

Burning a Nation: Pablo Escobar, Colombia, and the Cold War

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Abstract: While Colombia may have gained its independence in the 1800s, it remains a melting pot of instability and turmoil. Pablo Escobar used the instability caused by La Violencia, and that was exacerbated by the Cold War, to pursue his political and personal ambitions. However, this same instability eventually resulted in his downfall. Escobar's escapades during the 1980s impacted large swathes of the Americas, including Nicaragua, as well as a particular nation in the north: the United States. The evidence presented in this paper suggests that Escobar, coming from an impoverished background, sought to better his personal position, as well as the position of the average Colombian. However, after being forced out of government, Escobar resorted to terrorism in an act of revenge against those who viewed him as an outsider, and who he viewed as an enemy. It is during this period of terrorism that Escobar's legacy is defined, as he waged war against the Colombian government, taking countless innocent lives. This is the story of a man who once hoped to improve his nation — albeit through illegal means — but ultimately ravaged the nation; nearly burning it to the ground.

Revolutionary ideals soared in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, seeing former colonies throughout the Americas be granted the right to self-determination. Two such nations were Colombia and the United States. Over the remainder of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, however, it was the United States that placed itself into the development of Latin America; this is especially apparent early on through the Monroe Doctrine.¹ As the United States grew strong, its Latin counterparts like Colombia struggled with American interests adding to already growing tensions between the Colombian people and its ruling elites that represented land-owning, military, and religious classes.²

Following the end of the Second World War and the advent of the Cold War, American interests in the region expanded, seeing the United States challenge the will of the people, removing political leaders who appeared communist, loyal to Soviet interests, or in opposition to American enterprises.³ The environment was ripe for those with the ambitious rigor necessary to exploit the political, economic, and social instability. Pablo Escobar — the infamous narcotics kingpin — was one such individual. Escobar used the instability exacerbated by the Cold War that had erupted throughout Colombia, and the larger region, especially Nicaragua, to pursue his political and personal ambitions that were challenged by the Colombian elites, resulting in his and the Medellin drug cartel's eventual downfall.

To understand the environment that Escobar exploited, it is necessary to possess an understanding of the history of Colombia and its revolutionary ideals. The Spanish American colonies, inspired by the

¹ The Monroe Doctrine established US foreign policy, asserting “The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” James Monroe, “Monroe Doctrine (1823),” National Archives and Records Administration, December 2, 1823, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/monroe-doctrine>.

² For information regarding US intervention in the Americas, see Grace Livingstone, *America's Backyard: The United States and Latin America from the Monroe Doctrine to the War on Terror*, London, New York: Zed Books; in association with Latin America Bureau, 2009.

³ For more details regarding US meddling see, Nick Cullather and Piero Gleijeses. *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=6656>.

American Revolutionary War, began fighting for independence in 1810, following the abdication of Spain's royal family.⁴ The Spanish reclaimed the rebelling territories in 1815-1816, only for Simon Bolivar to defeat the Spanish at the Battle of Boyacá in 1819, establishing independence for Colombia once again.⁵ The United States recognized Colombia's sovereignty in 1822; the following year the Monroe Doctrine was established, marking the start of American intervention in the Western Hemisphere. Unlike the Caribbean, Colombia largely remained free of American influence for the remainder of the century.⁶

With the onset of the twentieth century, the United States began expanding its economic and political interests in Colombia. The United States supported Panamanian independence from Colombia in 1903, with the construction of the Panama Canal under US supervision beginning in 1904. The United States increased economic interest in Colombia over the following years, resulting in an increase of \$2 million in investments between 1913 and 1929.⁷ Although the American influence impacted the instability of Colombia, choices within the internal structure of Colombian society such as keeping the law enforcement branch of government weak were also a factor.⁸

Outside of economic interests, political ties began to emerge between the Colombian government and the United States as the Cold War tensions between Washington and Moscow began to grow following the end of World War II. In 1948, a new period of violence erupted in Colombia: known as La Violencia. This was a time of civil conflict with the conservative and liberal parties vying for control of the nation.⁹ The following ten years, 1948-1958, ravaged the nation, resulting in the deaths of 200,000 individuals, and the near destruction of Colombian society. La Violencia came to an end after an agreement was reached between the two parties, forming the national front — the parties would split control of the nation with the presidency rotating between the groups every four years. The National Front lasted for sixteen years, four terms before regular elections occurred again.¹⁰ During La Violencia, the Colombian Government supported the United States during the Korean War in 1951. Moreover, following La Violencia, the Colombians broke off relations with Cuba in 1961 and invited US Special Forces to train counterinsurgency forces in 1962 — regardless of who was in power — to combat the guerillas.¹¹ One of the more powerful insurgent groups took root to keep the fighting going; this is most prevalent with FARC, a far-left guerrilla organization that aimed to overthrow the Colombian government which they viewed as pro-American.¹²

