

Colombians Gird for War, While Pastrana Fiddles

by Valerie Rush

Colombians are preparing for the outbreak of total war, as the narco-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) continues to ignore government appeals for a return to the negotiating table, and the Jan. 31 expiration date on the “demilitarized zone” under their control draws near. When that deadline arrives, President Andrés Pastrana must either unilaterally extend the deadline—as he did last December—or acknowledge the failure of his appeasement strategy, and order the Colombian Armed Forces to reclaim the Switzerland-sized chunk of territory, now known as “FARC-landia,” which the narco-terrorists have ruled as their private fiefdom for the past two years. If Pastrana issues that order, Colombia’s hard-pressed military will face an entrenched, 20,000-strong terrorist army, trained and equipped with the most sophisticated weaponry that drug money can buy.

Pastrana, who was elected solely on his promise to secure peace, will do everything in his power to preserve the farce of unending peace talks with the FARC. Indeed, in a Christmas Eve address to the nation, he insisted, “We have made progress on peace. We should be optimistic.” This, despite the fact that terrorist violence is at an all-time high, kidnapping and drug-trafficking remain the FARC’s leading sources of revenue, more than half the national territory is unprotected and at the mercy of the narco-terrorists, and Pastrana’s highly touted peace talks were abandoned by the FARC more than two months ago.

As if to underline with what contempt the FARC views Pastrana’s so-called “peace process,” 50 of their gunmen were deployed out of the so-called “demilitarized zone” on Dec. 29—just five days after Pastrana’s appeal for “optimism”—to ambush a car carrying the leader of the Congressional Peace Commission, Congressman Diego Turbay. Forcing Turbay, his mother, driver, and several others to lie face down on the side of the road, the FARC assassins put a bullet through the head of each victim. The national clamor for Pastrana to bury his stinking “peace process” and to order in the troops, has thus far been ignored.

In a commentary in the daily *El Tiempo* of Dec. 31, Sen. Enrique Gómez Hurtado denounced Pastrana’s treasonous behavior. Hurtado, brother of the murdered former Senator Alvaro Gómez Hurtado and leader of the National Salvation Movement, wrote: “All Colombians must actively take a stand in the face of the generalized collapse of the state. The future of the nation is being handed over, through the apparently unlimited surrender of the sovereignty and dignity of

the Colombian people.”

Numerous other newspaper columnists have been only slightly more diplomatic, in denouncing Pastrana for his “weakness,” his “air of unreality,” and his abandonment of the national interest. Polls show that the vast majority of Colombians are fed up with Pastrana’s dalliance with the terrorists, and want the army unleashed against the FARC.

From Bad to Worse

Pastrana has apparently decided that he can shore up his failed peace strategy by delivering a new DMZ, this one carved out of Bolivar province in northern Colombia, to the National Liberation Army (ELN), a 5,000-man terrorist outfit whose main leaders are in jail and whose activities center on kidnappings, narcotics trafficking, and demolition of national infrastructure. Pastrana has even allowed the proposed DMZ to be situated just outside Barrancabermeja, Colombia’s leading oil-refining city. The ELN has cultivated its “radical” image by bombing the country’s main oil pipelines, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times over the past decade. Both Cuba’s Fidel Castro and Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez have played important roles in mediating Pastrana’s negotiations with the ELN, and another sucker deal appears to be in the works, helped along by the ELN’s highly publicized release of 43 of its kidnap victims, just in time for Christmas.

The citizens of Bolivar are having none of it. After months of protests against the DMZ failed to change Pastrana’s mind, they have reportedly begun to stockpile weapons, apparently determined to prevent a repetition of FARC-landia in their region.

The *Miami Herald* editorialized on Dec. 27 that Pastrana “should think twice before giving a second guerrilla group safe haven,” after what the FARC did with its government-authorized DMZ: “FARC-landia [is] a haven for staging attacks, training new guerrillas, stashing kidnap victims and cultivating coca. . . . The guerrilla army has grown to 20,000 soldiers, many of them children.” The *Herald* concludes that not only should the new DMZ plan be abandoned, but, “come Jan. 31, moreover, Mr. Pastrana should think twice before permitting the FARC to keep abusing the goodwill offered in hopes of peace.”

Surprisingly, this same view was expressed by the *Washington Post*, which has heretofore been a supporter of Pastrana’s “peace process.” The *Post*’s Jan. 3 lead editorial urged an end to the “political fiction” of peace negotiations with the FARC. Pastrana’s strategy, and State Department backing for that strategy, it said, has been centered on the “political fiction” that the FARC and ELN “are conventional insurgent movements with political agendas that can be negotiated—and not syndicates whose main interests now center on consolidating control over territory and drug revenues.” The *Post* called on Pastrana to “shut down the safe zones for the guerrillas,” and on the Bush Administration to “stop pretending that it is only supporting a campaign against the drug traffic in Colombia.”