

9-19-1989

Colombia's Drug War: Summary Of Events & Statements, Sept. 10-17

John Neagle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

Recommended Citation

Neagle, John. "Colombia's Drug War: Summary Of Events & Statements, Sept. 10-17." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/3522>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Colombia's Drug War: Summary Of Events & Statements, Sept. 10-17

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Tuesday, September 19, 1989

Sept. 10: The Washington Post reported that President Bush signed a National Security Decision Directive about three weeks ago that authorizes US military advisers in Latin America to move outside base camps to "secure" areas to train local forces. Prior to the directive, advisers were restricted to base camps to conduct training. In situations where US advisers are under fire, they are under standing orders to shoot back to defend themselves. The New York Times (09/11/89) cited an unidentified official as saying there are currently 50 to 100 US advisers in Colombia involved in anti-drug operations. The official added that there may be a small number of advisers in Peru under a program run from the US Southern Command in Panama. Unidentified officials said more advisers might be sent to Colombia, Peru and Bolivia under expanding anti-drug operations, but denied that the total could reach the hundreds. Sept. 11: Near Medellin attackers set fire to a farm owned by the head of the government oil company. On Monday night, the National Security Council adopted secret measures to stop violence in Medellin. The governor's office in Antioquia department, of which Medellin is the capital, said the council extended anti-terrorism measures to the entire state. Sept. 12: On Tuesday night, gunmen attacked the Medellin home of federal Judge Laurentino Gallego Gil but police guards drove them off. Earlier in the day, hundreds of mourners attended the funeral of former Medellin Mayor Pablo Pelaez Gonzalez, who was assassinated on his way to work Sept. 11. Sept. 13: Medellin Mayor Juan Gomez said there was no more need for the 11 p.m.-5 a.m. curfew, which was imposed Aug. 30. There are exceptions to the lifting of the curfew. Motorcycles, frequently used in drive-by bombings, are banned from the streets from 6:30 p.m.-5 a.m. Restaurants, bars, discos and other places of entertainment must close at midnight during the week and an hour later Friday and Saturday. In Bogota, the 13th Army Brigade displayed a cache of sophisticated weapons and radio scanners captured in a raid just north of the city. Chief Defense Ministry spokesperson, Col. Eduardo Arevalo, said the guns probably belonged to drug traffickers. The Bogota newspaper El Espectador said the cache, seized Sept. 12, belonged to Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, the reputed No. 2 member of the Medellin drug mafia. Arevalo did not confirm this report. Liberal Party presidential nomination hopeful Ernesto Samper Pizano criticized Washington's anti-drug program for treating consumption as an illness, and production as a crime. He said the distorted emphasis could be summarized as follows: "Educational videos in the US, bombers for Colombia: persuasive talks in the consumption centers; armed helicopters for Colombia." Samper Pizano asserted that if consumer nations do not effectively deal with demand, "supply will simply be displaced from Colombia to somewhere else." This is unacceptable, he added, given Colombia's terrible institutional and personal costs in the so-called drug war. In the 1970s, Samper Pizano supported legalization of marijuana. He said that he does not advocate legalization of cocaine. The politician said the US could promote peace in Colombia by eliminating tariff restrictions imposed against Colombian goods such as fresh flowers and sugar, offer assistance in renegotiating the nation's foreign debt, and act to see the International Coffee Organization's quota system reinstated. Sept. 14: In statements before a US Senate panel, a former member of the Medellin drug ring, Diego Viafara Salinas, said a hit team similar to that which sought his

