

# U.S. decertification of Colombia is in both nations' national interest

by Andrea Olivieri

The week of Feb. 12 could well prove decisive not just for the fate of Colombia, but for the future of the war on drugs globally. During that week, the Colombian Congress will be handed the evidence, in the form of a formal accusation prepared by the Office of the Prosecutor General, charging that the Colombian Presidency is a bought-and-paid-for asset of the world's largest and most deadly criminal organization, known as the Cali Cartel. With that evidence in hand, the "Accusations Committee" of the lower house of Congress must determine whether to recommend that the Senate pursue impeachment hearings against President Ernesto Samper Pizano. Such a recommendation would most assuredly lead to Samper's immediate resignation, while paving the way for a purge of the cartel's influence from the nation's political life.

But few expect the House of Representatives' tainted "Accusations Committee" to rise to the occasion and seriously investigate the President. That 15-person committee was given a chance to do its duty during a four-and-a-half month probe of the President last year. In December, 14 of its members, the majority of them elected to Congress with drug money themselves, instead voted to shelve the investigation for "lack of evidence." Chances are small that the corrupted committee will redeem itself in this, its second round.

Indeed, even Prosecutor General Alfonso Valdivieso declared to the press, on his way to a meeting with the committee, that "the discrediting of Congress is a fact. . . . It is no new discovery to say so."

Andrés Pastrana, Samper's former rival for the Presidency, issued a statement from Miami, where he has fled in fear for his life after the assassinations of several of Samper's political opponents, declaring his lack of confidence in the Congress' ability to judge President Samper. Numerous congressmen have issued protests, and even gone on hunger strikes, to denounce the Accusation Committee's refusal to reconstitute itself with new, presumably cleaner members.

But popular pressure for Samper to go is also mounting. There are weekly student and other demonstrations against Samper, business and military spokesmen continue to lam-

bast him, and new evidence surfaces daily documenting his close relationship to the Cali Cartel. Will it be sufficient to force him out?

## The battleground in Washington

While Samper and company play out their legal stratagems in Colombia, another side of the drama is being enacted in Washington, D.C., the second battleground that is decisive regarding Samper's—and Colombia's—future. The name of that drama is "certification." On March 1, by mandate of the U.S. Congress, President William Clinton must announce whether he will certify Colombia as "a fully cooperating partner in the war against drugs." Despite the fact that Colombia under Samper's corrupt regime is in violation of every criterion for such certification, there are those who insist that decertification would "punish" the people of Colombia, or would constitute undue interference in the affairs of a sovereign nation—as if that ravaged country has not already been brutally enslaved to Dope, Inc. for nearly two decades.

The fact is that the Cali Cartel's Samper is determined to hang on to the Colombian Presidency against all apparent odds, *because* he is convinced that he has sufficient support inside the United States—from the pro-drug Inter-American Dialogue, and from the apparatus associated with former President George Bush and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, which is still well-placed in Washington. Confident that these forces will produce a "green light" on certification, Colombia's ambassador to the United States, Carlos Lleras de la Fuente, has dragooned two separate groups of Colombian businessmen—who only a week earlier had been calling for Samper's resignation—into coming to Washington the week of Feb. 12-16, to lobby for certification.

At the same time, however, one of Colombia's well-known anti-drug fighters has entered the fray from the other side. Maximiliano Londoño, the president of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement of Colombia, will also be in Washington that week, for a series of meetings with U.S. congressional offices and other public and private agencies, where he will be delivering the urgent message that the Clinton administration must decertify the Colombian government



*Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano: The Cali Cartel financed his election campaign in 1994, and is now battling to keep him in office.*

of Ernesto Samper Pizano for its documented gross complicity with the international drug cartels. Londoño has received numerous death threats from the drug cartel in Colombia for his outspoken views against Samper's corrupt regime, and has been denied repeated requests for protection.

In a statement issued before his departure for Washington, Londoño explained: "Decertification is in the best national interest of both Colombia and the United States. There are growing mountains of evidence which prove that President Samper is in bed with the Cali Cartel, and has been for decades. For Colombia to recover its sovereignty, let alone its national dignity, Samper must go. But the fact is that he has no intention of leaving office willingly, and has been strengthened in that resolve by those in Washington and elsewhere urging certification."

Londoño elaborated: "I am talking about:

- Powerful political forces associated with George Bush and Henry Kissinger, such as Brent Scowcroft's Forum for International Policy, which on Jan. 31, 1996, issued a statement urging certification. Inside Colombia, Samper's most powerful supporter is beer magnate Julio Mario Santodomingo, a Kissinger intimate who, in April 1995, joined the former U.S. secretary of state for a tour of South America.
- The Inter-American Dialogue, the Washington-based bankers' lobby which favors drug legalization, and has for years argued that Washington shouldn't make such a big deal over the Colombia drug problem.

- The São Paulo Forum, Fidel Castro's continental narco-terrorist alliance, whose spokesmen, such as Venezuela's Col. Hugo Chávez and Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, have also gone to bat for Samper."

### **Witnesses, Samper opponents murdered**

Londoño added: "Samper and his Cali Cartel allies have also unleashed a wave of violence and terror designed to intimidate—or murder—anyone who might cross them. First, Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, a leading opposition politician, was assassinated. Then, on Feb. 1, Elizabeth Montoya de Sarria, the wife of an imprisoned drug trafficker and considered one of the leading witnesses against Samper, was brutally murdered—by the Samper government, according to her husband's televised accusations. I myself, my family, and associates have also received death threats signed by 'Dignity for Colombia,' the same shadowy group that also took credit for killing Elizabeth Montoya."

Londoño concluded: "Such terror tactics are unfortunately commonplace in Colombia today, and probably go a long way toward explaining why a group of prominent Colombian businessmen, who only a week ago urged Samper to resign, have now agreed to travel to Washington to lobby in favor of certification. They, like the nation as a whole, are being held hostage to the Samper mafia's threats and blackmail. I, for one, will continue to speak out, regardless of the consequences."