

The FARC attacks, the government negotiates, and Colombia disintegrates

by Javier Almarío

The publication in April of this year of several reports forecasting a very dark future for Colombia caused an uproar, both nationally and internationally. The British-run International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) warned in a recent report that “the guerrillas are winning the war and will take over the country,” a prediction London views with satisfaction, given its strategy of dismantling nation-states. According to the *Washington Post*, another report from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) predicted, that if things continue as they are now, in five years the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) will take power and convert Colombia to a “narco-state.” The DIA contends that narco-terrorists control 40% of the country’s national territory.

But if the situation continues on its current course, it will take far less than five years for Colombia to disappear as a viable nation-state. Colombia is *already* a narco-state. The Army and the National Police are already carrying out combat exercises in the streets of Bogotá. The capital is under siege, and on any one of the roads out of the city, groups of narco-terrorists can appear at one of their “roadblocks,” kidnap any individual whose name appears on the screen of their laptop computers, or anyone identified as a “military target.”

Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.), the only candidate for the May 31 Presidential elections who rejects unconditional surrender to the narco-terrorists, has been subject both to innumerable attacks by the media, controlled by the oligarchy, and to “military” attacks by the narco-terrorists. On the evening of April 26, one of his campaign offices in Bogotá was completely destroyed by a bomb; several volunteers have received death threats for campaigning, and in a number of regions, the candidate’s literature has to be circulated clandestinely.

The negotiation trap

Overlooked amid the daily barrage of media reports of kidnappings, murders, narco-terrorist “roadblocks,” bombings, extortion, ambushes, and armed takeovers of municipalities, is a very serious piece of news which signals Colombia’s descent into total disintegration. Gustavo Alvarez

Gardeazábal, Governor of Valle del Cauca, is negotiating directly with the narco-terrorists, purportedly to obtain “peace” for his department (state). Independent of the national government, he has travelled to London and other parts of the world to request help for his “peace process.” In his statements, Alvarez speaks of Valle del Cauca as if it were a separate nation.

Seventy percent of Valle de Cauca’s municipal mayors are threatened by the FARC, and are accountable to the group for what they do, and do not do. One key issue is the control of the budget. Although the FARC publicly tells people it intends to make sure that state funds are used correctly, and not stolen by the politicians, the truth is that unless mayors hand over 10% of their budgets to finance the narco-FARC, they will be killed or kidnapped. Gangs of armed men permanently “patrol” the municipalities to watch what is said and done. In oil-producing regions such as Arauca, Putumayo, and Meta, where royalties from oil companies are incorporated into the budget, funds are also diverted to finance the narco-terrorists’ activities, rather than being used for the welfare of the population.

To enforce this, one of the first conditions imposed on governors and mayors by the narco-terrorists is that FARC and ELN agents be named to key positions, from which they can control state funds. Alvarez Gardeazábal’s calls for “peace,” and his repeated attacks on the government for not letting him seek “peace my way,” reflects the terror felt by the political class of a country which has allowed itself to be corrupted by the drug trade, and is now surrendering to the logical outcome of that corruption: the increased power of armed narco-terrorism. Valle del Cauca is one of Colombia’s three wealthiest departments.

Other governors are walking down the same path. Cauca department is in a situation very similar to Valle del Cauca. In Nariño, on the border with Ecuador, the ELN kidnaps mayors with impunity, while its men patrol the streets of several municipalities, as if they were the authorities.

Samper hands over everything

In the meantime, President Ernesto Samper Pizano’s narco-regime has no interest in resuming control of the nation,

for which the first step would be to defeat the armed narco-terrorists. Samper's priority has been, and continues to be, achieving "peace" at any price, in the few months remaining of his term in office. He has therefore given orders that no offensive military operations be launched, and that the Army respond only if attacked. Samper's strategy stems from the argument that the war cannot be won and that, therefore, peace has to be negotiated. The FARC and ELN argue from the opposite standpoint—that they are winning, and will win the war, and that any dialogue or "peace" negotiations are another step forward in gaining legitimacy, international credibility, and ability to recruit troops.

