

Colombia's Pastrana Breaks With the FARC

by Valerie Rush

On the evening of Feb. 20, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana went on national television to declare an end to the so-called "peace process" with the terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and ordered the Armed Forces to re-take the 42,000 square kilometer safe-haven he had granted the FARC three and a half years ago. Thirteen thousand government troops are now deployed to secure the vast zone, liberate its 100,000 inhabitants, and at long last, engage the enemy.

Pastrana's decision, supported by 90-95% of the Colombian people, set the basis for this nation to recover its territory and dignity from the narco-terrorists. With Congressional and Presidential elections months away, the nation now has the opportunity, not just to wage war, but to win the peace. The congressional candidacy of Lyndon LaRouche associate Maximiliano Londoño Penilla, on Presidential candidate Harold Bedoya's "Fuerza Colombia" slate, offers Colombians a national reconstruction program, which can make winning the peace a reality.

U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche supported Colombia's decision as obviously necessary. Anyone not taking measures against the FARC is not serious about fighting international terrorism, LaRouche said. Not to oppose the drug-running empire of the FARC, is not to be serious about one of the most important components of all international terrorism and irregular warfare.

A Long-Overdue Rupture

Pastrana's abrupt rupture of negotiations with the terrorists was triggered by that day's FARC-engineered hijacking of a passenger plane, and the kidnapping of Sen. Jorge Eduardo Gechem Turbay from that flight. But it was just the latest of an escalating wave of terrorist acts by the FARC since the latest peace pact signed only one month ago. As Pastrana told the nation Feb. 20, the FARC had carried out 117 terrorist operations, exploding four car-bombs, blowing up 33 electricity pylons, two sections of oil pipeline, three bridges, a reservoir serving the capital city of Bogotá, and more. They have revealed their true face, said Pastrana. "Now no one can doubt that, between politics and terrorism, the FARC opted for terrorism."

In the first three hours of the military operation dubbed "Operation Thanatos," 200 bombing sorties were carried out against 85 sites within the FARC-run "demilitarized zone,"

including training camps, coca plantations and air strips, and highways the FARC had built throughout the zone. The attacks were conducted by a combination of bombers and armored helicopters, including the powerful Black Hawks provided by the United States. Thousands of land troops have massed, and are awaiting orders to enter the zone. Operation Thanatos is projected to take four to six weeks to complete.

It is widely expected that the FARC will strike back across the country with terrorism, aiming at both civilian targets and strategic infrastructure, and Pastrana has already put military and police forces—and the nation as a whole—on terror alert. In a series of Presidential resolutions issued along with his order to re-take the safe haven, Pastrana also revoked the FARC's political status and re-instated arrest warrants against a score of FARC leaders who have been parading as "negotiators," while deploying an army of terrorists, drug runners, assassins and extortionists in the guise of "rebels."

That Pastrana made his decision in the midst of the nation's electoral campaign has dramatically altered the national geometry. Leading candidate Alvaro Uribe Vélez, known as the "hard-line" Presidential contender, was quick to back Pastrana's decision, but repeated his insistence that Colombia requires international mediation to force the FARC back to the negotiating table, and international military aid. In his campaign, he has insisted that Colombia needs UN "Blue Helmets" or other supranational forces, to intervene.

Former Armed Forces Commander and Presidential candidate of the "Fuerza Colombia" movement Gen. Harold Bedoya, also welcomed Pastrana's announcement, and even offered to "put on my uniform again, if called upon to do so." But Bedoya is adamant that the Colombian Armed Forces are fully capable of defeating the narco-terrorist enemy. He has insisted that any foreign troop involvement in Colombia could set the entire continent ablaze.

LaRouche, on Feb. 21, also emphasized that foreign troops would be a mistake. LaRouche assessed U.S. assistance to the Colombian military, if confined to logistical and intelligence support, as proper, because it would not affect the sovereignty of the Colombian government. The United States must not go into another country and conduct warfare there, even as an ally, breaching the sovereignty of that country, he said, adding that if Colombia gets sufficient logistical and intelligence support for its efforts, it can prevail. He stressed that candidate Uribe Vélez should bring himself up to speed on terrorism, by studying LaRouche's own important policy directives on dealing with drug-related international terrorism. The U.S. candidate referenced two documents for study: what became known as his "Guatusa" policy of the 1980s, which specified the parameters for cooperation in fighting narco-terrorism between Guatemala and the United States; and "A Proposed Multi-National Strategic Operation Against the Drug Traffic for the Western Hemisphere"—a document first presented in Mexico City in March 1985, now famous as LaRouche's 15-point warplan against drugs.