

Latin American Herald Tribune - Colombia Confirms Drug Kingpin Makled to Be Extradited to Venezuela

BOGOTA – Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos confirmed that Venezuelan drug trafficker Walid Makled will be extradited to his homeland, in accord with the laws of Colombia, adding that he was confident the decision would be understood in Washington, which also wants to try the accused kingpin.



Santos made the announcement in an interview with Efe before traveling to New York, where on Wednesday he was scheduled to preside at a meeting of the U.N. Security Council after which there is a possibility that he may meet with U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington.

“We’re a country of laws, a democracy that has a constitution, procedures, and we’re going to observe those regulations,” Santos said.

“I’m obligated to comply with the constitution and with the laws. I’m going to continue along that road,” he stressed. **“We have an extradition agreement with Venezuela, not with the United States.”**

With those remarks, the president dispelled the doubts surrounding what the destination might be for Makled, known as “The Turk,” who was arrested on Aug. 19 in the Colombian city of Cucuta, bordering on Venezuela, and whose

extradition is being demanded by both Caracas and the U.S. government.

Venezuela, the first country to request his extradition, accuses Makled of the crimes of drug trafficking, money laundering, criminal conspiracy and murder, while the United States is demanding he be turned over to U.S. authorities only for drug trafficking.

Santos said the extradition treaty between Bogota and Caracas sets forth that “in cases like this, when a Venezuelan citizen is demanded by two countries, the one who made its request first takes precedence.”



Upon being asked about the possible reaction of the United States, which provides Colombia with roughly \$500 million a year in military aid, Santos responded that his country is a democracy that adheres to the laws and therefore the United States will understand his decision.

The president said that the U.S. government “cannot complain about (any) lack of willingness to extradite Colombians to the United States” on Bogota’s part.

“I have signed more than 100 extradition orders during my time in the government (since August 2010), more than 1,000 Colombians have been extradited to the United States and we have the best cooperation in the judicial area that any pair of countries in the world can have. There’s no problem at all. They understand and they have to understand perfectly what the situation is,” he said.

Santos is scheduled to meet next Saturday with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in the Colombian resort city of Cartagena and it is expected that there it will be officially announced that Makled will be extradited to Venezuela.

This decision presages better relations with Venezuela after Santos and Chavez last September reestablished diplomatic ties after they were ruptured at the end of the 2002-2010 administration of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. EFE

Walid Makled Garcia, drug kingpin, must face American justice: But will Colombia extradite him?



According to the White House, Makled is responsible for smuggling 10 tons of cocaine into the U.S. and Europe a month.

(Medioimages/Getty)

"I'm going to keep my word. We are a serious country."

With those words Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos defended his decision to hand over Venezuelan drug baron [Walid Makled Garcia](#) to [President Hugo Chavez](#) instead of extraditing him to the [United States](#).

According to the [White House](#), Makled is the third-most significant drug kingpin in the world, responsible for smuggling 10 tons of cocaine into the U.S. and [Europe](#) a month (which represents roughly one tenth of the global cocaine supply).

In statements made from the maximum-security prison where he is being held in [Colombia](#), Makled has stated that without the cooperation of high-ranking military and civilians inside the Chavez regime, he would have been unable to become [Venezuela](#)'s equivalent of notorious Colombian kingpin [Pablo Escobar](#).

That's almost certainly why, until 2008, Makled owned Venezuela's largest airline, had protected warehouses in Venezuela's largest port and bought enormous quantities of urea, a chemical used to process cocaine, from a state-owned entity.

How did he obtain these prizes? Makled has publicly declared that government officials and military officers awarded him concessions in exchange for a piece of the action.

In his own words: "Let's be clear. From these businesses, many people were fed. It's that simple, from high up in the government. Of course, they received \$1 million a month, and I have proof enough to demonstrate my relationship with the government. Furthermore, the generals recruited me. They even sold to me the drugs that they took from other dealers."

