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COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Memorandum

April 15, 2002

TO: Chairman Hyde

FROM: John Mackey, Investigative Counsel,
Caleb McCarry, Subcommittee Staff Director

RE: Staff Investigation: IRA in Colombia/The FARC Links

As a follow up to our recent extensive briefing, **the** following is a summary of our investigative findings on the **Irish** Republican Army's (**IRA**) activities in Colombia. The information **in** this memorandum is drawn **from** interviews conducted on behalf of the Committee.

One month before the tragic and deadly international terrorist attacks **on** the World Trade Center Twin Towers and the Pentagon here at home, another threat to U.S. **national** security, as well as Colombian democracy, was uncovered at the El **Dorado** Airport in Bogota, which is only three hours **from** Miami.

On August 1 I, 2001, **two** members of the **IRA** **along with** a representative of **Sinn** Fein, the IRA's political wing, who was then stationed in **Cuba**, **were** arrested by Colombian authorities at the El **Dorado** airport **after** leaving the **Revolutionary** Armed Forces of Colombia (**FARC**) narco-terrorist safe haven. We learned that the three men were carrying false identification documents (passports) and were found **to** have traces of explosives on their clothing and on items in their luggage. Two of the **Irish** nationals were the **IRA's** leading explosives engineer and a mortar expert. The **Sinn Fein** representative was reportedly on the payroll of the Cuban Communist Party.

Our Diplomatic Security Service (D/S) in **Bogota** informed Committee staff that forensic tests on the clothing and contents of the suitcases of the Irish nationals yielded positive results for **explosives** (TNT, **Nitro**, DNT). The Irish nationals were **first** detained by Colombian authorities and temporarily charged based on their use of false documents by the Fiscalia, the Colombian prosecutor's office. The three Irish nationals were later formally indicted by the Fiscalia in February, 2002 and charged with training FARC terrorists in explosives and using false travel documents to cover their true identities **while in** Colombia. The men, in fact, had admitted to Colombian authorities earlier that their passports were under false names.

In addition to having positive forensic evidence of explosives on their belongings, the three Irish nationals have been identified by a FARC defector who has surrendered to the Fiscalia

(prosecutor office) rather than turning himself into the Army. This individual identified photographs of three Irish nationals as being the same individuals from whom he received explosives training **in** the FARC safe haven. We **were** told that there are other corroborating witnesses in addition to this FARC defector. Colombian authorities appear to believe they have a strong case against the three Irish nationals.

The initial case against the Irish nationals appears to have been developed by Colombian military intelligence, and both the U.S. and the British embassies in Bogota responded to inquiries **from** Colombian authorities regarding the three Irish nationals **after** they were arrested on August 11th at the airport in Bogota. We learned **from** U.S. and British sources that the British embassy in Colombia first heard about and **responded** to the arrests of the Irish nationals after they were detained at the airport in Bogota. We were told that the first information the British embassy received was **when** the weekend duty officer at the British embassy took a call from Colombian authorities because two of the nationals had British passports in their possession. The British initial response to the arrests was to conduct routine consular work by the weekend duty officer and also to call the U.S. embassy for assistance.

Although British personnel providing **consular services** were present, U.S. personnel collected samples to be examined by our embassy explosives detection equipment. We were informed by our embassy **staff that** the American officer took forensic samples from **clothing**, toothbrushes, cameras, and the interior of luggage belonging to the three Irish nationals and placed these samples in secured plastic **Ziploc®** bags. We **were told** that these bags were then handed to Colombian police and Fiscalia. According to **the** U.S. official assigned to Diplomatic Security who took the samples, at no time did British Embassy representatives have access to or control over the items tested for eventual **sample** evidence.

The claim by the three Irish nationals that their activities in the DMZ were related to the peace process does not hold up, either. The Colombian government, which set up many outside meetings including a wide spectrum of people **from** Europe, did **not** know of their activities in the **FARC** safe haven.

We interviewed foreign diplomats who were working in support of the peace process as representatives of the group of ten **friendly** nations working in support of the Colombian government's peace process with the FARC. These diplomats were in the FARC safe haven in Colombia at the **very** same time in August, 2001 that the three Irish nationals were in the DMZ. None of these diplomats recognized these Irishmen by name or by the photos that we showed them, nor had they been aware of any FARC links to the **Irish** or the Irish peace process. Additionally, they said the **FARC** leadership with whom they met to discuss the peace process never mentioned the Irish peace process or these Irish nationals. However, one senior Latin American diplomat we interviewed volunteered that he was not surprised the IRA may have been brought in to help the FARC. The **diplomat** said that it was what he might have expected, since the helicopters the United States gave to the Colombian government for their use in fighting the drug trade impacted the **FARC**. **In** his view, it was logical that the FARC would enlist the help of the **IRA** in response to increased U.S. counter-drug assistance.

The obvious question, of course, is that if the **IRA** was legitimately concerned with **the** peace process in Colombia, why would the detained Irish nationals have needed false **passports** to conceal their identities, and why would the **IRA** have sent experts in explosives? Following the **arrest** of the Irish nationals, the Colombian government, in fact, changed its procedure for entry of foreigners into the FARC safe haven, requiring a license from their peace envoy, until the zone was **finally** ended on February **20, 2002**.

