

London's 'peace with terrorism' policy moves forward in Colombia

by Valerie Rush

Colombia's FARC and ELN narco-terrorist armies are in a new phase of open warfare against that nation. Drawing on vast resources derived from their active involvement in Colombia's cocaine and heroin trade, their plan is to seize control over entire chunks of Colombian territory, and ultimately to seize total political power. Their "balkanization" strategy has scored significant successes over the last few weeks:

- In the northwest Urabá region, near Panama, entire towns are being forcibly evacuated by heavily armed contingents of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), causing floods of desperate and starving refugees, and destabilizing what little government presence there is in the region.

- On the northeast border with Venezuela, the National Liberation Army (ELN) is escalating its bloody cross-border raids against Venezuelan Army posts, cattle ranches, and towns, resulting in numerous deaths, severe diplomatic tensions between the two countries, and even proposals for a UN "blue helmet" force to be deployed there.

- Terrorist inmates in Colombia's penitentiary system have been instructed to provoke bloody riots in the country's prisons, leading to Army deployments that are depleting troops in the field.

- The FARC still holds hostage at least 70 young soldiers kidnapped last August, while demanding that the Army demilitarize large swathes of land in Colombia's south, as the price for beginning to negotiate their release.

- The FARC continues to assassinate farmers and businessmen who refuse to pay them "war taxes," mayors and city councilmen who refuse to be bought, peasants who don't want to grow coca for the cocaine trade, and children who resist forced recruitment to "the revolutionary cause." The FARC has also now adopted the Medellín drug cartel's tactic of using car-bombs to terrorize entire towns into submission.

An 'agenda' for surrender

On April 11, the Samper Pizano government used the occasion of the swearing-in of its fourth civilian defense minister, Gilberto Echeverri Mejía, to release an eight-point "agenda for peace," a document which constitutes little more

than a surrender offer to the FARC and ELN. Among other things, the document calls for recognizing the "political nature of the armed conflict and of the guerrilla organizations," which de facto grants the terrorists their long-standing demand to be recognized as "belligerents" under the Geneva Convention's Protocol II. No longer viewed as criminals, this new status would put the narco-terrorists on an equal legal footing with the nation's military and police forces.

The document further insists that the drug-running FARC and ELN have "legitimate political aspirations that should ultimately be accommodated as part of a broader Colombian democracy." It is not the intention of the government, the statement reads, to "either object to the political model of the guerrillas or to achieve their surrender through negotiations." Rather, the guerrillas are invited to "freely submit their plans and programs to national scrutiny, so that they can legitimately aspire to become a true alternative for power, without the use of arms."

President Samper intends to hold a national referendum on his "agenda for peace," simultaneous with next October's gubernatorial elections, with the intention of giving his appeasement policy a veneer of popular support. The Samper government was elected to office with millions of dollars from the same drug cartels that are associated with the FARC and ELN.

The FARC, however, rejected Samper's offers out of hand, seeing no good reason to move from the victorious battlefield to a negotiating table—at least for now. On April 13, FARC chieftain Raúl Reyes announced to the press from his hideout in Costa Rica that his movement had no interest in talking peace with "an illegitimate government" like Samper's. The FARC's above-ground front, the Colombian Communist Party, was more specific in an April 9 editorial in its weekly *Voz*: "Peace is impossible if the Armed Forces are headed by a person who pushes confrontation and war. . . . General Harold Bedoya Pizarro must go. . . . There is no alternative."

Bedoya is Colombia's Armed Forces commander, and the country's leading opponent of Samper's surrender policy. He has already publicly stated that the military will never partici-

pate in peace talks with the narco-terrorists. However, other important sectors of Colombia are falling into line behind Samper's "peace agenda"—including the Catholic Church, elements of the political elite, the labor movement, and much of the business community. The leading pro-government daily *El Tiempo* editorially urged on April 6 for the government to "unify its position" behind the peace plan, that is, to dump General Bedoya.

