

Terrorists carving up Colombia thanks to Monetary Fund policies

by Benjamín Castro

By the time Colombian president Virgilio Barco Vargas completes his presidential term in 1990. He will be handing over to his successor not one, but two, perhaps even three "autonomous republics," controlled by narco-terrorists, drug traffickers, and the international oil companies, unless the present economic policy is totally reversed. This disintegration of the Colombian nation will be the "natural" consequence of the programs implemented, under orders of the international banks, by the governments which preceded Barco, and which Barco himself has not hesitated to continue.

The financial and economic dictates of the international creditor banks and the International Monetary Fund have, in effect, reduced the government and the institutions of authority in the country to a state of impotence, to the point that there is no official presence in the bulk of Colombia's national territory. Current policy has destroyed the capability to take on and defeat the subversive and drug-trafficking groups which now virtually dominate certain regions of the country, defying the very sovereignty of the state.

The underlying elements of the country's crisis were identified by the Colombian Catholic Bishops, in the concluding statement of their Bishops Council meeting in July 1987:

We are living with such calamity, that one further step would be total war. . . . We see a climate of violence. . . . Subversion is daily arming itself and sowing insecurity across the land; the drug traffickers are imposing their power through bloodshed and money. . . . The Colombian people are severely disillusioned by their rulers, the national institutions, and the political class. . . .

The country can no longer sustain the injustice of having a legitimate government, and simultaneously vast territories controlled by the guerrillas; having two armies, one that defends the institution [of the nation] and one that seeks to destroy it; having double justice, one that administers the law, and then the death penalty imposed by the guerrillas and the drug trade.

Church surveys estimate that the alliance between narcotics traffickers and terrorists is now operative in 80% of Colombia's national territory.

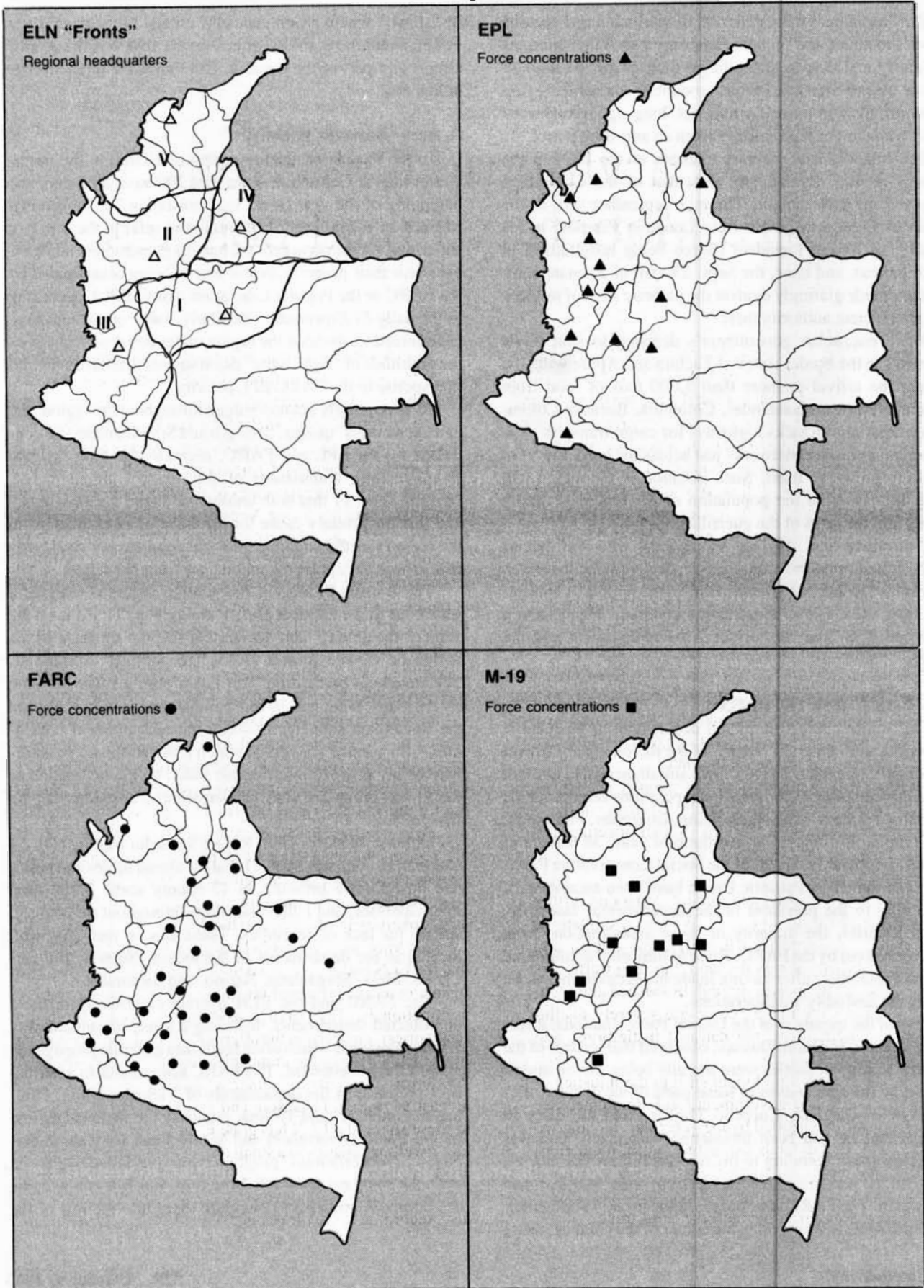
The commander-in-chief of the narco-terrorist National Liberation Army (ELN), Spanish priest Manuel Pérez, told the Colombian magazine *Cromos* on Sept. 8 that his group's intention is to capture the states of Arauca, Norte de Santander, and Cesar, bordering Venezuela, 1,700 kilometers of territory containing the critical Cano Limón Covenas oil pipeline. As the magazine noted, the traditional political leaders in the region admit that in Arauca, at least 90% of the population is in some way or another dependent on the ELN. Portions of Santander as well are now reportedly under ELN control; the terrorists serve as the local government, administering "justice," setting salaries, collecting taxes, and resolving conflicts.

