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## Colombia

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# Samper must go, for democracy to survive

by Andrea Olivieri

Colombia's Council of State, its highest judicial body, decided on Nov. 28 to extend the mandate of Prosecutor General Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento for another three years. The decision, taken on a 12-10 vote and under intense pressure from the Clinton administration in the United States, represents a blow to President Ernesto Samper Pizano and to the criminal networks of the Cali cocaine cartel, which today constitute his most important base of support in the country.

Valdivieso, considered a scrupulously honest man, was named to his office in August 1994 to replace the discredited pro-drug Gustavo de Greiff, now Colombia's ambassador to Mexico. Since then, the task of rooting out drug corruption has inexorably led Valdivieso directly to Samper's doorstep, and has turned the Prosecutor General into Colombia's best hope for finally breaking Dope, Inc.'s stranglehold on the country.

Desperate efforts by the Cali Cartel and its minions inside the government to force Valdivieso out of office by early 1996, failed, and their fury was registered by Samper's defense lawyer Antonio Cancino, who claimed that Valdivieso's ratification was entirely the result of pressure by the Clinton administration and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Cancino sneeringly dubbed the highly popular Valdivieso "a spectacle," and threatened that efforts to oust him would continue. "After Samper is exonerated by the [Colombian] House of Representatives, what will follow is a political trial . . . to identify those responsible for handing our justice system over to the United States," Cancino promised.

The threats notwithstanding, Valdivieso will now be dogging Samper's footsteps, and those of his cartel buddies, through 1998, when Samper—if he lasts that long—is slated to leave office.

The narco-Presidency of Samper is now fighting for its life, and that apparatus is using every imaginable form of Gestapo-tactics against its opposition, ranging from harassment to assassinations, including two new death threats against *EIR*'s Colombia correspondents.

### Desperate straits

President Clinton's Executive Order 12978, issued Oct. 22, which declares war on the Cali Cartel's financial appara-

tus, and Presidential Decision Directive 42, which goes after the global dirty-money laundering centers, have tightened the noose around the necks of Samper and his cartel backers. Not only is President Clinton holding the issue of U.S. "certification," with its attendant privileges, over the Samper administration's head, but he is simultaneously attempting to choke off the lifeblood of the drug trade which has corrupted governments such as Samper's, and the world monetary system as well.

The vise in which Samper and his cartel allies now find themselves has produced new levels of desperation on their part. On Nov. 21, cartel hit men assassinated Ernesto Vásquez, an executive of the Colgate-Palmolive subsidiary in the city of Cali, in gangland style in broad daylight. Colgate-Palmolive is one of several American companies in Colombia which have cancelled their contracts with the cartel front-companies named in Clinton's executive order, including the drugstore chain La Rebaja, owned by the cartel's imprisoned kingpins Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela. La Rebaja is feeling the pinch: The chain is drawing few customers to its nearly empty shelves, and is barely keeping its doors open. Workers at La Rebaja, and at other Rodríguez Orejuela front-companies named by Clinton's order, have been holding protest marches in Cali, accusing Clinton of being "imperialist" and causing unemployment in Colombia.

One day after Vásquez was assassinated, other Colgate-Palmolive executives reportedly began to receive threats that if their company maintained the commercial blockade against cartel businesses, they would get it "like Vásquez." Colgate-Palmolive has reportedly begun to send its executives abroad, and has taken special security measures for those remaining behind.

Samper and the cartel are also targetting journalists, both foreign and Colombian. According to a recent article in the magazine *Cambio 16*, the 60 foreign journalists in the country are convinced that their telephones are tapped. They further complain that Samper has created his own task force, allegedly to "improve Colombia's image abroad," which harasses foreign journalists with daily phone calls and faxes, and which smears journalists as "DEA," agents of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, when their coverage does not meet with Samper's—and the cartel's—approval.

The "DEA" smear has particularly threatening implications, in view of Interior Minister Horacio Serpa Uribe's ferocious attack last October on that U.S. agency, and on the Clinton administration itself, for having allegedly authored an assassination attempt against President Samper's personal lawyer, as part of a campaign to overthrow the Colombian President. Serpa Uribe, an intimate—and some say controller—of the President, has been described as close to the narco-terrorist National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas. He was also just chosen by Samper to head a new nationwide intelligence system, with wide-ranging powers.

The “DEA” smear was also used in the latest death threats delivered to Javier Almario, *EIR*’s correspondent in Bogotá, and to Maximiliano Londoño, a collaborator of *EIR* and president of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement in Bogotá. For two decades, *EIR* has been exposing the networks involved in narco-terrorism, and naming the names of the individuals and institutions which have created and protect them. Over the last year especially, Almario, Londoño, and their families have been subjected to a campaign of almost daily telephone harassment, muggings, break-ins to vehicles, apartments, and offices, and repeated death threats to Almario and Londoño. The latest, delivered in written form on Nov. 28, states: “DEA SOB You’ll have a widow and orphans.”

