



FACT SHEET

WHAT DOES THE INTERPOL REPORT SAY?

On May 15, 2008, Interpol presented its forensic report on computers and hardware received from Colombian Police on March 10, 2008. The materials were supposedly found following a military attack on a camp of the guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Ecuador, near the border with Colombia on March 1, 2008. The action violated the sovereignty of Ecuador, provoking conflict when a humanitarian process had already been established – with the help of Venezuela – between the Colombian government and the rebels. After the attack, the government of Colombia leaked emails to the press reporting that they were written by members of the FARC, and in this way, linking this guerrilla group with Venezuela and Ecuador.

Seeking to validate these claims, Colombia asked Interpol to analyze the computers. However, **the scope of the forensic examination by Interpol was limited.**

According to the report, “Interpol’s subsequent assistance to Colombia’s investigation did not include the analysis of the content of documents, folders or other material on the eight seized FARC computer exhibits. The accuracy and source of the user files contained in the eight seized FARC computer exhibits are and always have been outside the scope of Interpol’s computer forensic examination.”¹

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), **José Miguel Insulza**, pointed out in an interview with the newspaper *El Comercio* that “**what**

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Interpol cannot assure is that the information in those computers is true.”²

Nevertheless, some analysts and media outlets have insisted that Interpol’s findings support the claims made by Colombian officials. This is despite the fact that the report demonstrates that the computers supposedly linking the FARC to the governments of Venezuela and Ecuador were manipulated.

48,055 Files Manipulated

The Interpol report asserts on page 30 that “access to the data contained in the eight FARC computer exhibits between 1 March 2008, when they were seized by Colombian authorities, and 3 March 2008 at 11:45 a.m., when they were turned over to the *Grupo Investigativo de Delitos Informáticos* of the Colombian Judicial Police, did not conform to internationally recognized principles for handling electronic evidence by law enforcement.”³ The assertion that the files were not handled properly is worrying, regardless of the source of these computers and files.

Moreover, **deep in the report, Interpol states that several thousand files were created, accessed, modified, and deleted** on the laptop computers, external hard drives, and USB drives received by Interpol. For example, it says that on the external hard drive identified with the number 31, “3,832 system files were created, 13, 366 system and user files were accessed, 2,237 system files were modified, 1,049 system files were deleted.”⁴ Furthermore, paragraph 91

¹ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report on FARC Computers and Hardware seized by Colombia*, (May 2008), 7. (English Version) <http://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/speeches/2008/SGbogota20080516.asp>

² “Para nosotros la soberanía territorial es sagrada: Insulza.” *El Comercio*. Marzo 20, 2008.

http://www2.elcomercio.com/solo_texto_search.asp?id_noticia=15731&anio=2008&mes=3&dia=20

³ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 30.

⁴ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 32.



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asserts that in total 48,055 files had been manipulated.⁵ Why were these files manipulated?

Interpol experts also found that three of the digital devices contained files with erroneous date stamps which had been set in the future. For example, exhibit 31 contains “2,110 files with creation dates ranging from 20 April 2009 to 27 August 2009...”⁶ The experts concluded that the files were either created on other computers or “the files were later transferred – after their initial creation – to exhibits 30 and 31...”⁷ These facts raise even more questions about the authenticity of the material.

Furthermore, the Interpol report concludes with four pages of recommendations that emphasize the importance of training first-responder police units in the proper means of “encountering electronic evidence during criminal investigations.”⁸ Therefore, **the problems identified in the handling of the electronic evidence by the Colombian authorities were serious enough to warrant future action.**

Inconsistencies

In many instances, statements made by Interpol representatives about the case do not match the findings of the organization’s report. For example, on May 20, 2008, Colombian Senator Gustavo Petro highlighted the fact that **“Ronald Noble assured that Interpol could certify that the files were not manipulated, but the report points out that there were more than 48,055 accesses to these files.”**⁹

“Using their forensic tools, they found a total of 48,055 files for which the timestamps indicated that they had either been created, accessed, modified or deleted as a result of the direct access to the eight seized exhibits by Colombian authorities between the time of their seizure on 1 March 2008 and 3 March 2008 at 11:45 a.m.”

Furthermore, during the press conference and in answering a question posed by a reporter, Mr. Noble stated that Interpol was certain that the evidence examined by its experts came from a FARC camp, and therefore, it must have belonged to the FARC and its members.¹⁰ Nevertheless, as was explained above, **the report states that the “authenticity and sources of the files... are and always have been outside**

the scope of INTERPOL’s computer forensic examination.”¹¹

The report also states that “the verification of the eight seized FARC computer exhibits by INTERPOL does not imply **the validation of the accuracy of the user files, the validation of any country’s interpretation of the user files, the validation of the source of the user files...**”¹²

However, under part one, the report fully accepts the account of the Colombian authorities regarding where they found the laptop computers, hard disks and USB drives.¹³ It is even said that “Reyes and Guillermo Enrique Torres, alias Julian Conrado, a FARC commander, were killed in the operation.”¹⁴ Interestingly, **Interpol ignores the fact that the Colombian authorities had mistaken the dead body of an Ecuadorian man, Franklyn Aisala, with the body of Julian Conrado.**¹⁵

Once again, it is unclear **to what extent political interests may obscure the real findings of the Interpol technicians.**

⁵ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 33.