death could also strike in the US. Through an interpreter, he said, "Believe me, the organization constitutes a world threat. They have aircraft. They have vehicles. They have land to air weaponry. They're very sophisticated." Viafara said the drug ring leaders trained men as young as 15 to be professional killers, and those who failed to excel at the task were ordered killed. Former drug trafficker David Wheeler, who now operates undercover for the US government, said the Colombian drug mafia leaders are smart enough to know better than to attempt assassinations in the US. Wheeler also said the Colombian drug rings had developed sophisticated plans to evade Bush's expanded crackdown, including purchasing land along the US-Mexican border, digging tunnels to facilitate smuggling, and buying land in Montana to store cocaine. Colombian Defense Minister Oscar Botero Restrepo denied the presence of foreign troops and military advisers in Colombia. On Thursday evening, three banks in Bogota were bombed, a garbage truck atorched and a cattle rancher apparently kidnapped. Sept. 15: In a statement, the 4th Army Brigade said it had arrested 24 men and four women, suspected members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), who were accused of carrying out terrorist acts with drug traffickers around Medellin. The communique did not say when the 28 were arrested or what specific "terrorist acts" they were accused of committing. As pointed out by AP, collaboration between leftist rebels and drug traffickers would be "unusual." Drug rings have traditionally considered guerrillas enemies and have funded hit squads aimed at killing leftists in all walks of life. Drug traffickers also view the army-guerrilla confrontations in remote regions as getting in the way of cocaine processing and shipping operations. Four bombs exploded at banks in Bogota early Friday. No one was injured in the blasts and no one claimed responsibility, a police spokesman said on condition of anonymity. The Defense Ministry ordered the country's 200,000-member army and the national police on alert and reinforced security at many buildings in anticipation of violence on the eve of the "Day of Love and Friendship." Defense Minister Botero Restrepo said that Argentina would be sending "various airplanes." He provided no details. Caracol Radio Network reported that the government ordered the air force to shoot down aircraft failing to identify themselves and obey orders to land. Air force units were put on red alert, and all air bases were ordered to be ready to scramble two armed aircraft at any time to intercept suspected drug smuggling planes. The air force ordered its fighters to shoot down planes overflying and landing in prohibited zones. Next, air force planes were authorized to fire on aircraft on the ground which do not respond to radio contact after they land. Five people were wounded in the western city of Cali in three separate bomb attacks on local banks, police said. Cali Police Chief Roso Julio Navarro said the explosions caused considerable damage to the three bank offices. Unofficial sources said the bombings were the work of the drug mafia. On Saturday, Navarro reported that three more bombs exploded Friday night in Cali, injuring 13 people. The bombs went off in a high-rise building and damaged three banks and 12 stores, he said. In the town of Buenavista, Boyaca department, 10 emerald dealers were shot dead by some 50 heavily armed men, police said. The emerald trade in Colombia is widely regarded as having close links with organized crime. In Medellin, three policemen were wounded by a bomb thrown from a passing car. On Saturday, police reported that nine people were killed and 15 wounded in Bogota on Friday. A bomb was deactivated at the Colgate-Palmolive Co.'s headquarters in the western Colombia city of Cali Thursday night, police Col. Rozo Julio Navarro told The Associated Press. Sept. 16: Two bombs exploded in front of the Banco de Santander and Banco Popular in downtown Bogota at about 5 p.m., injuring two pedestrians. No one claimed responsibility for the bombings. On Saturday, army troops patrolled the streets of Bogota, Medellin and Cali, and the Caribbean coastal cities of Cartagena and Barranquilla, and searched cars for weapons and explosives. For the first time, Colombia's national police acknowledged numerous telephoned threats to people

in Bogota and said the telephone company is setting up an operation to trace such calls. Troops were also deployed to guard banks and government buildings. The Liberal Party's current leading candidate for the presidential nomination, Alberto Santofimio Botero, reportedly called for an end to extraditions of Colombians to the US during a speech Saturday evening in the town Ibague. "I do not support giving up Colombians to be tried under someone else's roof," he was quoted as saying. Excerpts from the speech were published in a dozen of Colombia's newspapers Sunday. Juan Diego Jaramillo, a columnist for Colombia's leading daily newspaper, El Tiempo, suggested Saturday the government should use extradition as a bargaining chip in negotiations and warned that the war could become "a little Vietnam." In another Bogota daily, La Republica, columnist Francisco Morales Casas wrote, "We should not continue with this war and should turn to dialogue." Sept. 17: Shortly after midnight, three bombs exploded in Cali at two banks and a shopping center, said national police force chief for the city, Col. Navarro. The bombing at the shopping center killed a guard. Another bomb, he said, was found at a bank and deactivated. As of Sept. 17, in Cali, Bogota, and Medellin a total of 42 blasts since Aug. 18 have killed four people and injured 115. Perhaps the most important Colombian favoring negotiation with the drug traffickers is Juan Gomez Martinez, mayor of Medellin and one of the owners of Medellin's leading daily, El Colombiano. The newspaper El Espectador is opposed to negotiations with the traffickers. On Sunday, the newspaper said its reporter in Buenaventura, Guillermo Gomez Murillo, was shot to death by three men who barged into his house Saturday night. El Espectador said there was no way of telling if the murder was the work of drug traffickers. (Basic data from Notimex, 09/13/89, 09/17/89; AFP, 09/14-16/89; AP, 09/12/89, 09/13/89, 09/15-17/89; New York Times, 09/11/89; Xinhua, 09/15/89, 09/16/89)

-- End --