

Will Washington wake up to narco-terror threat in Colombia?

by Gretchen Small

Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.), director of the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy, delivered a stark warning in a July 16 press conference in Washington, D.C. An "enormous internal attack on Colombian democracy . . . fueled, in large part, by the production of cocaine and heroin," has brought Colombia to a situation of "a near emergency," he said. The three main drug-linked forces warring against Colombia, McCaffrey explained, are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the paramilitaries. "U.S. support for Colombia is inadequate. There should be no closed door to any Colombian request," he added.

Standing at his side were Colombian Defense Minister Luis Fernando Ramírez and Armed Forces Commander Gen. Fernando Tapias, who had come to Washington to present a request for \$500 million in U.S. assistance, including military equipment, over the next two years. Several U.S. newspapers reported the next day that General McCaffrey sent a letter and memorandum to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright later in the day, requesting that the United States provide even more resources to Colombia and its neighbors, totalling some \$1 billion in emergency supplemental assistance, in order to help Colombia fight—and win—its war for national survival.

McCaffrey's memorandum reportedly specified that the "silly" distinction often made between the drug traffickers and the guerrillas, and which has been used to justify restrictions that U.S. aid can only be used to hit the first, and not the latter, should be dropped. "This is a criminal attack on Colombian democracy fueled largely by the production of cocaine and heroin," he was quoted as saying, and "the United States has an obligation to support the Colombian government as it attempts to reassert democratic control over its drug-

producing regions." In a most controversial statement, McCaffrey was reported to have questioned the continued commitment to a peace process with narco-insurgents, which he noted was, in any case, "faltering." This marks a direct hit at the U.S. State Department, which remains as fervently wedded to "peace" negotiations with the FARC, as does the Colombia government of Andrés Pastrana.

Ten days later, speaking from Bogotá, where he paid a two-day visit accompanied by a high-level delegation of other U.S. anti-drug officials, General McCaffrey continued sounding the alarm. "There's 240,000 police and army and 37 million people facing savage attack from 25,000 internal enemies funded by hundreds of millions of dollars in drug money. . . . It's a serious emergency situation. . . . A situation where there are nationwide offensives killing hundreds of people, and with a million internal refugees, more than in Kosovo, is a situation of incredible pain," he said. Drug production in Colombia has grown far worse in the last few years, and when a new satellite photography plan is completed over the coming months, it will be shown that the situation has worsened, he told a meeting of Colombian businessmen.

McCaffrey reiterated that, although the debate over this will probably continue, the connection between the drug criminals and the FARC, ELN, and paramilitaries is "undeniable." He specified that perhaps as many as two-thirds of FARC units "benefit financially from an association with drug criminal organizations by either guarding the crops, transporting the product, or in some cases actually producing HCl," the psychoactive agent in cocaine. From their association with the drug trade, these three forces have, in some cases, "doubled the pay scale of a Colombian infantry battalion and tripled the number of automatic weapons of a Colombian Army



Colombian President Andrés Pastrana (foreground, second from right) tours an area attacked by the FARC narco-terrorists, July 15, 1999. There is no "peace process" in Colombia, but a war for national survival.

battalion," he pointed out. The increase in drug production in Colombia has occurred, by and large, in the areas under the control of these "criminal forces," he emphasized, and he said that, therefore, the Colombian government must regain control over these areas to stop the surging drug production in Colombia. This, he stated, requires U.S. assistance.

So, 'peace' with drug traffickers?

But when it came to discussing the question of *how* to address the crisis, McCaffrey punted: He could only give his commitment that a serious debate would take place in Washington over if, and how much to increase assistance to Colombia. Narco-terrorism exists, but "the solutions are more complex," he said. McCaffrey reaffirmed the official State Department policy tag, that the United States maintains "a fundamental commitment" to President Andrés Pastrana and Pastrana's policy of negotiating a peace with the very guerrillas whom McCaffrey had identified as creating an international "emergency."

The glaring contradiction between reality and the United States' "peace" policy led Radionet journalist Carlos Barragán to ask McCaffrey at a July 26 press conference at the Colombian Ministry of Defense in Bogotá: "Would the U.S. government be committed to support a peace process with a group of drug traffickers?"

Something had happened between McCaffrey's July 16 letter to Secretary Albright, and his tortured defense of an untenable peace process while in Bogotá only ten days later. That something was that President Bill Clinton had, suicidally, issued a public statement which came down squarely on the side of negotiations with the narco-terrorists. In his July

21 press conference, President Clinton repeated the nostrum that Colombia is suffering from "decades of civil war and violence," and the "civil conflict" must be ended first, for Colombia to be able to go about the business of freeing itself from the drug traffickers. Clinton went so far as to state that it is in U.S. national security interest to do what it can to ensure the peace process goes forward.

In the same days, he sent a personal letter to President Pastrana, urging him to stand firm against pressure to cancel the peace process.

The battle raging in Washington over the Colombian crisis and its causes, is mirrored in Bogotá, but with even greater intensity. The FARC's unprecedented national offensive on July 7-12, launched from the giant demilitarized zone (DMZ) which President Pastrana's government had handed over to FARC control, provoked an enormous national backlash against the government's peace policy. Pastrana's respected Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo and 150 high-ranking military officers had already tendered their resignations to Pastrana in May, in protest over precisely the FARC's innumerable violations of the Colombian Constitution in the DMZ, including driving out the opposition, building up its forces, the forced recruitment of children to its ranks, and so on. Pastrana survived that crisis, by promising that what happens in the DMZ would be monitored by an international verification commission that would be established in the next round of negotiations with the FARC.