As the Colombian government knows, the [U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control](#) has named a number of these Venezuelan generals as "Tier II Kingpins" for material support of drug trafficking.

One of them, [Henry Rangel Silva](#), was promoted to his current position as general in chief of the Unified Command of the [Venezuelan Armed Forces](#) by Chavez after being named by Makled as one of his most important collaborators. Another is the head of Venezuela's military intelligence.

Yet Santos has decided to return this man to Venezuela, to a regime that stands accused of cooperating with drug cartels, supplying weapons to [FARC](#), the Colombian guerrilla group, and giving cover to the Islamic extremists of [Hezbollah](#).

Instead, Makled must be extradited to the United States, where he will receive a fair trial - something that Venezuela's judiciary, crippled by Chavez's crushing power, cannot provide.

A public trial in the U.S. can shed light on accusations that, if they are confirmed, will firmly brand Venezuela as a state sponsor of terror, not to mention a clearinghouse for drugs.

It could also shed light on the "drug route," where drugs flow freely through clandestine channels to the U.S. and Europe. According to the [UN Drug Office](#), 60% of drugs that eventually end up in Europe pass through Venezuela.

Before Santos gave his word to Chavez, he gave it to his own people, whom he has served with dedication in Colombia's efforts to fight the scourge of drug trafficking.

The Colombian now has the power to save Venezuela from the drug-running plague. But this is only possible if Makled is extradited to the United States and his crimes are exposed to the light of day.

Arria is the former governor of the state of [Caracas](#) and former Venezuelan ambassador to the [UN Security Council](#). This first appeared on [FoxNewsLatino.com](#).

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U.S. Aid Was a Key to Hostage Rescue in Colombia

By [SIMON ROMERO](#) • JULY 13, 2008

BOGOTÁ, [Colombia](#) — The United States played a more elaborate role in the events leading up to this month's rescue operation of 15 hostages in the Colombian jungle than had been previously acknowledged, including the deployment of more than 900 American military personnel members to Colombia earlier this year in efforts to locate the hostages, according to an official briefed on these efforts.

At one point in the first three months of 2008, the number of American military personnel members in Colombia passed the limit of 800 established by law, but a legal loophole in the United States allowed the authorities to go above that level since the service members, including more than 40 members of the Special Operations forces, were involved in search and rescue operations of American citizens.

The official who provided this detailed account spoke to The New York Times and several other news organizations, asking not to be identified because of the political sensitivity surrounding the involvement of American forces in Colombia. (Normally only about 400 to 500 American military personnel members are believed to operate in Colombia in noncombat roles.) A spokesman at the United States Embassy here declined to comment on the account.

Some of the details provided by the official have been confirmed by Colombian officials. But other details could not immediately be corroborated Saturday with other sources.

According to the official's account, the United States pared down its military presence in Colombia in early March after problems arose in attempts to track a unit of the rebels, the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#), or FARC, guarding three American defense contractors. Alexander Farfán, commander of the rebel unit holding the three men, discovered an American surveillance device planted in a remote area of southern Colombia, prompting the rebels to change location quickly.

At that point, Colombian military officials began devising their own plan to free the hostages by infiltrating the rebels' radio communications system and convincing a regional guerrilla commander that he needed to transfer the hostages aboard the helicopter of a fictitious aid group. The Colombians delayed formally informing the American authorities here of their plan until June 25, just a week before it was carried out on July 2.

In the earlier search-and-rescue effort with heavier American involvement, personnel included F.B.I. hostage negotiators embedded with Colombian counterparts at a location in San José del Guaviare, a provincial capital 200 miles southeast of Bogotá, and members of American Special Operations forces inserted into small Colombian reconnaissance teams tracking the rebels on foot through the jungle.

Hundreds of American support personnel members on the ground in Colombia complemented these elite forces, in addition to a frenzied intelligence-gathering operation located in the United States Embassy here, drawing on intercepts of the rebel group's radio systems, human intelligence, satellite imaging and "air breathers," as piloted surveillance aircraft are called in military jargon.

