

Andean Report by Andrea Olivieri

A narco-terrorist electoral strategy

The drug cartels and their communist allies would use electoral violence to dismantle Colombia's war on drugs.

Amid a new wave of violence and blackmail threats, Colombia's narco-terrorist forces unveiled their electoral strategy for the March 11 congressional elections, which also serve as a primary for the critical presidential election in May: By diverting national attention to a new "left-wing" upsurge, Dope, Inc. hopes to win drug legalization by default.

Using the carrot-and-stick approach, the cocaine-trafficking chieftains known as the "Extraditables" had declared a unilateral truce, while tendering a "surrender" offer to the Barco government, on condition that their crimes would receive "benevolent" treatment from the Colombian courts and that all extradition proceedings against them would be suspended. At the same time, the drug cartels' shock troops, the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, were deployed to conduct murders and kidnappings designed to convince the nation that a more serious threat from the "left wing" took precedence over President Barco's war on drugs.

When the Barco administration stuck to its guns and refused the traffickers' "unconditional" offer, however, the gloves came off. On March 5, the Extraditables proclaimed an undefined but threatening "state of alert," while police authorities began to report the resurfacing in Colombia of British mercenaries employed by the drug cartels to train their armies. In addition, a large weapons shipment destined for the Colombian drug cartels was intercepted in Calexico, Mexico the first week in March, which in-

cluded AK-47 assault rifles, machine guns, fragmentation grenades, and grenade launchers.

And so, while the pro-drug press was busily propagandizing the cartels' threats to *renew* their warfare, and electoral contenders like the Liberal Party's Hernando Durán Dussán were welcoming the Extraditables' offer of "détente," the truth is that that warfare had never stopped.

In response to the unequivocal statements of Government Minister Carlos Lemos Simmonds, that the Barco government was committed to restoring morality to the country and that it would never negotiate with the cartels, the Havana-trained ELN issued a death threat against him. The ELN's latest rampages against Colombia's national oil infrastructure and its kidnaping of dozens of public officials as well as private citizens, have prompted a major military deployment to the northeastern zone of the country, where the ELN's 1,400 terrorists are said to be concentrated.

Press reports of an ELN plot to disrupt the elections in the capital city of Bogotá have given further credence to the claim of a growing left-wing threat, to the point that a "European observer" quoted in the March 8 *Washington Post* suggested that the war on drugs may be abandoned, since "the government of Colombia cannot fight both wars at once."

Yet, any lingering doubts that the "right-wing" drug cartels and the subversive "left" are working in tandem were dispelled when the Extraditables issued a communiqué denying any

responsibility for recent murders of militants of the communist electoral front, the Patriotic Union (UP). The Extraditables' disclaimer was in response to a UP appeal for "clarification." Despite the government's repeated insistence that it is the drug traffickers who are the UP's worst enemies, the UP has persisted in blaming the Armed Forces for the murders.

The UP has also formally incorporated into its electoral platform a proposal for worldwide drug legalization, effectively joining the campaign of the cartels' own presidential favorite, Ernesto Samper Pizano. Samper has been the most outspoken of the presidential contenders in urging acceptance of the cartels' proposals. "The government has received an offer of surrender," he said, "and it should heed it and guarantee the traffickers due process. . . . If I were President, I would not extradite."

In a March 5 interview with the daily *El Espectador*, Samper said, "If repression fails and control of consumption is ineffective, the only alternative remaining to the industrialized countries in the medium term is the international legalization of consumption."

It is widely known that the cocaine cartels hope to be able to "convince" the next Colombian government to legitimize their vast economic and political interests through an amnesty which would ultimately include legalization of the drug trade. Of all the presidential contenders, only the Liberal Party's César Gaviria Trujillo bears the mantle of his anti-drug predecessor, the front-running Luis Carlos Galán whose assassination last August by the drug cartels shocked President Barco into declaring war on them. Now considered the front-runner himself, it remains to be seen whether the youthful Gaviria can fill his predecessor's shoes.