When, after having demonstrated that the military was right, that the DMZ was being used as a giant base for national war, the FARC then forced the postponement of the formal peace negotiations scheduled for July 19, on the grounds that

they refuse to accept any oversight commission of “their” area, Pastrana was in no position to make yet another concession. In his Independence Day speech on July 20, he warned the FARC that a commission must be created, because “there is a limit to the patience of the government and of 38 million Colombians. . . . Let there be no doubt, we have an army for peace, but also an army every day more prepared for war.”

Two days later, however, President Pastrana called in reporters, to read them parts of the letter from President Clinton, most particularly Clinton’s admonishment that Pastrana must work to convince “Colombians that a military solution is not possible and that we must find the way to promote a negotiated settlement.”

The grip of the Inter-American Dialogue

The policy enunciated by Clinton did not originate with the U.S. President, but with London—long before President Clinton swore his oath of office. The peace-with-the-traffickers policy, is the baby of London’s Inter-American Dialogue—the same Inter-American Dialogue whose 15-year-long drive for drug legalization and the destruction of sovereign nation-states in the region (and particularly, of their national militaries) is responsible for allowing the drug trade to advance to the point that Colombia—where *there was no drug production whatsoever* 30 years ago—now faces national disintegration at the hands of the narco-armies.

The Dialogue brazenly argues, as its director of Democratic Governance, Michael Shifter, did in the pages of the July/August 1999 issue of the New York Council on Foreign Relations’ *Foreign Affairs* magazine, that the FARC and ELN cannot be treated as criminals, because they run drugs to further their political project—an argument which constitutes sufficient grounds to open an official investigation into the Inter-American Dialogue’s financing of its own political project. The policy is dressed up and sold, through the much-repeated lie that Colombia’s crisis today is an outgrowth of many decades of honest guerrilla insurgency, rather than a product of the takeover of the country by the drug mafia.

The Dialogue is now on an organizing rampage, claiming that “protecting democracy” requires that the other nations in the hemisphere gang up on Colombia, and form a so-called “Group of Friends” which can force Colombia to stick to negotiations with the narco-terrorists, no matter what the cost. The intent of this policy was just enunciated by Arturo Valenzuela, a Dialogue asset recently inserted into White House policymaking for Ibero-America. According to a report in the July 20 *Washington Times*, in his first press conference as director of the National Security Council’s office of Inter-American Affairs, Valenzuela argued that if such a “Group of Friends” mechanism had been in place in 1992, it might have prevented Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori’s April 1992 “self-coup,” and thus safeguarded “democracy.”

This stunning statement is tantamount to declaring, that had there been a “Group of Friends” mechanism such as is

now demanded for Colombia, Peru’s *defeat* of the bestial Shining Path guerrillas *could have been prevented*. To lament Fujimori’s “self-coup,” is to lament that Shining Path and its other narco-terrorist allies do not control the entire Andean region today.

In 1992, Peru faced national disintegration, as does Colombia today: The Shining Path, also integrated into the drug trade, controlled more than 40% of the country, and was moving to surround and isolate Lima, preparatory to an attack on the capital itself. What Valenzuela denounces as “a self-coup,” was President Fujimori’s decision to save the nation. Backed by the military, police, and the majority of the Peruvian population, Fujimori scrapped democratic “rules of the game,” and put the country on a war-footing, to defeat the narco-terrorists. And they did so. The head of Shining Path was captured within five months, and the back of the insurgency broken within 18 months, thus saving an enormous number of lives, and ensuring the continued existence of Peru as a nation.

What form of regional assistance?

Peru’s President Fujimori is now also raising alarm bells on the need to help Colombia defeat the narco-terrorists. In a July 22 joint press conference with Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso at the end of Cardoso’s visit to Lima, Fujimori urged that a coordinated regional security strategy against narco-terrorism be developed. According to *El Comercio*, both Presidents called for such a strategy “to confront drug-trafficking and terrorism, which usually ally, and undermine the power of the state in insufficiently populated, or isolated areas.” Fujimori was adamant that it is necessary for other Ibero-American nations to help defend the human rights of Colombians, which are under attack by narco-terrorism, as it is also necessary to prevent the Colombian crisis from spreading to the rest of the region.

This can and must be done without foreign intervention into Colombia, Fujimori specified. Any foreign interventions, either direct or indirect, would be “condemnable from every standpoint . . . but I do believe that there can be cooperation to reach a solution which respects the sovereignty and security of that country.”

Fujimori is correct, that if Colombia is provided intelligence and material support, and its military is permitted to go on the offensive, instead of being forced to wait for the narco-terrorists to attack, Colombia can, as Peru did, defeat the terrorists, establish state control over the totality of the national territory, and restore the basic human rights which the narco-terrorists have destroyed, such as the right to not be kidnapped, to maintain a family and educate your children, to go to church, to travel between cities safely, etc. The cost in human lives would be much less than permitting the narco-terrorists to rampage in the name of promoting peace. No greater democratic action could be taken; 80% of Colombians are demanding such government action.