Events in Colombia make it clear that global terrorist networks are **interchangeable**, aggressive, **and** know no boundaries or borders. They can threaten anyone, any nation, anywhere **around the** world today. In addition, the situation in Colombia illustrates the growing phenomenon of proceeds **from** illicit drugs playing a major role in **financing** global terrorist networks' goals and activities. The FARC is believed by **knowledgeable** Colombians to take in as much as \$1 to \$2 million a day in illicit drug proceeds. It is suspected, although there is no hard evidence, that the **IRA** may have received as much as \$2 million for the explosive training they provided to FARC. There also may be some ideological alliances, as some in Colombia believe. There is no evidence of any **payment** in drugs for IRA training that we or anyone we interviewed have seen.

Colombian authorities believe that at least five and as many **as** 15 IRA-linked individuals had been traveling in and out of Colombia for some time. Colombian authorities said that some had entered as far back as five years ago, and possibly **as** long as ten years. According to Colombian authorities, the arrests in August, 2001 are merely the first publicly-exposed IRA activity in Colombia. However, more alarming than the number of IRA-related individuals who have visited Colombia is the stature of **some** of these individuals that Colombian authorities identified as senior **IRA** explosive experts and technicians.

The IRA has run up against U.S. national interests in our own hemisphere. Colombia produces 90 percent of the cocaine and at least 70 percent of the heroin coming into our nation. Largely because of this serious drug threat, we have a significant presence in that **country** to assist the Colombian authorities in fighting that threat, Colombia is **the** third largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world today.

The FARC is formally designated as a foreign terrorist organization (**FTO**) by our State Department. It is thought to be "the most dangerous international terrorist group based in this hemisphere," according to a State Department official. The FARC narco-terrorists openly target American civilians in Colombia, kidnaping and killing them. They also engage in massive drug trafficking to the United States that takes many American lives here at home each and everyday. U.S. federal indictments were issued on March **18, 2002** against several FARC leaders on serious trafficking charges. The **FARC's** drugs ultimately target **American** children and communities.

The well-publicized arrests in Colombia in August, 2001 of the three Irish nationals have been widely covered in the United Kingdom and Irish press. Improvements in the **FARC's** ability to **carry** out terrorist bombings that Colombian authorities link to the IRA's activity directly impacts our national interests in Colombia. Of particular concern is the large U.S. presence (**DEA**, special forces, contractors, embassy personnel, etc.) related to our major drug

fighting efforts in Colombia. We have hundreds of temporary duty personnel (TDY) in Colombia on any given day. As we increase U.S. assistance and enlarge our direct **counter-terrorism** role against the **FARC**, more Americans could be put at risk **from** the IRA training of the FARC identified by Colombian authorities.

Some apparently would hope this matter **would** disappear so as not to impede shared **governance in** Northern Ireland. We do **not** have **the luxury** of turning a blind eye when American lives and national interests are put at risk by IRA activity in Colombia. Colombian authorities believe that the rapidly escalating casualties **they** have suffered **from** terrorist attacks since the FARC safe haven was ended in February, 2002 is in substantial measure attributable to these **IRA** training activities..

As requested by Members on both sides of **the** aisle in Congress, during the last **nine** months Committee staff have conducted an **extensive inquiry, interviewing** Colombian officials, advisors, and police. We also conducted inquiries in Cuba, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Ireland (including Northern Ireland), and here at home. Investigative Counsel **Mackey** has conducted dozens of interviews, met with many experts **from** law enforcement and intelligence services here and abroad, and reviewed many documents **and** materials following the August IRA arrests in Colombia. Absent the excellent work of Colombian military intelligence leading to **the** arrests of the three Irish nationals in August, **2001** and **their** excellent follow-up along with that of the Colombian police and Fiscalia, the **IRA activity in** Colombia would likely have continued unnoticed, indefinitely.

Even if we were to make no inquiry into this **matter**, the revelations will continue to come out of the Colombian proceedings against the three **Irish nationals from** their **trial** which is scheduled to begin soon in Bogota. Irrespective of **our** inquiry, this matter has been widely covered and followed in the Irish, British and Colombian press. To those who say the Committee's investigation may embarrass Sinn Fein **or make** the Irish peace process more difficult, we must respond that the real culprit here is the IRA and its activities in America's backyard.

