



Directorate of  
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# Colombian Presidential Election: Impact on US Narcotics Policy



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An Intelligence Memorandum

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GI 82-10107  
May 1982

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# Colombian Presidential Election: Impact on US Narcotics Policy [redacted]

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An Intelligence Memorandum

*Information available as of 13 May 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted]  
[redacted] International Security Issues Division, Office  
of Global Issues. Comments and queries are  
welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Strategic  
Narcotics Branch, OGI, [redacted]

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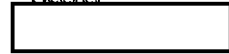
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The paper was coordinated with the Directorate of  
Operations, [redacted]

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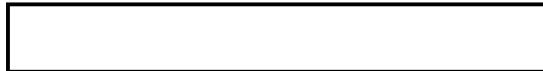
**Colombian Presidential Election:  
Impact on US Narcotics Policy**



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**Summary**

The election of a new Colombian president on 30 May 1982 will have serious consequences for US narcotics policies. President Turbay, for the most part, has cooperated with US drug control efforts; his successor will be generally less responsive to US interests and will probably distance himself from Turbay's pro-US stance. This will impede US efforts to persuade the Colombian Government to undertake effective eradication and interdiction programs at a time when Colombian drug production and trafficking are increasing.



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Colombian Presidential Elections:  
Impact on US Narcotics Policy

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Background

Colombia is a major cultivator and exporter of marijuana, supplying almost 80 percent of the US market; it also serves as a conduit for 50 to 60 percent of the cocaine entering the United States each year. This enormous illegal narcotics trade has created numerous economic, social, and political problems for Colombian authorities. Large-scale marijuana and cocaine trafficking has fueled Colombia's extensive illicit economy, generated a new elite of drug barons, and contributed to a significant rise in crime, corruption, and violence. [Redacted]

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Economic dependence on narcotics trafficking is spreading:

- In the north coast departments, many segments of the population earn part or all of their livelihood from smuggling and trafficking.
- In the Rio Vaupes area of southeastern Colombia, coca boomtowns such as Mitu and Miraflores are flourishing because of increased coca cultivation and trafficking activity.<sup>1</sup>
- In the Gulf of Uraba region, some farmers are replacing less profitable crops with marijuana—a trend which could eventually reduce local food supplies and increase Colombia's food import demand. [Redacted]

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Another corollary of drug trafficking is corruption, which, among its deleterious effects, undermines government narcotics control programs. The large sums involved in drug transactions are sufficient to corrupt many low-level government employees. In fact, [Redacted] one reason for the withdrawal of the Colombian armed forces from narcotics enforcement duty was the corrupting effect such duty had on military personnel. [Redacted]

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Trafficking money also supports the campaigns of local politicians. In the more active trafficking centers, some elected officials undoubtedly won their offices with the help of traffickers. The actual extent of narcotics-related political corruption within Colombia is open to conjecture, but most US intelligence analysts agree that such corruption is more pervasive and influential than current reporting indicates. [Redacted]

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Narcotics trafficking also poses a threat to Colombia's internal security. At one time drug smuggling was the province of the professional smuggler or ambitious amateur, but [Redacted] members of

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[Redacted]

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Colombian insurgent/terrorist groups—M-19 and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—are actively engaged in trafficking. The prospect of a linkage with insurgents and terrorists is of serious concern to Colombian authorities. Drug dealing could provide such groups with large amounts of cash for their operations. Their establishment of trafficking networks for narcotics also would improve their capability to import weapons, ammunition, and other supplies. Moreover, it could lay the groundwork for future insurgent/terrorist activity through the corruption of local police and security forces. [REDACTED]

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Turbay  
Administration:  
Progress Toward  
Narcotics Control

The Turbay government has cooperated with the United States in narcotics matters. In return for financial and technical assistance, the Colombian Government has mounted interdiction and eradication campaigns, revised and strengthened antinarcotics laws, and used the armed forces to assist National Police enforcement operations. [REDACTED]

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A recently concluded enforcement operation illustrates the effectiveness of joint US-Colombian efforts against drug trafficking. Operation Tiburon, begun in November 1980, was targeted against the north coast marijuana traffickers and resulted in the arrest of more than 400 traffickers and the seizure of more than 90 vessels and 770,000 kilograms of marijuana. It included personnel from the US Coast Guard, the Customs Service, and the Drug Enforcement Administration, as well as units of the Colombian Armed Forces and National Police. [REDACTED]

