

U.S. okays deal with Colombian Third Cartel

by Gretchen Small

Colombian President Andrés Pastrana came to Washington on Oct. 28-30 to ask the United States to back his administration's "creative" anti-drug strategy: strike a peace deal with Colombia's narco-terrorist groups, under which they become the government's principal allies against the drug cartels. Pastrana's government is offering territory, money, and government protection to the two main narco-terrorist groups, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as part of the package.

In Washington, Pastrana insisted that "the guerrillas want to tell the world that they are not in the drug trade. This is what we are telling the government of the United States." He said that "if we succeed in making peace, it will be the first great defeat for drug-trafficking." He claimed that the FARC had sent him a document in which they committed themselves to help eradicate narcotic crops, provided they receive sufficient financing—an "offer" not unlike the ELN's proposal to stop kidnapping, if the government guarantees them \$14 million a year in "alternative" financing.

The lunatic strategy received Washington's approval. President Clinton stated that the United States welcomed "efforts to open talks with insurgent groups," and added that he hoped they "will seize this opportunity the President has offered them, by ending terrorism and hostage-taking and involvement with drug traffickers."

Less than one week later, a 1,000-man FARC force seized control of Mitú, the capital of the department of Vaupés, an Amazonian state bordering Brazil which plays a critical role in the drug trade. The FARC held out against Army efforts to retake the capital for several days, and at the end of the battle, Mitú was in ruins, at least 150 people were dead, and the FARC had carried off another 45 policemen as hostages.

At the same time, FARC chief Manuel Marulanda (alias "Tirofijo") made a mockery of President Pastrana's chatter about the FARC, particularly their alleged commitment to help eradicate drugs. In a video sent to the Colombian Senate from his hide-out, Marulanda gloated: "Everyone has the impression that we met with Pastrana and negotiated I-don't-know-what. We have not negotiated anything, and this is the first thing that has to be explained over there. . . . As for the coca, we think that in order to supplant one thing with another, a lot of money is required, and there has to be a period of three to five years, when people already have something to live off."

So why does the plan proceed?

EIR correspondent Bill Jones raised the obvious question at a White House briefing on Nov. 3: "This is the same narco-terrorist group that President Pastrana wants to start a dialogue with, a policy which President Clinton gave his support to. . . . Aren't [these recent actions] leading to a re-evaluation of the policy with regard to Colombia? And doesn't it really contradict the U.S. position with regard to not negotiating with terrorists, and the war on drugs. . . ?" White House spokesman Joe Lockhart responded only that since he knew nothing about the FARC attack, he could not answer.

Inside Colombia, similar questions were raised.

Washington remains silent, however, while the Pastrana government marches blindly ahead. As demanded by the FARC, the government completed its withdrawal of all police and military forces from five municipalities in the south by Nov. 7, leaving behind only 150 unarmed soldiers to handle logistics for the government during the peace talks. The FARC secured its forces as the new government in the five municipalities—an area twice the size of El Salvador, lying in the center of the drug trade in Colombia—but announced that they will not participate in any talks until the unarmed soldiers are removed and FARC prisoners are released, including those convicted of "atrocious crimes" (kidnapping, bombings, assassinations, torture, etc.). FARC spokesmen added that the government had better prepare to keep out of the demilitarized area for more than 90 days, because peace is going to take a long, long time to achieve.

U.S. military analysts know full well that the ELN and FARC are an integral part of the drug trade—the FARC now constitutes the country's Third Cartel, surpassing the previously dominant Medellín and Cali cartels. As White House anti-drug adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.) said in 1996: The FARC and ELN "are guarding drugs, they're moving drugs, they're growing drugs. . . . They're a narco-guerrilla force, period." He reiterated the point upon returning from Colombia in August 1998.

But Pastrana's plan was never a "Colombian" idea. The deal was concocted in the United Nations and by the Wall Street establishment's Inter-American Dialogue; it is the financial interests, which have long sought to legalize the drug trade, that are imposing this policy, backed by their minions in London's Foreign Office and the U.S. State Department.

The policy is premised on the lie that narco-terrorism does not exist, that the drug cartels and the terrorist armies in the Americas are separate entities, which only cooperate in isolated cases. In the 1980s, the drug trade exploded in the Americas as the Bush crowd used this lie to argue that the U.S. should ally with the drug cartels against the "guerrillas." Today, it's the same policy, only reversed. Now, if Washington and Colombia continue to bow to Wall Street and London, Colombia will not exist much longer as one nation.