

# Narcos up the ante in Colombia, target nation's political elites

by Valerie Rush

On the night of Jan. 18, heavily armed individuals claiming to be a commando force of the narco-terrorist M-19 guerrilla army broke into the electoral headquarters of Bogota mayoral candidate Andrés Pastrana, and abducted him. Pastrana is the son of former Colombian President Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970-74), and was mooted by the polls as the probable next mayor of Bogota, a post traditionally viewed as a stepping-stone to the Colombian presidency.

A Jan. 22 telephone call received by the Pastrana family revealed that the abductors are, instead, the self-described "Extraditables," the leaders of the Medellín Cartel of cocaine traffickers currently sought for extradition to the United States. Demands were made, which the family has not yet publicized.

The junior Pastrana, who ran a nightly television news show prior to his election campaign, is known for having repeatedly broadcast strong attacks on the drug mob. His campaign itself identified drug addiction as Bogota's "number-one problem," a polemic which shatters the mafia myth that the Colombian drug trade only affects such "imperialists" as the United States and Western Europe.

Prior to the identification of Pastrana's abductors, it was widely believed that he was being held by the M-19, a narco-terrorist urban guerrilla group which has repeatedly carried out terrorist acts in the employ of the drug mafia. On Jan. 19, the M-19 central committee issued a communiqué cautiously denying knowledge of any role played by its various "fronts" in the kidnaping. Drug mafia or M-19, it makes little difference.

The "Extraditables" had, in fact, given advance notice of their intentions. On Nov. 23 of last year, immediately following the arrest of Medellín Cartel chief Jorge Luis Ochoa, the cartel issued a warning that, in the event of Ochoa's extradition to the United States, it would "declare total and absolute war against the entire political and leadership class of the country. We will execute without any considerations of any kind all leading political chiefs of the political parties." In the aftermath of Ochoa's scandalous Dec. 30 release from a Bogota jail—and consequent pressures against the government of President Virgilio Barco from the Reagan adminis-

tration—the path to extradition of the drug chieftains is now cleared.

In a series of tragicomic responses to Pastrana's kidnaping, the Barco government automatically militarized the capital city in preparation for a dragnet, and then just as quickly pulled back the troops in response to a pledge communicated by the abductors that Pastrana would be released if the city were demilitarized. Needless to say, Pastrana was not released, and his captors easily fled with their victim. A telephone call from Pastrana to his family the afternoon of Jan. 20 confirmed that he was alive, but gave no indication of the identity of his captors, nor their demands.

Since Pastrana's abduction, the Barco government has uttered not a single official word on the affair. Worse still, there has been no sign of progress in the nationwide search for Ochoa and for his cartel partners. The government's efforts since Ochoa's release have rather been dedicated to self-justification of its own inaction. On Jan. 13, Colombia organized the rest of the Ibero-American representatives to the Organization of American States to endorse a resolution condemning the United States' pressure tactics against the Barco government as "interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation." Barco has also issued repeated appeals to the international community to "do its part" in the war against drugs.

The vacuum of policy within Colombian officialdom is especially striking in view of the Jan. 13 appeal of opposition figure Enrique Gómez Hurtado for a "civil coup d'état," backed by the military, to rescue the nation from the grip of the drug mafia and return Colombia to the status of a sovereign republic (see *EIR*, Jan. 22, 1988, "Colombians see nation imperiled, call for coup to fight drug mob"). Gómez Hurtado was explicit that responses to his appeal would separate Colombia's nation-builders from those who would see her destroyed. President Barco and his cohorts may not have taken Gómez Hurtado's appeal seriously, but the drug mafia clearly has. The kidnaping of Pastrana—a direct assault on the country's political elites—is its response.

Aside from individual efforts by political and journalistic figures, efforts such as Gómez Hurtado's, the Catholic Church

is the only institution in the country which has issued any concrete directives to the population on how to battle the mob. On Jan. 6, Colombia's bishops issued a statement on the March mayoral elections, which have been targeted by the drug traffickers and terrorists alike as a springboard to political power. "In the present conjuncture, it is indispensable to remember that Catholics have the moral obligation to repudiate money of shady origins, both in campaigns and in the purchase of consciences. . . . It is unacceptable for Catholics to vote for persons who are in contradiction to Christian principles and who obstruct the action of the Church, or who are hostile to the Christian values and morals that the Constitution teaches."

