

British run private armies in Colombia

by Javier Alamario

In 1996, some 60,000 soldiers, approximately half of Colombia's military force of 129,140 soldiers (not counting the police), were deployed to guard infrastructure and installations belonging to the state-owned Ecopetrol oil firm, and its multinational partners, among them, British Petroleum (BP), the Anglo-Dutch firm Royal Dutch Shell, and Occidental Petroleum, founded by the notorious Anglo-Soviet agent, Armand Hammer.

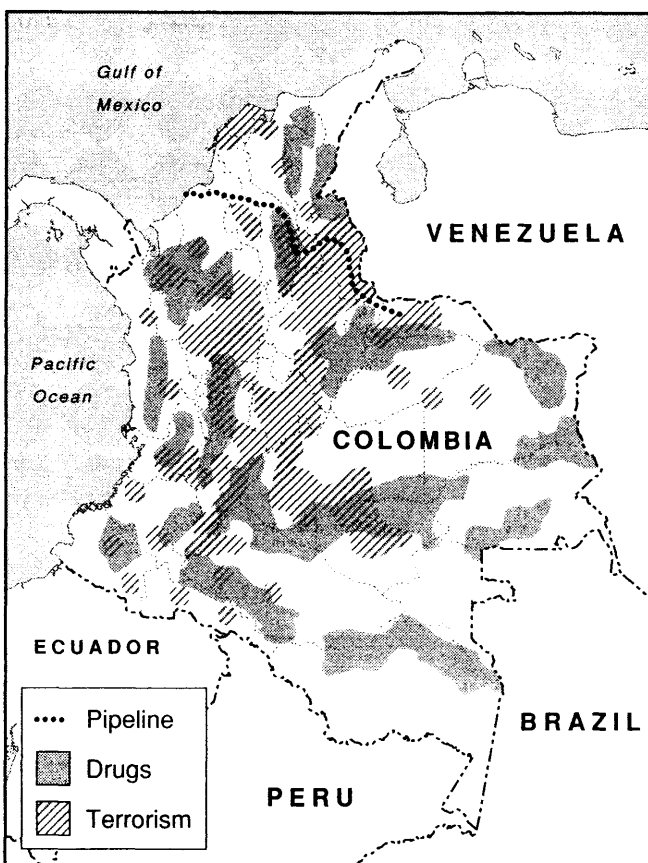
Aside from the "war tax" which these, and all large companies operating in the country, pay to the government to help defray special security expenses, they reportedly have an additional agreement with the Colombian government directly, by which they cover part of the cost of the military deployment. The oil multinationals say they pay \$150 million annually for these expenses; sources close to the Army insist this is greatly exaggerated, and that the multis only provide food, helicopters, and other logistical supplies to the troops deployed to protect them.

Whatever the reality, this is an odd case of private monies being paid to the national Army. As is well known, in private business, the person paying for a service is the one who runs the show. Among multinational corporations operating in the country, there is debate over whether they should continue to pay this sum. Some of their advisers argue that, just as citizens have the right to services provided by the state's security agencies, by virtue of paying taxes, the taxes paid by the oil multinationals should be sufficient to maintain security at their installations. Others, such as BP, have already begun to hire mercenaries or private foreign troops, including former members of Britain's elite Special Air Services (SAS). This is the same model the British Crown uses in Africa, employing private armies to protect the corporate members of its raw materials cartel.

This trend toward foreign private armies accelerated after an international scandal broke out in late 1996, when human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) denounced BP for allegedly financing Colombian right-wing paramilitary groups, which the NGOs claim are fronts for the Colombian military. BP denied any involvement, arguing that they only paid money directly to the Colombian military, and didn't know what the latter then did with the funds. The military denied receiving any BP funds. In the aftermath, BP shifted its emphasis to foreign private security agencies, espe-

FIGURE 1

Drugs and terrorism in Colombia, 1995



cially the London-based Defence Systems Ltd. (DSL), which has offices in Bogotá (see Chapter I.).

