
Interview: Harold Bedoya



Colombia and the U.S. can jointly defeat narco-terrorism

Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.), former Presidential candidate for the Colombian Force Movement, was interviewed by telephone from Washington, D.C., by EIR Ibero-American Affairs editor Dennis Small, on June 16.

EIR: General Bedoya, in looking at Colombia, one sees a nation at war. The majority of voices one hears are, frankly, voices of pessimism: those who say the war against narco-terrorism has been lost, and that you therefore have to negotiate the surrender of the country; or, those who say that Colombia cannot win by itself and must therefore call for a foreign or supranational invasion of Colombia. But yours has been a voice of optimism, saying the nation *can* be saved. Is this the case? And if so, why are you optimistic?

Bedoya: In Colombia, we are in a situation in which there has been a clear case of the state surrendering to the interests of terrorist and drug-trafficking groups. All of this stems from the electoral fraud which occurred in 1994, in which the drug mafias in effect came to power by buying votes and consciences, with drug money.

All this has led to the fact that the government that was elected with the money of corruption, has facilitated an indecent process which has brought the nation of Colombia to its knees before the crime syndicates. And all of this occurred simply because there has been a government which has not had the moral authority and legitimacy to confront the corruption generated by drug trafficking, and to confront the drug-trafficking mafias, which were in effect their partners during the 1994 political campaign which brought them to power, and which has enabled them to coexist with them for the past four years.

This is the reality in Colombia today. That is why we need a radical change in the upcoming June 21 elections, so that the history of the country can begin to straighten itself out, and so that the next governments, and especially a government not imposed by the current President, can have sufficient independence and freedom to confront the violence and corruption caused by the drug trade, with legitimacy and authority.

EIR: You use the term “narco-terrorism.” There are those who insist that there is no such phenomenon, of an organic

link between drug trafficking and terrorism. What do you think of this?

Bedoya: Unfortunately, there are people here who want to deny that this is a reality. Those who have most wanted to deny it are people involved in that activity, who are the same drug traffickers, the same terrorists, and the same government which, to all intents and purposes, has coexisted with them, and which has allowed this state of violence and drug trafficking to exist, directly, which no legitimate state would allow.

But this is not my discovery. It is recognized by the U.S. State Department itself, by the U.S. Congress, by neighboring countries. This is a reality, and one cannot deny this reality, in which we know that they [the terrorists] run the laboratories, including the processing and export of drugs. It is to deny a reality which the whole world has already accepted.

EIR: Some say that, to reach a peace agreement with the FARC and ELN, it is necessary to make certain concessions: military evacuations, negotiations, and so on. There have even been people who have spoken of the need to legalize drugs—for example, those linked on an international level to the famous megaspeculator George Soros. What is your opinion of such negotiations and supposed peace accords?

Bedoya: The Colombian Constitution does not allow the handing over of territory to the drug-trafficking mafias. We already had an experience in the region of Caguán, where territory was evacuated and handed over to the drug traffickers, and this led directly to an increase in drug cultivation, an increase in drug production, and an increase in terrorism. This is precisely the major problem we face—aside from the fact that it violates the national Constitution—because the Penal Code clearly states that to hand over, or to dismember, national territory, is a crime of treason against the state, which cannot be accepted under any circumstances.

Now, the issue of legalizing drugs is absurd. We have to fight the drug-trafficking mafias, so that not only will they not continue to produce drugs, but so that they cannot continue to cause the horrendous damage to which the youth and the entire world are being subjected through drugs. We know that worldwide, there are millions of citizens, of youth, who are lost, because of the activities of the narcos. I believe

that what we have to do here, rather than legalize drugs — it makes no ethical sense to do this — is to make drug-running a crime against humanity, and we should try the drug mafias in international courts, as befits any civilized society in the world.

EIR: Given the evident problem of drugs and narco-terrorism, certain sectors which say that they don't favor negotiating or handing everything over to narco-terrorism, are proposing instead a possible foreign invasion of Colombia. For example, an interview with Pentagon analyst James Zackrisson was recently published in the magazine *Cambio 16*, in which he argues that the Colombian Armed Forces are not capable of resolving this crisis. These same sectors have proposed the demilitarization of countries like Colombia, and, having helped create the problem, they go on to argue that supranational or United Nations troops, or some such, have to be sent in to invade the country and solve its problems.

I assume that you oppose this approach, but I would also like to know what the positive alternative is. What can Colombia do to combat this plague?

Bedoya: First of all, we Colombians are hoping to change an illegitimate, corrupt, and mafiosi government, which is the one we have, which is linked to the drug trade, so that, once changed, we simply achieve the legitimacy needed to be able to combat crime. The point is, that those who have deals with the mafia can't fight it. Battling the mafia with those who are part of the mafia is absurd. Therefore, the first thing that must be done is to put an end to the mafia in politics.