⁶ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 33.

⁷ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 33.

⁸ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 35.

⁹ “Gustavo Petro pide aclarar inconsistencias de informe de Interpol sobre computador de ‘Raúl Reyes.’” *El Tiempo*. May 20, 2008.

http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/2008-05-20/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR-4179364.html

¹⁰ “Interpol dice que datos de la supuesta computadora de Reyes no fueron alterados.” *Telesur*. May 15, 2008.

<http://www.telesurtv.net/noticias/secciones/nota/index.php?ckl=27897-NN>

¹¹ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 7.

¹² INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 9.

¹³ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 10.

¹⁴ INTERPOL, *Interpol’s Forensic Report...*, 10.

¹⁵ “Familia ecuatoriana asegura que su hijo fue muerto y confundido con ‘Julían Conrado.’” *Caracol Radio*. March 21, 2008.

<http://www.caracol.com.co/nota.aspx?id=566021>



Timing and other Important Elements

It is important to note that **Colombia's March 1st attack on FARC and the subsequent campaign of accusations against Venezuela was developed less than a week after the second hostage release** facilitated by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, and Colombian senator Piedad Córdoba.

The nature of the information leaked by the Colombian officials is doubtful at best. **Even supposing that the computers belonged to the FARC, and that they were indeed found in the FARC camp when it was raided by the Colombian army on March 1st, it remains to be proven that the alleged emails were in fact written by Reyes or other guerillas.**

Accordingly, Adam Isaacson of the Center for International Policy in Washington DC has reminded us that "the documents in question are communications between guerrilla leaders. (...) No documents or writings from the Venezuelans themselves appear; the FARC communications only reflect the guerrillas' version of events."¹⁶

Even more important to note is that **Interpol could not validate the source or veracity of the content of these documents. In fact, Interpol's report confirms that the files were manipulated at least between March 1st and March 3rd.**¹⁷ Additionally, **no insight is provided into the life of these computers and hard drives before the Colombian government handed them over to Interpol. Nothing is known of their authorship or veracity. In fact, the President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, asserted that his government has evidence that the computers were in the hands of the Colombian intelligence agency prior to March 1st.**¹⁸

¹⁶ Adam Isaacson, "What the New Farc Documents Tell Us," *The Center for International Policy's*, May 11, 2008. <http://www.cipcol.org/?p=596>

¹⁷ INTERPOL, *Interpol's Forensic Report...*, 33.

¹⁸ "Correa alerta sobre campaña contra Venezuela con el pretexto del informe de la INTERPOL." *Telesur*. May 17, 2008. <http://www.telesurtv.net/noticias/secciones/nota/index.php?ckl=27991-NN>

The size of the alleged evidence also raises questions. The Interpol report also stated that "if all the seized data were in Word format, it would take more than 1,000 years to read it all, at a rate of 100 pages per day."¹⁹ How it is possible that, within hours of the violation of Ecuadorian territory, the head of Colombia's National Police could unequivocally announce that they had found computers with information that linked the government of Venezuela with the FARC? How did they so quickly determine that the Venezuelan government had given \$300 millions to the FARC, if "\$300 million" is never explicitly stated much less alongside the name of President Chávez or any Venezuelan government official? In that short amount of time, how did they manage to read millions of documents and establish such connections?

Regardless, the meddling of Colombian officials may indeed have made the evidence they purportedly possess unusable. Regarding the still questionable validity of the supposed evidence, Interpol's report recognizes that "direct access may complicate validating this evidence for purposes of its introduction in a judicial proceeding, because law enforcement is then required to demonstrate or prove that the direct access did not have material impact on the purpose for which the evidence is intended."²⁰

Conclusions

Interpol could not verify the source or authenticity of the alleged documents, but the technicians of Interpol did find that thousands of files were manipulated in the computers provided by Colombia. Therefore, **it seems that the supposed evidence might be a diversion from real problems and questions.** For example, it is unclear why the Colombian government went so far as to violate the territorial sovereignty of Ecuador in order to kill the top FARC negotiator in the hostage talks. Sadly, **it is still unknown why this act was committed just after six captives were freed and on the brink of a path toward a humanitarian agreement.**

¹⁹ INTERPOL, *Interpol's Forensic Report...*, 26.

²⁰ INTERPOL, *Interpol's Forensic Report...*, 30.



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June, 2009

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