

Colombian narco-terror moves in where 'democracy' paves the way

by Valerie Rush

Military and civilian sources in Colombia now confirm that nearly a dozen of the country's provinces are under the domination of the narco-terrorist National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNG), through a combination of outright intimidation and/or political alliance. This disastrous situation is the direct result of the international "human rights" lobby's crippling offensive against Colombia's Armed Forces on the one hand, and the "let's make a deal" appeasement strategy of the government of President César Gaviria on the other.

According to a Sept. 19 press interview by Armed Forces Commander Gen. Ramón Emilio Bermúdez Gil, in the many regions of the country where this situation of "co-government" with the FARC and ELN (two of the terrorist components of the CNG) exists, "the guerrillas have put people on the payroll, in nonexistent positions; and that is how public funds are siphoned into the guerrillas' coffers." CNG documents captured during a recent raid of one of their safehouses in Bogotá revealed that the terrorists' war chest is expected to reach \$750 million this year, from a combination of extortion, protection fees, kidnapping ransoms and the drug trade, the last providing an estimated 60% of the total. If the CNG succeeds in putting together such a sum, it will equal 80% of the annual budget of the Armed Forces.

A Sept. 20 special report in the daily *El Tiempo* revealed that electoral candidates around the country are being forced to pay special fees to the guerrillas to allow them to campaign in public. Days earlier, the Conservative Party had issued a statement saying that guerrilla attacks had made Colombia so dangerous that more than 600 towns and villages were *off limits* to candidates because of threats. Conservative Party leaders and candidates met with the interior and defense ministers that same week to demand more effective security measures as well as a serious anti-terrorist policy by the Gaviria administration, pointing to the recent assassinations of at least three Conservative politicians. They left the meeting "dissatisfied" with the government's insistence on defending its method of dealing with the narco-terrorists—that is, negotiations.

Imprisoned ELN chieftain Francisco Galán set down the terms of war in an open letter issued to the media from

his jail cell, in which he demanded that every presidential candidate publicly present his "peace plan" for the first 100 days in office, or there would be no election. "Come up with a peace strategy," he warned, "or with a war strategy." Galán also confirmed that the bloody "Black September" offensive which the ELN/FARC terrorists have been carrying out and which has already claimed the lives of more than 50 police and soldiers, will continue into October and beyond, until the government accepts "a bilateral cease-fire."

In addition to the constant ambushes of police stations and military patrols, there has been an escalation of attacks on the country's oil pipelines, other economic targets, and population centers. For example, the police frustrated a terrorist attack on a number of banks and government, police, and army offices in the city of Pasto on Sept. 22, when a car-bomb containing 80 kilograms of dynamite was deactivated in the very heart of the city. Along with the explosives were found maps indicating the intended targets of sabotage and terrorism. That same week, the FARC/ELN called an "armed strike" against intercity transport in the southern department of Caquetá, allegedly in order to force a "peace dialogue." Buses were burned and drivers threatened with treatment as "targets of war" if they did not abandon their vehicles.

The bombing of the main transportation terminal in Colombia's third-largest city, Cali, was foiled when police stopped a truck carrying explosives and detonators just two blocks from the terminal. Colombia's leading oil refining city/port of Barrancabermeja was virtually shut down for three days when combined ELN/FARC forces blocked every highway into and out of the city and threatened to burn any bus that moved without their "permission." Vast quantities of oil have been spilled by repeated sabotage of the country's pipelines, and the newly discovered oil fields of Cusiana and Cupiagua are virtual armed camps to prevent guerrilla sabotage.

Consorting with the enemy

In the face of this terrorist blackmail, the Gaviria government has bent over backwards to try to accommodate the CNG. Not only has it insisted on pursuing "peace negotia-

tions” with these criminals even as the population clamors for a serious military counter-offensive, but it is redefining policy toward its own Armed Forces in accordance with the dictates of the international “human rights” lobby.

President Gaviria especially raised military hackles when he held three days of closed-door talks with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in mid-August. Despite the fact that diplomatic relations between their two countries were cancelled back in 1980 when Cuban backing for Colombia’s narco-terrorists was exposed, Gaviria invited Castro to Colombia to discuss his possible mediation of a peace agreement with the CNG. It was the adamant refusal of the military to agree to the terms of such a peace agreement—virtual self-eradication—that reportedly triggered the CNG’s ongoing “Black September” offensive.

