

2-16-1989

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John Neagle

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Recommended Citation

Neagle, John. "Guerrilla Chief Says Rebels Control A Quarter Of Colombian Territory." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/2738>

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Guerrilla Chief Says Rebels Control A Quarter Of Colombian Territory

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Thursday, February 16, 1989

On Feb. 16, several Colombian newspapers published a letter by Manuel Perez, a former Catholic priest and commander of the National Liberation Army (ELN), asserting that guerrillas now control a quarter of Colombian territory. The letter was addressed to former President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, who has attempted to bring the government and the country's six guerrilla groups to the negotiating table to hammer out a truce. Lopez received the letter on Feb. 15, the same day that the ELN was reported to have ambushed two boats carrying supplies for army garrisons on the Cauca River, some 240 miles north of Bogota. In an interview with Colombian radio network RCN, 2nd Brigade commander Gen. Juan Salcedo Lora said that five soldiers, five sailors and 20 guerrillas were killed in the fighting. According to the Defense Ministry, on Feb. 12 ELN rebels ambushed a boat transporting civilians on the Magdalena River in central Colombia, resulting in six deaths and 15 wounded. (Basic data from AP, 02/16/89)

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