
War on Narco-Terrorism

President García calls citizens to fight 'from heights of victory'

by Valerie Rush

President Alan García has issued a call to every Peruvian citizen to become "an active combatant" against terrorism. Otherwise, he stressed in a televised interview, "We will see our system gradually undermined."

Peruvians have reason to be angry. On Oct. 14, former Peruvian Navy chief Admiral (ret.) murdered by terrorists; since then, assassination plans against 50 other prominent Peruvians have been discovered.

On Nov. 1, in a speech to a gathering of mothers' clubs, President García made this appeal to citizens to mobilize on behalf of the national interest:

"I want to be President of a nation victorious over itself. . . . I say that each one of us, looking within ourselves, can find reasons to feel like men and women of our own century, to feel like human beings. I say therefore that it is within our capacity to create a generation of men and women with a victorious spirit, . . . to put aside the defeatism of those who have been overwhelmed by their sorrows. We are more than our sorrows. Peru is greater than its own problems. Each one of us is much more than our pains. . . . We will fight from the heights of victory."

García's speech could also have been addressed to citizens of neighboring Colombia, which on Nov. 6 was painfully reminded of the 100 victims, including 11 Supreme Court judges, of last November's narco-terrorist onslaught against the Bogota Justice Palace, now a blackened shell. Colombia today faces a strong resurgence of the drug mob.

García's "call to arms" to Peru's citizens was backed by a series of bold proposals which, if implemented, could set the pace for South America. Among them are the creation of special tribunals to try terrorists, headed by secretly chosen and highly protected judges, and the strengthening of the Peruvian penal and legal codes to provide "drastic" penalties for terrorism and to halt the "revolving door" phenomenon so common in the jails of Peru, Colombia, and elsewhere on the continent.

García motivated the proposed measures with a warning that "the worst thing that could happen in a country is that fear of the law, of judges and of the instruments of power and

justice is lost; we need to put an absolute and final end to these terrorists who come and go in the jails, and who are wreaking such death and economic havoc against the nation."

While further details of the measures have not been revealed, they have already received widespread support inside Peru. Members of the judicial branch expressed immense relief that concrete action would be taken to allow it to function with integrity, and the armed forces closed ranks behind García, describing the measures as "a brilliant response" to the people's demands for action.

Mafia advance in Colombia

The drug mafia has launched its bid for governmental power across the continent. But thanks to García's example, in Colombia, where the narco-terrorist threat to the national institutions is perhaps most advanced, there is a small but vocal chorus of demands for President Virgilio Barco to end his equivocation and follow García's lead.

Like Peru, Colombia has recently suffered the loss of one of its "priceless men," as García described the many victims of narco-terrorism. In fact, it was the mafia murder of the respected Medellín superior court judge Gustavo Zuluaga Serna on Oct. 30 that stirred Colombia's national association of judicial workers, Asonal, to issue its "ultimatum" to Barco:

"Enough shows of mourning and lamentation! This is the moment to act, and that mission is yours, Mr. President. . . . Order the capture, Mr. President, of the known assassins, and put the armed forces under your command. . . . If you wage the battle against the enemies of justice and democracy, Mr. President, we will back you. If you are silent, we judges of the republic will remain even more unprotected against the machine guns, and with us . . . Colombian society."

Speaking at the funeral of Judge Zuluaga, the president of Medellín's superior court Jairo Terna echoed the warning of Peru's García: "The atrocious crime represents for the judiciary . . . and for the nation a nearly irreparable loss, because respect for justice—the most abused public power in history—has been lost. . . . We must reflect on what a country without judges would be like. . . ."

'Narco-tolerance'

Asonal and Judge Terna were not only speaking of the narco-terrorist onslaught that has been threatening to eliminate the last vestiges of justice in the country. Their angry statements are also a response to the growing environment of tolerance for the drug mob's inroads in Colombian financial and political life. A government proposal for a tax amnesty for "dirty money" is exemplary of the Barco government's back-tracking in the war against drugs. So, too, is the recommendation of the National Narcotics Council, a dependency of the Colombian justice ministry, for the suspension of a highly successful herbicide eradication program against marijuana cultivation—under "environmentalist" pressures.

