

Beat: News

"Clan del Golfo" Leader Extradited from Colombia

To Face Federal Indictment

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USPA NEWS - "Otoniel" Allegedly Ran a Paramilitary Organization, One of the Largest Distributors of Cocaine in the World, and Ordered Ruthless Acts of Violence Against Innocent Civilians and Law Enforcement

According to the allegations contained in the superseding indictment, other court filings, and statements made during court proceedings, Dairo Antonio Úsuga David, known by various aliases including "Otoniel," was extradited this morning to the United States from Colombia to face charges in the Eastern District of New York of leading a continuing criminal enterprise and participating in an international cocaine manufacturing and distribution conspiracy for his role as the leader of the paramilitary, multibillion dollar drug organization known as the "Clan del Golfo" (CDG). On October 23, 2021, Úsuga David was arrested in the jungles of Colombia following an extensive capture operation by Colombian military and law enforcement personnel. The defendant is scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Vera M. Scanlon.

"The Justice Department will work relentlessly alongside our international partners to disrupt the most violent and extensive drug-trafficking organizations and hold accountable those who run them," said Attorney General Garland. "This extradition is an important step in delivering justice for the communities most harmed by deadly drug trafficking and is part of our broader efforts to protect our country from violent crime."

As alleged in court documents, between June 2003 and October 2021, Úsuga David was the leader of a continuing criminal enterprise responsible for exporting multi-ton shipments of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico and Central America for ultimate importation into the United States. Additionally, Úsuga David participated in an international conspiracy to manufacture and distribute cocaine, knowing and intending that the narcotics would be illegally imported into the United States. The charges in the indictment are allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Merrick B. Garland, United States Attorney General, Anne Milgram, Administrator, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Ricky J. Patel, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI), Michael J. Driscoll, Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), Keechant L. Sewell, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), and Kevin P. Bruen, Superintendent, New York State Police (NYSP), announced the extradition and charges.

"As alleged, the defendant was the leader of the Clan del Golfo, the most powerful paramilitary and drug trafficking organization in Colombia this century, responsible for importing multibillion dollars' worth of cocaine into the United States, fueling violence, drug abuse, and compromised quality of life in every community his cocaine shipments touched, from Colombia to right here in the Eastern District of New York," stated United States Attorney Peace. "We are committed to seeking the truth about Úsuga David's crimes and those who helped him, ensuring that they face consequences, and recovering ill-gotten gains to return to the victims and their families. Not only have the people of this country been victimized by Úsuga David and Clan del Golfo, the people of Colombia have suffered too much at his hands, they have lost loved ones from innocent civilians to law enforcement personnel, been kept prisoners inside their homes, and been gripped by fear of violence at every turn."

The United States remains committed to cooperating with our international partners to dismantle transnational criminal organizations like the Clan del Golfo and stem the tide of destruction wrought by their lethal product and violent methods of doing business."

Mr. Peace extended his grateful appreciation to the United States Attorneys' Offices for the Southern District of Florida, Middle District of Florida, Eastern District of Texas, and Southern District of New York, and the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section (NDDS) Judicial Attachés in Bogotá, Colombia, NDDS SOD Trial Attorneys, the United States Marshals Service, the Port Authority Police Department, and the President of Colombia, the Colombian Attorney General's Office, the Colombian National Police, the Colombian Ministry of National Defense, the Colombian Ministry of Justice, and the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for assistance in the investigation, arrest, and extradition of the defendant.

"Today's case sends a clear message—to the leaders of drug cartels around the world—that the DEA will stop at nothing to investigate and dismantle criminal drug networks that threaten the safety and health of the American people," stated DEA Administrator Milgram. "DEA has been investigating Otoniel—one of the most violent and prolific drug traffickers in the world—for almost 20 years. Under his leadership, Clan del Golfo terrorized the Colombian people and shipped massive quantities of cocaine into the United States. I commend the men and women of the DEA for their many years of outstanding work that culminated in today's extradition."

"The arrest and extradition of Dairo Antonio Usuga David, also known as 'Otoniel' sends a clear message to narco-kingpins around the globe that United States law enforcement will track you down and bring you to justice no matter what lengths are taken to evade capture," said Homeland Security Investigations Acting Special Agent in Charge Patel. "Otoniel is alleged to control Clan del Golfo (CDG), a notorious Colombian drug cartel responsible for the exportation of multi-ton shipments of cocaine from Colombia and the loss of countless lives around the world. HSI remains dedicated to disrupting and dismantling transnational criminal organizations that seek to profit from trafficking illicit narcotics and today's extradition exemplifies the unwavering cooperation between HSI and our law enforcement partners."

