

Offensive by Colombian narco-terrorists backfires

by Our Special Correspondent

The terrorist offensive launched by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on July 7 turned, over subsequent days, into one of the greatest tactical defeats ever suffered by the FARC. When the battles subsided, at least 400 FARC narco-terrorists and 37 soldiers were dead; 40 policemen had been kidnapped; and 100 homes and other installations in 22 towns had been levelled, the majority of them located near the so-called “demilitarized” zone, the zone from which the government of President Andrés Pastrana had graciously withdrawn all military forces, so that the narco-terrorists could establish their rule over 42,000 square kilometers of territory. It was from this territory, that the attacks were launched with impunity.

The offensive was the preamble for the initiation of formal negotiations between the Pastrana government and the drug-running FARC, otherwise known as Colombia’s “Third Cartel.” Preliminary talks on the negotiations have been ongoing for a year now, at each step of the way actively promoted by the U.S. State Department. Echoing London’s logic, Madeleine Albright’s U.S. State Department has urged the Pastrana government to strike a deal to share power and sovereignty with the FARC, with the lame argument that only in that way can these criminals be induced to “limit” drug production and trafficking in their areas of influence. The result of such craven capitulation, has, of course, been that the drug-running FARC now threatens to overrun the entire nation.

After innumerable concessions to the FARC, and innumerable delays, negotiations are now set to begin. The plan had been to begin the negotiations on July 7, but on the initiative of the FARC (and with Pastrana’s complicity), the talks were put off until July 20, the day on which Colombia cele-

brates both Independence Day and Armed Forces Day. The negotiations were finally set for July 19, brought forward a day, after the Armed Forces, in protest, had cancelled its traditional July 20 military parade.

The offensive planned by the narco-terrorist *jefes* (chiefs), had among its objectives: to assault jails in Florencia, Caquetá, and Bogotá, as well as other towns, in order to free jailed terrorist leaders whom the FARC needs to lead the thousands of new recruits who are being trained in their misnamed “demilitarized zone” (DMZ); to terrorize the Colombian population with a display of their aura of power; and to bring their followers back again in the DMZ for a triumphal parade on July 20, to celebrate what they call Colombia’s “New Independence.”

In the offensive, the FARC deployed 2,000 terrorists from staging areas in the DMZ to attack 22 different objectives, using the tactic of “5 to 1”; that is, it takes five terrorists for every policemen or soldier present, to overwhelm a military or police unit. By using this approach, they have defeated numerous units, and have kidnapped some 500 soldiers and policemen over the past two years.

The brutal *modus operandi* employed by the FARC in this offensive, was to begin the attacks with bombs fashioned out of metal cylinders used for natural gas. The terrorists’ innovation this time, was to add sulfuric acid to the usual explosives and shrapnel packed into the cylinders, which turned them into exploding chemical weapons, burning those caught within their range. The explosions destroyed not only the police stations which they sought to take over, but also neighboring homes. In some cases, the towns attacked suffered utter destruction, worse than if they had been hit by an

earthquake. Another innovation utilized in the offensive were homemade tanks—all-terrain vehicles to which armor had been attached—which could not be destroyed except by air bombardments by the Colombian Air Force and Army Aviation.

In the initial offensive, the FARC killed 37 soldiers in Gutiérrez, a town located 30 kilometers southeast of Santa Fé de Bogotá, the nation's capital. A good number of the 37 soldiers killed were executed by a shot to the head. Forty-seven terrorists also died in this battle. Their bodies were buried by the FARC in a mass grave. It is the FARC's policy to hide its dead, so that their losses are never known, thereby building up the terrorists' aura of power and invincibility. But this time, the common grave was found by the Army, which had to deactivate explosives filled with sulfuric acid that had been planted around the grave.

