
Interview: Colombia's Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Jaramillo

Colombia has aligned with Bush on economics, the Mideast... and drugs

by Javier Almario

The central objective of Colombia's foreign policy is "the process of both internationalizing the country and opening up the economy," according to Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Jaramillo. In an exclusive interview with *EIR*, held in his offices in Bogotá on Nov. 21, only three days before the arrival in that country of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, Mr. Jaramillo denied that this emphasis on free market policies was shaped under U.S. pressure, but he did admit that "of course, the United States stands to benefit somewhat by this."

A well-informed source inside the Foreign Ministry put it differently—on the condition that the individual remain anonymous. "The United States will seriously threaten a trade blockade of the country," the source confided to *EIR*, "if we don't vote with them in the U.N. Security Council on the Iraq issue. The pressures are intense and serious." A high-level member of the Colombian ruling elite confirmed to *EIR* that "President César Gaviria is not going to get into a fight with the United States; that would be suicide."

It appears that Colombia's present foreign policy has been cut from the same cloth as the U.S.'s in every aspect—including that of drugs—as can be seen in the exclusive interview we present below.

Following Baker's visit, Colombia promptly voted in the U.N. Security Council in favor of the U.S. ultimatum against Iraq, despite the fact that Colombian policy heretofore had always been that of seeking peaceful resolutions to border disputes. When *EIR* asked Minister Jaramillo why Colombia would tolerate a war against Iraq, allegedly for its invasion of Kuwait, when there "had been no international reaction" to the U.S. invasion of Panama, the minister responded: "Well, I'd rather not comment on Panama."

On economic matters, Minister Jaramillo gave his full support to the idea of turning Ibero-America into a strategic raw materials reserve for an eventual war economy in the United States. He explained that the so-called Group of Three—Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia—are doing ev-

erything necessary to assure the United States of an adequate and secure supply of fuel. The integration of those three countries, he confessed, was "accelerated by the Gulf crisis."

And with regard to drugs, actions speak louder than words. Our Foreign Ministry source had advised *EIR* that Baker, in exchange for Colombia's support at the U.N., would give his okay to President Gaviria's negotiations with the drug traffickers, which will effectively legalize their activities. That was precisely what Baker did. Gaviria's decision to negotiate, Baker told reporters, "falls to the competence of the Colombian government." This comes as no surprise, since Gaviria's entire approach to the Extraditables is modeled on U.S. "plea bargain" tactics, as demanded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The following are excerpts from the lengthy interview granted *EIR* by Minister Jaramillo.

EIR: United States Secretary of State James Baker is coming to visit, to ask that Colombia back a U.S. military action in the Middle East. What is Colombia's position on this?

Jaramillo: First, to hear Secretary Baker and to see what he wants to present to the Colombian government, or to see if he has any requests or if he wants to explore other alternatives. . . .

EIR: An anti-war movement similar to that which opposed the Vietnam War is currently emerging in the United States, and is making some strong criticisms, such as that the United States is in the Middle East to defend two outdated monarchies such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There are some who mention that these monarchies practice slavery. With what moral authority, then, is the United States entering into the fray, if it is not defending a democratic regime? What do you think of these criticisms?

Jaramillo: Without judging the perception of the American people regarding an American action—because what the American people think of what their government is doing

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does not really interest us—I do not believe that what is being defended are two monarchies like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but rather the principle of international law, in which there cannot be the violent annexation of a free and sovereign state like Kuwait. Further, this occupation has been condemned by the United Nations, and the withdrawal from Kuwait has been ordered. So, as long as this is not complied with, the rule of international law is violated and this is why there is currently an intervention in the Gulf. . . .

EIR: But the United States invaded Panama and there was no international reaction. The United States in the past century annexed Texas, California, and New Mexico, and Colombia has not proposed international action for these lands to be returned.

Jaramillo: Well, I would rather not comment on Panama. But you are talking about things of the past, and now we must make sure these kinds of things don't happen again.

EIR: Advanced sector strategists, especially in the United States and in England, think that the East-West conflict is already ended, and that now we will see North-South conflicts. Some have even dared to say that the first North-South case will be that of Iraq, but then others will come. For example, the Amazon jungle, which some feel should not belong to Latin American countries but to the whole planet. The other case is that of the war on drugs, which could be used as a pretext for supranational armed interventions. Is not the international action against Iraq worrisome as a precedent for future such actions against the Third World?

Jaramillo: We are starting from certain premises which, if true, are of course worrisome, but one must first prove that they are true. It is certain that the bi-polar Russian-U.S. confrontation, the East-West confrontation, has ended. It is true that there still exist tremendous imbalances in the industrialized world with respect to the developing sector, that is, between North and South. But one cannot conclude from this that East-West conflict is going to be replaced by confrontation over the Amazon jungle or over drug trafficking.

The issue of world ecological patrimony will have to be viewed within the larger general context which includes not only the Amazon jungle as the ecological patrimony of America, but also the damage the developed countries are inflicting on the ecology and on the eco-system. . . . There

exists what has been called the ecological debt of the developed world, that has been and continues to be created by the damage caused by the production of coal gas, by the deterioration of the ozone layer, the effect of acid rain, and by all the ecological damage to the eco-system being caused definitively by the industrialized world. I believe that this is the issue, among others, that will be addressed in the conference on the environment and development that will be held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This will be an excellent forum for seriously debating issues of economic development and ecological conservation. . . .

