

# Colombia's former military chief leads in Presidential bid

by Valerie Rush

Colombian narco-President Ernesto Samper Pizano did his countrymen an unexpected favor last July 24, when he fired his Armed Forces Commander, Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro, and replaced him with a man who has publicly described himself as an "anti-hero" who doesn't trust persons with principles. The highly respected three-star General Bedoya, who had refused to resign at Samper's bidding — and still considers himself "on active duty to the nation" — has gone on to rally anti-corruption forces across Colombia behind his front-runner Presidential bid that has already overturned the political chessboard in this captive nation.

As journalist Alberto Mejía Estrada wrote gleefully on Aug. 4 in the opposition daily *El Nuevo Siglo*, "Sooner or later, every criminal commits a grave error which costs him dearly. Thanks to Providence, Samper has just committed that error."

Samper's decision to fire Bedoya in July, rather than wait until the December military rotations to ease him out of office, was a desperate move to silence the most dangerous critic inside his administration. General Bedoya had consistently and publicly opposed Samper's treasonous appeasement policies toward the country's two rampaging narco-terrorist armies, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN), and was viewed by many, both inside the military and without, as the single most important obstacle to the wholesale surrender of the nation to those murderous forces.

Indeed, Bedoya's sacking had been demanded by the FARC-ELN as their first condition for sitting down to negotiations with the Samper regime. A "peace agreement" with the 18,000 narco-terrorists of the FARC-ELN is intended by Samper to be the crowning achievement of his infamous four-year narco-dictatorship.

## A civil-military alliance

Already in the months prior to Bedoya's dismissal, the streets of Colombia's capital city had been painted with "Bedoya for President" slogans, prompted in part by General Bedoya's public denunciation of the Samper government for acceding to narco-terrorist demands to demilitarize a vast

swath of land in the heart of FARC-cocaine territory. Also giving impetus to Bedoya's decision to run for office was the active organizing by the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA), associated with Lyndon LaRouche, in favor of a civil-military alliance to save the nation. When the news that General Bedoya had been fired went public, 1,000 junior officers occupied the Defense Ministry and, in defiance of their commander-in-chief Samper Pizano, called on Bedoya to run for the Presidency. Bedoya's answer was, "From this day forward, I am a citizen with all the rights I did not have before. . . . From today forward, I will do whatever Colombians want me to do for them."

Almost immediately, national opinion polls were showing 40% backing for the general, putting him well ahead of Samper's former interior minister and hand-picked successor, Horacio Serpa Uribe, who is also known as "Commander Serpa" for his long-standing association both with the narco-terrorist ELN and with the country's narcotics cartels. One month later, Bedoya has put together a movement, called *Fuerza Colombia*, which he describes as both nationalist and "anti-traditional," that is, as an alternative to the country's discredited political parties. He has dedicated his campaign to the simultaneous purging of narco-corruption, and to the reconstruction of ravaged Colombia (see *Documentation*).

Bedoya has also publicly denounced the Samper Presidency as "the political project of [Cali cocaine cartel boss] Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela," and has insisted repeatedly in the myriad interviews he has given, that Samper must be tried for treason, if the country is to be freed from the corruption which Samper's rule has come to symbolize both at home and internationally. In an interview in the inaugural, September issue of a new magazine, *Futura XXI*, Bedoya stated outright what his many civilian and military supporters have come to realize:

"I am convinced . . . that I am the last alternative remaining to Colombia, if it is to avoid falling into the abyss that Samper's corruption has dug." Asked whom he considers his strongest rival in the campaign for President, Bedoya confidently responded, "No one. I will be President."

## A state of war

Bedoya's campaign comes not a moment too soon, for it is now estimated that as much as one-half of the country may already be in the hands of the narco-terrorists. Mayoral elections scheduled for Oct. 26 have been suspended in scores of municipalities, as candidates from both traditional and non-traditional parties have either been killed, kidnapped, forced to flee the area, or terrorized into withdrawing their electoral bids.

Exemplary of the narco-terrorists' *modus operandi* is the case of Simiti, a town in northern Bolívar province. The entire town council of nine officials was kidnapped by ELN terrorists in August; their fate remains unknown. Television news programs showed the ELN's "flag" flying over the town of 8,000, which has had no police presence since 100 terrorists overran it on June 30, destroying the barracks and killing three policemen. According to Gilberto Toro, the head of Colombia's Association of Municipalities, "It is clear that the paramilitaries and the guerrillas have control of large parts of the country. There are not sufficient guarantees for the October elections."

Samper's Interior Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo has announced that he will evaluate the situation in each of Colombia's 1,000 municipalities, to determine whether to officially cancel October elections. Twenty-four municipalities in Cesar province alone are currently without any candidates, and the situation is the same in another dozen provinces. Source reports indicate that the narco-terrorists want to shut down at least 200 municipal elections, in hope of forcing negotiations with Samper more on their terms.