Shock at Gaviria’s shameless flirtation with Castro was not limited to the military. On Aug. 22, the Bogotá daily *La Prensa* reported that civilians linked to the presidential palace “expressed surprise at the Gaviria government’s inaction over information in its possession since early 1993,” which indicted Cuba for its *continued* involvement with Colombia’s narco-terrorists. The article revealed that an ELN guerrilla captured by the army shortly after her return from Cuba had confessed to receiving exhaustive training there in the handling of weapons, grenades, mortars, and explosives. Full documentation of her revelations, including a videotape of her confession, was delivered to the offices of the presidency, the Security Council, and the Defense Ministry in early January of this year, and yet no comment from those offices was ever forthcoming, much less an investigation pursued.

Foreign Minister Naomi Sanín, obliged to intervene into a mid-September congressional debate over the advisability of Gaviria’s invitation to Castro, was forced to admit that she viewed “with profound concern the fact that the guerrillas who murdered, kidnapped, blew up pipelines, and carried out assaults, were being received with generosity by several countries, not only by Cuba but others as well.” Immediately, her office issued a written retraction, saying that she “has the impression that Cuba neither favors nor sponsors the Colombian guerrilla,” and that history would show that the meeting with Castro had “very fertile consequences.”

Only weeks before meeting with Castro, President Gaviria had gone to London on an official visit. His first act was to visit the headquarters of the human rights NGO (non-governmental organization) Amnesty International, where he was urged to drastically reduce the military budget. It is noteworthy that on the eve of his London trip, Gaviria had presented Congress with a bill granting the executive the right to pardon any terrorist who wanted to enter into negotiations with the government.

In mid-September, Gaviria called on the national Congress to grant him extraordinary powers to reform the disciplinary code of the Armed Forces, for the explicit purpose of

reducing human rights violations supposedly being perpetrated by members of those forces. As Rafael Pardo Rueda, Colombia’s first civilian defense minister, explained the planned reform, “it will adapt to the dispositions of the new National Constitution.” That Constitution was written in 1991, after the constitutionally elected Congress was unlawfully suspended by President Gaviria, and replaced by a “constituent assembly” which included a large contingent of amnestied narco-terrorists and politicians on the drug cartel payroll.

Target: the Armed Forces

In particular, Pardo revealed that the new Armed Forces’ disciplinary code would be formulated on the basis of recommendations from the Attorney General’s office—an office which has functioned as a virtual “branch office” of Amnesty International for at least eight years. As part of that reform, all military barracks would be endowed with human rights offices which would oversee military behavior—and presumably function as a potential spy network for the narco-terrorists.

According to a Defense Ministry report published by the daily *El Espectador* on March 15, the nine-month period between July 1992 and March 1993 saw disciplinary sanctions imposed against nearly 20,000 members of the Colombian Armed Forces, not counting the national police. With the new reform, it is expected that that number will rise even more dramatically. The continued deterioration of morale—and thus of performance—of the country’s military forces is the expected result.

Estatic about the reform, of course, is Attorney General Carlos Gustavo Arrieta, who says it is the program he has been demanding for the past several years. Another enthusiast interviewed by the press is Ramiro Lucio, once the international spokesman for the “ex”-narco-terrorist M-19 and now its elected representative in Congress. Conservative presidential pre-candidate Juan Diego Jaramillo, on the other hand, declared that the reform “will end up destroying the little confidence the Army has left in itself, and the little confidence that the population has in the Armed Forces.” Jaramillo insisted that “the reality is that the Army is on the defensive across the country, while what we need is an Army that can win the war in the short term. . . . [The reform proposal] is a horror.”

The latest escalation against the military took place the last week in September, when two “negotiators” for an ELN splinter group were killed in a confrontation with an Army patrol that had not been advised of their protected status. A hue and cry from the “human rights” lobby that the military is a deliberate “saboteur of peace,” combined with widespread press coverage of the terrorists’ declaration that all peace talks with the government were off, is being used to further fuel demands for the country’s demilitarization “in the name of peace.”