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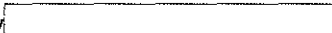


*Directorate
of Intelligence*

Intelligence Memorandum
DCI Counternarcotics Center
10 June 1993

Colombia: With Escobar Down, Bogota Faces the Cali Cartel

Summary

Sustained government pressure has substantially damaged Pablo Escobar's drug organization, relegating him to a minor trafficking role. Cali drug groups, however, remain a formidable counternarcotics challenge and dominate the cocaine market. The Cali kingpins, concerned they will be the focus of more serious enforcement operations, have begun surrender negotiations. They are probably trying to play for time and to forestall government operations, judging that President Gaviria's ability to step up antidrug operations against them will be constrained during the upcoming presidential campaign. They are also seeking to lay the groundwork for lenient surrender terms if the government does significantly increase the pressure against them. We doubt that Gaviria during the remaining year of his term will risk forcing the drug lords to surrender before the government has built solid legal cases against them, closed loopholes in the plea-bargaining laws, or construct a true maximum security prison. Prospects for a surrender may dim beyond Gaviria's tenure; at a minimum, we believe the new president as has happened in the past will initially seek a peaceful way to cope with the traffickers. 

This memorandum was prepared by 
 DCI Counternarcotics Center. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Director, DCI Counternarcotics
Center, on 



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Pablo Escobar's drug group has suffered substantial damage from sustained government pressure since his escape last summer, and he is not likely to be able to rebuild it:

-- [redacted] the organization's finances are in disarray and that Escobar now relies on relatively unknown and untested associates who lack experience, networks, and resources.

-- [redacted] the once powerful Medellin cartel is splintered; some anti-Escobar factions have cast their lot with former Cali competitors while other groups are reviving old Cali connections.

-- Prompted by the terror campaign of anti-Escobar traffickers and the deaths in March of key Escobar lieutenants Hernan Henao and Mario Castano, many associates have surrendered or turned against the kingpin, providing the government with intelligence leading to other arrests or deaths.

Even if Escobar surrenders, we believe that he will have to focus on protecting his personal security and on fighting the government's cases against him and that he will no longer play a significant role in the Medellin drug trade. [redacted]

We believe remnants of Escobar's organization and other Medellin groups will exploit trafficking contacts and existing transshipment networks to function but at a reduced level. [redacted] the Ochoa brothers--who head the largest remaining Medellin drug group--continue to operate an international network from Itagui prison, communicating with their subordinates and arranging the shipment of cocaine. If the Ochoas remain in prison for very long, however, we believe others from within their organization or elsewhere may gradually push them aside. [redacted]

