

# Gaviria and Baker agree on war with Iraq and peace with the drug cartels

by José Restrepo

Following his Nov. 24 meeting with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, Colombian President César Gaviria Trujillo endorsed an eventual armed intervention against Iraq by the United States. At the same time, Baker gave the green light to power-sharing negotiations between the Gaviria government and Colombia's cocaine cartel, a move which, in effect, constitutes a giant step in the direction of a legalized drug trade.

President Gaviria's backing for the Bush administration's Gulf war plan followed threats of a U.S. trade blockade of Colombia, according to sources from that country's Foreign Ministry. "The pressures are intense and serious," said a source just before Baker's arrival in Bogotá. The secretary of state's visit to Colombia followed a world tour in search of support from member countries of the United Nations Security Council, of which Colombia is temporarily one.

Colombia had always argued for a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict, and was part of a group of nations that urged the "use of political force" and the testing of "positive incentives" to get Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait. According to the Foreign Ministry source, among the mechanisms under discussion was that of sending a multinational peace force to coordinate the withdrawal of Iraqi troops, and to assure the gradual or immediate withdrawal from Saudi Arabia of U.S. troops, which currently hold the status of "invitees."

However, Baker met with President Gaviria and with Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Jaramillo, and during that meeting Gaviria reversed his government's line, giving full support to U.S. adventurism in the Middle East and to the use of "whatever means are necessary" to get Iraq out of Kuwait. The joint communiqué issued following their meeting says that the United States and Colombia are in agreement on the need to "direct the actions of the international community toward achieving the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait, toward which end they would seek to act through consensus to permit the use of all means necessary to achieve those objectives."

Colombia's foreign policy is extraordinarily vulnerable to U.S. trade pressures. In exclusive statements to *EIR*, Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Jaramillo explained that the

most important aspect of Colombian foreign policy was its trade relations, and that these took priority over any principle. According to Jaramillo, Colombia's embassies worldwide will dedicate themselves to becoming lobbyists for Colombian products.

While in Colombia to drum up support for war, Secretary of State Baker also confirmed the charges of this magazine that the Bush administration has decided that Colombia should surrender itself to the cocaine trade.

## Sharing power with the narcos

The César Gaviria government, which took office in August 1990, has publicly launched power-sharing negotiations with the country's cocaine traffickers. That process is being mediated through a series of dialogues with the political godfather of the drug cartels, former President Alfonso López Michelsen, dialogues which seek to guarantee political treatment for the drug traffickers and the incorporation of the cartels into the civil, political, and economic life of the country.

In a memorandum delivered to President Gaviria on Nov. 22, former Presidents López Michelsen and Misael Pastrana Borrero informed him that the drug traffickers are prepared to surrender. Although the government now seeks to present the surrender offer as "unconditional," in fact it is the drug traffickers who have set the conditions the government must meet:

- that their "human rights" be respected;
- that they not be obliged to give testimony against their fellow traffickers;
- that they be given guarantees against extradition to countries where they may have committed other crimes;
- that they not be obliged to confess their crimes before the Colombian courts;
- that the crime of drug trafficking be considered a "collective, not individual" offense, thereby warranting political treatment as if for sedition or rebellion.

In other words, they want treatment which implies the possibility of an amnesty, such as that won by members of the narco-terrorist group, the M-19.

## Gaviria complies, Baker gives the nod

Through Justice Minister Jaime Giraldo Angel, President Gaviria answered the petition of the Extraditables, as the drug traffickers like to call themselves. In his public response, Giraldo said that the government accepts all the conditions of the supposed “unconditional” surrender of the drug traffickers. The only condition not yet formally approved is that of extending political treatment to the cartel members.

Asked to comment on these negotiations in a press conference given after his meeting with Gaviria, Baker said that this was an internal matter to Colombia, “which falls to the competence of the Colombian government.” Baker’s message was unmistakable, and by no means limited to Colombia: We want war with Iraq and peace with the drug traffickers.