The idea then was for Colombian forces to surround rebel units in the jungle and encourage them to negotiate the release of their captives, emphasizing

that no attack on them was imminent. Given the rebel group's execution of captives in previous military rescue efforts, the chances of such a plan succeeding were believed to be dim by both Colombian and American officials.

The plan later devised by Colombian military intelligence officials first came into focus for the Americans in early June when they began intercepting communications pointing to three rebel units shifting in the jungle to converge near the village of Tomachipan, a location near where Venezuelan envoys picked up two hostages freed by the rebels in January.

Soon after American officials asked Colombia's government about the movements, Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos invited William R. Brownfield, the American ambassador to Colombia, to a meeting at his home here to go over the details of the plan, called Operation Check, as in "checkmate." After that meeting, the United States placed military and intelligence personnel members alongside Colombian officials planning the operation.

While the Colombians devised and carried out the operation with a team of more than a dozen elite Colombian commandos disguised as aid workers, television journalists and rebels, they did so with some important assistance from the United States, which provides Colombia with \$600 million of aid a year as part of a counterinsurgency and antinarcotics project that has made Colombia the top American military ally in Latin America.

For instance, the Americans provided emergency signaling technology on the two Russian-built Mi-17 helicopters used in the operation, only one of which landed, in addition to tiny beaconing systems placed with all the commandos. An American audio system to transmit the operation live to personnel in Bogotá was also put on the helicopters, but it did not work well when the

sounds were drowned out by the noise the rotor blades generated.

While the Colombians and Americans generally agreed on the details of the operation as it was put into motion, some differences emerged, like when American officials resisted a plan to place two former rebels among the commandos aboard the helicopter, apparently in an attempt to assuage any concerns the guerrillas might have in handing over their captives.

In the end, just one former rebel member took part in the mission aboard the helicopter. On July 2, a small number of diplomats, military officers and intelligence officials gathered in a safe room at the American Embassy to monitor the operation.

The mission, originally intended to last 8 minutes on the ground as the hostages boarded the aircraft, ended up taking more than 25 minutes. The delays intensified the anxiety in the safe room in Bogotá, which was relieved only when an American military official in direct contact with a colleague in San José del Guaviare proclaimed, “Helos with pax,” military slang for helicopters with passengers.

“Fifteen pax, all airborne, all good to go,” he continued, and embassy officials quickly scrambled to push ahead with a plan to get the three rescued Americans on an Air Force C-17 bound for Texas.

I Was Held Hostage in Colombia, and My Captors Should Face US Justice

For five-and-a-half years, until this past July, I was held hostage by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). [During my captivity](#) I suffered starvation, sickness, imposed isolation, and long, arduous, physically painful marches through the jungles of Colombia. I was chained to another hostage by the neck and threatened daily. One of the commanders of the group that held me was Alexander Farfan, a soft-spoken, thoughtful-looking man who was the only jungle-walking guerilla soldier I had ever seen who wore glasses. Together with my fellow hostages Keith Stansell and Tom Howes, we gave him the nickname “Gafas” or glasses. But in spite of our nickname or his intellectual mien, I saw in this man the worst of humanity.

It was his mission to prevent me from going home, his duty to massacre me in the event of a rescue attempt. Gafas was a terrorist as perverse as he was cruel. He took pleasure in mocking his captives, boasting how he would never be taken alive. “I will fight to the death! I will never surrender” was his constant refrain.

On July 2, 2008, fate would require him to prove those words when the Colombian Army performed one of the finest rescues in modern military history. The mission was code named operation “Check Mate,” and it was carried out with a textbook precision that you would only expect in a Hollywood blockbuster. Fifteen hostages saved, two terrorists seized (both Gafas and his boss, alias Cesar), and not a shot fired. After realizing he was caught, Cesar desperately struggled against the Colombian soldiers until he was rendered unconscious. Meanwhile Gafas, the man who would fight to the death, uttered barely a whimper as the chains encircled his wrists.

