

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Extradition, a first step . . .

Narco-terrorist mobster Ochoa could be headed for a U.S. jail, but Colombian survival will now require U.S. reciprocity.

Within days of the Nov. 21 capture of billionaire cocaine trafficker Jorge Luis Ochoa outside Cali, Colombia, a clandestine communiqué delivered to the media threatened that any effort to extradite Ochoa to the United States would lead to mass assassinations of the nation's political leaders. Such blackmail has worked—repeatedly—in the past. This time, President Virgilio Barco has found the political courage to cry “enough!” As of this writing, it has been learned that Ochoa will be extradited to the United States.

Colombia's decision represents a renewed declaration of war on drugs, a declaration also made on behalf of the U.S. population, the principal target of the lethal “free market” enterprises of Ochoa and his ilk. Colombia must now get the back-up—military and financial—from its U.S. ally, if it is to prosecute, and survive, that war.

Recent revelations by Justice Minister Enrique Low Murtra on the extent of collaboration between the country's drug traffickers and Moscow-linked narco-terrorist movements (see *EIR*, Nov. 27, 1987) make it clear that, despite feuding between elements of the two criminal forces, their combined narco-terrorist capability is enormous. Certainly enough to carry out their threat, and perhaps enough to bring down a government.

In the week just prior to Ochoa's arrest on Nov. 15, one of the country's most respected anti-communist hardliners, Liberal Congressman Pablo Emilio Guarín, was assassinated by the Moscow-run guerrilla umbrella group, the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla

Coordinating Group. Guarín had, in collaboration with the army, helped to force the terrorist FARC out of their stronghold in the Magdalena Medio region, forging peasant-producer alliances that created the basis for economic progress.

One day later, a 100-man commando unit from the Simón Bolívar terrorist group blew up an important cement plant in Boyaca department, Guarín's home state. Terrorists also attacked a military barracks in the southern department of Caquetá, and ambushed a convoy of soldiers en route to assist the besieged barracks. And one day after Ochoa's arrest, narco-terrorists attempted to kidnap the Conservative Party's candidate for mayor of Medellín, the city where Ochoa's infamous “Medellín Cartel” of drug traffickers is based. The kidnaping was fortunately foiled.

The National University in Bogota was recently closed down when rioting broke out on the campus, triggered by guerrilla infiltrators, and after a powerful bomb was discovered in the parked car of a professor. Three hundred professors from across the country, each of them under threat of death from a variety of terrorist groups, met with Justice Minister Low Murtra to demand protection. Another half-dozen journalists have fled the country after receiving death threats.

The arrest of Ochoa had posed a critical dilemma for the Colombian government; namely, what to do with the man. Keeping him inside a Colombian jail to serve 20 months for illegally importing bulls, was believed virtually impossible, in view of

his vast power to corrupt.

The June 1987 decision of the Colombian Supreme Court to overturn the 1979 U.S.-Colombia extradition treaty on a technicality, threw a legal roadblock in the way of shipping Ochoa off to the United States, where charges of murder, drug trafficking, and racketeering await him. He will now be extradited under an earlier, still-standing 1889 extradition pact, which was updated in 1943 to include the crime of drug trafficking.

A likely key element in the Barco government's decision was the Colombian military, which defined itself on the matter in no uncertain terms. Said Armed Forces commander Gen. Manuel Guerrero, “Colombians cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated by these people, who are corrupting our authorities, the Colombian people, the youth, with this filthy business of drug traffic. . . . We must stand up to this problem. . . . We cannot allow, from any viewpoint, that our people continue to be corrupted with [drug] money.”

Surrender to narco-terrorism would not only bury Colombia as a sovereign state, but would be a death blow to democracies across the continent. Yet the United States government has consistently failed to provide the political and financial back-up required to assist the Colombian government in its dilemma. Knowledgeable sources report that longstanding U.S. inflexibility on a variety of legal instruments between the two countries has done major damage to anti-drug efforts.

The capture and extradition of Carlos Lehder and now Jorge Ochoa could be a first step in dismantling the “Medellín Cartel.” But like the many-headed hydra, Dope, Inc. must be struck through the heart—its finances. That's where the power of the United States must come in.