## Death threats escalate vs. *EIR* in Colombia

*The following chronology documents the past year’s escalating threats against *EIR* in Colombia, and its employees.*

**Nov. 2, 1994:** *EIR* of Colombia booked a room in the Bogotá Royal Hotel for a Nov. 3 conference by Ibero-America Editor Dennis Small, on “The Coming Fall of the House of Windsor; How Colombia Became a British Colony.” On Nov. 2, the hotel manager called *EIR*’s office to report that important British investors, owners of the hotel, had ordered the cancellation of the conference, which they considered an insult to Great Britain. The executive said that if he allowed the conference to proceed, he would lose his job. However, he promised to find *EIR* a room in another hotel, given that *EIR* had been long-standing clients. The conference was eventually held in the Bogotá Plaza, located some 10 blocks away.

**Nov. 17, 1994:** A letter arrived at the *EIR* office, addressed to Javier Almario, and signed “A British Friend.” The letter threatened *EIR* for attacking Queen Elizabeth and “the august Prince Philip,” and criticized the theme of the conference on the “Fall of the House of Windsor.” Particularly distressing for this “friend” was the second half of the conference title, referring to Colombia as a British colony. The letter expressed an interest in talking with Almario, if the latter were “seriously” interested in learning about British culture and in leaving that “extremist” U.S. organization to which he belonged. The British “friend” offered the newspaper *El Tiempo* to serve as an “impartial” liaison for contacting him.

**November 1994:** Almario’s wife, Elizabeth Vásquez de

Almario, was attacked by two lumpens, brandishing machetes, who tried to rob her (although she hadn’t a penny on her), as she was leaving the apartment of *EIR* collaborator Maximiliano Londoño at 5:30 p.m. Elizabeth tried to run, but was seized by her jacket. A neighborhood guard on his way to work, got off his bicycle and confronted the thugs, and entered into a fight with bricks and stones. The thugs ran off and the guard escorted Mrs. Almario away from the place.

**December 1994:** Starting in early December, especially on weekends, a campaign of phone calls to the Almario home began, with no one speaking on the other end—the kind of calls used by burglars and kidnappers to determine the routines of prospective victims. In March and April of 1995, persons began to ask for Javier or Elizabeth Almario; as soon as the Almarios would identify themselves, the caller would hang up. For two weeks in March, the calls were daily, usually occurring just when one or the other Almario would return home from work.

**March 4, 1995:** Unidentified persons broke through the metal door of the Almario residence, in an apartment house with a security guard, wrecking clothes and books, and stealing various objects, including a stereo and a child’s violin.

**March 1995:** A group of knife-wielding thugs attacked *EIR* employee Virgilio Rativa, and stole his wedding ring, the only object of value in his possession.

- Unidentified persons broke into the van belonging to *EIR*, and usually driven by Maximiliano Londoño. The individuals apparently tried, but unsuccessfully, to hot-wire the vehicle. The “thieves” stole various tools and damaged its electrical system.

- Unidentified persons broke into the trunk of Javier Almario’s Renault, stealing his spare tire.

- The National Electoral Council verbally communicated with *EIR* that it had decided to cancel the legal status of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA), ostensibly because the MSIA had not won 5,000 votes in the last election. Later, official notice was delivered.

**April 16, 1995:** Unidentified persons tried to break into the *EIR* offices. The alarm was set off, frightening off the intruders before they could steal anything. The alarm simultaneously alerted the police, and Almario and Rativa’s homes. Almario arrived in precisely 10 minutes, and entered with two police agents; nothing was stolen and there was apparently no entry.

**April 23, 1995:** Patricia de Londoño, wife of Maximiliano Londoño, received a phone call at their apartment at 1:30 a.m.; a man’s voice said: “Tell Maximiliano Londoño Penilla to be careful, because we’re going to make mince-meat out of him.”

**April 28, 1995:** Javier Almario answered a call to the *EIR* office at 7:45 p.m.: “Son of a bitch, we’re going to f— you.”

**May 1, 1995:** Patricia de Londoño received another

call, in which the voice—which appeared to be tape-recorded—said repeatedly, “be careful, be careful, be careful. . .” until she hung up.

**June 27, 1995:** The third threat in less than a month was phoned at 8:15 p.m. to the home of Maximiliano Londoño. A male voice asked, “Is this the home of Maximiliano Londoño?” When told it was, the caller said: “Tell him to shut his trap. Or doesn’t he want to think about his wife and kids?” One week earlier, by mail, Londoño had received a death notice, or obituary, in his name.

**Aug. 3, 1995:** At 9:50 a.m., Almarío received a call from a man with a marked Cali accent: “You are going to pay for writing such garbage.”

