

Colombian Rebels Admit to Plane Shooting



--Leftist rebels acknowledged for the first time that they shot down a U.S. plane and are holding hostage three Americans they accuse of being CIA agents. The White House sent 150 soldiers to join the search for the captives.--

BACKGROUND:

Colombia is a country of significant natural resources, and has a diverse culture reflecting the indigenous Indian, Spanish and African origins of its people. However, it has also become a byword for drug cartels, violence, guerrilla insurgencies and gross human rights violations.

The fourth largest and third most populous country in South America with 39.5 million inhabitants, Colombia is endowed with substantial oil reserves and is a major producer of gold, silver, emeralds, platinum and coal. It also has a highly stratified society where the traditionally rich families of Spanish descent have benefited from this wealth to a far greater degree than the greatest portion of the population, who are mostly of mixed race. With few avenues for social mobility, this provided a natural constituency for left-wing insurgents.

At the other end of the political spectrum are right-wing paramilitary groups, who are sometimes in the pay of drug traffickers and large landowners, and backed by elements in the army and the police. The paramilitaries have sprung up everywhere, in particular in the northwestern regions, and target human rights workers and peasants suspected of helping left-wing guerrillas, street children and other marginal groups.

Alongside politically-motivated blood-letting is drug-related crime, which has become the most common cause of death after cancer and given Colombia the world's highest kidnap rate. Together with the political violence, this has made Colombia one of the most violent countries in the world, deterring investors and tourists alike.

FARC: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia are neither terrorists nor revolutionaries in the conventional sense. Their roots can be found in the Liberal guerrilla bands of La Violencia, a civil war between the Liberal and Conservative parties that raged from 1948 until 1958, which became disillusioned with the leadership of the Liberal Party and turned to communism. One such guerrilla band was led by Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda (his real name is Pedro Antonio Marin), who in 1966 baptized his group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Since then he has built up his guerrilla army from a handful of cousins and friends, into a fearsome force of some 18,000 fighters that today control almost 40% of the country. Manuel Marulanda, now more than 70, still heads the FARC.

Until the 1980s the growth of the FARC was slow, restricted mainly to the outer reaches of the country where hardy peasants had carved land from the jungle and where the state has neglected

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to follow them. But then the FARC discovered drugs, not consuming them, which is prohibited in the rebel ranks, but taxing them.

Now they tax every stage of the drug business, from the chemicals needed to process the hardy coca bush into cocaine and the opium poppy into heroin, right up to charging for the processed drugs to be flown from illegal airstrips they control. And they make at least \$300m from the drug trade every year, added to their income from kidnapping and extortion, making them one of the richest insurgent groups in the world.

The FARC did briefly flirt with a political route to power, establishing a political party, the Patriotic Union (UP), in the late 1980s. But the UP was decimated by right-wing death squads, sponsored by drug traffickers and with links to government security forces. Some 3,000 UP members were murdered, including the UP's 1990 presidential candidate, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa. The political route was therefore effectively closed to the FARC and they focused on the military route to power, which they are still following today, despite having been in a peace process with the government for three years.

Granted a 42,000 sq kilometers safe haven in 1998 by then President Andres Pastrana - their condition for sitting down at the peace table - the FARC have talked peace with the government but made war, bringing violence and kidnapping to record levels. They have used their safe haven to



import arms, export drugs, recruit minors and build up their military machine. From 1996 to 1999 the FARC inflicted a series of humiliating defeats on the Colombian army, capturing more than 500 security force members.

But the tide has turned and while the Colombian military is in no position to defeat the FARC, thanks in no small part to US military aid, it now is able to swiftly react to guerrilla attacks and with the use of airpower and heliborn troops has been inflicting heavy losses on the rebels. Yet the FARC still believe they can take power by force, and until they are shown that this is an impossibility they are unlikely to negotiate peace in earnest feeling, they can achieve more on the battlefield than at the peace table.

The US has been a sponsor of the Colombian Government's massive counter-drugs program - Plan Colombia - for almost two years. It is part of Colombian ex-President Andres Pastrana's struggle to get his beleaguered country back on its feet by tackling what he sees as the root of the problem - drugs and the money from them that is fuelling the country's civil conflict.

