

Colombia adopts Fujimori tactics in battling narco-terrorism

by Javier Almario

Forced by pressure from such institutions as the military and the Catholic Church, by the outrage of the population, and by a tidal wave of new terrorist assaults which claimed the lives of more than 40 people (the majority of them policemen) in less than 48 hours, the government of César Gaviria Trujillo decreed a state of "internal commotion" on Nov. 8, in a long-overdue effort to respond to the bloody challenge of Marxist terrorists and their drug-trafficking associates.

The special state of emergency will last 90 days, with a possible extension of 120 more, during which time the Gaviria government will issue a series of decrees aimed at destroying the financial and political protection apparatus of the narco-terrorists, and to facilitate a military and judicial offensive against the subversive insurgency. "I know that all of Colombia is awaiting decisive action against the terrorists, against the assassins and kidnapers, against this handful of mad fanatics," stated President Gaviria in a televised address announcing the emergency presidential decree.

Among the first measures dictated by the government the next day were: severe penalties against any media which interview the criminals, make apology for their actions, or directly broadcast details of ongoing military operations; a freeze and confiscation of bank accounts, real estate, stocks, and investments traceable to the terrorists (the government estimates that the different narco-terrorist groups have savings or investments of some \$500 million); the government will directly control management of the oil royalties from the departments of Arauca, Putumayo, and Casanare, to prevent those funds which normally go into local treasuries from swelling terrorist coffers; cancellation of the contract of any foreign company which pays protection money or ransom to the terrorists; suspension or firing of any government official who holds dialogue or collaborates with the terrorists; severe penalties for anyone who assists the terrorists or refuses to inform on their activities; suspension of land distribution by regional managers of the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform, who generally hand over territory to agents and frontmen of the terrorists; an increase in life insurance for members of the Armed Forces; and payment of rewards to anyone who gives information leading to the capture of the narco-terrorist chieftains.

'If Peru can do it . . .'

These long-awaited measures were to a large degree inspired by the fight being waged in next-door Peru by President Alberto Fujimori, whose popularity has soared in both his own country *and* in Colombia ever since the capture of Abimael Guzmán, the psychotic leader of the Shining Path narco-terrorists in Peru. Indeed, ever since Guzmán's capture, the question has increasingly been, "If Peru can do it, why not Colombia?"

Representatives of the Colombian business sector and Catholic Church have been increasingly demanding that the Gaviria government abandon its disastrous policy of dialogue with the terrorists, and instead impose the rule of law. Said the head of the Colombian ranchers' federation (Fedegan) recently to an audience that included Gaviria, "Enough of bowing our heads. No more guilt complexes. War cannot be avoided. The terrorist wave of October must have a clear and crushing response!" He reported that 700 ranchers had been kidnaped and 154 killed in 1992 alone, on top of the millions extorted by the terrorists. He warned that cattlemen were abandoning their ranches in record numbers in order to try to save their own and their families' lives.

The head of the Colombian bishops' conference, Archbishop Pedro Rubiano, called for an end to negotiating with the narco-terrorists. Now, he said, "the only way out left to the government is the exercise of authority, putting the house in order with a strong hand."

"A 'pro-Fujimori' sentiment is rapidly spreading, and is no longer limited to the so-called oligarchic classes," wrote the alarmed co-owner of *El Tiempo* newspaper, Enrique Santos Calderón, on Nov. 7. "In the middle and lower classes one can hear that what we need here is 'a tough little Japanese guy like in Peru, who can put an end to all this mess.'"

Colombians are fed up with a decade of dialogue and negotiations with the different terrorist groups, and with the multiple concessions that successive governments have granted to the drug traffickers and their narco-terrorist allies. During these past 10 years, every guerrilla group has grown in number and armed strength:

- The National Liberation Army (ELN) was a tiny group made up largely of a handful of pro-Castro fanatics and a few

“liberation theologians.” Thanks to dialogue and the millions paid them by the oil multinationals as “protection money,” the ELN has become the scourge of the national economy and is now on a major offensive to seize control of the major oil and mining zones of the country. It is already known that the ELN owns both gold and coal mines, through “legitimate” fronts.

- The heads of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), which until 1982 was largely a gang of bandits run by the pro-Soviet Colombian Communist Party, have since been elevated by the media to the category of “statesmen” with whom one must discuss and negotiate government policy.

