

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

Samper's ship is sinking

The Colombian President's list of supporters has shrunk to the narcos, the terrorists, and their international allies.

The support base for Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano has now dwindled to a chosen few: the cocaine- and heroin-trafficking Cali Cartel, the Colombian Communist Party, and the international human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Samper's desperate efforts to pull together a show of unity around his corrupt administration in the aftermath of the Nov. 2 assassination of his political opponent Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, have fallen flat, as the country's more savvy political forces smell which way the wind is blowing.

Thus, when Samper called for a "national pact of principle" just after Gómez's murder, former Conservative Party Presidential candidate Andrés Pastrana held a two-hour meeting with Samper, after which he told the press that there could be no pact until the charges of narco-corruption against Samper were cleared up. He demanded that an impartial "truth commission" be formed, because the congressional "Accusations Committee," currently charged with the investigation, has itself been thoroughly corrupted.

Simultaneously, Samper's development minister, Daniel Mazuera Gómez, announced his resignation from the government, declaring that his action "is the result of a process of reflection caused by the personal tragedy I feel from Alvaro Gómez's assassination." Mazuera is the murdered politician's nephew.

The Colombian Communist Party (PCC), however, has leapt to Samper's defense, charging a conspiracy to topple Samper's government through a military coup. Included in that conspiracy, says the PCC, are the

followers of Alvaro Gómez, the daily *El Tiempo*, and U.S. Ambassador Myles Frechette—precisely the charges made by Samper's defense attorney, Antonio Cancino.

Prosecutor General Alfonso Valdivieso put another nail in Samper's political coffin, when he announced that the testimony on Samper's personal corruption given by the President's former campaign treasurer, Santiago Medina, had been confirmed through other sources. To reward Medina for his collaboration, and to improve his personal security, Valdivieso recommended the imprisoned Medina be moved to house arrest, bringing howls of protest from Samper's defense lawyer and others.

Despite various diplomatic efforts by Samper, in hopes of winning a reprieve from the Clinton administration, Colombia's narco-President continues to be rebuffed. The latest incident occurred when Assistant Secretary of State for Narcotics Affairs Robert Gelbard told the U.S. Congress that Samper's government only succeeded in capturing the cocaine cartel bosses after U.S. certification for a serious anti-drug effort was temporarily withheld. Samper's response: "Gelbard is a subordinate. I have Clinton's support."

On Nov. 3, responding to a question from *EIR*, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns insisted: "When Bob Gelbard testifies, the Colombian government had better listen very carefully to that testimony, because he is speaking for this government." He added, "Anyone who knows Bob Gelbard, would never make such a comment."

A few days later, the *Miami Herald* published an article slamming Samper for having taken millions from the Cali Cartel in the 1982, 1983, and 1990 electoral campaigns, in exchange for promises to legalize drugs and eliminate Colombia's extradition treaty. Samper's defense attorney responded hysterically that the *Herald's* accusations came from the Clinton administration and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

At least some of Colombia's political elites are aware that, as weak as the Samper government is, the country will disintegrate into chaos and terrorism unless some semblance of order is imposed. Respected *El Tiempo* editor Rafael Santos penned a column on Nov. 7 urging a radical reform of the 1991 Constitution (which bans extradition), and the revival of military justice for crimes including terrorism, kidnapping, and drug trafficking. One week later, José Miguel Vivanco, director of Human Rights Watch, an NGO, met with Samper to urge that Colombia's military justice code be rewritten to satisfy "international requirements," arguing that even Samper's proposed reforms of that code did not go far enough to eliminate it as a "source of impunity in Colombia." Samper's justice minister has rejected calls for restoring extradition.

As the political situation in the country deteriorates, Samper will try to cling to power by any and all means, including his own ability to corrupt. The "Accusations Committee" must submit its recommendation to the Senate shortly. It can either clear Samper, or recommend impeachment proceedings and/or a criminal trial of the President by the Supreme Court. Most Colombians believe that Samper has bought the committee, but its ruling—either way—will likely mark a turning point for Colombia.