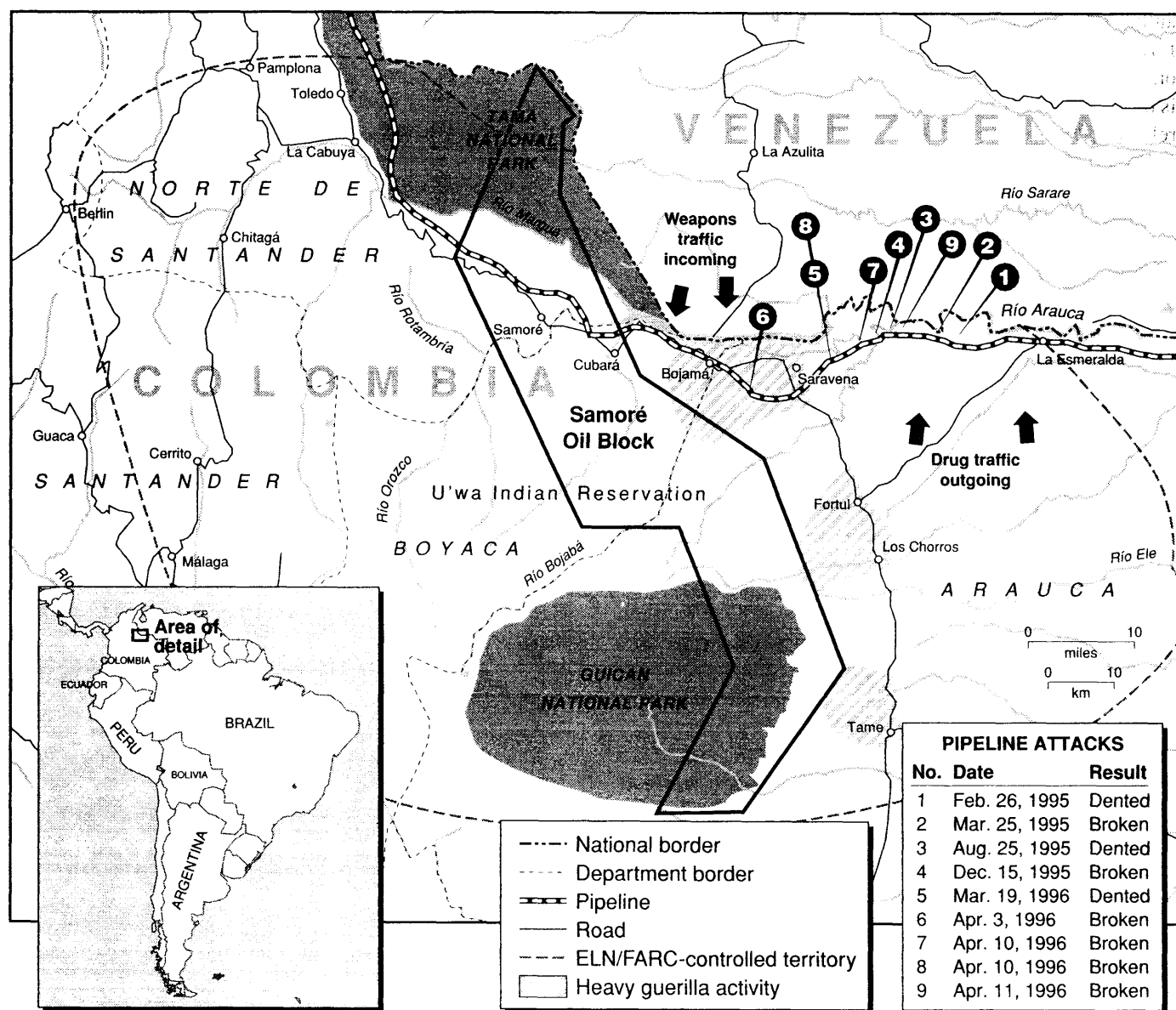
In all of this, it is the case that the Armed Forces deploy 50% of their forces to protect the oil industry, leaving the other 50% to protect the nation. Taking into account experts' recommendation, that overall troop strength be the equivalent of 1% of the total population, which would be 400,000 for Colombia, the situation is even worse: Today, the combined forces of police and Armed Forces, including civilian personnel, total 290,000 people.

Worse, these same oil companies, and the British security companies which "advise" them, protected by 60,000 soldiers, collaborated to *create* the country's grave security crisis. This is typical British *modus operandi*: First create a crisis, then employ the methods of "conflict resolution" to smash the sovereign nation-state and its institutions.

Occidental and the ELN

A specific example is the Caño Limón-Covenas pipeline, built at the beginning of the 1980s to transport crude oil from the Caño Limón oil field in the northeastern department of Arauca, to the port of Covenas on the Caribbean coast (see **Figures 1 and 2**). The oil field is run by Occidental, in partner-

FIGURE 2

ELN and FARC target Colombia's oil pipeline

ship with Ecopetrol and Shell Oil. Had there been good relations with Venezuela, it would have been possible to build a small, 50 kilometer-long pipeline to intersect that country's pipeline system, and either export oil from a Venezuelan port, or transport it to Colombian refineries.