⁴ For additional information regarding the Spanish Colonial Revolutions, see William Spence Robertson, "The Juntas of 1808 and the Spanish Colonies," *Oxford Journals* 31, no. 124 (October 1916): 573-585.

⁵ Harvey F. Kline, *Colombia: Democracy Under Assault* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 29.

⁶ For more information regarding US business imperialism in the Caribbean, see Dana Gardner Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964.

⁷ Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 46.

⁸ Kline, *Colombia: Democracy*, 132.

⁹ The Conservative Party focused on defending the interests of the elite; the Liberal Party had a similar approach with a slight focus on social disparities, being mostly supported within metropolitan areas.

¹⁰ For more information on La Violencia see Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹¹ Simons, *Brutal History*, 47-48.

¹² For additional information on FARC, visit — "MMP: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)," CISAC, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc#:~:text=The%20group%20was%20formed%20to,extortion%2C%20and%20illegal%20gold%20mining.>

It was during these turbulent years that Pablo Escobar experienced his formative years, doubtlessly influencing his future attitudes and proclivities toward violence and encouraging his pursuit of political power.¹³ Escobar was born in 1949 into a modest family in Rionegro, just outside of Medellin, in the poor Antioquia Region of Colombia. Escobar's father was a farmer while his mother was a teacher. He entered the world of crime at a young age but did not veer into the growing world of narcotics business until the 1970s.¹⁴ Though it is difficult to assert an exact date for the founding of his now infamous Medellin Cartel, a senate report from 1988 asserts that the cartel was founded in 1980, following the kidnapping of an Ochoa clan member. The Ochoas called on other narcotics leaders to form an alliance to wage war against the M-19 guerrilla fighters who embittered Escobar later found himself in an alliance with.¹⁵ M-19 was a major guerilla organization, "named after the date when a populist ex-president favored by the rebels lost a fraudulent election."¹⁶ For the time being, Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder, a far-right nationalist, and the Ochoa brothers maintained the alliance with "Escobar [managing] production, the Ochoas transportation, and [...] Lehder distribution."¹⁷ This alliance provided Escobar with the funding necessary to pursue political office and create infrastructure that he believed would benefit the poor in Colombia

In preparation for his political run, Escobar developed a Robin Hood persona, challenging the government by sponsoring housing projects that benefited the poor, and using football to boost public opinion. He was credited with the construction of football fields, large multi-sport courts, the funding of children's teams, and being the primary financier behind Atletico Nacional: Medellin's major football team.¹⁸ These efforts to grow public support did not go unnoticed by the CIA which acknowledged the use of media to influence public opinion, as well as a multitude of entertainment venues that would allow better integration with local communities.¹⁹

Indeed, early on, Lehder launched a media campaign against the Colombian government, taking out ads in major Colombian newspapers and magazines opposing anti-drug efforts and the US-Colombian Extradition Treaty.²⁰ The treaty became a point of contention between the cartels and the government, culminating in the outbreak of armed conflict. Escobar's alliance with Lehder demonstrates his willingness to align with far-right individuals that would benefit his ambitions amidst seemingly improving the lot of the poor in Colombia.

Lehder publicly admitted to his involvement in the drug trade and justified narcotics trafficking, asserting that it positively impacted the Colombian economy. Lehder purchased the *Quindio Libre*

¹³ For additional information regarding *La Violencia* see Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandits, peasants, and politics: the case of "La Violencia" in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Malcolm Deas, "Obituary: Pablo Escobar," *The Independent*, December 4, 1993.

¹⁵ Christopher Welna and Gustavo Gallón, *Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Colombia* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 356.

¹⁶ Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "The Medellin Cartel/M-19 Gang," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1988.

¹⁷ Simons, *Brutal History*, 67.

¹⁸ "The life of notorious drug lord Pablo Escobar," *New York Daily News*, November 29, 2022.

¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, *International Narcotics Situation Report* (Washington DC, 1989), 6.

²⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Drug Traffickers' Relations with the Media in Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru* (Washington DC, 1984), 2.

newspaper in 1982, to better express his views. “The paper serves as a platform for the political party [Lehder] founded in 1983 — the Latin National Movement.”²¹ Lehder used the paper to attack the extradition treaty, distributing it across major Colombian cities for free, building public support against perceived American Imperialism, and providing positive coverage of Escobar.²² The CIA analysis also confirmed that Escobar’s influence was growing in Colombian politics. One such report stated:

In early 1983, an article suspected as Escobar-inspired appeared in the popular magazine *Semana*, ranking him not only as one of the wealthiest men in Colombia, but also as one of the most powerful men in the world... Escobar’s local influence and financial contributions have secured him an appointment as an alternate Liberal Party member of Congress. Embassy reports indicate his desire to exert more direct political influence, a goal his efforts to publicize a glorified popular image would support.²³

Escobar entered the halls of government, as an alternative representative under the Liberal Party in 1982. Escobar viewed this election as the first step toward his presidency of Colombia. He reportedly told his wife, Victoria Eugenia, “Honey, get ready to be the first lady [...] the doors of the presidential palace are going to open to us.”²⁴ While holding office, Escobar was granted legal immunities; making him nearly untouchable, while simultaneously giving him a position to challenge the extradition treaty. He used intimidation while in government to shore up his status; his approach being known as “plata o plomo” (silver or lead).²⁵ However, his political machinations ended shortly. Escobar stepped down following accusations from Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara, who brought to light an American investigation against Escobar for his criminal escapades.

Along with his ties to the cartels, it can be ascertained that Escobar was viewed as an outsider by many in the political apparatus of Colombia at the time. As a member of the peasant class, Escobar was most likely perceived by the elites as someone who had no right to stand alongside the national leaders, some of whom often took bribes from drug cartel members. Those within the Liberal Party, however, did make attempts to rid Colombia of such influences. One such individual was Luis Carlos Galan, a journalist by training and a career politician. Along with forcing Escobar to step down, Galan — a presidential candidate and leader of the Liberal Party at the time — removed Escobar from the party to avoid drawing a connection between the party and drug trafficking.²⁶ Being forced out of government was not only humiliating for Escobar in front of his own constituents, most poor classes of the Colombian society, but the catalyst to Escobar’s nearly decade-long war against the Colombian government from 1984 until his death 1993. No longer being able to pursue power within the system, Escobar lashed out in an attempt to get revenge further exploiting the unstable political landscape of Colombia and the Central American region exacerbated by the Cold War.

²¹ “CIA, Drug Traffickers”

²² “La extradición de Carlos Lehder Rivas,” *El Espectador*, August 8, 2012, translated by Dallas Inabinett, <https://www.elespectador.com/investigacion/la-extradicion-de-carlos-lehder-rivas-articulo-366081/>.

²³ “CIA, Drug Traffickers”

²⁴ Kathianne Boniello, “Pablo Escobar Wanted to be President of Colombia: Report,” *New York Post*, August 11, 2019.

²⁵ “Notorious.”

²⁶ Jenna L. Bowley, “*Robinhood or Villain: The Social Constructions of Pablo Escobar*” (Honors Thesis, University of Maine, 2013), 50.

In April 1984, Escobar fired the first shot by having Minister Lara assassinated.²⁷ The assassination forced the hand of President Belisario Betancur of the Conservative Party. Previously in opposition to the extradition of Colombian drug lords to the United States, Betancur publicly changed his stance, reversing his position while simultaneously declaring a state of siege in Colombia.²⁸ During an interview in 2014, Escobar's son Juan Pablo Escobar — now known as Sebastian Marroquin — divulged that his father's pistol had 15 shots; 14 for his enemies and one for himself, and that Pablo's greatest fear was, "not achieving suicide."²⁹ To combat extradition, Escobar founded the group, "Los Extraditables," with the motto, "We prefer a grave in Colombia to a prison in the United States."³⁰

