



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, April 29, 2022

U.S. Attorney Announces Extradition Of Colombian National For Narco-Terrorism, Firearms, And Drug-Trafficking Charges

Carlos Fernando Melo Allegedly Conspired with Foreign Terrorist Organizations to Provide them Firearms and Explosives for the Purpose of Facilitating Attacks in Colombia, Including a Potential Kidnapping and Murder of a DEA Agent and Bombing of the U.S. E

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Anne Milgram, the Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), announced today the extradition of CARLOS FERNANDO MELO, for narco-terrorism, firearms, and drug-trafficking offenses. MELO, a Colombian national, was taken into custody by Colombian authorities on April 20, 2021 at the request of the United States, extradited to the United States, and arrived in the Southern District of New York yesterday from Colombia. MELO is expected to be presented later today before U.S. Magistrate Judge James L. Cott. The case is assigned to United States District Court Judge Sidney H. Stein.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, Carlos Fernando Melo attempted to broker deals for machine guns with known narco-terrorist organizations, with the stated mission of murdering a DEA agent abroad as a 'trophy.' Unbeknownst to him, the individuals Melo believed to be arms traffickers were, in actuality, DEA confidential sources. Melo's extradition today ensures that he'll be held accountable on U.S. soil for allegedly targeting DEA Special Agents committed to fighting the illicit drug trade."

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said: "DEA's central mission is targeting the most dangerous, most ruthless drug-traffickers who threaten our communities for their own profit. Carlos Fernando Melo is alleged to have not only supported and participated in violent narco-terrorism, but also sought to have a DEA agent murdered. DEA will relentlessly pursue narco-terrorists and drug traffickers who threaten the safety and health of Americans."

According to the allegations contained in the Complaint and Indictment charging the defendant, which were unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:[1]

Between approximately September 2019 and December 2019, MELO attempted to purchase explosives and firearms, including machine guns, from individuals MELO understood to be arms traffickers for use by two organizations then designated by the Department of State as Foreign Terrorist Organizations: the Fuerzas

Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (“FARC”) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (“ELN”). Unbeknownst to MELO, the arms traffickers with whom he was negotiating were, in actuality, DEA confidential sources.

During these meetings, a confidential source posing as a weapons broker introduced MELO to two other confidential sources who claimed to be weapons dealers. These confidential sources, in turn, introduced MELO to an undercover law enforcement officer who purported to be a member of the terrorist organization Hizballah with access to explosive material and firearms. In the meetings, MELO reiterated that he was seeking to broker weapons deals for the FARC and ELN, which he claimed to have done in the past. MELO provided the sources with a coded list of weapons that the FARC and ELN wanted to purchase. MELO also represented that he had spoken with leadership in the FARC and ELN regarding their interest in acquiring weapons and explosive material. Ultimately, MELO requested more than 300 machine guns for the FARC as well as explosive material and mercury for the ELN. While MELO initially suggested that the FARC would pay for their weapons in cocaine, MELO later told the confidential sources that the FARC would pay cash for their arms, and that MELO had another contact who would sell cocaine to the confidential sources for importation into the United States.

MELO also explained during these meetings that he sought to purchase the firearms and explosives because the FARC and ELN wanted to conduct attacks in Colombia. He detailed particulars of these planned attacks, which included the possible kidnapping and murder of a DEA agent in Colombia and the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia. MELO said that killing a DEA agent would be a “trophy” for the FARC or ELN and that he had a particular assassin in mind who could carry out the murder.

In furtherance of these plans, MELO enlisted a co-conspirator to take photographs of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota. When this co-conspirator called MELO expressing concern about the security at the Embassy, MELO instructed the co-conspirator to take the photographs on a single day so as to not arouse any suspicion.

* * *

MELO, 58, a Colombian national, is charged with: (1) participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy, which carries a 20-year mandatory minimum sentence and a maximum of life in prison; (2) conspiring to import cocaine into the United States, which carries a 10-year mandatory minimum sentence and a maximum of life in prison; and (3) conspiring to possess machine guns and destructive devices during and in relation to the narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies, which carries a maximum of life in prison.

The potential mandatory minimum and maximum sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding efforts of the DEA’s Special Operations Division Bilateral Investigations Unit. Mr. Williams also thanked the Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs, Judicial Attachés in Bogotá, Colombia, and the Counterterrorism Section.

The case is being handled by the Office’s National Security and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys Jason A. Richman, Kyle A. Wirshba, and Kaylan E. Lasky are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint and Indictment are merely allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

[1] As the introductory phrase signifies, the entirety of the text of the Indictment and the Complaint, and the description of the Indictment and the Complaint set forth herein, constitute only allegations and every fact described should be treated as an allegation.

Attachment(s):

[Download u.s. v. carlos melo indictment.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Drug Trafficking
Firearms Offenses
Violent Crime

Component(s):

[USAO - New York, Southern](#)

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Press Release Number:

22-144

Updated April 29, 2022