

Terror haunts Colombia as Gaviria 'dialogues'

by Andrea Olivieri

During the past three months in Colombia, the same three months in which narco-terrorism supposedly ground to a halt following the surrender of the Medellín Cartel's top drug lords, there has been an average of three terrorist attacks and more than eight victims—dead and wounded—per day. Seizures of entire towns, blockades of railroads and highways, bombings of fuel and energy infrastructure, transportation facilities, airports, and radar installations, and ambushes, kidnappings, and assassinations have plunged this violence-wracked nation into new depths of terror as the 15,000-man narco-terrorist army of the so-called National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNG) takes up where its cocaine-smuggling comrades supposedly left off.

In an effort to preserve his image as the "President of peace," Colombian head of state César Gaviria ordered an unprecedented 72-hour *unilateral* cease-fire July 17 in a half-dozen terrorist-infested regions of the country, to permit CNG negotiators who have been engaged in "peace talks" with his government, to safely return to those zones to "consult with their comrades."

Guerrilla participation in the peace talks, which had been ongoing since June 3 in Caracas, Venezuela under the sponsorship of the scandal-rocked Carlos Andrés Pérez government, came to an abrupt halt when it was learned that the Colombian military, in fulfillment of its duty, was refusing to abandon anti-subversive operations in those regions. The standoff between the Gaviria government and the CNG delegates lasted for weeks, while the CNG's narco-terrorist army rampaged nationwide.

Between June 3 and July 9, the CNG dynamited 18 oil installations, destroyed 11 electrical energy towers, 11 bridges, and 4 communications towers, carried out 6 assaults on towns, 15 assaults on police stations, 9 ambushes of military or police squads, and conducted a dozen other terrorist attacks. Defense Minister Oscar Botero Restrepo wrote in the Armed Forces' daily that, for the CNG, "only terror counts as a tactic to intimidate the community and as a strategy to coerce the state." Citizens' protests against continued dialogue with these terrorists began to be raised.

It thus came as a shock to Colombians when Gaviria announced that his government's commitment to a negotiated peace with the CNG stood firm. He explained that, despite the unrelenting terrorism, the CNG "has not violated any prior agreement to a cease-fire at the start of the dialogues,

as a condition for those dialogues."

On July 9, the Colombian Foreign Ministry revealed that Gaviria had met that day in Bogotá with military commanders of El Salvador's FMLN rebel forces. Also that day, presidential security adviser Rafael Pardo Rueda disclosed that the government has been consulting with Cuba's Fidel Castro for nearly a year on the "peace process" in Colombia. On July 13, Gaviria's negotiator Jesús Antonio Bejarano pledged, "The government will persist on the path of dialogue."

Armed Forces under attack

At the same time, the Armed Forces came under renewed attack for "standing in the way" of a peaceful Colombia. Veteran guerrilla commander Manuel Marulanda Velez, a.k.a. "Sureshot," charged July 10 that the Army's military operations in guerrilla-occupied zones had forced a "counter-offensive" by the rebels at a moment when "we are practically on the threshold of a peace treaty." Fellow terrorist Manuel Pérez declared, "With or without the Colombian government's consent, the Army unleashed that offensive, and we will respond militarily." Said a CNG negotiator, "The peace scheme will not work unless the government renounces the military option."

The campaign then escalated. Said CNG commander Francisco Galán, regarding the recently concluded Constituent Assembly which dissolved the national Congress and opened the corridors of political power to amnestied narco-terrorists: "It has positive aspects. It provides broader opportunities for politics, but if the Armed Forces do not democratize, peace will not come to Colombia. The Constituent Assembly did not resolve the root problem" of military reform.

On July 24, the *Christian Science Monitor* published a piece on Gaviria's crusade for "peace" in Colombia, including a quote from "Harvard-trained economist and Bogotá city councilwoman" Clara López: "We still have a dirty war going on." The *Monitor* explains that López is convinced the killing will continue because "constitutional reform did not address military reform." The paper fails to mention that López is a prominent member of the Colombian Communist Party, or that she is the niece of former President Alfonso López Michelsen, a key architect of Gaviria's "peace campaign." The paper concludes with a quote from Gaviria: "We still have a lot of important goals to achieve. The most important of all, of course, is the final settlement with the guerrillas."

Alfonso Cano Isaza, editor of the anti-government daily *El Espectador*, sarcastically commented in a July 14 editorial: "It would appear that in our country, some crimes—the most execrable, to be sure, such as kidnaping, assassination, and terrorism—stop being crimes out of a zeal for peace. . . . And should the Armed Forces of Colombia persist in fulfilling their pledge to defend the life, honor, and goods of the citizenry, they are sabotaging the peace process and violating human rights."