The US wants to help get rid of the primary source of cocaine on America's streets. It initially pledged \$1.3 billion of mainly military aid to train police and troops to eradicate plantations of coca, - the raw material for cocaine - by aerial spraying.

It is widely believed that few inroads have been made into the coca production so far. Recently, US senators expressed doubts about the plan, arguing that the results so far had been insignificant as larger amounts of cocaine were being smuggled into the US. US officials have admitted that while tens of thousands of hectares of coca has been sprayed, the crop has been replanted. The United States has given Colombia about \$2 billion, mostly in military aid, since 2001. The 2003 budget recently passed by Congress adds another \$500 million. The aid was initially limited to fighting drugs, but the restrictions recently were lifted to let Colombia use the equipment and U.S.-trained troops to confront the rebels directly.

The Colombian foreign ministry estimates that at least four million Colombians are living outside the country, whilst the customs authorities believe that as many as half of those traveling abroad have no plans to return.

Colombians are leaving in droves, fleeing kidnapping, record levels of violence and crime and a dire economic situation. Then there are the record levels of crime and violence. There were over 26,000 homicides in Colombia last year, making it one of the most dangerous places in the world to live. There were over 3,700 abductions last year, more than one every three hours. More than 90% of all crimes go unpunished.

STORY:

Leftist rebels on Saturday acknowledged for the first time that they shot down a U.S. plane and are holding hostage three Americans they accuse of being CIA agents. The White House sent 150 soldiers to join the search for the captives.

The Americans were on a U.S. government plane on an intelligence mission when it crashed on Feb. 13. A fourth American and a Colombian army sergeant were shot and killed at the site.

"We can only guarantee the life and physical integrity of the three gringo officials in our power if the Colombian army immediately suspends military operations and overflights in the area," the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, said in a statement. The rebels' demand specified that the military must halt operations and overflights in a 387-square mile area of southern Colombia's Cauqueta state.

Gen. Jorge Enrique Mora, Colombia's top military commander, rejected the rebel demand and said the search for the three Americans would proceed in the mountains and jungles of southern Colombia. President Bush ordered an additional 150 U.S. soldiers to Colombia to help in the search, Pentagon officials said Saturday. U.S.

officials already have been assisting with intelligence information. The deployment will bring to more than 400 the number of U.S. troops in the South American nation, and will deepen Washington's involvement in the civil war.

The Americans were on an intelligence mission when it crashed, Colombian Defense Minister Martha Lucia Ramirez has said. U.S. defense officials deny the Americans worked for the CIA and say the men were contractors for the Miami-based U.S. Southern Command, which oversees U.S. military operations in South America and the Caribbean. The bodies of the two slain men were found about a mile from the plane, Carolina Sanchez, spokeswoman for the Colombian attorney general's office, said Saturday. The American had been shot in the head while the Colombia was shot twice in the chest. Autopsy reports showed that the bullets were fired from a distance of less than 2 yards, Sanchez said.

The Bush administration demanded Saturday that the three Americans be freed and declared it holds the rebels responsible for their safety. The State Department has appealed to the captors for proof that the Americans are alive. The Colombian government on Thursday offered a \$345,000 reward for information leading to their safe return.

U.S. troops are in the country training soldiers. In 2001, the U.S. Congress limited the number of U.S. troops in Colombia to 400, but allowed the president to exceed that number for emergency search and rescue operations. Bush's order to deploy 150 more troops put the total in Colombia over the 400 limit.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The United States is considering direct military intervention in Colombia for the first time. The US embassy in Colombia has recommended Washington make a 'major

response' to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia rebels responsible, and American officials have confirmed that military action is being considered to recover the men from the dense jungles of the southern province of Caqueta.

For the people of Caqueta, the prospect of a US military incursion into the province is yet another nightmare. In the past year, since the collapse of the peace process, they have seen the suspension of local government and are living under a form of martial law. Scores of ordinary people have been tortured and murdered by right-wing paramilitaries and they face a constant campaign of bombing and kidnapping by the Farc.

