

EIR War on Drugs

Gen. Bedoya exposes FARC, Wall Street narco-alliance

by Valerie Rush

Colombia's former Defense Minister and former commander of its Armed Forces, Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.), spent a week in Washington, D.C. in early September, where he delivered a warning to the government of the United States: The Clinton administration must end its support for the capitulationist policy of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana, who is seeking "peace at any price" with that country's narco-terrorists. If the United States does not give its full political backing, instead, to the nation of Colombia for a total battle with narco-terrorism, the world community could soon see the establishment of the first "coca-republic," as well as Africa-style warfare across the Americas.

Throughout his visit, Bedoya pointed again and again to the fact that, as recently as late June, New York Stock Exchange President Richard Grasso met with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the jungle region that Pastrana has conceded to the FARC narco-terrorists. In Grasso's discussions with the terrorist leaders, who in effect dominate the drug trade in the country, "investment issues" were at the top of his agenda. Asked Bedoya: What is Colombia supposed to conclude from such a visit, which was condoned by the U.S. State Department? The unmistakable message is that Wall Street is ready to do business with the FARC, and that Colombia should go ahead and legalize drugs.

Bedoya's assessment of the crisis in Colombia, who is behind the crisis, and its global implications, intersected a heated debate within U.S. policy circles on how—or even, whether—to respond to the growing military and political strength of the FARC, which has become known as the Third Cartel in illegal drugs. His briefings were especially timely, as they occurred just prior to the visit of President Pastrana,

who came to the United States in mid-September to plead for "international understanding" for Colombia's plight, and for support of his capitulationist "peace policy."

In meetings with a dozen congressmen and senators, and with high-level officials at the State Department, General Bedoya gave a detailed map briefing of the narco-terrorist war against Colombia, and urged the United States and the international community to see Colombia's future as their own. He called for U.S. support for an all-out political-military war against narco-terrorism, conducted by Colombian troops, while there is yet time to win such a war, and to provide the kind of serious economic development aid that will enable Colombia to resist the assaults from the international drug cartels. In his meetings with nine congressmen, three senators, and four groups of congressional aides from both sides of the aisle and of every political persuasion, General Bedoya made a point of denouncing the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Wall Street banks in shamelessly encouraging narco-terrorism, in order to facilitate a constant flow of drug dollars into the moribund international financial system.

His briefings were treated with the utmost seriousness, reflecting full awareness that U.S. policy as presently pursued is simply not working.

In his meetings with official Washington, as well as with diplomats from every continent, Bedoya not only denounced Wall Street's Grasso, but also strongly condemned the IMF for demanding that Colombia include illegal money from the drug trade in its GNP accounting—in effect, the legalization of the drug trade. What war-torn Colombia doesn't need, said Bedoya, are IMF conditionalities or such Wall Street "invest-



Colombia's Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.) addresses a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 7.

ments.” What it does need, he insisted, is a Marshall Plan to give its people a future. He defined the two aspects of his Marshall Plan proposal as both political-military support for the war against narco-terrorism (including financial input, modern weaponry and equipment, and the training and intelligence to utilize them with maximum efficiency), and economic aid to help Colombia recover from its war wounds, and move forward. These same themes were repeated in the numerous press interviews Bedoya gave during his week-long visit—including a 20-minute televised interview broadcast across Ibero-America by the official United States Information Agency (USIA), whose full transcript appears below.

No to ‘peace at any price’

While few in Washington are as yet prepared to make the kind of 180 degree turn in policy so urgently needed to save Colombia, there is movement in the right direction. On Sept. 21, the same day that President Pastrana was presenting his “peace plan” to President Clinton, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Randy Beers told a Senate hearing that there is now incontrovertible evidence that the FARC “guerrillas,” with whom Pastrana hopes to talk peace, are actively involved in all aspects of drug trafficking—precisely what Bedoya has been arguing for years, and which readers of this magazine have known since at least 1985. Beers said that what the United States does or does not do in the coming months could determine Colombia’s future. And, he emphasized, “We have made it very clear to the Pastrana government that peace at any price

is not an acceptable policy.”

There are other voices within the Clinton administration which are pressuring for a policy “reevaluation,” such as White House drug policy adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.), who has demanded a dramatic increase in U.S. aid to Colombia, both to beef up the Colombian military and for economic development. McCaffrey has been clear that such increased aid is vital to decisively defeat the narco-terrorist assault. Contrary voices in the U.S. capital, however, may favor increased aid, but only enough to strengthen Pastrana’s hand at the negotiating table, not enough to actually win the war against the Third Cartel.

