

# Colombian drug lobby blames military for political assassinations

by José Restrepo

Former Liberal Party ex-President Alfonso López Michelsen has publicly blamed Colombia's military for the deaths of three presidential candidates, and is demanding a "reorganization" of that nation's defense and security forces. López is infamous for having met with the drug cartels—the so-called "Extraditables"—on May 6, 1984, one week after their murder of the anti-drug Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. In January 1990, just months after the mafia murder of front-running presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, López again went public about his meeting with cartel lawyer Guido Parra, in order to negotiate a pact between the Extraditables and the government.

It is perhaps no coincidence that López's "reorganization" proposal was sounded at the same time that Conservative Party Sen. Alvaro Leyva Durán, another would-be go-between for the drug cartels and a López co-thinker, issued a complementary call for a deal with the Moscow-run FARC narco-terrorists, whereby they would "demobilize" under a government amnesty that would permit them to retain their weapons and serve as a private domestic militia to guard the nation's borders. Leyva did not say what—or if—the military would have anything to say about such an arrangement.

## A 'strange coincidence'

On April 26, an assassin hired by Medellín cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar killed Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez, presidential candidate of the recently legalized narco-terrorist group M-19. The next day, former President López said, "The successive evidence of inefficiency surrounding the deaths of three presidential candidates forces us to consider the reorganization of the security forces." According to his arguments, the "security forces" were responsible for the killings, and not the drug traffickers with whom he has had long-standing cozy relations. López also demanded that a civilian be named defense minister, a post historically held by the military.

Immediately after López's statement, the Extraditables issued their own, offering a concrete plan for "the reorganization of security forces." Among other things, they called

for removing all leading police chiefs: National Police head Miguel Antonio Gómez Padilla and his deputy chief Carlos Arturo Casadiego Torrado, political police (DAS) chief Miguel Maza Márquez, and the head of the judicial police Oscar Pelaez, who, according to the Extraditables, "prevented the President from establishing the peace with our organization."

*El Espectador*, Colombia's

in opposing the drug mafia, succinctly answered the drug lobby's propaganda barrage on April 30: "Ex-President López Michelsen proposes the reorganization of the state's Public Forces and intelligence services. Immediately, the Extraditables demand . . . the heads of Generals Maza Márquez and Gómez Padilla, precisely the leading figures in the anti-drug fight. Strange, suspicious coincidence," concluded *El Espectador*.

The coincidence is not only between López and the Extraditables. The M-19 has refused to accuse cartel chieftain Escobar of the murder of their leader Pizarro, despite clear-cut evidence that Pizarro's death was ordered by the drug mafia in order to wreak havoc with the electoral process—perhaps even forcing the suspension of May 27 presidential elections—and to pave the way for the drug lobby's assault on the military, the sole remaining bastion of the anti-drug effort.

Antonio Navarro Wolf, the M-19's new presidential candidate, openly covered up for the traffickers, saying that his group does not believe the cartel could have done it, because the M-19 had signed a non-aggression pact with Escobar in 1981. And Pizarro's own brother Eduardo publicly blamed "certain state sectors" rather than the drug mafia for Carlos Pizarro's death.

## U.S. hamstrings anti-drug effort

The line of López and his narco-partners—that national militaries are the real threat to democracy in Ibero-America, because they are corrupt and ruthless—was just defined as the policy of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, in a report issued in Washington, D.C. at their April annual meeting. The Trilaterals suggested that the region's security

forces be reorganized, even replaced outright, by a supranational force.

Sure enough, right in the middle of Colombia's crisis, Bush administration officials stepped forward to make clear that they are toeing that line all the way. On April 28, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Bush administration has decided to block the sale of Cobra helicopters to Colombia, because they are too "lethal." John Walters, chief of staff to U.S. anti-drug czar William Bennett, told the paper that the U.S. does not believe the helicopters are "an appropriate piece of equipment" for Colombia. "This particular weapon system involves firepower in excess of anything [we] believe is appropriate."