Regarding the question of invasions: Colombia doesn't need invasions. What we need here is support and international help to take on these battles, above all with the realism required. Unfortunately, what we face here is that, every time the mafias are fought by the forces of order, international human rights organizations appear to fight and persecute the forces of law and order who are fighting against the drug trade.

The day that the drug trade is understood to be the main violator of human rights in the world, these things will begin to be straightened out. Unfortunately, there is a double standard that is preventing the world from learning what is going on in this country.

The world must understand that the principal violators of human rights in the world are the drug mafias and those who sponsor them, be they politicians, terrorists, growers, processors, launderers, or weapons traffickers. These are the mafias which must be fought. And, if there is to be an invasion, then all countries which are involved in this activity would have to be invaded.

I have said that what we need here is an "Alliance of the Nine," of the nine countries that are most involved in this fight, so that among the nine, we resolve the problem. The

first, logically, are producer countries such as Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru; then, consumer countries, like the United States; transit countries, like Mexico; countries involved in money laundering in Europe and in the introduction of drugs, like Spain; countries which sell the chemical precursors, like Holland and Germany; and countries which sell weapons to the drug mafias, like the former Iron Curtain countries and Russia. These are the "Group of Nine," as I call them, which must meet and resolve the problem, because they all have a major responsibility: some as coca paste producers, others as coca leaf producers; some as consumers; others as money launderers; others as sellers of precursors (the European countries). Among them all, I am certain that we can solve the problem.

This is not a matter of invading, because otherwise we would all have to invade the United States, or Mexico, or Spain. So, this is not a matter of invasion. The mafias are not Colombian, they are international; they exist in every country in the world, and they are all responsible. If we produced and consumed all the drugs, we could perhaps think that it is just Colombia. But it is also a U.S. problem, where the amount of drugs consumed is equivalent to the entire GNP of Colombia, which shows the gravity of the problem. So, we can't be naive in the face of this reality; we must take it on.

EIR: What can the United States do, concretely? There is a lot of interest in the United States, perhaps a little late, I would say, regarding the Colombia problem, in the Congress and in other places. But the concrete question is: What should the United States do to help Colombia resolve this problem in a sovereign way?

Bedoya: What I am recommending is that we all face up to it and say that we are all responsible. Second, the United States has to have a great Marshall Plan for Colombia, to help recover all the agricultural areas that have been destroyed by drug cultivation and violence. We have to inject capital and technology, everything necessary to agriculturally develop a country like Colombia. We need capital, technology, marketing to come in — everything a country needs. I presented this when I was in the United States, and it seems to have been well received there.

That is, on the one hand, we have to have a partnership for progress through a Marshall Plan, and ally in the fight against drugs.

On the other hand, we must confront the mafias through fumigation, through helicopters, through radar, through support for the forces of law and order, for the Armed Forces, giving them the assistance they need. And for once, commit ourselves, instead of persecuting the soldiers when they carry out their duties, accusing them — constantly, in the State Department — of violating human rights. There must be an alliance like the one we had with the United States when fighting communism in Korea, and against China, where the

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communists were the violators of human rights, not those fighting the communists. Well, we have to do the same thing here.

But everything here is the opposite: The State Department has refused to understand that the alliance is with everyone, that we must ally to confront this problem. And the United States must also commit itself to fighting its people who produce the inputs, the vast drug-dealing inside the United States, the money laundering, the sale of precursors, the contraband. One mustn't forget that millions and millions of dollars worth of contraband enter here, which launder the drug dollars.

So, let's unite, and I am certain we will solve the problem. This is not a problem of invasions, but of partnerships and alliances.

EIR: A moment ago you mentioned a Marshall Plan, of the need to develop the countryside. You are known for the relationship you have developed with the Colombian people, in each of your activities throughout your military career. What can you tell us, broadly speaking, of the role of the Armed Forces and its links to the people? What is your experience, in this regard, in Colombia?

Bedoya: Look, the problem of drugs here is so serious that the Armed Forces are participating, and must continue to participate, in the fight against the drug trade, because the drug trade has also become a terrorist act. The only organizations that have the capacity to confront the terrorist mafias are the Armed Forces, the forces of law and order. That is why they must be supported. And so, along with these Marshall Plans of which I spoke, it is necessary to create regional military commands, especially throughout the southern part of the country, to help to agriculturally and industrially develop all those areas.

And, simultaneously, we must continue to combat drug cultivation, the laboratories, the whole network of drug production. This has to be done, and the Armed Forces are the best for this job, but they need genuine backing. The United States, in reality, has practically denied the Armed Forces this support. Instead, they have been marginalized in every way and, in some ways, persecuted.