Shell and Occidental decided to hire a German construction firm, Mannesmann, to build the 1,500 kilometer pipeline, and together with their foreign partners, contracted German superspy Werner Mauss to handle security for the project. Under Armand Hammer's strategic guidance, Mauss came to an agreement with the narco-terrorist National Liberation Army (ELN), which was then close to extinction, whereby the ELN would protect the pipeline under construction for

\$200,000 monthly. The almost-defunct ELN became revitalized, bought better weapons and new uniforms, and began to recruit as never before. In a 1984 press conference, Hammer bragged, "We're giving jobs to the ELN. We hired them as suppliers."

Subsequently, Mauss continued to deal with the ELN, but was arrested on Nov. 18, 1996 in Medellín, after negotiating the release of a kidnapped German national. He paid the group a huge sum for his client's release. Some sources have even suggested that Mauss is a prominent ELN agent in Germany, whose job it is to get families of European kidnap victims to pay their ransom. These same sources say that Mauss collects a commission from families or companies of the kidnap vic-

tims, and is also paid by the ELN. Currently, he is free on bail in Colombia.

Some sources assert that Mauss was busted by Colombian authorities at the insistence of a competing—and far larger—foreign “security consulting” firm: Britain’s Control Risk, one of the country’s major private security companies. There is more than a little evidence to bolster that assertion. But the relevant fact is that both Mauss and Control Risk—and in fact the entire security “industry”—have the identical *modus operandi* for countries like Colombia: distance yourself from the host government and its official military; and build up a good working relationship, financial and otherwise, with the surrounding community, including narco-terrorist elements.

This doctrine was laid out with shocking openness in an article by Justine Barrett, senior analyst on the Americas desk of Control Risk, and published in the June 9, 1997 issue of the *Oil & Gas Journal*, as part of a feature story on Occidental and BP’s security problems in Colombia. The article outlined how to operate: “Build a sound and lasting relationship with the local community. . . . Companies have to find a way to ensure good relations with the local military while maintaining a clear distance. . . . Good relations with the local community must be at the heart of any long-term security strategy. . . . [Get] input from social scientists—typically sociologists and anthropologists—in the design of a successful community relations program.”

In the case of the Caño Limón-Covenas pipeline, the machinery used to build the pipeline in the 1980s was decorated with the ELN’s black and red flag. The workers employed to build it had all been recommended by the ELN. The narco-terrorist group became a type of employment vehicle, through which it recruited and gained influence all along the pipeline’s 1,500 kilometers. When the Colombian Army exposed the multinationals’ financing of the ELN, unleashing a scandal which led to the agreement’s undoing, the ELN began to blow up the pipeline, claiming “non-compliance” with the arrangement. At that point, the multinationals washed their hands of the whole deal, and handed management of the pipeline over to Ecopetrol.

In conclusion, the pipeline is extremely vulnerable: Almost all of it passes through the ELN’s sphere of influence; it has been subjected to 1,000 bombings since it was built, and any adequate protection system would require at least four soldiers for every 100 meters, as well as armored helicopters, or a 1,500-km security fencing system, and a specialized immediate-response group.

One of the most attacked stretches of the pipeline runs very close to the Venezuelan border, through the departments of Arauca, Boyacá, and Norte de Santander (see map, which notes some of the attacks through April 1996 only). This is an area of intense weapons- and drug-trafficking by the ELN, and even has protected park areas and a reservation of the U’wa Indians. Overlapping all of this is Occidental Petroleum’s Samoré oil block. Perhaps one of the wildest security

situations anywhere on the planet has developed here, where the 5,000-member U’wa tribe, under ELN pressure, has threatened to commit collective suicide—they say they will all jump off a cliff!—if Occidental proceeds with exploration and development in the area.

The fact is that Colombia as a whole is rapidly being turned into a no-man’s land of competing private armies: drug traffickers, narco-terrorists, British private security companies, and so on. Between them, the ELN and the larger Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), exercise control in about half of the country’s 1,050 municipalities; and they have announced that they will not permit elections to be held in at least 13 of the country’s 38 departments (states). Over 1,500 kidnappings for ransom occur in Colombia every year. The murder rate is by far the highest in the world, at about 100 per 100,000 inhabitants. And drugs, especially cocaine and heroin exported to the United States, continue to dominate the economic and political life.