A mouthpiece for London

But even more significant than this internal capitulation, is the fact that the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette has publicly stated that both the United States and Europe support the Samper government's new peace proposal. With such a shocking endorsement, Frechette is acting as a de facto spokesman for the policy of London on drugs and on Colombia. It is a matter of public record that the British House of Lords openly supported Samper's corrupt narco-dictatorship during a debate in April 1996, during which the Clinton administration was chastized for decertifying the Colombian government. Since that time, the British government has greatly expanded its commercial ties with Colombia, and its mouthpieces have repeatedly denounced U.S. pressures on Samper to crack down on drugs and terrorism.

London, of course, is the world's leading center for harboring international terrorists. Indeed, the British House of Commons held a debate in January and February of this year, on proposed legislation that would have banned individuals residing in Britain, from plotting and conducting terrorist operations overseas. That bill never got out of committee. Inside Colombia, the British have been pushing hard for Samper's "peace agenda," including drawing international attention to the Urabá refugee crisis, with an \$80,000 "humanitarian donation" from the British Embassy, and an appeal for a negotiated "solution to the violence." British Petroleum is similarly pressuring for peace talks, by threatening to pull out of its oil and gas projects in Colombia if the government doesn't resolve the "insecurity" problem in the country.

Does Frechette speak for Clinton policy toward Colombia? In late February, Clinton decertified the Samper government for a second year in a row, because of its continued alliance with the drug cartels. Ambassador Frechette, on the other hand, lobbied against that decision.

The Clinton administration and its spokesmen—such as National Drug Control Policy Director Gen. Barry McCaffrey—have repeatedly stated that the United States does not endorse negotiations with drug-runners, under any circumstances. Ambassador Frechette, however, has repeatedly employed a cheap lawyers' semantic argument that the FARC and the ELN aren't really "drug cartels," since some of their ranks may be involved in some aspects of the drug trade, but not all of their fronts handle all aspects of the trade. Thus, concludes Frechette, the FARC and ELN are

not a full-fledged cartel, and it is therefore okay to negotiate with them.

Exactly this issue was raised at the State Department press briefing on April 17, by the well-known Colombian anti-drug activist Max Londoño—a longtime LaRouche associate and frequent contributor to *EIR*, who was visiting Washington at the time. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns was asked by Londoño, how Ambassador Frechette could endorse Samper's proposed talks with the narco-terrorists, a position totally at odds with President Clinton's policy of not negotiating with drug-runners. "I mean, it's clear that the British policy has been to endorse the Samper government," Londoño told Burns, "but it's not the case with the Clinton administration."

In response, Burns praised Londoño's anti-drug activities, completely avoided his question about the peace talks, but then gave full backing to Ambassador Frechette, whom he described as "an outstanding American ambassador in Bogotá, and he is fully in line with our policies, with General McCaffrey's policies, and those of the President on this issue."

General Bedoya speaks out

The leading figure in Colombia still standing in opposition to Samper's "peace in our time" approach (others have been assassinated), is Armed Forces Commander Gen. Harold Bedoya. Bedoya has repeatedly clashed with Samper and his corrupt minions in his efforts to preserve the Colombian Armed Forces from Samper's drastic budget cuts, attacks on the military's legal and penal jurisdiction, and anti-military witch-hunts in the name of "human rights." In an April 3 address to the Colombian congress, Bedoya insisted: "The military also wants peace, but one must win peace by extirpating evil. . . . To have peace, we must do away with the drug trade, which is like a cancer. . . . To win the peace, one must make war against terrorism."

In a major April 1 address at the Superior War School in Bogotá (excerpted below), Bedoya warned that, unless the Armed Forces were given sufficient latitude to carry out their constitutional mission of defending the nation, especially while in the throes of internal war, Colombia would soon succumb to "the macabre alliance between the drug trade and subversion." He denounced the government's refusal to enact a serious national defense policy, and warned that the infiltration of the Colombian justice system by narco-terrorists was undermining the very foundations of democracy in the country.

Bedoya argued the need to defend the military justice system from the "human rights" lobbies, who are functioning as the narco-terrorists' mouthpieces, both at home and abroad. "It is indispensable that the armed institution be able to recover its freedom of action, through respect for its disciplinary jurisdiction and through maintenance of military criminal jus-

tice. . . .” Finally, General Bedoya proposed that Congress reauthorize the establishment of “national militias” that would extend the Armed Forces’ defense capability. “The human rights organizations cannot ask the [Colombian] community to allow itself to be assassinated with impunity. If the legitimate defense of the individual is founded in natural law, then with even greater reason is legitimate collective defense.”