The murder of the first US government worker in Colombia's bitter war has again focused attention on Caqueta. This isolated province first hit the headlines in 1999 when it became central to a truce under which the Farc were given effective control of a Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) the size of Switzerland. San Vicente del Caguán became its unofficial capital and the site for peace talks between the government and the guerrillas, but now the threat of US action hangs over the town, just a few kilometers from the scene of the plane crash. A search for the kidnapped men has been launched by troops, backed by US helicopters and intelligence planes.

The military confine themselves to San Vicente and the main roads, but even so are only partly successful. Two bombs went off near the town's central plaza last month and kidnapping has become almost a mundane activity.

Local guerrillas have perfected a technique they call pesca milagrosa - miracle fishing. The name comes from the biblical story of Jesus telling his apostles to cast their nets on the water and how they emerged bursting with fish. The guerrillas will stop a convoy of cars and buses, and take hostage they suspect have rich friends or families.

There was a local administration and police force in San Vicente, but when the DMZ ended, they all left - or were murdered. The town hall is closed, the police station was blown up and the area left without any form of non-military government.

Then the paramilitaries turned up. 'They arrived in town one night and the next day there were five bodies in the Caguán river,' said Fr Gabriel. Funded by ranchers and cocaine barons, the paramilitaries have grown into a fearsome force in Colombia. And although illegal, they have strong links to the military. Often no one is sure which side is responsible for murders in Caqueta.

For anyone working with the community, the risk is from both sides. The guerrillas murdered a colleague of Sister Bernadette who was seen talking to the military. She herself was stopped at an army roadblock and her medical supplies confiscated. Every day for a week she went to the local military commander's office to demand their return but also visited the local Farc commander to explain her trips, lest he decide she was an informer.

Areas of the Caqueta jungle have been cleared for coca growing and it is targeted by US-backed anti-cocaine measures. Coca is grown by small farmers, but the crop is the Farc's main source of income and they control every aspect of production. Locals complain the coca spraying destroys crops and wildlife, poisons the land and causes illness. The US has just increased its budget to the Colombian government to fight the cocaine trade and bring peace to the country.



Colombian flag.

SPORTS:**Mike Tyson At it Again**

The crowd of 15,171 at the Pyramid went wild over the sixth-fastest knockout of Tyson's career. It only took 49 seconds to take down Clifford Etienne (aka the Black Rhino). But the former heavyweight champion was realistic about what it all meant. Etienne — aka the Black Rhino — had gone down seven times in one fight with soft-hitting Fres Oquendo two years ago.

Tyson's handlers had hoped for a spectacular knockout to set up a June 21 rematch with Lewis, who gave Tyson such a beating in the same ring eight months ago that many wrote him off as finished. Lewis himself gave up an April fight with Vitali Klitschko to see whether Tyson would impress enough to sell the rematch.

But 49 seconds proved little, except that Tyson can still hit like a mule and Etienne can still fall down. And even though Tyson desperately wants — and needs — the money a Lewis rematch would bring, he said he needs another fight or two before risking it all against a fighter who simply may be too big and too good for him. Tyson said after Lewis knocked him out that he could never beat the WBC heavyweight champion. He didn't sound much more confident after disposing of Etienne. Tyson said. "If I have to make Lewis my next fight, there's no way I can continue fighting."

Tyson claimed after the fight that doctors told him he had a broken back from a 1997 motorcycle accident. His doctor said the injury was uncomfortable but nothing serious enough to keep him from fighting.

Etienne, who was booed and harassed as he left the ring, was clearly hit by a big punch. Afterward, he whispered in Tyson's ear that he should get his act together and become the heavyweight champion once again. Tyson was so touched he invited Etienne to come to Las Vegas. It was the closest Etienne came to Tyson's much-talked about tattoo, which an expert described as indicative of a Maori tribal warrior design. Tyson wasn't so sure--he just liked the way it looked.

