

Who's Been Making U.S. Policy on Colombia?

by Dennis Small

There's stiff competition, but Washington's behavior toward Colombia in the past few years ranks as one of the biggest fiascos of recent U.S. foreign policy. Thankfully, both the Bush Administration and Congress are currently reviewing Colombia policy, although the outcome is far from certain. They are questioning, in particular, the ludicrous, supposed distinction made for years between the "ideological" terrorist activities, and the drug-running "business" side, of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). That phony premise—denounced by Lyndon LaRouche since the early 1980s when he coined the term "narco-terrorist"—has been Washington's cornerstone which, in four short years spanning both the Clinton and the Bush Administrations, has succeeded in:

- Handing about half of Colombia's national territory over to de facto control by the FARC;
- Transforming Colombia into the world's number-one cocaine exporter;
- Overthrowing the one government in the region—that of Alberto Fujimori in Peru—which had both wiped out terrorism and sharply reduced drug production, and was a model for Colombia and for the region.

Whom do we thank for this remarkable track record? The State Department, of course, was involved at every step. But who designed the policy which State's bureaucrats merely executed? Consider two such State Department bureaucrats—Peter Romero and Harold Koh—to get a glimpse of just who has really made Washington's policy. A compressed chronology tells our tale best.

Romero: Making Nice With the FARC

Peter Romero was the State Department's principal hands-on man for all of Ibero-America, including Colombia, from August 1996 to mid-2001—first as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, then as the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. By 1997, there was a raging policy debate over how to deal with narco-terrorism.

April 1997: Peru's Fujimori government retook the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima from MRTA terrorists, after a four-month stand-off, in which hundreds of diplomats and others were held hostage.

March 31, 1998: Gen. Charles Wilhelm, head of the U.S. Southern Command, told the House International Relations Committee that his staff was conducting a comparative study

of the war against narco-terrorism in Peru and in Colombia. He described it as "a study in contrast. . . . Peru, which has made steady and measurable progress against the dual threats of insurgency and narco-trafficking . . . [and] Colombia, which has not." Wilhelm promised that this "side-by-side analysis" would provide "a set of benchmarks" for how to address the crisis in Colombia. No official study ever saw the light of day; but *EIR* put its own analysis into print in its May 8, 1998 *Feature*, "Colombia Must Follow Peru's Strategy vs. Narco-Terrorism."

April 21, 1998: U.S. anti-drug czar, Gen. (ret.) Barry McCaffrey, visited Peru, where he praised that country's highly successful war against narco-terrorism.

April 24, 1998: Gen. Nicolás Hermoza, head of the Peruvian Armed Forces, was invited by General Wilhelm to speak at a Miami conference of the U.S. Southern Command. Wilhelm characterized the Peruvian commando operation to retake the Japanese Ambassador's residence, as "one of the few resounding victories against world terrorism in the last 20 or 30 years."

May 4, 1998: General Wilhelm visited Colombia's jungle region, Caguán, to gain first-hand knowledge of the battle against the FARC. The Colombian military presented him with unambiguous evidence that the FARC have become Colombia's largest cocaine cartel. Since 1996, General McCaffrey had been emphatic on this point: "They [the FARC] are guarding drugs, they're moving drugs, they're growing drugs. . . . They're a narco-guerrilla force, period." By early May 1998, the no-nonsense approach of McCaffrey and Wilhelm was gaining the upper hand.

Then, Enter Peter Romero.

May 15-18, 1998: The U.S. Embassy in Colombia hosted a three-day "peace seminar" in Cartagena with the presence of 35 U.S. government officials, headed by Peter Romero. The goal was to pressure Colombia, especially its military, into negotiating with the FARC; and to establish, as Romero put it, that *all* Colombian-U.S. contact must go through the "natural channel," the State Department. Colombian observers saw a transparent attack on Generals Wilhelm and McCaffrey.

Dec. 14-15, 1998: Romero chose to set the example himself, and sent State's Office of Andean Affairs Director, Philip Chicola, to Costa Rica, for secret face-to-face meetings with the FARC's notorious chief of finances, Raúl Reyes.