Earlier this month, the Colombian Supreme Court denied a request by the United States to extradite Gafas for our kidnapping. The court issued a statement explaining they denied his extradition “because the crimes for which he is wanted were committed in national territory.” Similarly, though the extradition request for Cesar was approved, it was approved for drug trafficking not for our abduction.

How is it that a terrorist who was caught red handed committing crimes against Americans is not going to be extradited to the US to face American justice?

Colombian President Uribe has extradited over 800 criminals to the US, more than any other president in the history of Colombia. In his time as president he has worked forcefully and skillfully with the United States to put criminals in their place and see that justice is served. But despite Uribe’s diligent efforts, the situation with Gafas and Cesar demonstrates the fraught and difficult questions that need to be answered as America confronts terrorism in its own backyard. In Colombia and in other locations around the world, the War on Terror is unavoidably tied to the War on Drugs. Both are important and crucial to keeping America safe, but making drugs the only grounds for extradition sets a dangerous precedent and risks undermining our country’s ability to combat terrorism.

Extradition is a deterrent and when used correctly it can be a powerful tool for preventing terrorism. Pablo Escobar, the legendary Colombian drug lord, put it best when he said he’d prefer a tomb in Colombia to a jail cell in the United States. Mono Jojoy, a key leader of the FARC, has publicly declared the same. I know that Gafas will be judged in Colombia for Colombian crimes, but that is just a piece of due process. He must be brought to the United States to account for his crimes against America as well. This is the only way that we can work to ensure that what happened to us will never happen again.

As a Christian, I forgive Gafas; but as a citizen of the world, I want justice.

Colombia Blocks Extradition of FARC Rebel to Protect Peace Deal

The Colombian government refused Wednesday to extradite a FARC rebel who stands accused of kidnapping three U.S. contractors, in a sign of changing relations between authorities and the guerrilla group.

The press office of the Ministry of Justice in Bogota stated that Octavio Orrego Sanchez, alias “Sebastian,” will not be extradited to the United States now that the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC are a hair’s breadth from signing a peace deal.

WATCH: What Does the Peace Mean for FARC Rebels? Chapter 1

“For the Colombian state, the fulfilling of its obligations in the area of international cooperation in the fight against criminality has been the first priority.

However, on this occasion the national government has to carry out an exercise in deliberation between the primacy of the relations of international cooperation and the possibility of bringing about the right to peace and to achieve a state of reconciliation and coexistence in the national territory,” the state document denying extradition read.

The document reiterated that the government and the FARC agreed on the creation of a special court to investigate and judge figures of the armed conflict.

According to Washington, between 2006 and 2008 “Sebastian” was a member of FARC, who took as hostages three U.S. citizens: Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes, and Keith Stansell.

IN DEPTH: [The Colombian Peace Process Explained](#)

The light aircraft in which the three foreigners were traveling fell in a guerilla-held zone. The trio were freed by the Colombian army July 2, 2008, with the help of politician Ingrid Betancourt.

At the end of last year, the Colombian government banned the extradition to the U.S. of militant Vicente Carvajal Isidro, requested by a New York court for drug trafficking crimes. The refusal was also due to the peace process.

WATCH: What Does the Peace Mean for FARC Rebels? Chapter 2

Around 60 FARC members have been extradited to the U.S., though Santos said this would have to stop for the peace treaty to go through.

“I don’t believe that any guerrilla is going to turn in his weapon only to go and die in a U.S. jail,” Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said in March last year. “It will be up to me to propose to the U.S. authorities some solution to this issue, which is complex and difficult, but has to be resolved.”

However, it is unlikely that the refusal to extradite will place tension around bilateral relations, as it is in the interest of the U.S. to demobilize the armed group.

WATCH: Colombian Peace Process Comes to Final Stage