- The People’s Liberation Army (EPL), a Maoist creation, also grew during the dialogues. Today, one part of the EPL has “legalized” itself while another is in alliance with the ELN and FARC.

- Finally, there is the M-19. Notorious as the narco-terrorist group which massacred half the Supreme Court during its bloody siege of the Justice Palace in 1985, today the M-19 controls Gaviria’s Health Ministry and is angling for the presidency. The M-19 was legalized by presidential amnesty in 1989 and has been inside the presidential cabinet ever since César Gaviria took office. The visible head of that group, Antonio Navarro Wolf, today dedicates his efforts to demanding “international mediation” for a negotiated “peace” between the government and the terrorist groups.

The Gaviria government has shamelessly intervened on numerous occasions to prevent the courts from charging the M-19 terrorists with their multiple crimes, and has even promoted disciplinary investigations against those judges who have dared to apply the law.

The price of capitulation

Of course, as can now be readily seen, the deals struck between Gaviria’s government and the drug traffickers have reduced neither drug-trafficking nor the violence related to it, nor have they prevented the so-called guerrilla groups from financing themselves with drugs. What Gaviria’s deals with the narcos have accomplished is to lull the government and society into an illusion of security, leading them to lower their guard against narco-terrorism. Today it is paying the price.

With the October death in a firefight with the police of Brance Alexander Muñoz Mosquera (a.k.a. “Tyson”), one of the heads of the Medellín Cartel’s “military” apparatus, the Gaviria government’s justly ridiculed “surrender to justice” deal with the cartel was suspended. At least 20 policemen were assassinated by the cartel’s hitmen in Medellín and surrounding areas in the course of a single week following Tyson’s death.

The dialogues and their consequences have demoralized the Colombian population, already suffering the effects of severe economic decline. While those over 40 years of age

complain that the government has only had time to listen to and negotiate with the most brutal of criminals, a segment of the youth population has drawn the conclusion that to “make it,” it is not necessary to be educated, diligent, and disciplined, but simply ruthless and violent. It is precisely through the spread of this “culture of violence” that narco-terrorism has been able to recruit and grow powerful.

However, Fujimori’s successes in Peru have managed to swing the pendulum back toward the Peruvian model and away from the so-called Salvadoran model, where the United Nations and U.S. government have managed to blackmail the Salvadoran government into handing the discredited FMLN insurgency its quota of power.

The Fujimori model is the only one that can possibly work in Colombia, whose “guerrilla” movement coordinates strategy with Peru’s Shining Path. According to intelligence sources, the Colombian terrorists have held numerous meetings with representatives of Shining Path, to coordinate actions “in defense of the Peruvian revolution.” The best defense, insists Shining Path in these meetings, is to universalize the “revolution.” Shining Path is the most violent group in Ibero-America, which combines Maoism with “Inca fundamentalism” that seeks to wipe out western culture and return the continent to primitivism.

Recent brutal actions by the FARC and ELN show how quickly they are coming to emulate Shining Path. On Nov. 7, some 200 FARC-ELN terrorists massacred 26 police agents who were guarding a state oil installation in the southern department of Putumayo. Previously, such attacks were directed against the multinationals, as much to improve their image as “anti-imperialist” as to facilitate the extraction of protection money. This time, it was property of the state oil company Ecopetrol that was attacked and completely destroyed after the police guards were slaughtered.

Simultaneously, in the course of just two days, they set off more than 50 dynamite bombs at police posts, banks, markets, and pipelines, causing the deaths of 50 people and injuries to 70 more. According to II Army Division commander Gen. Harold Bedoya, military intelligence has acquired documents confirming that the ELN keeps a count of how many legs they cut off from peasants suspected of collaborating with the Army!

The Gaviria government’s response to this latest terrorist offensive will only prove effective if the population obliges the President to follow through on his word. In the past, Gaviria has responded to the general clamor for action against narco-terrorism with bombast and promises, designed to calm the citizenry and pave the way for a renewal of dialogue. Gaviria has always considered a military offensive a last resort to force the terrorists to the negotiating table, and never as a means of defeating them. Only by discarding the concept of “dialogue” and “peace pacts” with these murderers can Colombians hope to free themselves of this nightmare of instability and violence.