Koh. . . as in 'Caine'

Not everyone in Washington was ready to swallow this insanity. The FARC was on the State Department's own list of international terrorist organizations, with which the U.S. government purportedly refuses to negotiate. The FARC, moreover, answered Romero's Chicola overture by murdering three Americans in February 1999. Lyndon LaRouche and *EIR* had systematically proven that the FARC were, in fact, a drug cartel—backed by Wall Street and City of London

financial interests, and their gaggle of human rights NGOs, such as George Soros's Human Rights Watch and British intelligence's Amnesty International. Many in Washington thought on the same lines as McCaffrey and Wilhelm's initiative. Shouldn't the U.S. government listen to LaRouche, and follow his policy recommendations, giving technological and logistical backing to Colombia's armed forces, and supporting their campaign to defeat the FARC narco-terrorists militarily?

Not if Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, an unrepentant follower of Zbigniew Brzezinski's strategic madness, could help it. To buttress Peter Romero, Albright, in November 1998, brought in Harold Koh as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Harold Koh's official State Department biography reports that he studied law at Harvard and Oxford; authored more than 70 articles on international law and human rights; taught at Yale Law; and "has received numerous honors for his human rights work." But the bio conveniently fails to report the politically most significant single fact of his prior career: from at least 1995 until his 1998 recruitment to State by Albright, Koh was a member of the Board of Directors of Human Rights Watch (HRW).

This notorious NGO is funded by George Soros, the world's leading drug legalizer, who also sits on the Advisory Committee of HRW's Americas Division. HRW states that one of its chief missions is "to document and challenge human rights violations caused or exacerbated by efforts to curtail drug trafficking internationally, as well as in the United States." That's exactly what Harold Koh set out to do, from his new post at State.

February 1999: The FARC cancelled the start of "peace talks" until the Colombian government purged top military officers who had been particularly tough on drugs and terrorism, and whom the FARC accused of having links to paramilitary forces violating human rights.

April 9, 1999: Koh flew to Colombia and backed the FARC's demands. At a conference on "Human Rights: An Open Dialogue" in Medellín, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, he bludgeoned the Colombian government into going back to the negotiating table, and purging key military officers who were opposed to this policy. Koh demanded: "The Colombian government must cut each and every one of the ties between the military and paramilitary, bringing to trial, even unto the far-reaching consequences, those members of the Armed Forces." He adds that the Colombian government "has to do more to protect the defenders of human rights from attack."

April 11, 1999: Colombian Defense Minister Lloreda Caicedo and the office of President Andrés Pastrana himself publicly protested Koh's remarks. But the purges and negotiations were carried out as demanded.

The 'Grasso Abrazo'

June 26, 1999: Wall Street decided the time was ripe for New York Stock Exchange President Richard Grasso to travel to the FARC-controlled DMZ in southern Colombia. Grasso

met with FARC finance chief Raúl Reyes, and was photographed in an embrace with him: the "Grasso Abrazo" since made infamous by *EIR*. Grasso told a press conference that he and Reyes had discussed a "mutual exchange of capitals."

July 16, 1999: General McCaffrey sounded the alarm, calling the Colombian situation now "near emergency."

July 21, 1999: Albright convinced President Clinton to issue a public letter to President Pastrana, backing negotiations with the FARC. Sources told *EIR* that the Clinton letter, with which Wall Street and London turned the tide, was in fact drafted by Peter Romero.

Sept. 7, 1999: Gen. Harold Bedoya, former head of the Colombian Armed Forces, visited Washington and intensely lobbied Congress and the administration against the policy of the "Grasso Abrazo." Returning to Washington in February 2000, General Bedoya held a joint seminar with Lyndon LaRouche, on the subject of "The War on Drugs and the Defense of the Sovereign Nation-State," where Bedoya endorsed LaRouche's policy approach.

Oct. 15, 1999: Harold Koh was featured at a day-long seminar at the Rayburn Congressional Office Building, and repeated his earlier charges of the Colombian military's institutional links to paramilitary death squads. An array of human rights NGOs participated, including HRW and Amnesty International.

Jan. 22, 2000: Richard Grasso returned to Colombia, meeting in Cartagena with President Pastrana and his "Millennium Group" of advisers. Participants included America Online co-founder Jim Kimsey, former American Express CEO James Robinson, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Washington power-broker Vernon Jordan, and others. It was the "Grasso Abrazo" writ large. Who organized this meeting? Violy McCausland, president of Violy, Byorum and Partners (VB&P), a high-powered Wall Street investment banking firm "specializing in the volatile, but highly lucrative, world of Latin American investment banking," said one business magazine. A native of Barranquilla, Colombia, McCausland worked for J.P. Morgan for 14 years as their "star Mergers and Acquisitions player." In 1993 she became the top investment banker for the private firm of James Wolfensohn, later head of the World Bank. In 1996, she set up VB&P with Stormy Byorum, who came from a 23-year career at Citicorp. The VB&P Board of Advisers includes former Honduran President Rafael Callejas, former Argentine Finance Minister José Martínez de Hoz, as well as Mulroney and Robinson.