ENTERTAINMENT:**Grammy Award Winners**

The 45th Annual Grammy Award winners announced Sunday night:

Album of the Year: "Come Away With Me," Norah Jones
 New Artist: Norah Jones
 Record of the Year: "Don't Know Why," Norah Jones
 Song of the Year: "Don't Know Why," Jesse Harris
 Hard Rock Performance: "All My Life," Foo Fighters
 Spoken Comedy Album: "Robin Williams— Live 2002"
 Country Album: "Home," Dixie Chicks
 Rap Album: "The Eminem Show," Eminem
 Male Pop Vocal Perf: "Body Is a Wonderland," John Mayer
 Pop Vocal Album: "Come Away With Me," Norah Jones
 Pop Vocal Perf. by a Duo/Group: "Hey Baby," No Doubt
 Score Soundtrack Album: "The Lord of the Rings"
 Latin Pop Album: "Caraluna," Bacilos.
 Contemporary R&B Album: "Ashanti," Ashanti.
 Female Country Vocal Performance: "Cry," Faith Hill
 Male Country Vocal Perf: "Give My Love To Rose," J. Cash
 Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal: "Long Time Gone," Dixie Chicks.
 Country Collaboration with Vocals: "Mendocino County Line," Willie Nelson with Lee Ann Womack
 Country Instrumental Perf: "Lil' Jack Slade," Dixie Chicks.
 Female Pop Vocal Perf: "Don't Know Why," Norah Jones.
 Pop Collaboration with Vocals: "The Game of Love," Santana and Michelle Branch
 Female Rap Solo Perf: "Scream a.k.a. Itchin'," Missy Elliott.
 Male Rap Solo Performance: "Hot in Herre," Nelly.
 Rap/Sung Coll: "Dilemma," Nelly featuring Kelly Rowland.
 Alt Music Album: "A Rush of Blood," Coldplay.
 Female Rock Vocal Perf: "Steve McQueen," Sheryl Crow
 Male Rock Vocal Perf: "The Rising," Bruce Springsteen
 Rock Perf Duo/Group with Voc: "In My Place," Coldplay.
 Metal Performance: "Here to Stay," Korn.
 Rock Song: "The Rising," Bruce Springsteen
 Rock Album: "The Rising," Bruce Springsteen

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY:**February 24, 1991****Gulf War: Ground Offensive Begins**

On August 2, 1990, Iraq had invaded Kuwait, its tiny oil-rich neighbor, and within hours had occupied the most strategic positions in the country. One week later, Operation Shield, the American defense of Saudi Arabia, began as U.S. forces massed in the Persian Gulf. Three months later, the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq if it failed to withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991.

At 4:30 p.m. on January 16, 1991, Operation Desert Storm, a massive U.S.-led offensive against Iraq, began as the first fighter aircraft were launched from Saudi Arabia and off aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf.

Operation Desert Storm was conducted by an international coalition under the command of U.S. General Norman Schwarzkopf and featured forces from 32 nations, including Britain, Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. During the next six weeks, the allied force engaged in a massive air war against Iraq's military and civil infrastructure. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's only significant retaliatory measure was the launching of SCUD missile attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia in the hope that the attacks would provoke Israel, and thus other Arab nations, to enter the conflict; however, Israel remained out of the war.

On February 24, a massive coalition ground offensive began, and Iraq's forces were rapidly overwhelmed. By the end of the day, the Iraqi army had effectively folded, 10,000 of its troops were held as prisoners, and a U.S. air base had been established inside Iraq. Four days later, Kuwait was liberated, and the majority of Iraq's armed forces had either been destroyed or had surrendered. On February 28, President Bush declared a cease-fire, and Iraq pledged to honor future coalition and U.N. peace terms. 125 American soldiers were killed in the Persian Gulf War, and another 21 regarded as missing in action.

WHO YOU NEED TO KNOW:**Alvaro Uribe Velez**

Born in Medellin on 4 July 1952, Alvaro Uribe is Colombia's current president. Described as a hard-line independent, liberal, and right-leaning politician, Uribe picked up 53% of the votes in the May 2002 elections.



He pledged to fight the left-wing guerrillas and the right-wing paramilitaries alike. He wants to increase the already stretched 120,000-strong army and add a one-million strong civilian force. He has described

himself as a democrat with authority who wants a cease-fire and a commitment by the rebels to give up terrorism before entering any kind of negotiations. Uribe is keen on seeking international mediation to end the violence and bring about "democratic security."

His political opponents have plenty of ammunition against him, but none has hit the target with the electorate. They have tried to paint him as the candidate of the right-wing paramilitaries that were responsible for killing more than 1,000 people last year through their policy of massacres and assassinations of suspected guerrillas, trade unionists, left-wing intellectuals, and journalists. Most of the raw material for such accusations comes from Mr Uribe's term as governor of his home province of Antioquia from 1995-1998. During this time he set up a network of rural security co-operatives, known as Convivirs. At least two later became fronts for the paramilitaries.