Oil and terrorism

After having hired the ELN as its private mercenary army, the oil multis looked for others. According to Venezuelan sources, Occidental hired Keenie Meenie Services (KMS), founded by Col. David Walker (ret.), to handle security for its Colombian installations. These sources were very concerned that the multis might be sponsoring ELN terrorism in Venezuela, as a way of pressuring the Venezuelan government into accepting greater presence of the multinationals there. Nonetheless, KMS isn’t registered in Colombia as a legally constituted company. Its president, Walker, helped Oliver North to organize the private military training and financing network for the Nicaraguan Contras.

British Petroleum recently admitted that it hired Defence Systems Ltd. to protect its installations (see Chapter I). BP also hired Control Risk to carry out “security planning studies.” In fact, it was Control Risk which first recommended hiring DSL, made up of retired SAS mercenaries. The book *Secret Conspiracy, Inside the Secret Service in the ’90s*, by Stephen Dorrill, affirms that Control Risk is the most important of the private secret services run by Queen Elizabeth II’s Privy Council. According to the same sources, the recommendation to hire DSL was due to the fact that “one Defence System agent is equal to 100 Colombian Army soldiers, and that the British want to employ former SAS agents.” Among Control Risk’s responsibilities in Colombia, where its competitor is Werner Mauss, is negotiating ransoms for kidnap victims.

The British aren’t just interested in protecting BP, however. Since the eruption of the scandal over how the drug cartels bought the Presidency for Ernesto Samper Pizano, the narco-President decided to move Colombia toward the British, to evade the Clinton administration’s persistent attacks. The British moved quickly to support Samper—but not for free. BP demanded better conditions for its exploration

and exploitation contracts, and the Samper government mandated the signing of several agreements for collaboration with the British in training Colombia's security personnel. Among these was the stipulation that Scotland Yard train agents of Colombia's Administrative Security Department (DAS), and that MI-5, Britain's secret intelligence agency, train the elite units of both the Colombian National Police and Army. Special British interest in DAS's rural section is said to be related to British oil investments—curious, given that the rural DAS is known to be composed largely of amnestied narco-terrorists.

Through another public scandal which erupted recently, over the presence in Colombia of Defence Systems mercenaries, the police revealed that a cooperation agreement exists, by which SAS trains a group of police agents. Although Defence

Systems and BP say that DSL employees have nothing to do with training police, the truth is that it is very difficult to distinguish between an SAS agent and an ex-SAS agent.

The drug connection

The presence of ex-SAS mercenaries is not new, however. According to the Aug. 13, 1989 issue of the *London Times*, that year the Cali Cartel hired a group of retired SAS agents, led by Peter McAleese, David Tomkins, Alex Lennon, and Geoffrey Adams to train the private army of kingpin-brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, and to carry out an operation to kidnap rival Medellín cartel chieftain Pablo Escobar Gaviria. The British mercenaries were all veterans of the independence war in Zimbabwe. Curiously, the operation to kill Escobar failed. But on Aug. 18, five days after the

London, the new lord of Mexico's skies?

Britain is out to seize control of Mexico's national airport grid, when the planned privatization of 35 of Mexico's 57 state-run airports (including two of the most important, the international airports of Mexico City and Guadalajara) finally goes ahead. A delegation of *six hundred* British officials and businessmen visiting on July 21-25, announced during a seminar on "U.K.-Mexico Airport Links" in Guadalajara, that they plan to invest \$2 billion in Mexican airports.

The security implications of who controls Mexico's airports, and their related electronic communications grid, are staggering: 70% of the cocaine entering the United States comes through Mexico, some by land, some by sea, but much by air. Air transport routes were so upgraded under the reign of Juárez cartel kingpin, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, that he was given the nickname "Lord of the Skies." (Lord Carrillo arranged flights from Colombia of entire Boeing 727s packed with cocaine, until he died from complications during a liposuction surgery gone awry in early July.)

Mexican security officials are on alert, as to just what agency will provide security for the soon-to-be privatized airports. The officials report that the issue of privatized security is now on the table in a big way in Mexico, because of the ongoing privatization of the infrastructure previously owned, run, and *protected* by the state. When Mexico's highways were privatized a few years back, for example, the hottest issue was: Who would patrol them and provide security? When the highways were run by the

federal government, security was provided by either the military or the federal highway patrol. For the moment, the military is still assigned to the job.

The delegation of the British Airport Group was led by its president, Sir Gil Thompson. He brought along with him the commercial director for Capital Projects of DERA, the scientific and research agency of the British Defense Ministry, as well as officials from Britain's Department of Trade and Industry, and Trevor Hines, the Second Trade Secretary at the British Embassy, with responsibility for "aerospace, airports, ships and ports, urban transportation, security equipment and tourism." (Hines's previous assignment, during 1990-95, was consul in Belize.)

