
General Bedoya in Peru

Colombians want freedom from the narco-terrorist dictatorship

The following are excerpts from an interview with Colombia's Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro (ret.), broadcast on Aug. 22 on the program "Specials on America," Channel 4 America Television, in Lima, Peru. The interviewer was Laura Bozzo.

General Bedoya is a former Commander of the Military forces of Colombia, a 1998 Colombian Presidential candidate, and the leader of the Fuerza Colombia political movement.



Q: Welcome and thank you very much for being here with us. We brought you here in a rush, General. Thank you very much. How do you find Peru at this time?

Bedoya: Well, coming to Peru is truly like entering liberated territory. Travelling through the streets, talking with the people, feeling the human warmth of Lima's residents, of Peruvians, is very nice. And it is what we Colombians, God willing, are hoping to be able to have very soon.

Q: Is it possible that the steps which President Andrés Pastrana is taking are coldly calculated, that is, that they form part of a single goal, which takes into account the political cost of what is being done? Would you say that there is planning, or improvisation, in Pastrana's measures?

Bedoya: First of all, the government has, unfortunately, not begun to function. Before Pastrana was seated, he decided to meet secretly with these drug-trafficking and terrorist organizations, signed secret agreements that we Colombians still don't know [the details of], resigned from power, resigned from ruling, resigned from being head of state, resigned from being Commander-in-Chief of the military forces, such that at this moment, the forces of evil, headed by "Tirofijo" [Manuel Marulanda, the leader of the narco-terrorist Revolutionary

Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC] and his lackeys, are, in effect, ruling the country, and have us on the brink of tragedy and failure.

Q: They're ruling the country? That's serious.

Bedoya: In essence, because the government's policy is very much influenced by the terrorist and drug-trafficking organizations, and has led the country into a permanent bloodletting—which not only we Colombians are going to have to suffer, because all this territory that we, unfortunately, lost once Pastrana took power, is going to affect the entire bordering region. . . .

Q: How does Colombian public opinion see Pastrana?

Bedoya: Pastrana is a man who has already lost that opinion. He began with 70% in his favor, which today is down to 20%. I believe that he is not a loved man. You might even say that he is hated. We Colombians are waiting, from one day to the next, for some solution, which cannot be the continued surrender of the country into the hands of criminals and drug traffickers. . . .

Q: Do the FARC and ELN have any level of credibility? Have they lived up to any of the agreements? Because they have sat down to negotiate many times. Have these criminal organizations fulfilled any commitments?

Bedoya: The point is that these organizations haven't the slightest interest in any business but that of drugs, which is what the government today is allowing them to build up in those territories, increasing their business and, logically, destabilizing the economy and, in effect, threatening the rule of law and the Presidency of the republic.

Q: What reasons, do you believe, led President Pastrana to trust in the word of the FARC and ELN?

Bedoya: During his campaign, President Pastrana committed himself to a peace policy, as did the other candidates. The one who offered the most territory, the one who offered the most concessions, the most handouts to these organizations, thought that he would win the most popular support. Pastrana committed himself to the point that, even before taking office, he had visited the laboratories of the drug trade.

Q: So, that led him to win the elections?

Bedoya: That is what he thinks, but I don't believe it, because neither "Tirofijo" as a person, nor the FARC, are popularly backed. The political party that they had some time ago, which was the Communist Party (and then, the Patriotic Union), has effectively disappeared from the political map. That's why I don't think so. However, Pastrana does believe that "Tirofijo" helped him reach political power.

Q: What is this alliance between the FARC and ELN, and the drug trade?

Bedoya: Until just a few years ago, they were growers, laboratory security, and handlers of coca paste. Today, according to reports and documents that have been intercepted, not only are they involved in the process of cultivation, and laboratories, but also in exporting. Even here, in the Republic of Peru, they have laboratories in certain areas known as Cocorá. And so, for the airplanes that have been taking the exports to Europe and to Cuba, their origin is all of this territory where the great laboratories, the coca plantations, and all the coca-processing centers are, which inundate the entire world with cocaine.

Q: How would you briefly define the FARC?

Bedoya: The FARC is an armed drug-trafficking organization, with terrorist power to intimidate, which only pursues its own business and economic welfare.

Q: Okay, so why does President Pastrana maintain that the FARC and ELN have nothing to do with the drug trade, as opposed to the opinion of [U.S. National Drug Policy Adviser] General [Barry] McCaffrey . . . who said that his opinion is that \$400 million finance the actions of the FARC and ELN, but that that money comes from the drug trade? And why does the President say not? Because they live off the drug trade.