What I believe is that the United States has to form an alliance and learn that Colombia's Armed Forces are the best allies and the best partners the United States has in the fight

against terrorism. But they must change their strategies, because until now, the equipment they have given is obsolete. The little military aid has amounted to meager amounts of money. A lot of resources are needed: helicopters, planes, fumigation, radar, intelligence equipment, and so on.

I believe that this must be done, but seriously. Not saying that a fight is being waged, when in reality practically nothing is being done.

EIR: What you are saying about the role of the military is not unlike what has happened historically in the United States. At certain points, there have been close ties between the Armed Forces and the people. For example, the Army Corps of Engineers led the construction of railroads in the 19th century, and so forth.

If we talk about a similar role in Colombia, one must take into account Colombia's irregular geography, and its vast infrastructure requirements. What role could the Armed Forces play in that regard?

Bedoya: As I said: We have to create regional military commands for development, where the Armed Forces, in the conflict zones, use engineering units to create roads, highways, health, needed security—including the centralized handling of government or state revenues.

We already have experience in that: We've done it, we did it during the period when I was commander in many regions, during 1988-89. Surely this is remembered in the United States. We did a good job throughout the Guaviare region, where we got production going in that agricultural zone, but unfortunately without sufficient help.

A great deal of U.S. aid is needed. When U.S. Ambassador Myles Frechette had just arrived here, I proposed to him that this be done throughout the southern region. Unfortunately, Ambassador Frechette didn't listen to me. We could have done this, and we would have gained four years, or five, or seven years, with that kind of activity.

So, military engineers, the Armed Forces, have a very broad capacity to work in the countryside, in agriculture, with the peasantry. The people like them, they like the Armed Forces. Thus, the Armed Forces can be a powerful instrument in this fight.

I am certain that the next government—and I don't believe it will be Mr. Serpa, because that gentleman has no interest in anything of this sort. On the contrary, he has encouraged

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this entire problem of drug trafficking and terrorism. But the other candidate, Dr. Pastrana, is studying the necessary support for dealing with this whole problem of violence. He will surely have the backing of the United States, and he will be able to undertake works to benefit the people.

EIR: So there should be a close civil-military alliance in a country like Colombia, so that the Armed Forces, the government, and the people jointly fight against these problems and develop the country.

Bedoya: Yes, this is what must be done, and I guarantee that this would resolve things. I guarantee that if this is done with intelligence, with will, and the United States commits itself to help—not just with rhetoric and with constant government accusations against the forces of law and order, but real help—this can rapidly be solved.

EIR: With regard to the broader issue of the nation-state: There are those who say nowadays that, because of globalization and the Information Age, it is no longer necessary to have a nation-state, and that sovereignty is a thing of the past. Similarly, they argue that the Armed Forces no longer have a role to play. In fact, I have seen cartoons in the U.S. press of a Colombia divided into parts, as if it were Bosnia, stating that a nation-state is no longer needed. What do you think of this, of the role of the nation-state?

Bedoya: That's absurd, because every nation has its borders. We face very serious threats: We have the international drug mafias, the international mafias of terrorism. We still have not resolved many border problems: We still have areas that have not been defined, and further, we have highly dangerous criminals, such as the mafias of contraband and of common crime.

When countries face these kinds of threats, they have problems, and they cannot do away with their forces of law and order. This would be tantamount to saying the U.S. should deactivate its military forces so that Mr. Hussein can do what he likes around the world. The United States would have no control over its own borders.

This must be seen from a realistic standpoint: Every country has its problems. There may be some countries that don't need armed forces. Every country should be sovereign, but you can't impose a straitjacket on the entire world, when the problems faced are of a different scope.

EIR: There have been statements coming out of the House of Lords in London, arguing that nothing can be done in the Colombian situation to combat the drug trade, that drugs are a global reality, and that Colombia should simply accept a process leading to the legalization of drugs, and stop fighting so hard. These were the instructions that these gentlemen, so comfortably situated in London, gave to Colombia.

Bedoya: It would be like saying that the British Army, or the Spanish Army, should be deactivated, although they have not dealt with the problem of the IRA or of ETA. Or, that the Israelis, who have been unable to solve their problems with the Palestinians, should deactivate. That is absurd.

The fact is that there are a lot of theoreticians, a lot of rhetoricians, who talk about peace, which they unfortunately don't understand. They don't know the problem and they want to solve things from their armchairs. Reality is otherwise: Countries have their problems, which they have to solve sovereignly.

EIR: Apart from drug trafficking, Colombia also has very serious economic problems, difficulties with its banking sector, and so on. At the same time, Colombia is immersed in a world in which there already exists a generalized international financial crisis: the situation in Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil. How should Colombia relate to these other countries, especially in light of the international financial crisis?