"Úsuga David was the leader of one of the most powerful, and arguably one of the most violent, paramilitary organizations in the world. We allege his cocaine often ended up here in our neighborhoods in the United States. However, his fortunes changed last year after he was arrested by the Colombian military and law enforcement. Úsuga David now faces a new fate this morning, in the American criminal justice system, where he will be forced to answer for his crimes," stated Assistant Director-in-Charge Driscoll.

"Today's charges further affirm the New York City Police Department's unwavering commitment to ridding our city of illegal drugs," stated NYPD Commissioner Sewell. "No matter where or how this poison is peddled, we are united with our local, state, federal, and international law-enforcement partners in the fight against violent drug traffickers. To that end, I thank and commend the Eastern District of New York, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York State Police, and everyone else involved in this case for their exceptional work."

"I congratulate and commend our partners for the investigation that led to the extradition and indictment of the leader of a major international drug trafficking organization. This case underscores our commitment to pursuing the members of violent organizations who profit off the trafficking of illegal, dangerous narcotics to the United States and other countries around the world," stated NYSP Superintendent Bruen.

The Clan Del Golfo

According to court filings, between 2012 and through his capture by Colombian military and law enforcement forces on October 23, 2021, Úsuga David was the supreme leader of the CDG.

The CDG is one of the most violent and most powerful criminal organizations in Colombia, and it is one of the largest distributors of cocaine in the world. With as many as 6,000 members, the CDG exercises military control over vast amounts of territory in the Urabá region of Antioquia, Colombia, one of the most lucrative drug trafficking areas within Colombia due to its proximity to the Colombia-Panama border and the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. Clad in military uniforms, CDG members employ military tactics and weapons to reinforce their power and incite wars and violence against rival drug traffickers, paramilitary organizations, and Colombian law enforcement authorities who threaten the CDG's control.

The indictment further alleges that the CDG funds its operations primarily through drug trafficking. Among other things, it imposes a "tax" on any drug traffickers operating in territory under its control, charging fees for every kilogram of cocaine manufactured, stored, or transported through areas controlled by the organization. The CDG also directly exports cocaine, and coordinates the production, purchase, and transfer of weekly and bi-weekly multi-ton shipments of cocaine from Colombia into Central America and Mexico for ultimate importation to the United States.

The volume of drugs exported by the CDG under the leadership of Úsuga David is illustrated by multiple drug seizures linked to the organization. For example:

On April 12, 2021, approximately 1,365 kilograms (approximately 1.5 tons) of cocaine were seized from two boats off the coast of Panama;

On April 14, 2021, approximately 2,609 kilograms (approximately 2.9 tons) of cocaine were seized from a go-fast boat off the coast

of Panama; and

On July 18, 2021, approximately 5,463 kilograms (approximately 6 tons) of cocaine were seized from a boat within a jungle region in Colombia.

To maintain control over CDG territory, court filings allege that Úsuga David and the CDG employed a veritable army of “sicarios,” or hitmen, who carried out acts of violence, including murders, assaults, kidnappings, torture, and assassinations against competitors and those deemed traitors to the organization, as well as their family members. The CDG frequently murdered and assaulted Colombian law enforcement officers, Colombian military personnel, rival drug traffickers and paramilitaries, potential witnesses, and civilians. Úsuga David and the CDG used violence to promote and enhance the prestige, reputation, and position of the CDG with respect to rival criminal organizations; preserve, protect, and expand the CDG’s power and territory; finance the CDG’s operations and enrich its leaders through the collection of drug debts; maintain discipline among its members and associates; and protect CDG members from arrest and prosecution by silencing potential witnesses and retaliating against law enforcement authorities and those assisting law enforcement.