This State Department blessing to Colombia’s narco-negotiations is no last-minute concession, but rather an official nod to something which the State Department itself had hatched long before. Sources at the Justice Ministry have told *EIR* that Gaviria’s current strategy toward the drug traffickers is actually that which the State Department recommended, in the form of “suggesting” that judicial instruments like those used in the U.S.—for example, plea bargaining—be adopted. Through this mechanism, for example, the criminal can admit his guilt as a bargaining chip in negotiating his sentence with judge and jury.

Following the U.S. model, Gaviria began his presidency by issuing Decree 2047, which permits the drug traffickers to “surrender themselves” to the authorities if they admit to but *one* of the crimes for which they are charged; the prisoner would then benefit from a reduction in penalty and a guarantee against extradition to the United States.

On Nov. 20, Justice Minister Giraldo told a press conference that special judges would have to define before Jan. 16, 1991 the legal status of properties, especially homes and ranches, seized during anti-drug raids, since these judges “don’t know what to do with them.” Giraldo added that if it could not be proven that those properties were involved with the drug trade or with illegal gain, they would have to be returned to whoever had legal claim to them. Giraldo predicted that the majority of the properties would be returned to their owners.

At the same time, according to Bogotá sources, Development Minister Ernesto Samper Pizano—Colombia’s leading proponent of drug legalization—has been negotiating with the traffickers for the return of their drug money to Colombia. Another amnesty, perhaps? Such negotiations are entirely coherent with Foreign Minister Jaramillo’s assertion that “trade relations” took priority over principles.

## Cartels hold dual power

But the most telling proof that what is going on is not dialogue, but power-sharing negotiations with the traffickers, is the recent firing of Col. Oscar Eduardo Peláez Carmo-

na from his post as head of the Judicial Investigations Department of the National Police (DIJIN). He has been accused in the communiqués of the Extraditables of violating their human rights. Colonel Peláez’s removal suggests that the drug traffickers are already exercising political power in the country. Colonel Peláez has been assigned as “police attaché” to the Colombian embassy in Washington.

According to the Bogotá daily *El Espectador* of Nov. 21, Colonel Peláez did not go to the Colombian embassy in London, as originally planned, because Scotland Yard insisted it was impossible to guarantee the officer’s security against the multitude of serious threats against his life.

And, if there were any doubts as to the extent of power actually wielded by the drug traffickers, the Colombian press reported that same day that Attorney General Alfonso Gómez Méndez has begun an investigation into the National Police, in particular the DIJIN and the narcotics police, because both agencies were supposedly violating the human rights of the traffickers. Gómez Méndez confirmed that he had ordered the investigation on the basis of “accusations” contained in the communiqués of the Extraditables!

But not all is yet rotten in the state of Colombia. On Nov. 26, a column appeared in the anti-drug daily *El Espectador*, written by Ana María Busquets de Cano, widow of the newspaper’s director Guillermo Cano, who was assassinated by the Extraditables in 1988. Entitled “Palace nightmares,” the column makes a powerful reference to the victims, both prominent public figures and anonymous citizens, of the drug cartels’ assassination teams:

“It had been difficult to get them to sleep, and they had just begun to dream when they heard the sounds of a huge crowd. [The President’s children] María de la Paz and Simón arose terrified from their beds and raced through the [presidential] palace corridors in search of help. They found their father, who together with the justice minister, ran to them upon hearing the children’s screams.

“ ‘What’s the matter?’ they asked.

“ ‘We heard strange noises, a murmuring. We looked everywhere and suddenly saw a huge gathering, half alive, half ethereal, calm and silent, serious and solemn. They came through the corridors and patios and rooms and stairs; it wasn’t easy to distinguish faces, but little by little they could be seen: There was Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Guillermo Cano, Luis Carlos Galán. . . . All the passengers of the Avianca airliner.

“ ‘The demonstration went on and on, but we couldn’t see the faces of those behind. . . .

“ ‘Don’t worry,’ said the President. ‘They are unarmed, they demand nothing; they are enjoying their divine, not human, rights. You have nothing to fear. Go back to bed and sleep soundly.’ And without blushing, the President and his minister turned around and returned to their meeting with the country’s leading personalities.”