Feb. 1, 2000: Seven FARC "comandantes," including Raúl Reyes, took a three-week, six-nation, all-expenses-paid tour of Europe, to promote the "peace process." Secretary of State Albright praised the tour as "remarkable" and "very encouraging."

Feb. 29, 2000: Harold Koh was interviewed by the Colombian daily *El Tiempo*, demanding a purge of the Army of elements suspected of "links" to paramilitary groups. Koh admitted his office had no evidence of such links, other than that provided by his former colleagues at Human Rights

Watch. “Human Rights Watch concludes that there are links at every level with the paramilitaries. We have no evidence that this is so. . . . But. . . .”

March 4, 2000: AOL’s Kimsey and his sidekick, millionaire real-estate investor Joseph Robert, paid a personal visit to the FARC in its Caguán redoubt. They met for three hours with “Supreme Commander” Manuel Marulanda, on potential U.S. investments with the FARC.

March 30, 2000: A FARC communiqué called upon the United States to legalize drugs, and send a Congressional delegation to “their” DMZ to dialogue.

The Last Straw: Fujimori

The Wall Street-City of London crowd were near their objective. There remained one serious thorn in their side: Fujimori’s Peru, whose mere existence was a constant reminder to the world that there was no need to surrender to the international drug trade and their terrorists.

June 26, 2000: Madeleine Albright travelled to Warsaw with Harold Koh, for an international gathering called “Community of Democracies.” On its sidelines, both Albright and Koh met with Alejandro Toledo, the Peruvian economist they were cultivating to overthrow the Fujimori government. George Soros also met Toledo in Warsaw, and gave him \$1 million to finance the plot—as Toledo himself subsequently admitted.

Sept. 25, 2000: Koh and Romero visited Peru, and set up the political kill against Fujimori, who had recently capitulated to pressure and fired his chief intelligence adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos.

Oct. 18, 2000: Romero’s underling Philip Chicola visited Colombia. His December 1998 secret talks with the FARC were, by then, public. Chicola told the press the United States would support international financing for the FARC “when there is a clear agreement as to where the peace process is going.”

Nov. 19, 2000: Peru’s Fujimori resigned.

Nov. 20, 2000: Koh travelled to Colombia with General McCaffrey, who told the press, in one of his last public statements as a government official, “I haven’t the slightest hesitation in affirming that the main cocaine-producing organization in the world is the FARC.” But Koh threatened explicitly that unless the “extremely severe” human rights crisis in Colombia was addressed, promised U.S. funding for the Colombian government would be cut off.

March 8, 2001: Romero said, “We do not discard the possibility of some [U.S. government] participation in the peace process inside Colombia in the future.”

Where did Peter Romero go, after leaving the State Department in mid-2001? He became a partner at none other than Violy, Byorum & Partners, the Wall Street firm underwriting the campaign for a full-scale international financial deal with the FARC narco-terrorist cartel. These being the makers of Washington’s Colombia policy, is it any wonder that things have turned out as they have?

Voters Have Rejected Surrender by Pastrana

This statement was released March 14 by Maximiliano Londoño Penilla, President of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) in Colombia, and candidate from Bogotá for Colombia’s House of Representatives in the March 10 election, on the Fuerza Colombia slate. The Presidential election is scheduled for May 26.

In the recent elections for the Colombian Congress, there was a massive rejection of the Pastrana policy, of having surrendered the country to the narco-terrorists, and liquidated what little remained of industrial plant and employment in the country.

Given the President’s inability to offer competent solutions, all the institutions, and especially the political parties, were hard-hit. The ruling Conservative Party was even left without a Presidential candidate, and is now desperately trying to figure out how to survive politically. Several candidates associated with Presidential contender Alvaro Uribe won their elections because an important section of the voting population identifies them as enemies of narco-negotiations.

Unfortunately, Alvaro Uribe, just like (Presidential rivals) Horacio Serpa and Noemí Sanín, is not proposing anything



Presidential candidate Harold Bedoya Pizarro (left) with Maximiliano Londoño. In a national television debate on March 20, Bedoya said he would renegotiate Colombia’s debt and seek low-interest, long-term reconstruction credits. He said that the FARC were narco-terrorists six years ago; in the debate, he called for more assistance to Colombia against them, but rejected foreign troops.