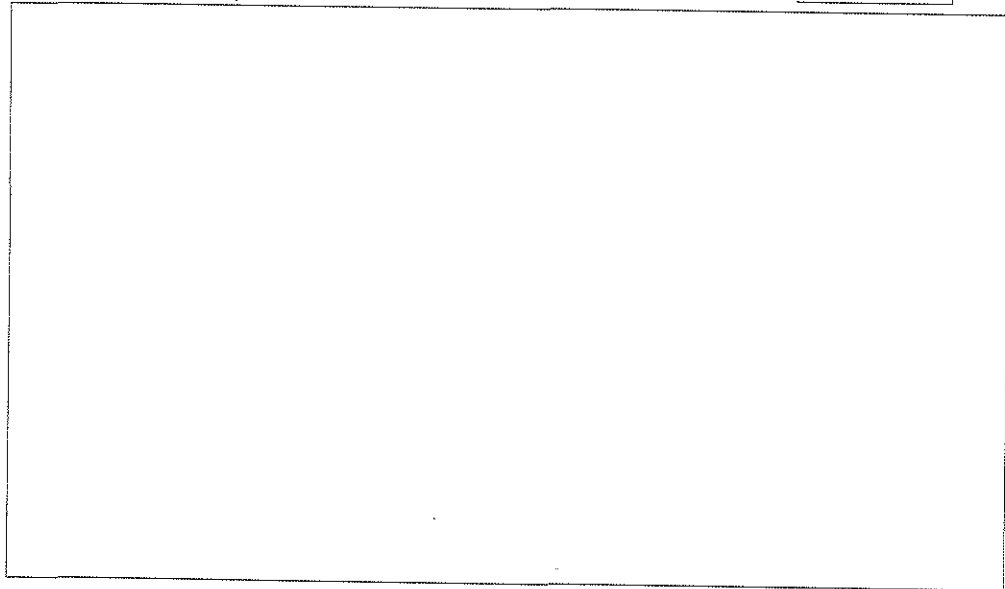
Cali Traffickers Looking for a Deal

With Escobar on the run, the Cali kingpins are concerned they may become the focus of the Gaviria administration's antidrug operations. The Colombian press, since early January, has been publishing articles on government plans for major operations in the Cauca Valley--the principal location of the Cali-linked cocaine processing laboratories--and the Colombian Army has recently stepped up its interdiction effort there.


[redacted] in late-May police raided several Cali targets, including the offices of a key cartel lawyer, arresting to high-level associates. This, in conjunction with the violent deaths of so many Escobar associates over the past few months, may have raised the fears of the Cali kingpins for their own safety. Further, last year the government announced the indictments of Cali drug lords Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela on a minor trafficking charge and Jose Santacruz Londono on a murder charge. [redacted]

In response to these moves, Cali drug leaders opened talks with the government about a surrender or a reduction in their trafficking activities:

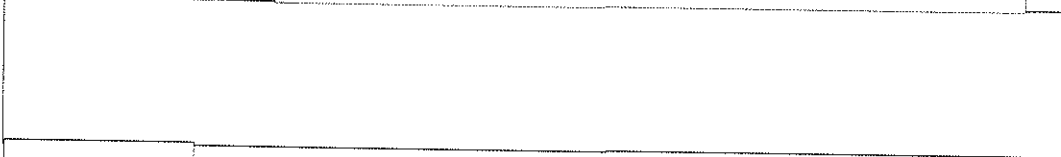
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Cali's Calculus

We believe the Cali leaders' surrender offer is at a minimum designed to forestall more vigorous government operations. Although the Cali kingpins have coped with previous government raids, they must worry that successes against Escobar will embolden the government to pursue new and perhaps more violent tactics against their organizations. The deaths of so many of Escobar's lieutenants during government operations must cause some Cali figures to worry that they might suffer the same fate. Some traffickers reportedly worry that a harder effort would occur soon after Escobar is killed or captured. 

Absent more severe actions by the government, the kingpins, in our view, will try to drive a tough bargain. 



The Cali kingpins also may see negotiations as a way to play for time, calculating that as the 1994 presidential campaign heats up the Gaviria administration will be less likely to press antidrug operations. Several polls have indicated that Cali cartel activities, and narcotics in general, are low on the list of voters' concerns. The traffickers may calculate that Gaviria will be concerned that intensifying antidrug operations would engender future political countermoves from the drug lords and undermine the prospects for his chosen successor, Humberto del la Calle, to overtake Ernesto Samper for the Liberal Party nomination. In apparent response to political pressures, Gaviria has publicly blamed Washington for not providing adequate trade preferences in return for Bogota's effort in the drug war. 

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[REDACTED]

The traffickers may also judge that, if they can string the government along until the end of Gaviria's term, a successor government will be less committed to counternarcotics operations. Ernesto Samper of the Liberal Party has taken a more accommodating posture on counternarcotics. One of the two leading presidential contenders, Samper [REDACTED] has stated he intends to decriminalize narcotics should he be elected. Samper has advocated legalization in previous election campaigns and has joined the conservative candidate, Andres Pastrana, in blaming Washington for failing to address drug consumption in the United States and for placing too much pressure on Colombia. Humberto del la Calle--Gaviria's choice for the Liberal Party nomination--is running far behind Pastrana and Samper in polls. In any case, a new president will be too distracted by other problems in the early months to pursue a concerted counternarcotics campaign. [REDACTED]

