

Gen. Bedoya: To win, mobilize the nation

“Don’t try to sell me the story, that in order to achieve peace, we have to hand over pieces of our country to criminals, to terrorists,” said Presidential candidate Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.). He has based his campaign on one central message: “All is not lost.” Colombia’s continued existence as a nation requires that it drive the drug cartels and their armies out, and it is possible to do so. The following are excerpts from interviews he has given to Colombian media.

Semana of Feb. 23, 1998 describes Bedoya as a hardworking, devout Catholic, married for 28 years to a woman who loves opera. Some suggest Bedoya will beat the system, and sweep the elections as Peru’s Alberto Fujimori did in 1990, writes *Semana*, and then asks, why are you the only candidate who rejects dialogue with the guerrillas as the road to peace?

A: “Every government has offered dialogue, and here we have, after many years, a country at war. What purpose have these constant offers served? Who says that the FARC or the ELN are interested in peace? . . . From 1964-66, President Valencia, called the President of peace, pacified the country. How? With dialogue? No, by applying the law and the Constitution. Above all, the rule of law must be reestablished. This is an essential condition for any democracy. The law. Whoever commits a crime, must pay for it. Whoever assassinates, should be sentenced. . . .

Q: “You really would not accept any form of amnesty?”

A: “It could be acceptable for those who have committed a political crime of sedition and mutiny, without taking recourse to criminal actions, to terrorism. And also for the guerrilla rank and file who want to turn themselves in. We would give every kind of guarantee to them. But there cannot be an amnesty for the leaders of organizations who are no longer guerrillas, but are terrorists, and which have been internationally classed as such, just like the ETA or the IRA.

Q: “You do not believe, then, in the neutrality of the civilian population?”

A: “No, no one can remain neutral in the face of criminals. . . . What if the civilian population, during the war for independence, had declared itself neutral? Bolívar would have lost the war. There is no neutrality possible. One is either with terrorism, or against it. . . . Here, or in any other place, the first thing that is needed to confront this war, is a state which is organized, and a nation which is mobilized.



Colombia’s Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.), campaigning for the Presidency.

Q: “Don’t you think that this has been tried?”

A: “Never. Here we still believe that the problem of terrorism is a matter exclusively for the military, and this is not true. A strategy of the state is required. . . . If the priority of the country is, and must be the fight against subversion and drug trafficking, it is necessary that the Executive—that is, the President and all the ministries, starting with those of Justice and Finance, formulate their activities based on this objective. Also, Congress and the Judicial branch.”

General Bedoya told the daily *El Tiempo* of March 29: “We are going to end this practice of kidnapping, raping, forcing the guerrilla rank and file to stay in these organizations, because if they leave, they kill their brother, their mother, their father, whomever. . . . There are no guerrillas here. What there are in Colombia, are mafias of terrorist drug traffickers. In the United States, they are already considered a worldwide threat. They are a threat to international security, because what they are, are a bunch of terrorists. . . . One-third of the country is in their hands, planted with coca up to its eyeballs. . . . I am going to draw up a plan, for the United States to help . . . develop these agricultural regions, so that the food that is needed is produced. . . . We need a joint government-peasant program, so that capital, technology, infrastructure, machinery, credits, etc., are invested. . . .

“This is simply the legitimate use of the arms of the republic. If there are criminal organizations which kill, extort, rape, kidnap, destroy infrastructure and national wealth, it is elemental that the state use its arms. . . . [When the nation rallies,] we are going to win this fight.”