The CDG’s staggering capacity for violence is illustrated by multiple weapons seizures linked to the organization. For example:

On January 24, 2021, weapons linked to the CDG were seized in Medellin, Colombia, including 15 rocket propelled grenades, six Galil rifles, two M4 rifles, one AK-47 rifle, one Remington rifle, 10 rifle magazines, and over 1,000 rounds of various caliber ammunition;

On January 30, 2021, another cache of weapons linked to the CDG was seized in Medellin, Colombia, including five rifles, 10 handguns, one revolver, one handgun silencer, and more than 670 rounds of various caliber ammunition;

On July 28, 2021, additional weapons linked to the CDG were seized in Medellin, Colombia, including five grenade launchers, 31 rifles, 10 semiautomatic handguns, five revolvers, 30 rifle magazines, and 55 rounds of various caliber ammunition.

The Defendant’s Conduct

According to court filings, Úsuga David served as a high-ranking leader within the CDG from its inception and was its principal leader for the past 10 years. During his alleged reign, Úsuga David oversaw all of the CDG’s activities and directed its members to engage in extensive criminal acts, including acts of violence, mandated “strikes” or shutdowns of all business activities and civilian movement within designated regions of Colombia, retaliation against law enforcement authorities and potential witnesses, the exertion of control over drug manufacturing facilities and trafficking routes, and the exportation of cocaine in multi-ton quantities.

Court documents allege Úsuga David assumed power and territorial control over vast swaths of the Colombian coastline and personally directed members of the CDG to commit acts of violence to reinforce that power. This included violence against civilians. For example, in early 2012, following the death of Úsuga David’s brother, Juan de Dios Úsuga David (also known as “Giovanni”), in a police raid, Úsuga David ordered that a multi-day shutdown or “strike” be imposed on towns and communities within the CDG’s control. During the strike, CDG members ordered that all businesses remain closed, and that residents stay in their homes. For multiple days, the streets remained empty, as Úsuga David ordered CDG members to execute those who did not adhere to his orders.

Úsuga David also personally ordered CDG members to commit murders of specific individuals on dozens of occasions, including the murders of rival drug traffickers and members of the CDG who betrayed him or the organization. For example, Úsuga David ordered the assassinations of multiple individuals who worked for a rival drug trafficking organization run by Daniel Barrera Barrera. Úsuga David also ordered the torture and murder of a CDG member who provided information to Barrera’s organization. That individual was subsequently tortured, buried alive, exhumed, and beheaded post-mortem.

In addition, Úsuga David regularly directed CDG members to use violence, intimidation, and murder to dissuade law enforcement authorities from performing their duties and to silence potential witnesses. For example, at Úsuga David’s direction, the CDG carried out organized campaigns, referred to as “Plan Pistolas,” to kill Colombian law enforcement and military personnel using military-grade weapons, including grenades, explosives, and assault rifles. Úsuga David also offered bounties for the murder of Colombian police officers and military personnel to intimidate law enforcement authorities and prevent them from capturing him or interfering in the CDG’s business. Úsuga David’s organization made numerous attempts to assassinate individuals who were believed to be cooperating with law enforcement. For example, CDG members attempted to poison a witness with cyanide while he was imprisoned overseas and attempted to assassinate the witness’s attorney.

Úsuga David was also extensively involved in the narcotics activities that funded the CDG and enabled its power. He allegedly oversaw the CDG’s drug trafficking exports and directed a network of “debt collectors” tasked with the enforcement and collection of

taxes paid by drug trafficking organizations that operated in regions controlled by the CDG. In addition, Úsuga David controlled cocaine manufacturing facilities and used the CDG's extensive distribution network to export cocaine independently for his own personal profit.

The Defendant's Arrest and Extradition

According to court documents, for years, Úsuga David evaded capture by periodically moving through a network of rural safe houses and refraining from using a cell phone, instead relying on couriers for communication. Úsuga David was arrested on October 23, 2021, in a rural hideout in Antioquia province, Colombia, near the Colombia-Panama border, following an operation by Colombian military and law enforcement personnel involving 500 soldiers and 22 helicopters.

The extradition of Úsuga David is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

The charges in the indictment are allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's International Narcotics and Money Laundering Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Francisco J. Navarro, Gillian A. Kassner, and Tara B. McGrath are in charge of the prosecution with assistance from Paralegal Specialist Sophia Cronin.

The Defendant:

Dairo Antonio Úsuga David (also known as "Otoniel," "Mao," "Gallo" and "Mauricio-Gallo")
Age: 50
Antioquia, Colombia

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 14-CR-625 (S-4) (DLI)

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

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