

# Key dates in Colombian rebel kidnappings

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A look at key dates in the kidnapping of three American defense contractors and a Colombian politician held by Colombia's largest rebel force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Feb. 23, 2002 - French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt is kidnapped as she campaigns for president in a rebel-stronghold in southern Colombia. Her campaign chief, Clara Rojas, is abducted with her.

July 23, 2002 - A video of Betancourt and Rojas airs on Colombian television. Betancourt, dressed in what looks like a military jacket says, "I believe in the (peace negotiations) ... I continue to defend them now."

Feb. 13, 2003 - An aerial counter-drug surveillance flight goes down in the southern department of Caqueta. Aboard the single-engine Cessna are four American defense contractors: Thomas Howes, Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell and Thomas Janis. A Colombian army sergeant Luis Alcidez Cruz is also aboard. Rescue teams find Janis and Alcidez Cruz shot to death.

Feb. 24, 2003 - In a statement, the FARC claims responsibility for bringing down the plane and announces it has the three Americans, who it calls "prisoners of war."

July 2-22, 2003 - Betancourt's sister, Astrid, and husband Juan Carlos Lecompte, wait in the Brazilian town of Tabatinga for Betancourt's release. The FARC had told the family it would hand her over because of poor health, Lecompte says. There is no hand-over.

Aug. 28, 2003 - FBI officials say they are studying a video of the three Americans, recorded by a Colombian journalist. "It shows the men alive," says a U.S. official on condition of anonymity.

Aug. 30, 2003 - Colombia's Noticias Uno shows a video of Betancourt, the first images of the politician in over a year.

Oct. 8, 2003 - CBS' 60 Minutes II shows footage of the three Americans urging authorities to negotiate their release and not risk a rescue, saying they would likely die in the attempt.

Oct. 13, 2003 - The U.S. government offers a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those involved in the kidnapping and the killing of Janis.

Jan. 2, 2004 - Ricardo Palmera, better known as FARC commander "Simon Trinidad", is arrested in Quito, Ecuador, and later extradited to the U.S. to face charges of drug-trafficking and kidnapping the three Americans.

May. 2, 2006 - FARC spokesman Raul Reyes says Clara Rojas has had a baby boy after a relationship with a guerrilla.

Oct. 16, 2006 - Palmera goes on trial in Washington for conspiracy to kidnap the three Americans, but a judge declares a mistrial after the jury cannot reach a verdict.

July 9, 2007 - In a second trial, Palmera is convicted.

Aug. 16, 2007 - Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez announces he will meet with the families of hostages held by Colombia's largest rebel group and says he is willing to help mediate peace talks between the guerrillas and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe.

Sept. 25, 2007 - Relatives of the three American hostages visit Venezuela to express support for Chavez's efforts.

Nov. 8, 2007 - Chavez meets with a FARC representative in Caracas.

Nov. 21, 2007 - Colombia's government cancels Chavez's mediation role after Chavez spoke directly with the head of Colombia's army, disobeying an order from Uribe.

Nov. 30, 2007 - Colombian authorities release videos of the three Americans and Betancourt confiscated during a raid on three suspected members of the FARC's urban militias in Bogota.