To advance his revenge against the Colombian government, Escobar aligned himself with the radical M-19 leftist guerrillas, displaying his mercurial ability to reach to both sides of the political spectrum during the Cold War, just as he did with the far-right Lehder a few years prior. In a surprising attack on November 6, 1985, M-19 forces attacked the Palace of Justice, with financial support from Escobar, resulting in the deaths of fifteen of the twenty-four Supreme Court Justices.³¹ Juan Pablo states that Escobar funded the M-19 guerrillas with \$1 million in the lead-up to the attack.³² The alliance with Escobar also suited guerrillas who viewed the Colombian government as illegitimate and sought to combat American involvement in the Colombia and the Latin American region. The Palace of Justice contained documents regarding Escobar and his narcotic operations which Escobar wanted to destroy by using the insurgents. Juan Pablo backed the claim that Escobar was interested in the destruction of the documents.³³ The M-19 attack was a clear signal of a new escalation of Escobar's exploitation of the Cold War environment.

Escobar's capitalization of the Cold War reached its peak beyond Colombia, this time in Nicaragua, during the Iran-Contra affair of the mid to late 1980s.³⁴ Escobar is known to have stated the following in regard to supporting guerrilla forces, "they try to present me as an associate of the guerilla... hurts my personal dignity... I am a man of investments and therefore I cannot sympathize with the guerrillas who fight against property."³⁵ Perhaps. However, while Escobar may not have sympathized with the leftist, anti-American guerillas, he had no qualms about using the poor and the insurgents alike for his own personal and political gain in Colombia as demonstrated above, as well as leftist governments in Central America.

The Contras, a far-right paramilitary group backed by the United States, waged war against the Sandinista ruling government of Nicaragua. The Reagan administration coined the term narcoterrorism in

²⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Colombia: Death of a Minister — Implications for US Narcotics Control Policy* (Washington DC, 1984) 1.

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Colombia: Status of Narcotics Crackdown* (Washington DC, 1984), 3.

²⁹ Juan Pablo Escobar, "Pablo Escobar se suicido, no lo mataron: su hijo," interviewd by Juilio Sanchez Cristo, translated by Dallas Inabinett. *W Radio*, Prisa, November 6, 2014.

³⁰ "Killing Pablo," TV program (CNN, May 25, 2003), <https://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0305/25/cp.00.html>.

³¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *Colombia: M-19 Guerilla Attack on Colombian Palace of Justice 6 Nov 1985* (Washington DC, 1985), 3.

³² Escobar, "Pablo Escobar."

³³ Escobar, "Pablo Escobar."

³⁴ The Iran-Contra affair was an American political scandal where the United States secretly sold arms to Iran, using the funds ascertained to support the Contras in Nicaragua. For more information see, Peter Kornbluh, and Malcolm Byrne. *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York: New Press: W.W. Norton, 1993).

³⁵ Alfredo Schulte-Bockholt, *The Politics of Organized Crime and the Organized Crime of Politics: A Study in Criminal Power* (Lexington: Lexington Press, 2006), 95.

cases regarding the involvement of arms and narcotics by asserting that the largest supporters of narcoterrorism in the Western Hemisphere are Cuba and Nicaragua; both nations being socialist.³⁶ Connections between the Medellin Cartel and the Nicaraguan Sandinista government came to the forefront following revelations that Frederico Vaughan, an assistant to the Sandinista Interior Minister Tomas Borge, used his position to establish cocaine laboratories and distribution centers in Nicaragua, while simultaneously allowing narcotic traffickers from the Medellin Cartel to use Nicaraguan airfields as refueling stations for planes en-route to the United States.³⁷

While Escobar's cartel was working with the Sandinistas, his activities also benefited the pro-American Contras involved in drug trafficking to finance their political activities, including arms smuggling. In May 1986, Medellin's involvement in Nicaragua elevated to a new level as a suit was filed on behalf of two American journalists seeking to prove that anti-communists in the United States dealt cocaine to secure guns that could be used to support the Nicaraguan insurgents.³⁸ In an article published in the *New York Daily News* in December 1986, Joseph Volz reported:

House crime subcommittee investigators also have interviewed a jailed arms smuggler, Jesus Garcia, who says he was an operative in Contra arms smuggling. Garcia, a former Dade County (Miami) deputy sheriff, has claimed it was "common knowledge" that cocaine was financing the Contra operation.³⁹

The suit charged a multitude of individuals with complacency in the cocaine trade to support the Contras, including the retired Major General John Singlaub, chairmen of the World Anti-Communist League, multiple CIA officials, and kingpin Pablo Escobar.⁴⁰ John Singlaub denied the allegations, calling them, "pure fabrication... an effort by the radical left to put up a smokescreen."⁴¹ For American officials, removing the Marxist-Leninist Sandinistas from power was the primary goal; and they were willing to engage in the drug trade to fund the project.

