

Colombian terrorists get olive branch

by Andrea Olivieri

Colombian President César Gaviria's amazing "double-joint-ness" is gaining international notoriety, for the head of state has bent over so far backwards to accommodate the narco-terrorists who have declared war on his country, that many wonder if his backbone can still be intact. His latest announcement, made on the eve of a Sept. 27 departure for the United States, was to offer the country's bloodiest narco-terrorist groups, the Moscow-run FARC and the Cuba-trained ELN, four unprecedented concessions in the name of "peace":

- 1) to create a negotiating commission, including high-level government officials and notables, to establish the parameters for the "new peace process";

- 2) to permit international oversight (Amnesty International, Red Cross, etc.) over this peace process;

- 3) to grant the terrorists "belligerent" status under Protocols I and II of the Geneva Convention on "humanization of war"; and

- 4) to establish mechanisms for safeguarding the human rights of these so-called insurgents.

The immediate response of the ELN and FARC was to issue still further demands to the government, including the abolishing of extradition as a government weapon against the drug traffickers, a lifting of the state of siege which was imposed following the mafia assassination of presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán in August 1989, their guaranteed participation in a National Constituent Assembly intended to "reform" the Colombian constitution, and the implementation of programs to "protect" Colombia's natural resources from multinational exploitation.

The FARC, the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party, has become known in recent years as the "Third Cartel" because of its extensive involvement in the cocaine trade as a means of self-financing its insurgency. The ELN started out in the 1970s as a small, Cuban-backed guerrilla force on the Che Guevara model, until it was adopted by Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum during the mid-1980s, when it was converted into a highly efficient sabotage force against the country's petroleum infrastructure. Recently the ELN has been dubbed "Pablo Escobar's personal army," a reference to the protection services the ELN has

reportedly provided the fugitive head of the Medellín Cartel.

In an Oct. 1 interview with the Communist Party's *Voz* weekly, ELN head Manuel Pérez answered Gaviria's offer by insisting that his group would never surrender its weapons. "These terms do not exist in our vocabulary." He pledged that terrorist attacks on the oil pipelines and installations would continue, with the modification that they would "revise the form of sabotage so as not to produce ecological damage." He warned Gaviria that he was very much mistaken to think that the ELN was weak and could be taken advantage of. Rather, said Pérez, we are "a guerrilla movement in full bloom." The fact that *Voz* published the interview was widely viewed as a signal that the FARC fully shared Pérez's view on the matter.

A message to the narcos

The Gaviria offer to the ELN and FARC was immediately denounced by Enrique Santos Calderón, columnist for the daily *El Tiempo*, as a veiled message to the drug traffickers that the more violent their demands, the more likely that they could wring similar concessions from the government. Santos is the brother of *El Tiempo's* managing editor Francisco Santos, who was kidnaped and is currently being held by the drug traffickers in exchange for what they term "political treatment" by the government. Wrote Santos, since the Gaviria proposal was made while the guerrillas were "in full offensive, doesn't this tell the Extraditables [the cartel chiefs who are under indictment in the U.S.] that the best way to proceed is to return to the harshest, most violent actions, to be listened to?"

Santos's comments reflected growing recognition on the part of most Colombians—even those like Santos who have long advocated drug legalization and an end to extradition—that President Gaviria has effectively abandoned the fight against drugs. The head of state's U.S. visit was the clearest indication of this, for sitting at his right hand during the National Press Club speech Gaviria gave in Washington on Sept. 28 was Antonio Navarro Wolf, the "former" head of the narco-terrorist M-19 which murdered half the Supreme Court in November 1985 on orders of the drug cartels. Navarro Wolf is now Gaviria's minister of health. And yet, during Gaviria's National Press Club speech, he waxed eloquent about his commitment to eradicate drug traffickers and narco-terrorists. "They are plain criminals: We will never negotiate with them," was his hypocritical pledge.

Gaviria also reversed his usual pointed criticism of the United States for its failure to back words with deeds in supporting Colombia's anti-drug efforts. This time, during the question and answer period following his presentation, when he was asked what the U.S. could do to back the war on drugs, he answered that the U.S. was making a great effort, and that it was Europe and Japan which must do more. "I am impressed by Bush's will to support Colombia," he told the surprised audience.