

Andean Report by José Restrepo

Drug cartel threatens 'superbomb'

Will Colombia's Gaviria yield to Escobar's newest "surrender" campaign, or will he stand by his pledge?

More narco-terrorist attacks with car bombs, such as a 10,000-kilo "superbomb" against the Attorney General's office or against some national newspaper, is the latest threat by fugitive drug lord Pablo Escobar Gaviria against the capital city of Bogotá, its inhabitants, and the Colombian government.

The threat was made by anonymous callers to the media on Feb. 15, immediately after two car bombs exploded in the heavily trafficked commercial center of the city. The callers claimed to represent Escobar's criminal Medellín Cartel. The bombings caused the deaths of five people, and injured more than 200 others. They also caused incalculable material damage, and triggered total social panic.

Escobar's spokesmen declared that the terror campaign would only be suspended if the government agreed to the following surrender terms: 1) that Escobar and his associates receive full pardon or amnesty for any and all crimes they have committed; 2) that all ongoing military and police operations aimed at his capture be suspended; 3) that all the directors of the National Police force be changed because, according to Escobar, they have violated the human rights of the drug traffickers; 4) that the state commit itself to investigating and pursuing the so-called Cali Cartel, criminal rivals of Escobar's own organization, and offer significant rewards for capture of the Cali Cartel leaders.

"Only after the government complies with these conditions will we be prepared to hold dialogue with the

government," stated one of the anonymous spokesmen.

"The wave of terrorism which the country is suffering, is nothing but a continuation of the drug traffickers' violent efforts to force the government and the country to submit to its will," declared Enrique Parejo González, former Colombian justice minister and one of the country's few surviving heroes of the anti-drug war. Parejo, who is currently a presidential pre-candidate of the ruling Liberal Party, told the daily *El Espectador*, "They clearly hope that the government will again negotiate the law with them and that it will again surrender to them," as occurred two years earlier when the government even rammed through a change in the Constitution to prohibit extradition, a key demand of the traffickers.

Despite the threats, the Gaviria government does not appear willing to submit once more to the humiliation and international disgrace it suffered when Escobar fled his personal posh jail last year. "The government reiterates its firmest decision to confront these criminal organizations, and calls upon all Colombians not to yield," states an official government communiqué issued after the Feb. 15 bombings.

However, the daily *La Prensa* and the radio and television news programs show no inclination to heed the government's appeal, and have already begun a furious campaign to force Gen. Oscar Peláez Carmona, commander of the Bogotá police force, to resign, thereby fulfilling one of Escobar's conditions.

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Four years ago, General Peláez Carmona was director of the investigations division (SIJIN) of the national police. His operations against the cartels were so effective that one of Escobar's first demands during his late-1990 and early-1991 surrender negotiations with the government was that Peláez be retired from the job. The government yielded, and sent the general out of the country to a diplomatic post. After Escobar engineered his July 1992 prison walkout, Peláez was named Bogotá police director.

The electronic media and *La Prensa* nonetheless now argue that the terrorism slamming Bogotá is a direct result of Peláez's position as police chief. Their astounding argument is that, were Bogotá to choose a police chief less odious to Pablo Escobar (that is, either bought by the cartel or at least negligent in his law enforcement duties), the city would not be terrorized, but would be left in peace!

Television's QAP news show went so far as to ask Peláez if Escobar's claim that the police department "belongs to the Cali Cartel" were true. Other news shows have unleashed a flood of accusations against General Peláez, charging negligence in protecting the city and so forth. The campaign is, not surprisingly, strikingly similar to the mudslinging campaign that Escobar orchestrated against Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, just prior to his 1984 assassination.

Instead of dancing to Escobar's tune, these news services would better serve the public interest by asking why Escobar's wife, children, and nephews were found in possession of *valid* U.S. visas, a fact discovered when they recently tried (unsuccessfully) to abandon Colombia for the United States. An embarrassed U.S. State Department was forced by the revelation to revoke the visas.