According to Father Manuel Moreno, S.J. (reportedly closely tied to various Central American guerrilla organizations), the ELN seeks to take leadership over the millions of Colombians currently being driven out of Venezuela due to border tensions between the two countries. The ELN has organized "social assistance programs" in various parts of the region, which are financed by the oil companies that operate there—Occidental Petroleum, Shell, Chevron, Saccim, Mannesmann—and administered by a combination of local government officials and the church.

Last May, the comptroller general of the nation revealed that the ELN had prepared a detailed oil exploration program for the country, premised on full collaboration with the oil multinationals. This strange association, according to the Jesuit priest, emerged in the aftermath of a terrorist campaign by the ELN against the companies, during which more than 200 terrorist assaults on personnel and installations yielded at least \$4 million in ransom and protection money. Thanks to these sums, the ELN has gone from a tiny band of mountain-dwelling fanatics to a small modern army of an estimated 1,000 men.

But the ELN's alliance is not solely with the multinationals. According to Guajira Congressman Oscar Gómez Brito,

The Colombian battlefield: Concentrations of guerrilla forces called "fronts"



the ELN has a deal with Venezuelan marijuana and cocaine growers to attack any Venezuelan army patrol that attempts to identify and destroy their illegal drug crops. Exemplary was the case of Sierra de Perija, a mountainous border region where an ELN commando unit not long ago slaughtered nearly a dozen sleeping soldiers from an anti-drug patrol.

The financial and military strength of the ELN in the region contrasts dramatically with that of the Colombian army and the government. The mid-September visit to the region of Foreign Minister Julio Londoño Paredes, in his capacity as Acting President (Barco being hospitalized in South Korea), and later, the Sept. 23 visit of a senate commission, made glaringly evident the pathetic state of military and government authority there.