It is plausible that Escobar shared some of the ideals of far-left insurgents, with the strongest reason for his support being the shared viewpoint against the United States. Escobar was "benevolent and sought a way to preserve and support them [M-19]" while using them to advance his own personal ambitions.⁴² During the Nicaraguan affair, Escobar's war against the Colombian government and by extension, against the United States, was ongoing and wreaked havoc in the nation. Essentially, Escobar successfully led the United States into funding a war against itself and the Colombian government.

The pressure on Escobar, however, was mounting as the Colombian government had placed a \$500,000 bounty on him, and the Cali cartel, Escobar's main competitor in the narcotics trade, began targeting his operations in hopes of removing their greatest rival. On January 13, 1988, the Cali cartel

³⁶ Frank Greve, "Some Latin Politicians Cashing in on Cocaine Smuggling Profits," *Miami Herald*, April 29, 1985.

³⁷ Michael Hedges, "Nicaraguan Official Tied to Cocaine Ring," *The Washington Times*, November 19, 1986.

³⁸ James Morrison, "Journalists Sue to Prove Plot Against Sandinistas," *The Washington Times*, May 30, 1986.

³⁹ Joseph Volz, "Contra-Coke Tie Eyed," *New York Daily News*, December 31, 1986.

⁴⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Christic Institute Attempts to Unravel Contra Connection* (Washington DC, 1986), 1.

⁴¹ Morrison, "Sandinistas."

⁴² Escobar, "Pablo Escobar."

bombed Escobar's penthouse in the Santa Maria de los Angeles district of Medellin. He was not present at the time of the attack, and the penthouse faced minor damage, but Escobar's daughter, Manuela, was deafened.⁴³

At the same time, American business interests grew as enterprises actively supported the drug trade by exporting chemicals to Colombia that were used in drug manufacturing. The United States government, on the other hand, viewed the instability caused by the conflict as a prime opportunity to increase its political presence in Colombia. "The US State Department declared that it would be sending up to 100 military advisors to supplement the ones already in Colombia."⁴⁴ Along with advisors, the US provided up to \$167 million by the end of 1990 to the Colombian government to support fighting the cartels; though it was suspected that the US was more interested in their advisors and funds being used to fight far-left insurgencies than the cartels. This is supported by the lenient sentences being enforced by Colombian courts on drug traffickers.⁴⁵

Indeed, by the mid-1980s, the US had begun connecting the war on drugs with combating insurgents, as detailed by Christopher Welna and Gustavo Gallon:

In April 1984, a police squad found an enormous cocaine laboratory in the southwestern jungle region of the country. The [US] ambassador seized the opportunity to publicly announce that FARC guerrillas protected this laboratory, which in his opinion was final proof that this organization has ties to the traffickers.⁴⁶

While expanding his drug activities and connections with the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, Escobar continued to supported far-left groups in Colombia by hiring the National Liberation Army (ELN) to carry out assassinations and bombings against government targets.⁴⁷ In 1986, the Colombian government took a major hit with the assassination of Colonel Jaime Ramirez-Gomez, who was described by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as being, "the only thing left [in Colombia] of an active drug enforcement effort."⁴⁸ In 1989, Escobar got his revenge against Luis Carlos Galan, a front-running political candidate that was pro-extradition, and the leader that removed Escobar from the Liberal party.⁴⁹ Escobar's assassination of Galan in August 1989, resulted in an increased effort to combat the drug kingpin.⁵⁰

As the Cold War was winding down and the Soviet Union was teetering on the edge of collapse, Escobar surrendered himself to the Colombian government in 1991. His condition was that he be permitted to construct his own prison, choose his personal guards, and avoid extradition to the United States.⁵¹ His

⁴³ Simons, *Brutal History*, 65-68.

⁴⁴ Simons, *Brutal History*, 65-66.

⁴⁵ By 1989, 1600 of 4500 judges had received some form of death threat from the cartels. Simons, *Brutal History*, 65.

⁴⁶ Welna, *Human Rights*, 80.

⁴⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Narco-Insurgent Links in the Andes* (Washington DC, 1992), 2.

⁴⁸ Hedges, "Nicaraguan."

⁴⁹ Deas, "Obituary."