**Aug. 4, 1995:** Almarío received a call at 3:55 p.m., in which a woman’s voice whispered, “Be careful, jerk!”

**Aug. 26, 1995:** Londoño received another call at 7 p.m., in which he could only hear dance music in the background. Londoño hung up, and immediately received another call. This time, with the same music in the background, a woman’s voice was heard: “Fool!”

**Aug. 28, 1995:** Telephone call at 6:45 a.m. to Almarío home. A man’s voice said: “You won’t make it past this week.”

**Aug. 30, 1995:** The conservative daily *El Nuevo Siglo*, run by Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, published an EFE wire, dated Washington, reporting on the death threats against Almarío and Londoño, who are identified, respectively, as correspondent and collaborator of *EIR*, “financed by the ultrarightist group led by Lyndon LaRouche.”

**Aug. 31, 1995:** Caracol FM Radio, on its program Viva FM, broadcast a brief live interview with Almarío at 9 a.m. Before the interview, the newscaster read parts of the Aug. 30 EFE wire which said that *EIR* was founded by “ultrarightist Lyndon LaRouche.” Caracol FM Radio asked: What kind of threats have you been receiving? What have you been writing that has caused them to threaten you? After the interview with Almarío, his apartment received 15 silent, “heavy-breather” calls.

**Sept. 5, 1995:** Phone call at 10 p.m. to the Londoño home, answered by Patricia Londoño. A woman said: “Fools, don’t you realize we’re following you?”

● Strangely, a shipment of *EIR*’s Spanish-language bimonthly *Resumen Ejecutivo* carrying the special report on Ernesto Samper Pizano and the drug trade, “disappeared” at the Bogotá airport. Avianca airline owned by the Santodomingo financial group which supports Samper, claimed the shipment never arrived in Colombia.

**Sept. 12, 1995:** Jeny Valencia, supporter and lawyer for the MSIA who represented the MSIA and its president Maximiliano Londoño in a suit against the National Electoral Council, received a telephone death threat. Dr. Valencia is also lawyer for the National Peasant Association (ANUC), whose president had been assassinated one week earlier. It is not clear if the threat is connected to her representation of

ANUC, or her links to the MSIA.

● At 2 a.m., nearly simultaneous “heavy-breather” calls were made to the apartments of Londoño and Almarío.

**Sept. 15, 1995:** The Cali section of the Administrative Security Police (DAS) called the *EIR* office in Bogotá to inquire about the threats to Almarío and Londoño. The DAS agent asked if *EIR* had offices in Cali. When he learned it did not (it had been closed 18 months earlier), he said he would write a report to send to Bogotá, which would be the investigating office. This is the first time a State security agency showed any interest in the ongoing threats.

● On the Sept. 15, a caller to the the *EIR* office simply whistled into the phone. A second call, at 1 a.m. on Sept. 16 to Londoño’s home was a “heavy-breather” call.

**Sept. 25, 1995:** An individual with an American accent called the *EIR* office, asked for Londoño, and asked to know what *EIR* stood for. Told it was *Executive Intelligence Review*, a magazine founded by Lyndon LaRouche, the individual burst into laughter and then said, “Ah, LaRouche, son of a bitch.”

**Sept. 26, 1995:** “Heavy-breather” call came into Londoño’s apartment at 7 p.m.

**Sept. 28, 1995:** A male caller to Londoño’s apartment at 6 p.m. said, “son of a bitch,” and hung up.

**Oct. 9, 1995:** Bogotá police discovered a bomb one block from *EIR*’s offices, and the entire area was cordoned off from 7-8:45 a.m., while the bomb squad successfully deactivated it. The bomb was composed of 10 kilograms of the explosive pentrite and a lot of shrapnel designed to cause maximum fatalities. The bomb was to be detonated by remote control and supposedly targetted a police bus carrying 25 agents that was to have passed at 9:30 a.m. Although the bomb would not likely have reached *EIR*’s offices, it could have injured or killed an employee passing through the area.

**Oct. 12, 1995:** Gilberto Mora Mesa, manager and owner of the company Miami Spy Representaciones Ltd., with which *EIR* of Colombia had a verbal agreement to install telephone call tracing equipment at its offices, was arrested by the National Police on charges of illicit enrichment. He was named as the Cali Cartel’s chief of telephone interception. It was Mora who had tapped the phones of the U.S. Embassy in Colombia and produced the tapes used by M-19 congressman Carlos Lucio to try to prove a U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) conspiracy to overthrow Samper. Although the deal between *EIR* and Miami Spy was never concretized, Mora Mesa was given information about *EIR*’s phone lines, as well as those of Londoño and Almarío.

**Oct. 16, 1995:** The *EIR* office alarm went off twice on this holiday, at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., indicating attempts at forced entry.

**Nov. 28, 1995:** Identical written death threats were slipped under the door at Almarío’s apartment, addressed to him, and at the *EIR* office, addressed to Londoño, reading, “DEA SOB, you’ll have a widow and orphans. . . .”