Among the representatives of leading British imperial corporations were:

- David Thornton, director for global business of Midland Bank PLC, in Mexico City. Midland Bank is part of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp.
- Roger T. Nunn, president of BP-Mexico.
- Carl R. Griffiths, manager for business development, Mexico and Central America, AIR BP, a "worldwide commercial network within the BP group, related to the marketing of fuel and technical services for aviation."
- Roberto Latapi, Mexican representative of Barclays Bank PLC, one of the member banks of the Crown Agents Foundation.
- Phil Baker, general manager for commercial development, Manchester Airport, PLC, another Crown Agents corporation. Among their specialties is the provision of security systems for airports.
- Nigel Smith, sales manager for Simoco International, Ltd., "one of the leading firms in the world in radio-communications and related services . . . [including] in the area of public transportation and local government security."

Times exposé, the leading Presidential candidate and anti-drug crusader, Luis Carlos Galán, was gunned down at a rally, by hit-men hired by the drug cartels. Could the British ex-SAS team have been involved?

At the same time, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, and the Ochoa Vásquez brothers of the Medellín Cartel, hired retired Israeli Col. Yair Klein to train their private army. Escobar also sought out the mercenary services made up of former Israeli Army officers, to train his army of hit men. One of Yair Klein's partners, Eytan Koren, is the owner of Telesentinel, a company which monitors electronic alarms; it is the legal representative of the General Security Co., a subsidiary of a Miami-based company of the same name. It is suspected that the company's real owner is the Mossad, Israel's secret intelligence service.

During the government of César Gaviria, at the end of 1990, for the first time in Colombia, the justice minister used private bodyguards provided by the General Security Co., known as the "black ants." Until then, bodyguards for ministers and the President had always been provided by agencies such as the DAS or the National Police. The same firm was hired by the Justice Ministry to design and build the "maximum security" prisons at Itaguí and Envigado. It was from the Envigado prison that Pablo Escobar so easily escaped in 1991.

This wasn't the end of it. In 1995, Ernesto Samper hired Kroll Associates, the Wall Street investigative firm, whose advisory board includes Henry Kissinger, to profile his political enemies, and to counter whatever the latter might do regarding revelations on the drug cartels' financing of Samper's election campaign. Among those profiled by Kroll was Gen. Harold Bedoya, at that time head of the Army. Kroll recommended that Samper set up a special file, in which Bedoya would be accused of human rights violations, copies of which would be available at all Colombian embassies, in the event that Bedoya attempted any action against the narco-President. Curiously, the Samper government used the same argument of human rights violations as the pretext for removing Bedoya as head of the Armed Forces in July 1997. Kroll Associates is another in the British-run nest of companies which conduct security profiles, and negotiate ransoms for employees of multinational companies kidnapped by the ELN and its partner, the FARC.

Finally, a word about the Swiss company, Swipco. When Samper's former campaign director, Fernando Botero, was later Samper's defense minister, he hired Swipco to organize a list of the Armed Forces' suppliers. This sizable contract, later suspended because of the scandal it provoked, called for a 4% commission for each purchase made using the pool of suppliers provided by Swipco. Swipco has a number of contracts with the Defense Ministry. As for Botero, he was subsequently convicted and jailed for funneling \$6 million in drug money into the Samper Presidential campaign.

Swipco brags in its literature that it handles 100% of

Uganda's defense budget, from soldiers' rations, to weapons purchases, to troops' wages and uniforms.

The plot against the Armed Forces

These private security companies and mercenary forces have emerged precisely at the moment when the Armed Forces are under fierce attack. On the one hand, the human rights NGOs, affiliated with the UN and financed by such mega-speculators as George Soros, work with the Samper narco-government to eliminate both the concept of military jurisdiction over its own personnel (including administering justice), and due obedience. On the other hand, the International Monetary Fund, and several Colombian agencies which follow its orders, have presented plans to vastly reduce the size of the Armed Forces. Already in 1997, the budget was cut from \$1.9 billion to \$1.2 billion—an almost 40% reduction.

Now, these same institutions are proposing that troop strength be cut in half, supposedly improving the quality of each soldier, and that wages and benefits of officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers also be cut. The immediate result of this policy, were it to be applied, would be the disintegration of national territory, and the proliferation of private armies very similar to those under feudalism. Under these conditions, the mercenary armies, or "soldiers of fortune" as they are euphemistically called, would have plenty of work replacing Colombia's Armed Forces.

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