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## **Colombia: On National Liberation Army (eln) Rebels' Kidnappings, Objectives**

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On Nov. 9, Notimex reported that Mexican engineers Armado Caicedo Camargo and Juan Carlos Mores were kidnapped by National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels on a road to oil fields in Saravena, eastern Colombia. The two engineers are employed by the Colombian-Mexican consortium, Associated Civil Engineers (ICA). Notimex said that another Mexican engineer abducted over three months ago remained in the hands of the ELN. On Dec. 11, British engineer John Mark Jones was abducted by ELN guerrillas while driving with three Colombian colleagues to an oil field in eastern Arauca province, said police. The rebels reportedly set up a roadblock to stop the oil workers' car, and released the Colombians. The ELN is described as Colombia's most active guerrilla organization. Its primary objective is total nationalization of the country's oil industry, and principal tactics include sabotage against oil pipelines and refineries, and kidnapping of foreign oil workers and engineers. According to Notimex, ELN abductions of foreigners may be used to obtain ransom money, to further its nationalization objectives, or both. In some cases, the kidnapping victim is isolated and ELN rebels enter into direct negotiations with employer companies. The rebels have also used abductees to carry messages to employer companies and Colombian government officials regarding ELN oil policy preferences and demands. Earlier this year, the ELN kidnapped three Brazilian engineers. Conditions for their release included on-site videotaped interviews with guerrillas by a prestigious journalist from Brazil's O Globo network. Several weeks after their abduction, and subsequent to broadcasting the report in Brazil, the three engineers were released. According to Colombian military sources, ELN guerrillas "in arms" number about 900. Another 2,000 persons, say the sources, provide the ELN with regular logistical support. In 1973, a nation-wide military operation against guerrillas and leftists nearly destroyed the ELN. The only surviving remnants of the ELN were concentrated in northeastern Colombia, near the Venezuelan border. Discovery of oil deposits in the area and former President Belisario Betancur's pacification policies led to a resurgence of the rebel group. In the 1980s, the ELN has managed to collect millions of dollars from foreign oil companies for "protection" of facilities and personnel. When the transnationals failed to deliver payments, the guerrillas responded with a sabotage campaign against oil pipelines and refineries. Thus far in 1989, sabotage has resulted in an estimated \$300 million in oil export revenue losses. Colombian government officials claim the ELN works alongside drug traffickers. The rebels openly protect marijuana growers in the Perija mountains, located in the Colombian-Venezuelan border area, from attacks by Venezuelan and Colombian soldiers. According to the US Drug Enforcement Administration, marijuana sales provide the ELN with a substantial cash flow. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/09/89; AFP, 12/11/89)

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