Documentation

General Bedoya upholds sovereignty of the nation

The following are excerpts from an April 1 speech by Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro, Colombian Armed Forces Commander and acting defense minister, at the “Topic: Colombia” seminar series, sponsored by the Superior War College. The title of his speech is, “Toward an Integral Security and National Defense Policy.” Subheads have been added.

We are all aware that the threats to the nation are growing more insolent and ferocious. Especially the proven and macabre alliance between the drug trade and subversion, which is gaining a barbarous and uncommonly cruel strength through indiscriminate terrorism, with which it once again seeks to intimidate the state, to terrify and demoralize society. . . .

Society and the Colombian state are in a profound crisis, the result of a confluence of many factors of decomposition. We cannot continue to rely on simplistic and impassioned interpretations. Nor can we allow the Public Forces to be falsely charged, as some are doing, with a lack of professionalism, a lack of ability to confront the narco-guerrilla, a lack of adequate military strategy, or its members denounced as the principal violators of human rights, to justify a reform of the military supposedly to correct such offenses. The Armed Forces and police are respectable institutions, working with dedication, sacrifice, and courage on the difficult task of stopping the violence, in all forms. . . .

As is formally consecrated in our National Constitution in its preamble and its Article 2, the essential goals of the state [are]: “Defend national independence, maintain territorial integrity, and assure peaceful coexistence and a just order.” . . . I don’t understand how this can be ignored in practice by the Colombian state. . . . At this moment, for example, despite the fact that Colombia is one of the countries of the world most affected by factors of insecurity, there is no modern and

realistic national defense law. That is because there are so many . . . criteria within the state itself, that efforts to bring about such a legal framework, which would define and orient all the various state bodies responsible for security, have been in vain. . . .

Justice: the foundation for democracy

Another priority issue pertaining to security is that of justice. As long as criminals—whether they be drug traffickers or common criminals—do not expect to be punished, impunity will lead them to increase their criminal activities. This is precisely what is happening in Colombia, where the Public Force . . . captures many subversives *in flagrante*, and hands over innumerable such criminals to the justice system. . . . But it would appear that our probatory system was designed to protect the criminals, who are released for “lack of evidence.” . . .

I believe that justice must be the foundation for democracy, and one of the major purposes of the social contract. A society is more democratic, to the extent that individuals enjoy their freedom as a function of the rights of all others, from which coexistence and peace are derived. Democracy is not libertinism, nor anarchy; it is freedom and order. . . . A state which has justice is a strong and democratic state. . . . A state without justice is an empire of chaos, of violence, of tyranny of the strongest, as is happening in Colombia, which, according to the statistics, is one of the countries with the highest criminal and violence indices in the world. . . .

In Colombia, there are narco-criminals because there is impunity, there are criminals of all stripes because of impunity, there is corruption of the public administration because there is impunity. The state and society are taking too long to launch a great crusade against impunity . . . [which should include] sending to common jails those white collar criminals who today sit contentedly in their privileged detention centers, representing a detestable form of “classist justice.” . . .

It is also necessary to cleanse the justice system of the politicization which has managed to infiltrate various courts . . . with the clear intent of destabilizing the state through the undermining of justice. This is the strategy of narco-subversion. . . . Those who battle a weak state employ legal strategies to undermine the established public order. Because in this way, the subversives can count on an inversion of the value system, and thus can easily go from being the accused to the accuser. It is a matter of shattering the authority of the state, and of radically changing the rules of the judicial game, so that the criminal action becomes secondary, and the main objective that emerges is a total or partial challenge to the established public order. Its first victims are those who should be its defenders.

This is how Colombian narco-terrorists have gone from accused to accuser, successfully evading the military penal justice once applied to them with rigor, and today seeking

to do away with military justice altogether, while taking up the banner of human rights to put in the dock those uniformed men and women who have courageously defended the state and society. This is a farce which public opinion has already seen through, but which in the international arena has yielded its effect in Europe and the United States, where their mouthpieces do not cease to demand sanctions against our country.

