

Was Betancourt's freedom bought?

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Around \$20 million was paid to secure the release of Ingrid Betancourt and 14 other hostages held by FARC rebels in Colombia, according to Swiss public radio, RSR.



French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt speaks during a news conference in Bogota July 3. The former presidential candidate was rescued by the Colombian military on Wednesday along with three Americans and 11 other hostages long held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). REUTERS/John Vizcaino

The station says the United States was behind the deal, because three FBI agents were among the hostages. Citing what it claims as a "reliable source", RSR claims cash was used to induce the FARC commander holding the hostages to change sides. According to RSR, Wednesday's elaborate military operation to free the hostages was simply a scam timed to boost the standing of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. Some observers have questioned the absence of video footage of the operation as further proof of a cover-up. Switzerland - along with France and Spain - has been negotiating for several years for the liberation of FARC hostages. Ms Betancourt, who holds dual Colombian and French citizenship, today arrived in Paris where she was met by President Nicolas Sarkozy. She thanked the French people for their support during her captivity, saying: "I owe everything to France." Ms Betancourt, a former candidate for the Colombian presidency, was kidnapped by FARC rebels in 2002 while campaigning.

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