
Colombia

Narco-terror gets away with murder

by Javier Almario

On May 30, a car-bomb triggered in the middle of Bogota came within inches of murdering the head of the DAS secret service, Gen. Miguel Maza Márquez. The general survived, but several innocent passers-by were killed, including a child. The attack was universally attributed to the drug mafia, and its boldness stunned the nation.

The response of the government of President Virgilio Barco and of Colombian political circles, however, continues to be one of sheer impotence. Instead of battling the drug trafficking mafias which sponsor, finance, and train the assassination squads running rampant in the country, the government has decided to step up its war against the so-called "paramilitaries"—and against the military itself.

On June 12, the Barco government issued a new decree designed to impose tougher fines and longer prison sentences on "those who promote, finance, lead, encourage, or carry out acts leading to the formation of or recruitment of persons to armed groups commonly known as death squads, assassin bands, or private justice." The penalties are also to be applied to those who train or belong to such armed groups.

The decree's wording makes clear that it is not intended to be applied to terrorist guerrilla organizations of the "left," such as the communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the April 19 Movement (M-19), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) or the National Liberation Army (ELN). Rather, it is explicit that "when the acts described in this decree are committed by active or retired members of the Military Forces, National Police, or state security agencies, the penalty will be increased by one-third."

Mafia off the hook

DAS director General Maza Márquez himself admitted that the authors of the attack against him were the "narco-paramilitaries." But instead of urging the government to launch a political-military offensive against the drug cartel, he cast suspicion on the Armed Forces and police because, he said, they had failed to cooperate in investigations of the "paramilitaries." By demanding a scrutiny of possible links between the Armed Forces and paramilitary death squads—

precisely what the guerrilla groups have been demanding as the precondition for entering into "peace dialogues" with the government—Maza seems more eager to set off quarrels between institutions that should be coordinating efforts to fight the drug trade, than he is to stop the mafia.

Maza Márquez called on Attorney General Alfonso Gómez Méndez, who is tied to the left politically and through his family, to investigate a document discovered in the possession of retired Army Capt. Luis Javier Wanumen, in which details of the May 30 car-bombing were elaborated. It was later revealed that the document to which the secret service chief was giving so much credibility, accused Interior Minister Raúl Orejuela Bueno and the director of investigations of the National Police, Oscar Eduardo Peláez Carmona, of being members of the drug trafficking cartel based in the state of Cali and run by Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela.

Defense Minister Gen. Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz issued a public statement in defense of the interior minister pointing out that "former officer Luis Javier Wanumen Camargo," the source of the damaging allegations, "was dishonorably discharged from the Military Forces in 1984." All the governors of Colombia's departments similarly upheld the interior minister, while National Police director General Miguel Antonio Gómez Padilla defended Peláez Carmona for his "special ethical and moral values."

The Barco government has consistently refused to make a frontal assault on the drug trade, despite the fact that it has been repeatedly proven that the drug cartel is behind the financing of terrorism on both the "left" and "right." Although the Army and police have managed to search out and destroy many laboratories, warehouses, and airstrips belonging to the traffickers, the government has not provided the political backing for their actions in the form of extradition of captured traffickers and expropriation of their properties. Neither have the drug money laundries been touched, nor the "citizens above suspicion" that run cover for the drug trade.

Renewed push for drug legalization

Worse yet, the political elites of Colombia are still promoting the legalization of the drug trade as an acceptable alternative to an all-out war on drugs. The ruling Liberal Party's likely presidential candidate, Sen. Ernesto Samper Pizano, is using his electoral campaign to hawk his favorite argument for drug legalization, namely that if Colombia doesn't legalize drugs, the United States will.

In an interview with the popular weekly *Semana* June 8, Samper Pizano declared, "I hope what I predicted doesn't come to pass, that by the end of the century we would be importing marijuana cigarettes stamped 'Made in U.S.A.,' and we would be left with the dead and they with the profits." Samper cynically proposed that a "new model of coexistence" with the drug trade and with terrorism be established, since they represent "two new forms of struggle" in today's "reality."