The Venezuelan government's decision to shut down highways in the border states of Tachira and Apure will now prevent the arrival of more than 5,000 tons of food from Arauca to Norte de Santander, Colombia. Because Colombia's border region lacks highways for cargo transport, it is dependent upon road networks just across the border in Venezuela to provision itself. Such isolation of the region will serve only to drive the population of the region yet more deeply into the arms of the guerrillas.

Colombian Sen. Alfonso Valdevieso, who was part of the frustrated senatorial commission, declared that there was an evident "absence of government" in the region. A spokesman from the German construction company Mannesmann described it as "two authorities," the government and the ELN.

The FARC and the narcos

The southeastern Colombian department of Caquetá is the headquarters for eight "fronts" of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It is simultaneously, and not coincidentally, one of the principal operations centers for the cocaine traffickers—the others being Amazonas, Putumayo, and Vaupes. In Caquetá in just the past year, 38 leaders of the ruling Liberal Party, 18 of the Social Conservative Party, and 12 of the leftist Patriotic Union have been assassinated. According to the president of the departmental assembly, Angel Ricardo, the majority of those assassinations have been carried out by the FARC. Ricardo himself was murdered in mid-September, after having made his accusations public during the assembly's deliberations.

One of the members of the Liberal Party's national directorate, Hernando Durán Dussan, observed that leaders of the country's political parties were literally being driven underground by the subversives in some parts of the country. The governor of Caquetá, Cornelio Trujillo, told the daily *El Tiempo* that he had been threatened with death, and was prevented from attending to his responsibilities because his principal job was to survive the trip from home to office, and back again. The FARC attacked his home in early September.

The FARC is strongest in the center of the country, along

its "spine," where it dominates the crucial Magdalena River valley. From there, FARC guerrillas are able to strike against almost any part of the country. But they have other strongholds, too.

A new 'banana republic'

In the banana-producing region of Urabá, in the northwestern tip of Colombia, more than 200 have died since the beginning of the year from "lead poisoning," a euphemism adopted by inhabitants of the region to refer to the constant shootings. Of the owners of the banana plantations, only 16% ever visit their property, out of fear of being assassinated by the FARC or the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), according to the daily *El Espectador*. Similarly, labor organizers have been forced to abandon the region under threat of death from the multitude of "right-wing" death squads that have surfaced in response to the FARC/EPL activity.

As is popularly acknowledged throughout the region, the banana workers' unions, Sintagro and Sintrabanano, are controlled by the EPL and FARC, respectively. Gen. Miguel Buenaventura, commander of the region's armed forces, charged Sept. 11 that both unions had their "armed wings," and that the primary cause for the wave of assassinations in the region was the ongoing battle between the two rival guerrilla groups to capture the unions, and thus the region.

The Banana Producers Association in Urabá released a statement to the national press warning that "Urabá is on the edge of the abyss," and demanding that the situation in the region be viewed from a global "geopolitical" standpoint. The statement pointed out that rather than a battle between rival groups, what was in fact going on was a battle between the Soviet-run subversives—and the multinational companies—for control of a region which is the necessary passageway in any plan for interoceanic links, be it construction of the Atrato-Truandó Canal, or a superhighway connecting the two gulfs.

Defense Minister Gen. Rafael Samudio Molina told the Colombian congress Sept. 21 that the armed forces and police had no effective presence in 47 county seats, 3,100 rural municipalities, and 1,808 townships throughout the country, simply for lack of resources. These are, in their majority, located in the departments of Antioquia, Boyaca, Bolivar, Choco, Meta, Magdalena, Nariño, and Santander.

The FARC and the ELN operate extensively in these unprotected departments, fostering a sense of vulnerability and hopelessness which often feeds into guerrilla propaganda against the government. The FARC also maintains a permanent presence in the departments of Vichada, Huila, Putumayo, Guaviare, and Tolima, precisely the regions targeted by the Barco government and World Bank for a share-the-poverty "rehabilitation" program which has failed to provide even the most essential infrastructure, much less a genuine development program to integrate them into the rest of the country.