Colombian Cardinal López Trujillo issued a warning Jan. 18—just before Pastrana's abduction—that, "Disgracefully, the country is becoming habituated to the madness of violence and our situation is already approaching a truly demented state, in which life no longer has meaning." In what observers noted was a striking similarity to the formulations of Gómez Hurtado, Cardinal López concluded: "This mangled nation, of assassins and guerrillas, is deteriorating. The country must be re-made."

And on Jan. 21, Cardinal López issued a statement in the name of the Colombian Church which condemned the kidnaping of Pastrana as a threat to the institutions of the nation. An extraordinary conference of Colombian bishops has been called for Feb. 8 to formulate a response to the violence.

### **A state of dissolution**

Precisely as Gómez Hurtado's open letter to President Barco warned, Colombia is already in an advanced stage of dissolution. The March municipal elections could well prove the spark that ignites civil war in the country.

Confrontations between Moscow's narco-terrorist irregulars and Colombian military and police forces are now occurring on a daily basis. Since New Year's day, the combined and/or separate forces of the FARC, ELN, EPL, and M-19 guerrillas have ambushed patrols, seized entire towns, assassinated dozens of political leaders, and conducted constant cross-border raids into neighboring Venezuela. Colombia's most critical Cano Limón-Covenas oil pipeline was dynamited a half-dozen times in one week, doing extensive ecological damage and putting a crimp in the country's oil export earnings.

Narco-terrorist activity along the Venezuela-Colombia border has escalated dramatically since Jan. 1, prompting the majority of Venezuelan cattlemen who have been targeted as kidnap victims by the terrorists to abandon their holdings and flee into the interior. Innumerable clashes between Venezuelan troops and the Colombian guerrillas have turned hundreds of kilometers of border into a no-man's land.

A confrontation in the Venezuelan border state of Arauca took place Jan. 16 between Colombian terrorists and Venezuelan soldiers, with at least eight killed, among them women and children. Venezuelan Interior Minister Ciliberto issued

a statement the next day lamenting the deaths of the women and children, and noting that as the guerrillas persist in using innocents as their protective shield, such deaths "cannot be our fault." Ciliberto took the occasion to issue a warning to the Barco administration that "until the government of the neighboring country lends us collaboration [in the war against narco-terrorism], Venezuela's efforts to fight crime along the border will be diminished."

In the jungle province of Caquetá, in Colombia's southwest, the ruling Liberal Party has been forced to pull out of the March elections for "lack of security" for its candidates.

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*The crisis has deepened, with the kidnaping of Bogota mayoral candidate Andrés Pastrana. Cardinal López Trujillo warned: "Disgracefully, the country is becoming habituated to the madness of violence and our situation is already approaching a truly demented state, in which life no longer has meaning."*

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On Jan. 19, the Liberal candidate for mayor of Florencia, the capital of Caquetá, was assassinated, one of three top Liberal leaders killed in the province over a five-day period. Despite the appointment of an active general to serve as military governor of Caquetá, the province's Liberal leadership insists that "there are no guarantees, and under these conditions we cannot participate [in the elections]. The fact is that our people are being murdered."

Moscow is employing its agents within Colombia's labor movement to sow economic chaos as well. On Jan. 19, Colombia was shaken by a 24-hour warning strike, which included the nation's state workers, judiciary workers (including judges), bank workers, television workers, even voter registration employees. The oil center of Barrancabermeja was racked by riots, and the state oil company Ecopetrol briefly shut down, following the Jan. 15 assassination of the president of the oil workers union USO. The rich agricultural region of Urabá was similarly paralyzed in response to the murder of the vice president of the banana workers union.

All of these labor organizations are run by one or another variety of communist, and are now announcing their intention to turn a Jan. 27 protest against International Monetary Fund conditionalities into a national strike that could seriously destabilize the nation.