To allege that there is a danger in providing "excessive" aid to Colombia's military at this time, is criminally insane. The drug mob killed 38 policemen in the city of Medellín in April alone. Since August 1989, they have detonated at least half a dozen enormous car-bombs in Colombia's cities, and have blown up a civilian airliner in mid-flight. Three presidential candidates have been killed in this year's electoral race—so far.

Colombian President Virgilio Barco has responded to the latest candidate murder by ordering a doubling in size of the Police's Elite Corps. Leading presidential candidate César Gaviria—top on the traffickers' hit list—answered with a national address calling for renewed attack against the drug cartels, no matter the cost. "Our survival as a civilized society, as a democracy, depends on a monopoly of the [armed] force in the hands of the Colombian State," said Gaviria.

Gaviria pledged not to yield in the fight against drugs and narco-terrorism. In a speech transmitted nationwide by radio and television on April 27, he said, "We must punish the narcoterrorists, the terrorists, the assassins, the sponsors of paramilitaries, the terrorist guerrillas. . . . It is time for clarity and for courage, not for negotiations and dialogue with terrorism. It is time to face up to it: The demented attacks of which we are victim will admit no course but confrontation. Terrorism must be confronted without concessions, but with principles. We will fight it until it is defeated, never evading the responsibility of leadership which we claim. . . ."

"To fight implies strengthening our spirits for what is to come and to accept the risk, even as the assassination threat escalates. The merchants of terror will not prevail against the solidarity of the nation," Gaviria promised. "All of Colombia must stand up and be counted. Our responsibility to our children and to the future is undergoing the test of fire. We cannot be inferior to our mission."

### **Gaviria will offer no deals**

Gaviria's words mean that as soon he is President of Colombia, he will end the most important mistake the country has made in the war on drugs. Since President Belisario Betancur (1982-86), the government has sought to "make peace" with the so-called "guerrillas," in vain hope that they

could somehow be distinguished from the criminal drug cartels. The "dialogues" promoted by Betancur resulted in the creation of a new above-ground political party, the Patriotic Union (UP), by the underground FARC narco-terrorists. While the UP "dialogued," the FARC gained breathing space to reinforce its armed ranks and carve out new territory for itself. Today, the FARC is considered Colombia's third cocaine cartel, after the Medellín and Cali groups, because of its vast drug-trafficking operations.

At the same time, Betancur ordered the Armed Forces to suspend operations against "guerrilla" forces in order to respect "peace agreements" that put the narco-terrorists in control of whole sections of national territory, zones where the national constitution and Colombian law were effectively suspended. The legitimacy given the "guerrillas" allowed them to recruit new people and expand operations, while increasing their legitimacy through the dialogue process. Betancur's peace experiments were soon promoted by the U.S. State Department as a model for Central America, especially for El Salvador.

Initially, President Barco continued Betancur's policy, with some variations. The result was the "legalization" of the narcoterrorist M-19, the same group whose occupation of the Justice Palace in November 1985 led to the total destruction of that building, and the executions of half of the Supreme Court justices. Although the M-19—currently a legal political party—has apparently not retained a part of its armed organization, as the FARC did, the group has offered itself as a mediator between the government and other "recalcitrant" terrorist groups, and between the government and the drug mafia.

On May 7, candidate Gaviria said Colombia should halt that policy. In a nationally televised speech he argued for imposing the reign of law over the narco-terrorists, the paramilitaries, the assassins, and so-called common criminals. He said: "We are not going to do away with the guerrillas as long as they retain their sources of financing. As long as we allow them to resort to political dialogue, without the condition that they . . . abandon weapons and violence; as long as we give them credit for political changes. . . . Nor are we going to be successful against the paramilitaries as long as there are citizens who believe that the way to confront the criminal actions of the guerrillas is to promote the same excesses by people organized outside the law. We will have no success in the war against the drug trade as long as certain sectors and leaders think that the way to confront these organizations is to respond to their crimes with every kind of concession from society and from the government."

Gaviria added: "The Colombian Armed Forces must recover a legitimate monopoly over force, which is essential in any democracy. It is necessary for our military and police forces to be adequately supplied and to have greater collaboration on the part of the civil population. Only thus will their actions be more effective than they have been in the past."