

## Battle royal rages over U.S. drug war policy

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The current battle over U.S. anti-drug policy toward Ibero-America, first reported by *EIR* on Aug. 6 (“Will Washington Wake Up to Narco-Terror Threat in Colombia?”), has dramatically escalated over the few past weeks, with Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.) and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright emerging as the two leading protagonists, struggling to shape the Clinton administration’s response to a life-or-death situation in Colombia, compounded by a dangerous subversive initiative by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (see article in *International*).

Chávez declared on Aug. 10, that he would negotiate directly with the two leading Colombian narco-terrorist groups, the FARC and the ELN, over border security—a de facto endorsement of these terrorists as a legitimate “co-government” of Colombia. Speaking through Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel, Chávez made it clear that he intends to hold “talks with the ones who have the power.” Suddenly, an already-devastating crisis inside Colombia has become an even more ominous, regional crisis, one that requires policy clarity and action from the Clinton administration.

If Secretary of State Albright prevails, Colombia will likely fall into the death-grip of the narco-terrorists, and President Clinton will be saddled, by a subversive and self-serving group of Congressional Republicans, with the label, “The Man Who Lost Colombia.”

Clinton administration officials have confirmed to *EIR* that there is a major policy review now under way, over how to deal with the rapidly deteriorating situation inside Colombia, where narco-terrorists of the FARC and the ELN have successfully used the pretense of a negotiating process with the government of President Andrés Pastrana, to wage a new terror offensive, demand outright control over larger sections

of territory, and further boost the flow of illegal cocaine and heroin into the United States.

In July, General McCaffrey, in a letter to Secretary Albright that was leaked to the press, called for an additional \$1 billion in military aid to Colombia and neighboring countries, to combat the escalating offensive by the narco-terrorists.

### Albright’s perfidy

Despite the fact that this policy review has not yet been completed, on Aug. 10, Secretary Albright penned an op-ed, published in the *New York Times*, headlined “Colombia’s Struggles, And How We Can Help,” in which she promoted a U.S. policy sure to bring disaster, were it to be formally adopted at the end of the policy review.

While paying lip service to the grave crisis in Colombia, and admitting some links between the guerrilla groups and paramilitaries and the narco-traffickers, Albright asserted that “after 38 years of struggle, it should be clear that a decisive military outcome is unlikely. President Pastrana was right to initiate talks [with the guerrillas]; the question is whether he can muster a combination of pressure and incentives that will cause the guerrillas to respond. . . . The peace efforts must be guided by Colombians themselves. President Pastrana has taken courageous risks in this quest, and it is up to him to decide what carrots and sticks are needed. But the United States and other friends of Colombia must be ready to help. President Clinton has already pledged our support in a letter to President Pastrana on July 20.”

In fact, President Clinton’s letter was a disaster. He pledged to support President Pastrana’s misguided efforts to make a deal with the FARC and the ELN. White House sources have said that the President regrets having sent the letter, which was probably pushed by Albright. As *EIR* has

already reported, the release of the letter, on the eve of General McCaffrey's trip to Colombia, undermined his efforts to forge a Washington-Bogotá joint strategy to defeat the narco-insurgency.

But the Albright op-ed was even worse. The notion that "after 38 years of struggle . . . a decisive military outcome is unlikely," is not only a lie; it represents a frontal attack against the efforts of McCaffrey, among others, to muster the kind of military assistance to Colombia that would enable the military and police to wage a winning war.

A senior official in the State Department Office of Counternarcotics was at a loss to explain Albright's motive in putting forward such a line, in the midst of a top-down policy review process, in an Aug. 12 discussion with *EIR*. He asserted that there is ample evidence that the FARC and the ELN are a vital component of the "vertically integrated drug cartels" in Colombia.

Indeed, Albright's letter appeared at the very moment that a State Department delegation, headed by Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering, was just arriving in Bogotá for several days of fact-finding and consultations. Her letter triggered a firestorm of reaction among Pentagon officials grappling with an action plan for Colombia, that could provide the needed U.S. military and technical assistance, while assiduously avoiding even an appearance of a direct U.S. military role in combatting the narco-terrorists.

## **DEA and Republicans muddy the waters**

As if Secretary of State Albright was not doing an adequate job of mucking up any appropriate administration action toward the Colombia crisis, on Aug. 6, Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), the chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, appeared before one of his own subcommittees to attack General McCaffrey. Burton, who was one of the most virulent of the Clinton-bashers in the House (he became notorious for entertaining weekend guests by "reenacting" the suicide of Vincent Foster, shooting into a watermelon with live ammunition), sounded like a cheerleader for George Soros's Human Rights Watch, charging that the Colombian military was so corrupt that they could play no constructive role in the anti-drug effort.

"The lack of counter-narcotics strategy by the Clinton administration has never been more evident than in Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey's \$1 billion aid package," he blustered, referring to McCaffrey's letter to Albright. "This money targets the Colombian Army, rampant with allegations of human rights abuses."

Burton's alternative? Put American aid exclusively into the hands of the Colombian National Police instead of the Army. The CNP clearly has a role to play in any effective counter-narcotics strategy, but with the narco-terrorist FARC fielding 25,000 soldiers, with double the pay scale of the Colombian Army, and an estimated \$1.2 billion a year, at minimum, to spend on weapons and other equipment, from

the proceeds of narcotics trafficking, kidnappings, extortion, and other criminal acts, the idea of any police agency, alone, defeating such a narco-insurgency borders on the preposterous.

Yet, in the name of "defeating the insurgency in Colombia," Burton, along with House International Relations Committee Chairman Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.) and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), is openly opposing the McCaffrey \$1 billion military aid infusion. *Cui bono?*

Compounding the chaos fostered by Burton et al., the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is weighing in in support of the House Republicans' push to ice out the Colombian Army from the war on the drug cartels, including the FARC and the ELN. At the same hearings of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources where Burton spoke, the DEA's Chief of International Operations, William Ledwith, also testified. In addition to focussing his recommendations on further support for the CNP, Ledwith, in effect, stated that the DEA had no evidence that the FARC or the ELN were integral to the dope business in Colombia. He acknowledged an "alliance of convenience between guerrillas and traffickers," but he asserted later, "The terrorists are not the glue that holds the drug trade together."

Sources familiar with the Ledwith testimony report that White House officials prevailed on the DEA to "water down" its opposition to the idea that the FARC and the ELN are "narco-terrorists," and that anti-drug operations should remain purely police functions inside Colombia. In other venues, DEA officials go much further in denying reality.

Fortunately, both General McCaffrey and Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Rand Beers appeared at the same hearings to set the record straight. Beers, who travelled to Colombia with McCaffrey in late July, openly told the Congressmen that the Colombian Army would have to play a vital role in any successful anti-drug operation, particularly in the crucial Putumayo region, which borders Peru and Ecuador. "The CNP cannot operate there alone," Beers insisted. "In order to operate effectively in this area, which is heavily dominated by the FARC, the CNP will need the support of the Colombian military. Therefore, we must begin working with the Colombian military, to bring their capabilities up to a level where they can successfully operate alongside the CNP and contribute to the counter-narcotics effort."

Albright has shown herself once again to be a champion of the hard-core anti-Clinton Congressional Republicans and other enemies of the United States—in 7e, contradicting her own counter-narcotics experts. Sources report that President Clinton recently came inches away from dumping Albright as Secretary of State, as the result of her disastrous mishandling of the Kosovo crisis. The time is long overdue for the President to remove her, unceremoniously—before Colombia and all of South America go up in smoke.