⁵⁰ Church, "Going," 13.

⁵¹ "In the late 1980s two drug barons, Jorge Luis Ochoa and Pablo Escobar, then among the 20 richest men in the world, had reportedly offered to pay off Colombia's foreign debt." Simons, *Brutal History*, 61.

arrest in 1991 marked the start of a ceasefire and established the golden age of Escobar's drug operations. With his war over, Escobar stepped away from supporting revolutionary groups. However, the peace was short-lived.

In July 1992, thirteen months into his sentence, Escobar escaped, as the government pushed to relocate him to a new facility after he had two of his men killed, violating the terms of his surrender.⁵² Escobar's escape impelled the government into chaos as leaders began anticipating a return to war. Though he was on the run, Escobar still maintained the support of the Medellin citizenry, with one woman stating, "The government did not keep its word. Escobar was right to do what he did. Pablo Escobar is a god. It is like he has a pact with the Devil, which gives him the power to disappear. They were going to kill him or send him to the United States."⁵³

After his escape, the US Defense Department announced that it would provide support in locating Escobar. Following the announcement, US military aircraft were spotted flying over large parts of the country, likely searching for insurgency strongholds. The US government levied a \$6.5 million bounty on Escobar, an additional \$1.5 million would be applied by a competitor of Escobar.⁵⁴ Major members of the Medellin cartel were either being killed or captured — Escobar's own brother surrendered to the police in October 1992.

In 1993, a new group emerged, Los Pepes, an anti-communist conglomerate of Escobar's rivals with a singular goal: kill Escobar. In October of that year, members of the Colombian government announced concerns about the American objective in Colombia. Gustavo de Greiff, the attorney-general of Colombia critiqued the American effort in the war on drugs. He argued that the United States had effectively blockaded the coast to prevent drugs from leaving the nation and had increased operations in Colombia and neighboring nations but had done little to combat the increasing demand for drugs within the United States.⁵⁵ The war could not be won as long as the demand of American consumers remained intact to incentivize the continuation of the trade. As mentioned above, it was not only American consumers who were using Colombian cocaine, but American businesses were also benefiting in processing that cocaine by sending the necessary chemicals to Colombia's cartels for that purpose.

As the situation in Colombia grew untenable, Escobar sent his wife and children to Germany to seek asylum; they were refused entrance and sent back to South America. Fearing for the lives of his family, Escobar reached out to the government, requesting that they protect his family as a basis for a new surrender agreement. On November 29, 1993, the family was met at the airport and transported to a hotel in Bogota, to be protected by the government.⁵⁶ Two days later, on his birthday, December 1, Escobar called his wife;

⁵² "Notorious."

⁵³ Simons, *Brutal History*, 70.

⁵⁴ Simons, *Brutal History*, 70-74.

⁵⁵ Simons, *Brutal History*, 80.

⁵⁶ "Colombia to Protect Escobar Family Again," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 30, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-11-30-mn-62543-story.html>.

however, the call was too brief to be traced. Colombian officials gained another opportunity to capture Escobar when he called again the next day, this time successfully tracking his location. Escobar was found in a two-story building in west Medellin. Government forces moved in to capture Escobar; the subsequent gunfight was lethal. Juan Pablo attests that Escobar shot himself, instead of allowing for the chance that he could be captured.⁵⁷ The official story is that Escobar was shot twice by Colombian forces while fleeing. In the days following his death, Colombia's poor mourned Escobar, in the thousands.⁵⁸

The war on drugs did not end with Escobar's death. The Cali cartel moved to replace the Medellin cartel, providing the American populace with narcotics, and Colombia continued to face political and economic turmoil. The political landscape of Latin America remains one of turmoil and exploitation. Escobar is just one of many individuals to exploit the environment he found himself in for personal gain. Originally holding ambitions to achieve control of the presidency, Escobar was forced out of politics and chose to get revenge by burning Colombia to the ground. Escobar's story is one of exploiting the Cold War by playing all its sides from using leftist, anti-American guerillas like the M-19 and governments like the Sandinistas to far-right, conservative individuals like Lehder and the Contras to expand his personal goals and achieve his ambitions while eventually contributing to his downfall and that of his Medellin cartel.

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⁵⁷ Escobar, "Pablo Escobar."

⁵⁸ "Thousands Attend Drug King's Funeral," *Deseret News*, December 4, 1993.

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