The reality of the Third Cartel

Just prior to his visit, Bedoya, who was also a 1998 Presidential candidate, had toured several countries in South America, seeking collaboration for a region-wide war on narco-terrorism. He was invited to Washington as one of the main speakers at the semi-annual national conference of the Schiller Institute Sept. 4-5, where he held 1,000 political activists from the LaRouche movement enthralled with his shocking description of a nation held hostage to the FARC and their fellow narco-terrorists, the National Liberation Army (ELN). Many of Bedoya’s audience watched in tears, as he showed a brief film clip, taken clandestinely, of kidnapped Colombian boys and girls, aged 10-16, being drilled by the FARC in terrorist warfare against their own nation. It is estimated that the FARC is currently holding some 4,000 of these children, who are used as cannon fodder in battles with the

Colombian Army (see box).

It is not only these children who have been deprived of their most fundamental right to protection by the state, insisted Bedoya. The Colombian government has also abandoned the 100,000 people who live in the five vast municipalities that President Pastrana has already surrendered to the FARC. Their children are stolen from them. They are daily terrorized, their property no longer their own. They face summary execution if they complain. And no one is safe. Just recently, the constitutionally elected mayor of the municipality of Vistahermosa was assassinated by the FARC, after he publicly denounced their terror tactics.

As Bedoya has also pointed out, there are an estimated 1,500 kidnap victims from around the country, who have been brought to the FARC's "de-militarized" jungle zone, until they are ransomed, or abandoned to their fate. With no military or police presence in the 42,000-square-kilometer area, the FARC kidnappers can operate with utter impunity.

When Pastrana, under pressure from his own military, urged the FARC to accept the presence of an "international verification committee" in the five-municipality area under its control, to guarantee that human and civil rights were being respected, the FARC had at first agreed, even proposing its own list of names for the committee. Only later did it reject the idea of such a verification committee, protesting that it was a U.S.-inspired "intervention," and announce an "indefinite suspension" of its non-existent negotiations with the government. Desperate to arrive in Washington with good news, President Pastrana had his "peace commissioner" Víctor Ricardo publicly announce on the eve of his departure, that international verification was not a required condition for peace talks. Pastrana's capitulation notwithstanding, the FARC was unmoved and the President was forced to come to Washington with a frozen "peace process."

The war spreads

While Bedoya was touring Ibero-America and the United States, the very forces out to destroy Colombia were conducting their own counter-deployment. FARC leaders travelled to neighboring Ecuador, to Brazil, and to Cuba, where they denounced U.S. "interventionism." Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who has openly taken the side of the FARC, has deployed his Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel on a continental tour, supposedly to garner support for a continental conference on "peace in Colombia." What Chávez means by such a "peace" was best expressed by his personal protest over a Colombian Army raid of a FARC safe-house in a region bordering Venezuela. During the raid, two Venezuelans in the hideout were killed, and another four arrested, including the son of a prominent "leftist" journalist. The four claim that they were merely holding a meeting on "human rights." The Chávez government has denounced Colombia's military for violating the four terrorists' human rights, and is demanding their immediate release.

Interview with USIA

'United, we can finish off narco-terrorism'

On Sept. 10, Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.) was interviewed on the United States Information Agency's (USIA) "Foro Interamericano" (Inter-American Forum) television program, under the headline "General Bedoya Proposes War on Narco-Terrorism: 'United We Can Finish Them Off.'" EIR translated the following transcript of the introduction and interview.

Reporter: The Colombian government's proposed peace dialogue with the guerrillas has stagnated, while President Andrés Pastrana is preparing a new integral strategy. Once that plan is ready, it will be examined by the United States, to determine future assistance to this troubled South American country. Washington has ruled out a direct U.S. military intervention into the Colombian conflict.

Together with Colombian Gen. Harold Bedoya, we'll analyze the alternatives available to his country. General Bedoya was Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and the Presidential candidate of the Fuerza Colombia Movement.

Before we start, let's look at the following.

Announcer: While Colombian President Andrés Pastrana prepares a new strategy in Bogotá to confront the drug trade, and restart peace talks with the guerrillas, in Washington, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Colombian Army, and former Defense Minister, Gen. Harold Bedoya, harshly criticized Pastrana's approach and, in a press conference, proposed a military solution to his country's conflict.

Bedoya at his Sept. 7 press conference at the National Press Club in Washington: What I am saying precisely, what I am proposing, is that an alliance be formed, and a political-military decision be made to destroy these criminal organizations—defeat them, destroy them, recover our territory, destroy the laboratories, and give Colombians back the freedoms they have lost in that territory [the demilitarized zone], and in general terms, to try and pursue those organizations. But this isn't being done right now, because the government is protecting that territory.

Announcer: General Bedoya, who met with U.S. legislators, thinks that a well-equipped Colombian Army could defeat both the drug trade and the guerrillas.

Bedoya: To do that, countries have to help Colombia, and the Colombian Army. I also told [the Congressmen] that our Army is heroic. Today, an army without an adequate budget, equipment, weapons, without communications or he-