

## A Chronology

# Barco's tolerance of the narco-takeover of Colombia

**Aug. 7, 1986:** Virgilio Barco is inaugurated as President of Colombia. Among his cabinet appointments is Labor Minister José Name Terán, from the mafia-infested state of Atlántico. After his departure from the cabinet, his name repeatedly surfaces in connection with the narcotics mafia. Name Terán is also considered the political godfather of UTC labor union president Victor Acosta, a close associate and business partner of such Medellín Cartel mobsters as Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela.

**Aug. 15, 1986:** Jorge Luis Ochoa, one of the five bosses of the cocaine-trafficker Medellín Cartel, is "provisionally" released from jail after his extradition from Spain to Colombia. Ochoa disappears.

**Oct. 21, 1986:** Barco administration decrees a wide-ranging tax reform/amnesty which, according to public statements of Finance Minister Gaviria Trujillo, would enable the drug traffickers to repatriate their billions without paying taxes or explaining the origin of their dollars.

**October 1986:** Justice ministry's National Narcotics Council yields to the arguments of the pro-drug environmen-

talist lobby, and recommends the suspension of Colombia's model herbicide eradication program against marijuana and coca cultivation.

**Nov. 17, 1986:** The country's leading anti-narcotics law enforcement official, police colonel Jaime Ramírez Gómez, is assassinated by the mob. The defense ministry later denies Colonel Ramírez posthumous promotion to brigadier general, as scheduled, claiming he did not die "in combat."

**Dec. 1, 1986:** Magistrate Samuel Buitrago Hurtado, president of Colombia's Council of State (a presidential advisory body on constitutional matters), goes on national television to oppose the standing U.S.-Colombia extradition treaty as "unconstitutional" and "unpatriotic," and to urge the legalization of the drug trade. Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos responded to Buitrago's arguments with the statement, "This is no way to end the drug trade." President Barco is silent on the opinions of his leading constitutional adviser.

**Dec. 12, 1986:** The Supreme Court overturns the 1979 U.S.-Colombia Extradition Treaty, on a legal technicality. President Barco reinstates it on his personal authorization, but fails to re-submit it to Congress for approval, which would have made it legally inviolable.

**February 1987:** The ruling Liberal Party, to which President Barco is beholden, chooses as its five-man directorate individuals who, each and every one, are either mobsters themselves, known to be on the mafia's payroll, or are openly pro-drug legalization and/or anti-extradition. The daily *El Espectador* editorialized that the party had fallen into the camp of "lack of moral conviction, unexplained links to crime, and intellectual abandonment." President Barco is silent.

**February 1987:** The Supreme Court overturns an emergency decree to place the trials of drug traffickers under military jurisdiction.

**June 1986:** President Barco rejects U.S. extradition requests on three wanted drug traffickers, one of whom is Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, partner to Jorge Luis Ochoa and a top financier of the Medellín Cartel.

**June 25, 1987:** The Supreme Court succeeds in breaking a tied 12-12 vote on the "constitutionality" of the U.S.-Col-



A silent march in honor of slain editor Guillermo Cano, in Bogotá Dec. 15, 1986. The mafia murderers got off scot-free.

ombia extradition treaty, and defeats it.

**July 23, 1987:** The Barco government revokes arrest warrants for purposes of extradition against the heads of the Medellín Cartel.

**July 1987:** A judge finds “insufficient evidence” to accuse the cartel bosses of the April 1984 murder of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla.

Narco-financier Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela is found innocent of drug-trafficking charges in a fixed trial, and is released from jail.

Secretary to the President Germán Montoya is accused of business links to drug trafficker Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela.

**September 1987:** In the wake of a dramatic escalation of narco-terrorist violence in the country, Colombian military demands for increased funding for training and equipment to meet these threats are rejected by the finance ministry as a potential “trauma” to the government’s IMF-dictated fiscal policies.

**October-November 1987:** President Barco drops his demands that the narco-terrorists “disarm and demobilize” before renewing “dialogue” with them. This, despite their October bombing of the defense ministry as part of their campaign to force an end to the longstanding state of siege, and a “civilianization” of the nation’s intelligence service, police force, and defense ministry.

**November 1987:** A judge finds “insufficient evidence” to indict the leaders of the Medellín Cartel for the December 1986 murder of *El Espectador* editor-in-chief and anti-drug spokesman Guillermo Cano.

**Nov. 23, 1987:** Just two days after the stunning capture of Medellín Cartel chieftain Jorge Luis Ochoa, the Barco government revokes an arrest warrant against him, accepting Ochoa lawyers’ arguments that the non-validity of the extradition treaty nullifies the arrest order.

**Dec. 19, 1987:** The Barco government is forced to deny widespread rumors that it had authorized negotiations with the Medellín Cartel, based on an offer of amnesty in exchange for the mafia’s payment of the foreign debt.

**Dec. 30, 1987:** Despite several months remaining of a jail sentence on an animal contraband charge, and despite a standing U.S. extradition petition against him for drug trafficking, murder, and racketeering, Jorge Luis Ochoa is released from a maximum-security jail, on a legally secured writ of *habeas corpus* which the justice ministry had been informed of at least 24 hours earlier.

**Jan. 4, 1988:** Justice Minister Enrique Low Murtra goes on national television to present the following contradictory list of excuses for Ochoa’s release: 1) His orders that Ochoa not be released were “disobeyed”; 2) due to the constitutional mandate of “separation of powers,” his ministry was in any case powerless to revoke Ochoa’s release papers which were “legally” secured from a judge; and 3) the judge who ordered Ochoa’s release had “lacked the competency” to sign the release papers.

## The war against extradition

Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos Jiménez was not the first Colombian official executed for his support for extradition. For 10 years, the chiefs of the Medellín Cartel have used extortion, bribery, terror, and extermination to crush any and all efforts to implement an extradition agreement between the United States and Colombia, under whose terms criminals wanted on drug-trafficking charges can be deported to face trial in the United States.

Two leading Colombian officials, Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and his right-hand aide, Col. Jaime Ramírez Gómez, argued that, because it is extradition that the drug traffickers fear, extradition must be carried out. “While the Colombian judges fear the drug traffickers, the latter only fear the U.S. judges,” Lara Bonilla’s collaborators report the minister repeated incessantly.

Speaking to a group of reporters in early November 1986, Ramírez repeated: “In this matter of extradition, no one should be fooled into believing that we are dealing with anything less than the key factor in the fight against drugs. . . . The day that [the treaty] is annulled, they will have won the war.” *El Espectador* published his interview posthumously on Nov. 19, 1986.

Both men were murdered by drug mafia hit squads: Lara Bonilla on April 30, 1984, Ramírez Gómez on Nov. 17, 1986.

### Methods of terror

When, after Lara Bonilla’s assassination, President Belisario Betancur signed extradition orders, which had been sitting on his desk, for the top drug traffickers, the mafia undertook a legal offensive against the treaty. While Medellín Cartel lawyers argued that the Supreme Court must overturn the 1979 extradition treaty with the United States as unconstitutional, and thus bury it permanently, the cartel’s military apparatus deployed against the Supreme Court. For over a year, each Supreme Court judge received death threats from the mafia—daily, sometimes by the hour.

On Nov. 6, 1985, the Colombian Supreme Court met in the Justice Palace to consider the legal challenge to the treaty brought by Ochoa’s lawyers. As they gathered to meet, the terrorist M-19 group seized the palace.

“It was evident that the guerrillas sought above all to reach the fourth floor of the palace, where the offices of the magistrates of the Supreme Court’s Constitutional Tribunal and those of the Criminal Annulment Court, were located,” reported one of the judges who survived. The head of the