Committee staff spoke with well-known experts (Irish and British) both here and abroad on the IRA and its methods, **means**, terrorist techniques, and structural makeup. **In** summary, Committee staff has concluded:

1. **It appears that the IRA has had some well-established links of some long standing with the FARC narco-terrorists in Colombia, possibly going back 5 to 10 years. More Irish nationals than just the three arrested in Colombia in August, 2001 may have been involved in visiting Colombia for possible terrorist activities.: It appears they have in recent times been training in the FARC safe haven in explosives management, including mortar and possibly car-bomb urban terrorist techniques, and possibly using the safe haven as a means to test and improve the IRA's own terrorist weapon's and techniques in the rural jungles.**
2. **Explosives management training for the FARC by the IRA, and possibly by other foreign-based terrorists suspected by the Colombians; such as Cubans, Iranians, ETA (the**

Spanish Basque terrorist group), among others, has markedly improved the **FARC's** proficiency in urban terrorism in the last few years. There is no concrete evidence, but many suspect that ETA, having had past relations with **the IRA** and being active in both Cuba and Colombia, may have been the link that brought the FARC and IRA together. (Note: The Sinn **Fein** representative arrested August, 2001 in Colombia was Cuban-based and Spanish-speaking.)

3. There have been many new FARC techniques employed in car bombings which target the police **explosives teams** and other first-responders whose job it is to try to dismantle or neutralize these deadly devices. (The police have lost more than 10 percent of their bomb technicians to the terrorists in the last 12 months.) This is a typical **IRA** method of operation. The use of mobile mortars on trucks and pickups, which the FARC is **getting** increasingly effective at using, is also strikingly **similar** to **known IRA** explosive techniques and practices, as is the targeting of police explosive experts. Neither we nor the Colombians can fiid credible explanations for **this** increased, more sophisticated capacity for these types of terror tactics by the **FARC**, beyond IRA training.

4. Alleged IRA training is now **having** a severe and adverse impact on Colombian life. Apparently **IRA** explosive management training techniques. are resulting in more effective explosive attacks against **the** Colombian infrastructure including bridges, power **lines**, dams and other facilities as **well**. We have heard little from either the Colombian police and **military** or our embassy personnel to dispel this logical theory, and the training exposed last summer has been **followed** by incident: after incident since that time. The **military** and **police** casualties mount daily, weakening Colombian democracy even further. One police Colonel **from Narino** Department (a FARC stronghold) told us of an unprecedented **loss** of three police bomb technicians and 19 police officers who were killed by **FARC** mortars in just **the** last 18 months alone.

5. Finally, in light of the **long** history of very strict **IRA** discipline against freelancing by its membership, **the** only real question remaining in **our** inquiry concerned what the **Sinn Fein** leadership (**IRA's** **political** wing) **knew** about these **IRA** activities in Colombia, and when did **they** learn of **them**. These were the questions posed in your March 13th invitation letter to Gerry Adams, President of **Sinn Fein**.

During our inquiry, **in** a very brief meeting with a senior **Sinn Fein** leader, they were adamant about their Jack of knowledge of these events in Colombia. Only time and history can ultimately judge this question. However, since our most recent return from Colombia, the IRA has answered the above, and last, question of our inquiry in its April 8th statement on its much welcomed and constructive second arms decommissioning, "...**the IRA is a highly disciplined and committed organization....We are relying on the discipline and commitment of our support base and volunteers.**" This statement is totally consistent with the staff findings, and answers **the** last outstanding major question on what likely happened here, and concludes our investigation.

The Colombian authorities who will testify at our hearing believe that not only has the **IRA** been in the former **safe** haven helping the FARC, **but** also the *Iranians, Cubans, and*

possibly ETA (Basque terrorists), among other terrorist networks. As you have previously stated, Colombia is “a potential breeding ground for international terror equaled perhaps only by Afghanistan.” The IRA findings are **the** strongest among these global links because of the arrests of the three Irish nationals and the accompanying evidence. However, it is likely that in the former FARC safe haven all of these terrorist groups had been sharing techniques, honing their terrorism skills, using illicit drug proceeds in payment and collectively helping to challenge the rule of law in Colombia, the oldest democracy in South America.

We are witnessing a new and serious global threat to civilized society today, as the three underground plates of **global terrorism, illicit drugs, and organized crime** converge together to produce seismic damage to the world as we’ve known it. The hearings scheduled for April 24th at full Committee will hopefully expose these links and help change U.S. policy in Colombia where, to our tremendous regret; we and recent Administrations have underestimated the terrorist threat and instability in Colombia that can **only** lead to increased global terrorist activity.

Recommended Course of Action

In **light** of our Committee’s extensive **and** difficult investigation which has exposed the **full** magnitude of terrorist activity by the **IRA** in Colombia, working against both Colombian democracy and overall U.S. interests in that beleaguered nation just three hours **from** Miami, some action by the U.S. government is clearly **warranted**.

We suggest that you request both our Department of Justice and Department of State witnesses to review and evaluate the IRA’s continued absence from the U.S. State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (**FTO**) in light of our findings. The analysis should also include **an** evaluation of recently reported possible IRA-linked weapons **trafficking** activity from Florida as well. **If** the IRA is not to be included on that list, you should request a written explanation to Congress justifying such inaction.

Anything less than such a formal and extensive **FTO** analysis by the U.S. government, along **with** increased monitoring of IRA activity by both the U.S. and other interested **govern-**ments, will only encourage the efforts of such global terrorist networks to mislead governments around the world as to their real intentions and continued global terrorist activities, while politically portraying themselves as being in favor of the pursuit of peace.