## Samper's treason

The other evident objective of the FARC-ELN is to shackle the Armed Forces; here, too, the Samper regime has been more than obliging. Samper readily acceded to the demands of the narco-terrorists to demilitarize a large portion of Caquetá province last June, and he is currently negotiating with the FARC-ELN the evacuation of the military from various other terrorist-infiltrated areas, and turning them into so-called "neutral zones."

At the same time, Samper's Defense Ministry is working overtime with corrupt elements of the Judiciary and Congress to rewrite the military criminal code and destroy what little remains of the precepts of military legal jurisdiction and "due obedience." The Army-sponsored civilian security corps, known as Convivir, a vital source of anti-terrorist information in areas where the Armed Forces are underdeployed, is on the verge of being disbanded, and pro-terrorist elements of the human rights lobby are being directly deployed into the Colombian Armed Forces in an "oversight" capacity.

Many inside the political establishment have finally begun to awaken to the extent to which Samper's anti-military and pro-"peace" policies have destroyed Colombia's political

and territorial integrity. Such is the case, for example, with the co-president of the ruling Liberal Party, Emilio Lebolo, who warned that "war has been declared against the nation," and urged that all regions under narco-terrorist control be declared "war zones." That way, said Lebolo, "the Armed Forces would be free to act without the criminal code hanging over their heads."

With the drug cartels ruling from the Presidential palace, the military hog-tied, and the narco-terrorists seizing ever greater chunks of national territory, Colombia is facing the prospect of total disintegration in the very near future. Under such conditions, the movement of General Bedoya, based on a civil-military alliance of nationalist forces, offers a rallying-point for the recovery and reconstruction of Colombia.

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## Documentation

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# General Bedoya speaks out against narco-terrorism

*In a series of hard-hitting interviews granted to the Colombian media in early September, former Colombian Armed Forces commander and Presidential front-runner Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro defined the character of the new political movement he is launching as both "nationalist" and "anti-traditional." Here, we publish excerpts of those interviews, compiled from the dailies El Espectador and El Tiempo, and the inaugural, September 1997 issue of the magazine Futuro XXI.*

"There can be no peace with delinquents, with narco-terrorists. There are no guerrillas in Colombia. What we have are very well-organized bands of criminals, and so what should be done is to fight against them, annihilate them. . . . The decision [by the Samper government] to evacuate territory, is surrender to the terrorists, a violation against the fatherland and not the act of a ruler. Whoever does this is committing a crime against the nation. . . . We Colombians own all our territory, and no one can be forced to surrender the fatherland."

## Drug-runners and the FARC

Asked by a journalist if there were not a difference between drug-runners and "politically motivated" guerrilla groups, Bedoya answered: "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contradict you. What you are saying is a lie.

[Drug-runners like] the Rodríguezes, like Pablo Escobar, also had their political organizations. Recall that Mr. Pablo Escobar had a political movement called ‘Medellín without Slums,’ remember? And also recall that Pablo Escobar became a congressman in the House of Representatives. So I don’t see the difference between the gentlemen of the FARC and the drug-runners.”

On his Presidential campaign: “Colombians really want a candidate like me, who is not beholden to anyone, who has no problems with the law, who is not linked—even at a distance—with the illegal activities of the drug trade, and about whose life there are no doubts. I am convinced, and I am going to tell the country this, that I am the last alternative remaining to Colombia, if it is to avoid falling into the abyss that the Samper government’s corruption has dug.”

**‘My only ideology is to defend the nation’**

“... My only ideology is to defend the nation. I am not going to belittle myself by saying that I am from the right or left, the extreme or the center, from above or below. I am not going to get involved in that. My political orientation can be found among ... all Colombians who wish to free themselves from crimes and corruption.”

“Since I did not resign my post, nor my rank, nor my duties, I continue in active service to the nation. That was the

commitment I made with all Colombians, to be their President if they give me the support at the polls to exercise the political power of the state. With this objective, I am proposing a movement that calls itself *Fuerza Colombia*, which will register before the Electoral Council on Sept. 15.”

“I represent the antithesis of traditional politics. . . . Colombians no longer want to identify with the traditional parties, but they remain faithful to the ideas, the objectives, and the principles. That is why this movement is being created, so that people from the parties and from independent sectors can be included. No one will be persecuted for their ideas, but without hesitation I intend to subject criminals to the rule of law, to answer to the authorities.”

“I am going to propose to my compatriots a government program with clear ideas and purposes, which will be complied with precisely, to do away with a corruption that is widespread, and to solve the great problems of the nation such as education, health, housing, and employment. I will seek to improve relations with all countries, and obviously with the United States, so that Colombia will no longer be decertified and denigrated internationally, so that Colombians—from the head of state on down—will no longer be characterized as pariahs because of the influence of the corrupt. We will involve both national and international private enterprise in the reconstruction of Colombia.”

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