

## International plot to stop Colombia's anti-drug war

by José Restrepo

The Colombian government's declared war against the drug cartels came under violent attack from former President Alfonso López Michelsen, during a Nov. 3 speech to a gathering of Colombian legal experts in the city of Paipa, Boyacá. In his speech, López went to the extreme of saying that "the so-called war against the drug trade" constitutes "a new element of destabilization" in the country.

López Michelsen's speech coincided with the appearance—in publications worldwide—of an article by his friend, writer Gabriel García Márquez, advocating government "dialogue" with the narcotics mafias. It also coincided with tours through Europe of presidential candidate Ernesto Samper Pizano, the most visible head of the drug legalization lobby in Colombia and political heir to López Michelsen, and of so-called "human rights" advocates deployed by the Colombian Communist Party.

These deployments were denounced Oct. 26 as "a genuine international conspiracy" of the drug mafia and its left-wing apologists, by the lead editorial of Colombia's leading anti-drug daily *El Espectador*. That editorial referred specifically to an upcoming "human rights" extravaganza in Amsterdam, at which narco-terrorists of all stripes will be congregating to point the finger at the Colombian government for allegedly using the pretext of a war on drugs to mount a "dirty war" of repression against the Colombian left. The most recent report issued on Colombia by the London-based Amnesty International, which charges Colombia's government and Armed Forces with all manner of human rights violations in their anti-drug operations, was the first major salvo of that international conspiracy.

The conspirators were also denounced *by name* as traitors, in a signed Oct. 25 editorial by *El Espectador*'s director Juan Guillermo Cano. Warning President Barco that he is

being betrayed by his own political colleagues, Cano urged that López Michelsen, Samper Pizano, and their ilk be brought before a "summary trial" on charges of treason and desertion in time of war.

### The face of treason

In his Paipa speech, published Nov. 4 in the Conservative daily *El Siglo*, López Michelsen asked rhetorically, "Why is it that only in Colombia has the fight against the drug trade turned into . . . a war between the State and the mafias? How has it come about that a problem to be handled between the local police and criminals, as occurs in other countries, has become a great national concern, affecting the economic, social, and even political life of the entire citizenry? . . . What came first, the Ministry of Justice classifying the war against the drug trade as a problem of state, or the chain of homicides that terrorizes society?"

López replies: "It seems to me that to claim it was the assassinations that forced us to raise the level of the conflict inverts the terms; it was by giving it the character of a war that Colombia has become the only country where such atrocious events have spread throughout the national territory." López's message is clear: if Colombia had struck a deal with the drug mafia back in 1984, when López served as the emissary of the cartel's amnesty proposal, there would have been no problem today. He then concludes with the argument that if, indeed, this is a "real war," then the drug traffickers have every right to seek peace negotiations with the government.

It were appropriate here to refresh Sr. López's memory a bit. The power of the drug mafia did not, in fact, derive from the Barco government's declaration of war against it. Rather, the cartels took root in Colombia through the creation

of various speculative and money-laundering capabilities—including the so-called “sinister” or black-market window at the Colombian central bank—facilitated by the infamous “tax reforms” under López Michelsen’s 1974-78 administration.

Further, the drug cartels began to infiltrate and capture the institutions of state through the purchase of congressmen and investment of “narco-dollars” in electoral campaigns. The most celebrated case, of course, is that of López Michelsen’s re-election bid in 1982, when the treasurer of his presidential campaign accepted 20 million Colombian pesos from Medellín Cartel mafioso Carlos Lehder, currently serving a life sentence in a U. S. jail. In 1983, Lehder told reporters that the 20 million peso contribution had been a cartel downpayment on legalization of the drug trade, were López to have been re-elected. López’s campaign treasurer admitted to taking Lehder’s money, but denied that any strings were attached. That campaign treasurer was, of course, legalization lobbyist Ernesto Samper Pizano, currently making his own bid for the country’s top office.