Perhaps most telling of the degree to which the intensely Catholic country has succumbed to mafia blackmail is the recent proposal of high officials of the Colombian Church for government dialogue with the drug mafia, modeled on previous peace negotiations with the guerrillas. As the daily newspaper *El Espectador* noted in a signed editorial on Nov. 2, "the Church's generous office to the drug trade was answered with the assassination of another magistrate. . . . We simply don't understand, though the pastoral language of the Church be used, how, when and why there should be dialogue with the drug trade." (See *Documentation*.)

The editorial, signed by the newspaper's editor Guillermo Cano, went on to challenge the inroads of the mafia in government, financial, and political layers. *El Espectador* has already been threatened by a spokesman for the powerful Medellín-based drug mafia, Jairo Ortega Ramírez, the congressman from the Medellín crime capital whose chosen "alternate" in Congress was cocaine czar Pablo Escobar Gaviria before the latter turned fugitive.

Ortega was used by the mafia three years ago, in 1983, to smear then-Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla with false corruption charges. Undeterred by the slanders, Lara Bonilla carried out an unprecedented war against drugs which threatened the financial godfathers of the Colombian drug trade, until he was assassinated by mafia gunmen on April 30, 1984. Congressman Ortega has denounced *El Espectador* for exposing his role in that dirty affair, and pledged he would "do it again."

Extradition treaty under fire

The center of the fight in 1983-84 was the Colombian-U.S. Extradition Treaty for drug traffickers, which then-President Belisario Betancur pushed through in Lara Bonilla's honor after his death. Now, a bill to overturn the treaty is being considered in the powerful First Commission of the Colombian Senate. The commission is presided over by Liberal Party gangster Alberto Santofimio Botero, who is known to favor the bill and to have encouraged its proponent, Sen. Ramón Elías Nader. Elías Nader is the brother of a former senator and convicted cocaine trafficker who has just finished serving five years in a U.S. penitentiary.

The justice ministry has already announced that it considers the extradition treaty of higher constitutional standing than any law. Nonetheless, it is widely recognized that approval of the anti-extradition bill would represent the most serious reversal for the anti-drug forces of South America, which have looked to the precedent-setting war on drugs launched by Barco's predecessor, Belisario Betancur, as a model for them all.

Documentation

On Nov. 2, Colombian newspaper El Espectador published an unusual editorial signed by owner and director Guillermo Cano, excerpts of which follow:

We are at the point of co-existing with organized crime, of accepting it, be it legalizing its corrupt business deals, sitting down with it at peace talks, or facilitating the conversion of pesos stained with the perversion of youth into clean Colombian pesos, giving the seal of approval to the profits of abominable crimes.

As opposed to what is said, what is in fact proposed lacks real effectiveness. If the drug traffickers today are absolved by an amnesty, their pasts pardoned, we will see that within 24 hours their place will be taken by equally dangerous criminals. That is why we cannot understand, though the pastoral language of the Church be used, how, when and why there should be dialogue with the drug trade.

There is a divine justice inclined to pardon the repentant. But there is also a human justice which should judge those suspected of atrocious crimes. . . . Given that the drug trade has nothing to do with politics, with social equality, nor with ideologies, its crime . . . lacks any possible political or social justification. This horrid crime, in a society which considers itself more or less organized, should be punished by laws which throughout the history of human society have established civilized parameters, which man has organized for his own defense. Centuries have passed since the law of the jungle prevailed, and it would appear that we are very close to returning to that period, as the victor in the battle for justice appears not to be the good citizen, honest and respectful of the law, but the individual who assassinates, robs or degrades his fellow man. . . .

Each day we are more and more shocked to see how in Congress bills are presented which are going to strengthen the drug traffickers. That the prescription be legalization of the drug trade. That the panacea be Church dialogue with the drug kingpins. That the money of the drug trade be declared welcome at the cost of the lives of judges, journalists, helpless citizens, ingenuous youth lured by easy money. . . . If the situation is not changed, the final word will be given by the drug trade, and it will be, "We win!"