. He sponsors the first efforts to use herbicides against drug crops, and makes the first efforts to forge an Andean-wide war on drugs.

April 30, 1984: Lara Bonilla is assassinated by cartel hitmen. His death triggers an intense but short-lived military war on the cartels.

May 1984: Escobar meets with former Colombian President Alfonso López Michelsen and Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez, to try to iron out an amnesty for the cartel. The proposal is rejected by the government of President Betancur.

Escobar is photographed by informant pilot Barry Seal, using a Nicaraguan (Sandinista) government airstrip to smuggle cocaine. Seal's information serves as the basis for a U.S. indictment of Escobar and other cartel chieftains. Seal is later assassinated while in the U.S. witness protection program.

July 16, 1984: Patricia Londoño, editor of *Guerra a las Drogas (War on Drugs)* magazine in Colombia and wife of Anti-Drug Coalition head Maximiliano Londoño, is abducted and tormented by elements of Universal Christian Gnostic Church, which is linked to López Michelsen and the M-19 narco-terrorists.

Nov. 6, 1985: As the Colombian Supreme Court considers several extradition cases, Escobar's Medellín Cartel finances M-19 guerrillas to the tune of \$5-10 million to besiege Colombia's Justice Palace, murder more than half the Supreme Court magistrates, and burn its archives. The justice system has not recovered to this day.

Nov. 17, 1986: Col. Jaime Ramírez Gómez, Lara Bonilla's right-hand man in the war on drugs, is assassinated by cartel hitmen.

Dec. 17, 1986: Anti-drug newspaper publisher Guillermo Cano, a fierce opponent of drug legalization who had fought any appeasement tendencies in the government, is murdered by cartel assassins.

Jan. 11, 1987: Lara Bonilla's successor as justice minister, Enrique Parejo González, barely survives an assassination attempt by Escobar hit team in Hungary, where he is serving as Colombia's ambassador.

Jan. 25, 1987: Anti-drug Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos, who had initiated the first significant confiscations of cartel property, is assassinated. He is the last Colombian attorney general to stand up to narco-terrorism.

Aug. 18, 1989: Presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, a close friend and colleague of the murdered Lara Bonilla, is assassinated by the cartel, triggering a bloody war—including the bombing of a commercial airliner in which 114 die, the bombing of Bogotá's security police headquarters, the bombing of the offices of the paper *El Espectador*, and numerous other terror attacks. Galán's elimination from the race paves the way for the May 1990 victory of President César Gaviria Trujillo.

August 1989: After Galán's murder, President Virgilio Barco declares a "war on drugs" and seeks military aid from the United States. The necessary matériel is not made available. Covert amnesty negotiations with the narco-terrorist M-19 are begun.

October 1989: Cartel lawyer (and Escobar's godfather) Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez reveals that the cartel had considered hiring Henry Kissinger as their Washington lobbyist. Kissinger's office refuses to confirm or deny having received such an offer.

February 1990: Escobar's narco-terrorist partner, the M-19, is granted a political amnesty by the Barco government. The M-19 is later incorporated into Gaviria's cabinet and is instrumental in getting extradition constitutionally banned in Colombia.

September 1990: Weeks after his inauguration, President Gaviria ends Barco's war on drugs and offers the cartels lenient prison terms and immunity from extradition.

June 1991: Escobar "surrenders" to a jail of his own construction, with guards of his own choosing, and continues to traffic drugs and murder opponents. He announces his intention to study law and run for the presidency, and gives an interview to the *Washington Times* stating that "legalization is the solution to put an end to drug trafficking."

July 1992: Revelations of Escobar's continuing crimes force Gaviria government to tighten prison conditions. Escobar escapes with all his henchmen and relaunches terrorism.

1993: Government tries to negotiate new surrender deal with Escobar. A powerful "vigilante" group called PEPES surfaces and begins to kill cartel members and lawyers, bomb Escobar's properties, and threaten his family. A joint Army/National Police task force, dubbed the Escobar Search Team, is initially hard on Escobar's heels, but the trail grows cold amid police charges that the attorney general's office is sabotaging Search Team efforts.

October 1993: Gaviria government passes legislation designed to give virtual amnesty to the rival Cali Cartel; the deputy attorney general overseeing police affairs is discovered to have been an agent of the drug cartels, passing security information to both the Cali and Medellín cartels; with his purge, the Escobar Search Team's efforts revive. Several cabinet members of the Gaviria government publicly promote drug legalization.

Dec. 2, 1993: Pablo Escobar is killed in shootout with the Escobar Search Team.

Ukraine gets remake of Munich betrayal

The western attitude toward Ukraine is "a remake of Munich 1938," which could lead to a new general war on European soil, Ukrainian writer Yuri Pokalchuk writes in a guest commentary in France's *Libération* daily on Dec. 8.

Pokalchuk begins by noting that force has "succeeded so well" in the internal affairs of Russia, that there is no way Russia won't be tempted to use threatening speech vis-à-vis its neighbors. This is clear in the "aggressive posture toward Europe" adopted by intelligence chief Yevgeny Primakov in his Nov. 25 press conference, in which he rejected NATO attempts to integrate central and eastern European countries into the NATO structure.

Pokalchuk stresses that if Russia takes such a hard line on matters pertaining to countries of the former Warsaw Pact, how much harder will its attitude be toward the former Soviet republics. After Kiev refused, on Nov. 18, to unconditionally transfer to Russia the totality of its strategic missile capabilities, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a declaration calling Ukraine "a threat for the security of Russia." Furthermore, the recently released Russian military doctrine gives Russia the right to a "nuclear first strike" if it claims to be threatened by a nuclear state. Is Ukraine meant by this?

The writer wonders whether all the noise being made by Russia about the missiles, the Black Sea Fleet, Crimea, etc., takes on meaning if one keeps in mind the Russian desire to place Ukraine under Russian influence again. It is only in this context, he stresses, that one can understand the Ukrainian reticence to transfer its missiles to Russia. The missiles are "the only bargaining chip that Ukraine has, to exchange them for a guarantee by the United States or Europe for Ukraine's national independence and territorial integrity."

But, he goes on, the West is abandoning Ukraine in its unequal confrontation with Russia, hoping that Russia will succeed, "one way or the other," in bringing Ukraine under its bondage. The Ukrainians feel "insulted and embittered" before this "remake of Munich." The western wager is that Ukrainian "cowardice and resignation" will prevail, but this is "not assured. For after the Ukrainians, they risk having to make the same wager again respecting the Moldavians, the Belarussians, the Baltic countries, and—why not?—the Poles, the Hungarians, and the Czechs. If the bet failed, a Yugoslav-style war would threaten Europe. Even worse. Is Europe so myopic, so forgetful and so deaf to its own security—the same Europe which, two times in this century, has seen the flames of war, flames which were lit at the borders of Mitteleuropa?"