### Promoting legalization

Samper’s European tour, which took him to Spain, France, and Sweden, was intended to deliver a single message: that drugs must be legalized worldwide. On Oct. 27, during a Bogota press conference on the eve of his departure for Europe, Samper reiterated that “If there exists the perception that the war against the drug trade is not going to be won, the way will be opened to reach a negotiated solution. . . . Legalization is the viable alternative.” That theme was repeated on every European stop, along with the argument that “We will not permit Colombia to be turned into the Vietnam of a war against drugs in Latin America.”

At the conclusion of his European tour, Samper descended on neighboring Venezuela, where he joined with his fellow drug-lobbyist Gabriel Garcé Márquez in a meeting with Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, and promoted his arguments for surrender to the mafia in numerous press interviews. Asked at a Caracas press conference what he is doing to guarantee a victorious war against the drug cartels, Samper responded: “Once upon a time, a French colonel (at war with England) said he would fight until the last Briton was dead. . . . I cannot say that we will fight the war against the drug trade until the last Colombian is dead.” Journalists at the conference were heard to ask each other whether Samper’s simile meant he was on the side of the drug traffickers, or of Colombia.

Gabriel García Márquez, Colombia’s Nobel laureate who resides in Mexico, has joined forces with the Samper/López campaign. A long-standing advocate of drug legalization, García has not only publicly appeared with Samper during his Venezuela tour, but has just published a lengthy article—appearing, among others, in publications of Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia—accusing the United States of

sabotaging efforts to reach a negotiated settlement with the drug cartels and of using the Colombian war on drugs as a pretext for sending in U. S. troops.

In his article, García furiously denies that such a thing as the “narco-guerrilla” exists—perhaps in deference to his good friend Fidel Castro, whose financing of both the ELN and M-19 narco-terrorists in Colombia is as well known as his sponsorship of Havana’s long-term guest, Medellín Cartel financier Robert Vesco. If the U.S. can prove that the drug traffickers and guerrillas are one, argues García, “the rest is just a question of sending troops to Colombia under the pretext of capturing the one and battling the other. In the end, sooner or later, all of us Colombians could be extradited.”

“The war against the drug trade in Colombia will be long, ruinous and without a future,” warns García, who laments that efforts to establish a dialogue between the drug cartels and the Colombian government have repeatedly failed, including his own mediation effort in late 1985. He hints that the drug traffickers have, perhaps, been provoked into their violent deeds.

García is not the only one shedding tears for Colombia’s poor misunderstood drug traffickers. The “human rights lobbyists” are mobilizing internationally, just as *El Espectador* has denounced, against Colombia’s anti-drug war. On Oct. 30, in a press conference given in Bonn, West Germany, the president of Colombia’s National Association of Judicial Employees accused the Barco government of using his anti-drug war as a “smokescreen” for violating human rights. Antonio Suárez is, not accidentally, a leading member of Colombia’s Communist Party (PCC).

The Communists are active inside Colombia as well. On Oct. 25, the PCC newspaper *Voz* said editorially that “the alliance of important sectors of the drug trade with militarism is the principal obstacle to a negotiated political solution to the national crisis.” On Oct. 26, all the leaders of the Patriotic Union—the electoral arm of the narco-Communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—published a statement opposing the extradition of drug traffickers, using the mafia’s own argument that “extradition violates national sovereignty and allows extraditables to be given sentences not considered within Colombia’s legal guidelines.”

And on Oct. 29, the *The Washington Post* published a front-page article supporting the notion of dialogue with the Colombian drug cartels, and arguing that “the war will never be won until consumption inside the United States is controlled.” The article also lies that “if Barco continues to lose support between now and next May’s (presidential) elections, and offers no new results, such as the arrest of (cartel chieftains) Escobar and Rodríguez Gacha, it will be still more difficult for his successor to continue with a hard line” against the drug trade.

The *Post*’s message to the drug traffickers is clear: hang on until the next President comes in. If it’s Samper Pizano, you’re home free.