From the very beginning of his government, Samper has accepted the FARC's demands to clear large portions of national territory (i.e., removing the military from them), in order to begin "peace" negotiations. The FARC has always demanded clearing those areas where it has influence, with the goal of keeping them under its permanent control.

At the same time, Samper has accepted advice from the multitude of UN non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country, which spend their time vilifying the Army, and demanding that military officers be tried and sentenced, under cover of "human rights abuses." As a result of the recent murder of Eduardo Umaña, a lawyer for several people accused of belonging to the ELN, and recognized by the NGOs as a defender of human rights, Samper allowed the NGOs to have access to all secret military intelligence files. Thus, anything the military investigates will immediately become publicly available. The NGOs argue that Umaña was assassinated, because he was identified as an ELN member in some intelligence file.

The plot against the military

Colombia's Armed Forces are demoralized, have an insufficient budget, are the target of terrorist attacks carried out with the complicity of Samper's government, and operate under the onus of being "led" by a President who is an accomplice of the drug cartels. Most soldiers still recall the words of Gen. Ricardo Cifuentes, who resigned from the Army in January 1996 because he was convinced that drug money had put Samper in the Presidency, and who hated the idea that troops would swear loyalty to a President unworthy of such trust. "The President doesn't deserve my support," he said at that time. The troops also know that General Bedoya was removed from his post as head of the Armed Forces, because he opposed Samper's strategy of losing the war, and because the FARC made Bedoya's removal the condition for any "peace" talks.

Add to this the terrorist attacks on the Armed Forces during Samper's term in office. At the end of 1994 and beginning of 1995, as a result of a march that the FARC organized using threats of violence, the Samper government negotiated an agreement with the coca producers of Caquetá and Guaviare, that the government would not eradicate coca planted on plots

of less than three hectares. Given this arrangement, the Army opted to prevent the entry into the region of chemical inputs for cocaine processing, and stop the outflow of cocaine. In mid-1996, the FARC organized another march to take over Florencia, the capital of Caquetá.

While the Army was occupied with containing the march, it was the victim of a severe attack at the Las Delicias military base in Caquetá, in which the FARC murdered 50 soldiers and kidnapped another 60. Subsequently, at the end of 1996, the government ordered the clearing of 15,000 square kilometers of territory, supposedly to allow the FARC to free the soldiers. Despite this, not one soldier was freed. Samper then ordered another clearing in mid-1997, which resulted in the freeing of the soldiers, but which was a huge publicity stunt which effectively handed control of the cleared area over to the FARC.

EIR warned at the time, that after this occurred, the FARC would never give back that territory willingly, and that its goal was to maintain permanent control over the Caguán Valley, in which a large percentage of the world's coca is produced. Then, in December 1997, the narco-terrorists attacked another military base in Nariño, killing 10 soldiers and kidnapping 22. Subsequently, in March 1998, Mobile Brigade No. 3 was effectively dismantled after a surprise attack while trying to take back Caguán, the region Samper had surrendered to the FARC a year ago. The FARC attacked a battalion of the brigade, killing 62 and kidnapping 43 soldiers. Following this, Samper ordered the Mobile Brigade, a unit made up entirely of professional soldiers, to be demobilized.

Now the FARC is demanding that it be handed 50,000 square kilometers of national territory, supposedly as the first step toward eventual peace talks. Except for Bedoya, all the candidates are unaware of how precarious the country's situation is. Colombia is about to lose all of its freedoms, and fall to a narco-terrorist dictatorship. Samper is doing everything possible to ensure that his narco-regime lives on in the person of his candidate, Horacio Serpa, who insists that he is the candidate of "peace."

The truth is, that any public agreement between the narco-terrorists and the regime is the equivalent of an agreement between mafias to redefine the terms under which they will continue running the business. All of the "peace" proposals under discussion have as their first demand, the dismantling of the Armed Forces.

Conservative Party candidate Andrés Pastrana, who in doctored polls appears to be the front-runner, can't do enough to show that he is even more willing than Serpa to make concessions to the narco-terrorists. Colombia's political class thinks it can pacify the narco-terrorist groups, by granting the FARC autonomy over Caquetá, Putumayo, Meta, and Arauca, and granting the ELN autonomy over the Santander departments and a couple of others.

Nothing could be further from reality.