Prospects for Surrender Under Gaviria

In our judgment, while the Gaviria administration may ratchet up pressure against Cali groups, it is unlikely to force the surrender on tough terms of the Rodriguez-Orejuelas or other top Cali traffickers during its remaining year in office. Although it is conceivable that the government could sufficiently reduce the cartel's pervasive influence within the security services to direct operations against the organization with the same force as those against Escobar, the administration is unlikely to be able to build solid legal cases against the kingpins, close loopholes in the pleabargaining laws, and construct a true maximum security prison to ensure that the drug lords serve long prison terms for their crimes. [REDACTED]

We believe, however, there is an outside chance that the government and the traffickers will agree on lenient surrender terms. Gaviria and his colleagues might be willing to make substantial concessions to gain what they presumably would portray as a substantial and peaceful victory. For their part, the traffickers might accept a compromise rather than risk that Gaviria in the final months of his term might seek his victory by force. We believe the traffickers would at a minimum expect promises of safety, lenient sentences, and comfortable conditions in prisons. [REDACTED]

If The Traffickers Surrender

A surrender of significant numbers of traffickers on almost any terms would carry considerable risks for the government:

- The Colombian judicial system, which has been slowly reforming under Gaviria, would be very hard pressed to cope with many surrenders.

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- [REDACTED]
- The need to hold traffickers to await trial would overburden a prison system that in the past has been easily corrupted by traffickers.
 - The likely confusion in wake of the surrenders would play into the hands of Gaviria's opponents, who could undermine his victory by showing the futility of his antinarcotics efforts. [REDACTED]

But incarceration, even on easy terms, will also leave the traffickers vulnerable to an erosion of their influence. While the jailed kingpins would still be able to communicate with their organizations, they would lose some flexibility to control day-to-day operations. In the first few months, this would be of little consequence; the traffickers could continue drug operations relatively easily. However, the need for the kingpins to delegate operational authority in their groups and conflicts over control could splinter the Cali organizations, making them much more vulnerable to concerted antidrug operations--much as happened to Pablo Escobar's organization during his confinement.

[REDACTED]

A Trafficking Moratorium?

The Cali organizations continued drug transshipments despite the reported agreement, and there are no indications that they intend to honor it. Since the moratorium began on 27 April, cartel associates made several shipments of cocaine base to laboratories in the Cauca Valley. Cartel traffickers also continued to plan shipments of cocaine through Mexico and Central America, to the US. [REDACTED]

While we have seen no evidence of a standdown, [REDACTED] Cali traffickers are shifting to alternative routes and locations to avoid heightened counternarcotics operations in the Cauca Valley. [REDACTED]


[REDACTED]


Mixed Signals Ahead From Bogota

We believe that mixed signals will emerge from Bogota over the coming months. To avoid criticism from presidential aspirants, the Gaviria administrations will need to create at least a facade of flexibility on negotiations with the Cali organizations. Barring unambiguous signs of their intent to surrender, however, we believe law enforcement efforts against the Cali groups will continue as the government seeks to strengthen its hand for any talks and tries to keep relations with the United States on an even keel. Gaviria will continue to look to the United States for increased counternarcotics assistance as Colombia pursues the long-term fight against the Cali

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cartel. He will persist in pressing Washington for trade concessions, which he can present to the electorate as a tangible benefit of Colombia's war on drugs, and for closer cooperation on evidence sharing in order to strengthen legal cases against the Cali kingpins. 

Beyond Gaviria, prospects could dim for progress against the Cali kingpins. If Samper is elected, US-backed antidrug policies could be reversed. Gaviria and--presumably--his handpicked successor, del la Calle, want to build upon judicial reforms, tighten the pleabargaining laws, and ultimately imprison the Cali kingpins, but Samper almost certainly would be more open to an accommodation with Cali. While Samper may hesitate to decriminalize narcotics, out of concern that it would severely damage relations with Washington, he may be willing to grant the Cali kingpins freedom to run their narcotics enterprise in exchange for reduced drug-related violence and their political and financial support. 

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