On the problem of the drug trade, I believe that this is a problem which affects all of humanity, but the major effort is being made by [drug] producing or processing countries like Colombia, while an equivalent effort is not seen on the part of the industrialized countries. We can see how right now the demand for drugs is growing in Europe, and that there is no serious, generalized, concerted effort by the European Community to fight drugs. Of course, Colombia is very grateful to the international community for its help in trade matters, but it is also important that this help be not merely in trade matters but also that much more drastic and coordinated measures be taken among all the European nations to be able to repress outbreaks of drug consumption, illegal weapons trafficking, dollar laundering, and also the illegal trade in chemicals. All this contributes to the expansion, to the proliferation, and to the universalization of the drug trade as a phenomenon which is rapidly spreading throughout the developed world.

EIR: What is the order of priority of Colombia's foreign policy?

Jaramillo: The Foreign Ministry is committed to the process of internationalizing the country, and to the opening up of the economy. This process has very important economic ramifications, and we are carrying it out for reasons of internal policy. After an analysis of Colombia's internal situation, we have reached the conclusion that this is what must be done right now with the Colombian economy, and the Foreign Ministry is collaborating and assisting this effort in all the forums to which it has access and through collateral relations with the rest of the world. Colombia's diplomatic missions abroad are doing the same thing, to establish a much more aggressive and active presence of Colombian products in foreign markets.

EIR: In Colombia, the government says that the economic opening is designed and applied by the government. But in Washington, it is seen differently. For them, Ibero-America's opening is the means by which they will succeed in turning all of America into a captive market for U.S. products which no longer have an outlet in Europe or in Japan. Are we not falling for a one-sided deal, in which the opening is on Ibero-America's part while the United States closes the door to our exports?

Jaramillo: No. I am necessarily talking about carrying out the opening and the internationalization of the Colombian economy for internal policy reasons. . . . Now of course the United States stands to benefit somewhat by this, but this is a tangential result, because what this whole process tends to do is lower Colombian costs of production, to make Colombian products more competitive abroad. . . .

EIR: Regarding Ibero-American integration, the President proposed an institution that would be a sort of Organization of American States (OAS) without the United States. What has been the continental response to this proposal?

Jaramillo: This has already been achieved in the Rio Group, where all the countries of Latin America, a representative of the Caribbean, and a representative of Central America are participants. This is in a certain way a Latin American Forum, which contains all the countries of South America and which little by little is becoming the forum to represent or interpret Latin America. . . .

EIR: Regarding the integration of Venezuela, Mexico, the Group of Three, it would seem that the President wants integration without provoking an adverse reaction on the part of the United States. Is the idea to seek integration but that it be small and not continental?

Jaramillo: I don't understand your question, because integration with Venezuela and Mexico cannot exactly be called small. It is a very important, very large thing for Colombia, for Mexico, and for Venezuela.

EIR: What I am referring to is this: In the United States, there is resistance to the idea of Latin America presenting itself as a bloc, whether it be to deal with the debt or with economic problems. Does this affect the proposal that President Gaviria has made?

Jaramillo: No. I believe that President Gaviria's idea is beginning to take shape at this very moment with the Rio Group. . . .

EIR: How is the proposal to create a common energy market between Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia proceeding?

Jaramillo: What has been proposed is that the Inter-American Development Bank finance a study of the Caribbean energy basin, to evaluate the possible development and complementarity among the three countries and also the Central

American and Caribbean countries. From the conclusions of this study we will derive the actions to be taken in the future, such as possibly the sale of coal to Venezuela, coal from Venezuela and Colombia to Mexico, transfer of gas from Venezuela to Colombia, or the sale of hydroelectricity from Colombia to Mexico via Central America. . . .

EIR: Will the conflict in the Middle East accelerate energy integration? That is, Mexico could sell more oil to the United States if Colombia were to give or sell it coal.

Jaramillo: Yes, I think that the conflict in the Gulf makes the need for coordination of efforts among all the Latin American countries, and especially those of the Caribbean Basin which are all surplus energy producers, much more urgent. Colombia is the world's number-four coal exporter, and we are on our way to becoming the world's top coal exporter. Venezuela is a major oil exporter and exports to the United States. Venezuela also has surplus coal, gas, and hydroelectric power.

Thus there is the possibility for great complementarity, and eventually the freeing up of energy for the North. In that way, the energy freed up by the consumption of coal, or gas, or hydroelectric power from Colombia or Venezuela could be sold by Mexico to the United States. I believe that we would all come out winners: the United States by improving its oil reserves, Mexico in having a cheaper energy source like coal, Colombia and Venezuela in being able to sell part of these natural resources to Mexico.

EIR: Would this also be an opportunity for foreign investment, especially by the United States, in exploiting these resources?

Jaramillo: That would be an alternative. The other would also be domestic investors or foreign-domestic consortiums. All of these alternatives are viable; we must study them, and there is no reason to discard the possibility of foreign investment in this sector within the Colombian context.

EIR: Within this framework would there be privatization of state companies?

Jaramillo: It depends on which ones.

EIR: In the energy sector, in particular: Ecopetrol, Pemex, Petroven, etc.

Jaramillo: I don't think there is any possibility that Pemex would be privatized. Pemex is the result of an ancestral Mexican fight which cost a lot of effort and blood in its time, and its reversion to private hands would not be easy. In the cases of Ecopetrol and of Petroven, I also don't see the urgency of doing that. In Colombia today, there is already a large percentage of oil exploitation in private hands; transportation of crude is also in private hands. We will have to see what the future of Ecopetrol will be. . . .