Wall Street's partners

The Armed Forces counteroffensive was swift and effective. The weak flank of the FARC's mobilization was the high visibility of its forces, which had to use boats and trucks to reach the towns they were to attack. The few airplanes and helicopters which the Armed Forces have, were pulled into service to bomb FARC forces and transport combat troops. Even the Presidential airplane, which is the property of the Air Force, was used in the counterattack. The majority of the FARC "combatants" who died in the fighting were women and children under 14 years old. And, the majority of these had either been forcibly recruited, or were poor people who had contracted themselves out to the FARC as mercenaries, in a desperate effort to escape unemployment.

Keep in mind that conservative calculations estimate FARC revenues at over \$2 billion a year, double the Colombian government's combined annual defense and justice budgets, thanks to the drug trade, kidnapping, and extortion, among other activities. Other reports say that the FARC has an income of over \$20 billion a year, from which it helps to finance Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba.

Military sources report that the FARC has constructed underground bunkers in the DMZ, where they have stored an enormous quantity of gold, and dollar and peso bills, along with many financial papers which document the movement of the group's money, and which identify the group's frontmen, in whose name their money is kept.

It is not by coincidence, that a delegation from Wall Street, headed by New York Stock Exchange President Richard Grasso, went to cut a deal with the FARC, and talked for hours with Raúl Reyes, considered to be the FARC's financial brains. (Last week's cover of *EIR* showed a photo of Grasso and Reyes embracing.)

Military sources told *EIR* that they have found 400 dead terrorists, and that it is very likely that for each body found, there are two other bodies buried. Among them, were some

whose arms and legs had been cut off, so that they could more easily be transported and hidden, and others, whose faces and fingerprints had been disfigured by sulfuric acid so that they could not be identified, in order to keep the international community from realizing that they were children, or perhaps, because some of them were narco-terrorist leaders.

Red Cross supports narco-terrorism

It is not only the terrorists who received a harsh blow, but also the international networks that support the narco-terrorists as an instrument to destroy Colombia as a viable nation. Each FARC squad went into battle with photographers assigned to film footage for television, and with Red Cross units to attend to their wounded. In Cravo Norte, in Arauca (near the border with Venezuela), the Red Cross actively participated in the terrorist attacks. The terrorists were transported in International Red Cross vehicles, which the Colombian Armed Forces did not attack, because they adhere to the Geneva Convention for conduct of war.

In El Doncello, Caquetá, International Red Cross officials carrying white flags appeared in the middle of the fighting, to deliver a message from the narco-terrorists to the policemen: Surrender and turn over your arms, or the terrorists will annihilate you. The policemen did not surrender, and were therefore able to report on the active participation of the Red Cross in the battle.

Government grovels

But even as the Armed Forces troops are remoralized, and the public has witnessed both the vulnerability of the terrorists and the barbarity of their acts, the government insists on continuing the "peace" negotiations with the narco-terrorists, in spite of the fact that it has been made abundantly clear that, for the FARC, "peace" will only come when they are handed power.

Despite all the confirmed abuses, the government insists on maintaining the demilitarized zone in which the FARC commits every kind of arbitrary act, and whence the FARC prepares its attacks. Thanks to the demilitarized zone, there is war throughout the Colombian nation—except where the FARC general headquarters are located.

According to the Prosecutor General's office, 41 people in the DMZ have been executed, on FARC orders. Classes in the primary and secondary schools have been suspended, because the students were forcibly recruited to the FARC's ranks. All those kidnapped around the country, possibly as many as 2,000 people, were taken to the DMZ, where they are being kept until ransom is paid, or until the government signs a law guaranteeing the release of the jailed terrorist chiefs, in exchange for the FARC's military and police hostages.

Military sources have told *EIR* that the FARC is building a highway in the Macarena nature park, which would permit

them greater mobility in entering and leaving the DMZ. There are stretches of the highway which are completely straight, which could be used as landing strips. Three fighter aircraft and five helicopters have, in fact, been sighted in the DMZ, which indicates that the FARC is forming an air force, and that their attacks could soon be carried out with air support. The sources also report that the FARC is acquiring, and bringing to the DMZ, tanks, surface-to-air and air-to-surface missiles, and all kinds of heavy weaponry and construction equipment. "The moment that the negotiations be suspended, and they give us the order to retake the demilitarized zone, the fighting will more resemble regular warfare, than irregular warfare," the source told *EIR*.