He is a Harvard and Oxford University-educated lawyer. He is described as a workaholic and a disciplined and focused scholar. Uribe is a staunch Roman Catholic and is interested in horses and yoga. He is married with two children. His father, a wealthy landowner, was killed when FARC rebels tried to kidnap him. He has survived 15 attempts on his own life.

FEATURE: *By Renee Stender*

One Example

You read it in the newspaper; you hear the television reporters discuss it; you overhear conversations on the bus, in movie lines and at cocktail parties. “Experts” declare that our schools are in trouble, that test scores are low, and that inept people are teaching... You’ve heard it all, every argument about our nation’s schools being low. Perhaps you haven’t heard that there are a lot of things that work well in our schools, a lot of successes, and a lot of good teaching going on.

Case in point: recently a group of fourth graders from San Rafael, California went on an overnight field trip to Fort Ross. Fort Ross is on the coast of California, just north of Jenner. It is run by the National Park Service and is a learning “museum” for students and teachers from around the state. Fort Ross once served as an outpost for the Russian American Co. who came from Alaska (and Russia) to make money hunting sea otters.

Before ever leaving the classroom, the students researched a character from the area, prepared a written report and gave an oral presentation. They wove baskets, sewed necessity pouches, made fabric “Russian dolls”, learned a Russian folk dance, and drew maps. (And these kids cover the spectrum of California school children from “gifted” students, to “English as a Second Language” students, to “Special Education” students and everyone in between.)

The Trip. Parents took time off from their jobs to escort the students. They loaded up supplies and children, drove through the rain and highway repair delays, all dressed as though they lived at Fort Ross in the late 1800’s. They were a spirited and helpful group of parents that were totally committed to the education of all the children. These parents (and teachers) had to work while at the fort, cooking, cleaning, fishing, hiking, making boxes, leading the “militia”, loading and unloading gear for 70 people, weeding, gardening, hauling water, setting out sleeping bags, sleeping on the floor with 30 kids,

using porta-potties, and all the while remaining cheerful and responsible. Everyone was on duty for 24 hours a day. The high degree of compassion and professionalism was inspirational. Was anyone paid for this adventure? No, everyone who came gave of their time, energy and love freely.

This type of hands-on experience reaches students who sometimes are not the best student in a classroom setting. One of the boys had only been in the country, learning English, for about a year. He is a very nice boy, who understandably has trouble in the classroom due to his language acquisition. He was in the “militia”, his teacher watched him marching, learning Russian phrases, and bonding with the father that was in charge of that station (who coincidentally is from Russia). Amado took his job very seriously, he went on night watch with his equipment, checked the perimeter of the fort with his teacher, telling her that he “would keep everyone safe”. He told the teacher that she could sleep well because he would be on the job. When the students were bedded down, there were a couple who were scared of the dark, he rearranged everyone so that he was in the middle of them and assured them that they would be safe with him there. Mind you, this is a 9 year old who speaks very limited English. This was a place where he was able to grow and prove to everyone that there is a lot to learn that has nothing to do with standardized tests and books.

Stories like these are not always heard in the movie lines or on the news, but they do occur more than you know. Yes, there is always room for improvement in education. But don’t let the good that occurs in our schools get lost in the shuffle of standardized test results and curriculum changes. There is a lot that is right with our schools, you just might have to dig a little deeper to find the teacher that is not the “teacher of the year” but works hard, or the parents that work but make sure their child goes to bed on time. There are principal’s out there that truly care that their students are happy and learning. They set high standards for their teachers and themselves. One small example...

Quote of the Week:

Time is a great legalizer, even in the field of morals.
-Henry L Mencken, *Book of Prefaces*

Fact of the Week:

In Colombia there is one kidnapping every 3 hours.

Word of the Week:

Stolid (stol'*id) *adj.* Slow in intellect; dull; heavy; stupid.

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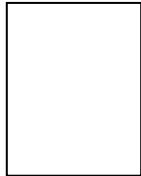
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