Bedoya: Well, the serious problem Colombia has, is drug trafficking. If we solve the problem of terrorism and drugs, we are a country which, by virtue of its natural wealth, its geostrategic location in the world, the quality of its land and its climate, could become the most developed country in all of Latin America. Unfortunately, we have an internal problem of corruption, of violence, and of drug trafficking, which we have been unable to resolve. With this problem resolved, I am certain the country would move forward.

We have highly serious problems of corruption today, which have virtually brought the economy into total crisis. And because the violence has increased, unfortunately the costs of any commercial operation—investment, money, credit, any activity—are high. Because as long as there is no calm, in any country, not even its own citizens are going to risk investing.

We could have major international companies here. But we are unable to do this, until the problem of violence is

resolved. I believe that, once this problem is resolved, Colombia is a country that will enter into an accelerated process of development.

EIR: In the aftermath of the first round of the Presidential elections, where do things stand? What do the results mean for the country? What will happen in the second round? And, what is the future of your movement, Colombian Force?

Bedoya: I think that the upshot is that the country is polarized into three groups: the liberal group, the conservative group, and the independent group, all more or less with the same forces. The independent group is anti-corruption, anti-political establishment, anti-violence. And it is logical that they back the aspirations of the Conservative Party candidate. The other is the candidate of the same government which has led the nation into a state of violence, a state of corruption, a state of drug trafficking, and which has virtually done away with the community.

We are faced with a fraudulent and dangerous state, which I am certain is going to fall in the elections of June 21, next week. And the country will enter into a process of accelerated recovery. The entire world has both the right and the duty to give its support to this government so that the country can move forward.

EIR: And your role, and that of your movement?

Bedoya: Colombian Force is a truly independent movement, perhaps the only independent movement the country has. It is a movement that is fighting against corruption, against violence, against misused political customs which are what governments have imposed every four years, without democratic alternatives for change. We are fighting all this.

I have offered Colombians a secure and ordered state, so that they can take the path toward the future, with dignity and with development. At this point, we have joined forces with the candidate of the Conservative Party, Andrés Pastrana, to put him into the Presidency of the Republic. And we will begin to address the serious ills the nation faces.

As a group, the Colombian Force Movement will continue, because it is an independent group. It has not fused with any other group, and it will continue to fight under the banners of dignity, of work, of justice, of order. These are the nationalist sentiments that I have been defending since the beginning of my campaign.

EIR: So, neither General Bedoya nor Colombian Force are going to disappear from the Colombian political scene?

Bedoya: No, absolutely not. They will continue, and are already consolidated, because we garnered, in a very difficult political campaign, 200,000 votes—beyond the millions of votes which, undoubtedly at the last minute, through the manipulation of the polls and the media, were siphoned off to other politicians.

EIR: You said that your movement is independent. According to information we have received, this independence is not only one of ideas and proposals, which have definitely given the drug traffickers and the narco-terrorists a headache. Colombian Force is also independent with regard to its finances, which is very different from other political campaigns in Colombia. And, that independence has now brought some financial problems to you and to Colombian Force. What is the situation?

Bedoya: The situation is that, for there to be electoral reimbursements, for the state to recognize some of the expenditures, you have to get at least 5% of the total vote in the last elections. I, my movement, won 1.84% of the vote. And so, there are no electoral reimbursements, and this has left me with a debt of approximately 500 million pesos, or some \$500,000.

So I owe this. I think that Colombians, and the entire world, are going to have to help me resolve this, because I am fighting against corruption, against the drug mafias, against international crime. That is the great campaign, the great enterprise which I have ordered and organized, but I have, unfortunately, not received the support, either nationally or internationally, for this great endeavor, which, after all, is a fight against the international mafias.

This campaign is what has allowed this country to be in the process of reordering itself. And I am certain that the June 21 elections, the election results, are going to be against the mafias. I feel victorious in this, because I fought a war without quarter for seven months, and I believe the results will soon be evident.

I call on my friends in the United States and internationally, as well as Colombians, to help me achieve this contribution, which is so important to resolve not only the problem of the debts I have, but so that this movement can continue into the future, truly independent of corruption and crime.

EIR: It is clear, as we noted at the beginning of this interview, that your voice is one of optimism, under very difficult circumstances. In that regard, I want to congratulate you, and thank you for having given us this opportunity to talk with you. Any final message for our readers?

Bedoya: Yes, my message is that, in this world, we definitely have to globalize ourselves, not just in the economic sense, but also globalize ourselves against the mafias, against corruption, against terrorism, which has no borders, and which operates as criminal organizations in Colombia just as it operates in any other part of the world. Therefore, we must unite. And the true democrats in the world, among whom I include myself, need to make many international alliances, because the world is made up of millions of inhabitants with whom we must find solidarity to live in peace, with order, and without violence and drugs. When all is said and done, that is the purpose of any citizen of the universe.