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Unfortunately, while these actions temporarily disrupted trafficking, they have not significantly reduced the long-term flow of narcotics northward. Many of the steps initiated by Turbay under the terms of the November 1980 agreement require an extended commitment on the part of the Colombian Government. There are signs, however, that Colombia's resolve may be wavering. As Turbay's term of office has been drawing to a close, he has shown an increasing reluctance to involve himself in narcotics-related matters. [REDACTED]

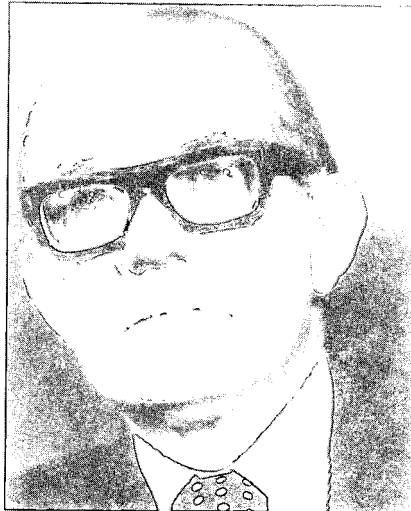
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By assuming a lameduck role several months before the election, Turbay has hampered US plans for marijuana and coca eradication. He is unlikely to undertake any controversial narcotics enforcement activities or enter into any bilateral agreements that would hurt the chances of the Liberal Party candidate for election. Moreover, Colombia is beset by a number of problems more pressing than narcotics. National attention is focused on the upcoming election and the candidates' programs for curbing inflation, strengthening the economy, and maintaining internal order. [REDACTED]

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Alfonso Lopez Michelsen [redacted] Liaison ©



Belisario Betancur Cuartas [redacted] Guion ©

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The Candidates' Positions on Narcotics Control

Neither candidate has a clearly articulated program on narcotics. [redacted]

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*Alfonso Lopez Michelsen*

A former president (1974-78) and the Liberal Party candidate, Alfonso Lopez Michelsen may be reluctant to pursue an aggressive antinarcotics policy, especially in the north coast departments—the traditional marijuana trafficking region of Colombia—where the Liberal Party did exceptionally well in the March legislative elections. To dispel opponents' charges of collusion and corruption, however, and to appease the United States, Lopez would probably undertake some token campaigns in Colombia's more sparsely inhabited growing regions, where he is not politically indebted.

[redacted]

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Lopez's position on the marijuana legalization issue is unclear—especially in view of the fact that his campaign manager, Ernesto Samper, is a well-known advocate of legalization. Samper's views probably do not reflect Lopez's stand on this controversial matter. Lopez is an astute politician whose policies generally mirror his perception of the public mood, which is generally opposed to legalization. He has managed so far to avoid the issue and probably would not support a legislative initiative to legalize marijuana at this time. [redacted]

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*Belisario Betancur Cuartas*

Belisario Betancur Cuartas, the Conservative Party candidate, is a veteran of Colombian presidential elections. He barely lost to Turbay in 1978, and most observers concede that his chances for election are better this time. Because of his personal integrity and high moral standards, Betancur

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would probably support US narcotics policy. He views narcotics trafficking as morally corrupting and a threat to Colombian institutions and society. [redacted]

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His personal views will nevertheless be tempered by political reality. No Colombian president will be able to eliminate narcotics trafficking because drug producing and trafficking are so completely imbedded in Colombian social, economic, and political realities. Moreover, if elected, he is expected to pursue a more nationalistic and neutral course than Turbay in foreign affairs. This would allow him to use the narcotics issue as a bargaining point to gain concessions from the United States on other bilateral issues.

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Conclusion

Neither Lopez nor Betancur is likely to be as cooperative on the drug issue as Turbay. A win by Lopez probably would seriously set back US narcotics efforts in Colombia. While the extent of his narcotics connections is not fully known, Lopez probably would be hesitant to undertake eradication programs in areas of traditional Liberal Party strength. Betancur, on the other hand, would be more receptive to US overtures on narcotics matters. Both could be expected to use US interest in controlling narcotics trafficking as a bargaining chip in future US-Colombian diplomatic negotiations. This could adversely affect the implementation of US narcotics policy at a time when drug cultivation and trafficking from Colombia are increasing. [redacted]

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