Colombians gaining heart

The narco-terrorists' military actions, brazen crimes, and threats, have brought about a phase-change in the morale of Colombian citizens. The families of all the people kidnapped by the FARC's National Liberation Army (ELN) allies on May 30, as the people attended mass at the Roman Catholic Iglesia del la María, have signed a declaration, stating that they will not pay a single peso in ransom to the ELN for their kidnapped loved ones. Another statement circulating, "There Is No Price on My Life," is being signed by people who consider themselves potential kidnapping targets, which asks that, should they be kidnapped, neither their families nor their businesses pay any ransom for them.

Recent polls show that more than 80% of the citizens reject the way the so-called "peace" process is being conducted, and reject the excessive concessions which President Pastrana has been making to the terrorists.

The sophism promoted by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), that so-called "civil society" is "neutral in the conflict," and should not take sides in the war—a way of inviting that civil society not to denounce the terrorists—is losing all credibility. People now believe that this is a war "of the narco-terrorists against civil society." Many Colombians are eager to join a national militia formed by the Armed Forces to participate in their own defense. Leaflets are circulating, which argue that it cannot be possible for 40 million people to be cornered by "20,000 armed, heartless" narco-terrorists. Every week there are demonstrations in Colombian cities against the kidnapping, violence, and extortion. Colombians' onetime timidity before these terrorist groups, is becoming a will to fight.

Among the news items most commented on by Colombians, besides the fighting, is an interview which Peru's President, Alberto Fujimori, gave on July 10 to *El Espectador* and the Caracol radio and television network. Fujimori contrasted the chaos which Colombia is suffering, with the peace which Peru has achieved by fighting narco-terrorism.

"This peace has been achieved through an entire strategy which involved the development of an efficient intelligence service and bringing together the Armed Forces and the peo-

ple to gain their trust, the participation of the civilian population in the fight through the peasant militias, and very strong laws. . . . I would not allow these narco-terrorists, after negotiations, to retain their citizenship rights, and enter national political life. I cannot imagine a former terrorist as a member of Parliament," Fujimori said.

However, the Colombian government still clings to the process of slowly handing the country over to the narco-terrorists. Pastrana pays more attention to the U.S. State Department, the United Nations, the British Foreign Office, NGOs of every stripe, and international financiers, all of whom insist on the balkanization of Colombia, than he does to Colombians.

There are 106 points of discussion on the table for the peace negotiations. The discussion of these points implies, de facto, that the government intends to co-govern *with* the terrorists in all aspects of national life. Among those points of discussion, is the "reform" of the Armed Forces, which could mean that military promotions would be agreed upon with the FARC, and also that many members of the FARC would become soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and even full officers of the Armed Forces.

At the speed with which the talks have advanced thus far, agreement would be barely reached on two points every month. That is to say, at least 53 months would be needed—more than four years—for these negotiations. The negotiations are to be carried out without the FARC "demilitarizing" the rest of the country, and without there being any cease-fire, so that the FARC would always be trying to demonstrate its force with greater violence.

But for the FARC, this is only a stratagem to gain time, and fulfill its objective. This would be a period of time more than sufficient for the FARC, protected by Pastrana's commitment to respect the FARC's "demilitarized zone," to spend its money buying on the black market all the weapons it needs, to attempt to seize control of the whole national territory, or, failing that, to control part of that territory, balkanizing the nation.

That is why former Presidential candidate Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.), in a speech before members of his movement, Fuerza Colombia, on July 8, stated that Pastrana must be overthrown. Similarly, the view among active-duty military officers, is that they will accompany Pastrana, only "as far as the Constitution permits," and that the defense of territorial integrity is one of the Constitutional obligations of the Armed Forces.

Curiously, the U.S. State Department and the human rights NGOs are promoting a new military criminal code, in which troops would not be obliged to follow the orders of their superiors, if the subordinates believe that the order violates the law. And what would happen if the military believes that the orders of the President violate the Constitution, which requires the military to defend the country's territorial integrity?