Most serious is that some judicial officials, influenced by these strategies—whether by threat, by personal interest, by ingenuousness, or ignorance of the situation—have released narco-subversives, while at the same time they arrest and try to convict members of the Public Force. . . . In the face of this criminal offensive against the judiciary, the Public Force is completely defenseless. They are trying to do the same thing, by eliminating military justice, and the universal principle of due obedience. . . .

Military penal justice has as its essential purpose, to provide the state with a legitimate, monolithic, disciplined, and efficient armed organization, as guarantor of its own existence. . . . Military life molds the personality of the soldier toward a predisposition to sacrifice, to command, and to obey under the strictest discipline. . . . Knowledge of these conditions of military life, unfamiliar to the average citizen, is fundamental to be able to judge military personnel who commit service-related crimes, especially in a state like Colombia, martyred by the permanent and fierce internal war declared against it by narco-subversion.

Military penal justice is a universal institution, intended to preserve justice. . . . This is contained within Article 221 of the National Constitution, under the condition that the crime is committed by a soldier in active service, and that said crime is service-related. . . .

None of this means that we are proposing the disappearance of state control over military actions; rather, simply, that the disciplinary attributes of the commanders must be respected. Neither does this imply that ordinary penal jurisdiction be ignored, when the crimes committed by members of the Public Force have nothing to do with military service. . . . It is indispensable that the armed institution be able to recover its freedom of action, through respect for its disciplinary jurisdiction and maintenance of military penal justice. . . .

We live in a democratic, if not perfect, system . . . where the laws are designed for the protection of the human rights of Colombia's inhabitants by civilian and military authorities, an inescapable duty. That is why, when someone invested with authority violates those rights, it is done individually, in an isolated manner, without involving state, government, or military policies. But the protectors or sympathizers of narco-subversion say the opposite, and take advantage of any isolated deed to generalize it. It is shocking that requests to the courts by military commanders for search warrants and judicial authorizations to conduct other operations, have been leaked to the subversives, and used by them to bring outrageous accusations against military and police personnel. Such

is the case with the book, published in Belgium, entitled *State Terrorism*.

Need for improved intelligence

Another priority security matter is improving state intelligence. . . . With skilled, technical, and highly efficient instruments of intelligence, the financial infrastructure of narco-subversion can be attacked. . . . Otherwise, this threat will make the country unlivable, because, as we have warned, the resources of subversion in cohabitation with the drug trade, are immense. They maintain a financial infrastructure under the protection of innocuous and permissive laws, with laughable penalties that only serve to give the criminals cause to laugh at the state, to blackmail its judges, or to give themselves advantages.

These enemies of the fatherland can easily go abroad to buy weapons, explosives, and ammunition of any caliber, to acquire campaign material, to propagandize internationally, to maintain a "parallel justice system," and to acquire highly efficient communications equipment. . . . It is critical that the committees which trace the finances of the narco-guerrillas have maximum effectiveness, such that appropriate legislation should be passed to allow for the detection, tracing, and seizure of financial instruments and bank funds, property and assets that subversion manages through its front men. . . .

As the simultaneous presence of the Public Force in all corners of national territory is impossible, the community should collaborate with it, especially where it is under siege. The Convivir are appropriate organizations to supplement the information of the state, and to guarantee the very life of the community, when there is no other legal means to do so. But the actions of Convivir should be exclusively defensive. The experience of other countries shows us, without objection, that where the civilian population is defensively organized, the armed bands cannot attack, and end up either surrendering or entering into dialogue and coexistence. That is why Colombia's Convivir are under attack with such terrorist virulence.

The Colombian state is under constant assault, and Colombian society is subjected to every kind of abuse and cruelty, without mercy or moral reserve. The human rights organizations cannot ask the [Colombian] community to allow itself to be assassinated with impunity. If the legitimate defense of the individual is founded in natural law, then with even greater reason is legitimate collective defense. . . .

Therefore, it is appropriate that our legislators contemplate the possibility of reestablishing in the Constitution [the concept of] the national militia. These are the most democratic expression of the political community, since they are organizations of society in its own defense, in which its members, without losing their civilian nature, become collaborators of the Public Force in purely preventive and defensive tasks, such as early alarm, control, and vigilance of vitally critical areas for the community, and also socio-economic development works. . . .