Bedoya: That's true. Because, among the secret agreements the President made with "Tirofijo," one was most certainly to launder their image, and he has committed himself to making them a political organization. He even put out a Presidential decree, in which he determined that the FARC are no longer drug traffickers and terrorists, as all Colombians and the whole world views them, but that they are political organizations. All this, to justify an absurd negotiation, with an organization that only pursues its own economic interests and, of course, the destruction of the world through drugs. . . .

Q: Is it true that you are sentenced to death?

Bedoya: There have been various terrorist attacks. During the campaign, there were two bombs set, one in Bogotá, one in Bucaramanga, and I am sentenced to death, according to the ELN. Surely, the FARC is after me as well, since a long time ago.

Q: Doesn't the murder of [Colombian political satirist] Jaime Garzón frighten you, which has had such an impact on all Peruvians and on all Colombians who watch this show?

Bedoya: Yes, fear is very human, but I am more frightened at allowing my people to continue being kidnapped and destroyed by these criminal organizations, in association with political machines and the government. . . .

Q: There is a question that I feel is important. Why does President Pastrana say that the guerrillas have nothing to do with the drug trade, when "anti-drug tsar" Barry McCaffrey has indicated that the drug trade provides more than \$500 million to the Colombian guerrillas?

Bedoya: Simply because President Pastrana founded his peace policy with these organization, and he wants to deny realities. All Colombians, and all of the Colombian public, international opinion, the United States, the Colombian military, all the commanders, know that since the 1980s, the FARC have been drug traffickers, and live off the trade. It is documented.

Q: They protect—

Bedoya: They protect the laboratories. . . .

Q: They participate in drug production—

Bedoya: They participate. . . .

Q: Protect—

Bedoya: They protect, process, and export. That is a reality.

Q: Then, how could a President say something like this, if it is so obvious?

Bedoya: Simply because President Pastrana thinks he is the President of some other country, which is not Colombia. When he handed over five townships—

Q: Yes, here we have the map for you to explain [Figure 1]—

Bedoya: Minimally, what we Colombians believed was that he knew he had been elected by a republic named Colombia. And minimally, what could be demanded of a President is that he know geography, know the geography of Colombia. And, I would like to show you what has happened. [Approaches the map.] President Pastrana surrendered five townships, which are here: La Uribe, Vista Hermoza, Mesetas, La Macarena, and San Vicente del Caguán. But, it turns out that these townships are not the 42,000 square kilometers the government is saying, but are the last townships, that is, they are practically the entrance to the Amazon. And the Amazon has no borders. . . .

Q: What does this mean? If they aren't 42,000 square kilometers, what are they?

Bedoya: It would be half a million square kilometers.

Q: Half a million square kilometers!

Bedoya: In essence, because if you will observe, these are jungle provinces. The same with the Amazon. These townships are the beginning of the jungle. The rivers have no borders, the jungle has no borders, the mountain ranges in this region have no borders, the native communities have no borders. So, we are handing over half the country. And that is why Mitu was attacked, Guaviare was attacked, Miraflores was attacked, practically the entire border region. In the long run, it is going to end up the drug-trafficking republic of Amazonia.

Q: That is very serious. You mentioned something to me yesterday. . . . You told me that this has been turned into the largest terrorist center in the world.

Bedoya: In this area of the five townships that have been surrendered, one finds terrorist organizations from Uruguay, from Paraguay, from Argentina, from Vietnam, and from Iran. We know that the Russian mafias are also involved there. We know that there are five airplanes, three helicopters, at the service of these criminal organizations; that they have received 6,000 Russian rifles; that there are U.S. and Russian missiles, helicopters, two field hospitals, throughout the Yari region. A few days ago, there was an airplane that left from Brazil carrying weapons; the same from Ecuador, and from Surinam. So, we are facing aggression from international mafias, against a country called Colombia which, unfortunately, due to its location at one of the most strategic points in the world, has been placed in the drug trade's theater of operations. But the world, every citizen in the world, is going to suffer the consequences of this collaboration. . . . The United States, by being the great consumer; the Europeans, by being involved in the business of the precursors; the Russians, because they sell us weapons; the countries like Bolivia, for example, or Peru, from which coca paste is still entering these territories, improving the business of these criminal organizations. . . .

Q: What do you think of the way in which the Peruvian government is definitively solving terrorism and violence in our country?

Bedoya: Peru has suffered the same evils that Colombia is facing today, namely, drug trafficking and terrorism, and it has succeeded in eliminating them, as can be observed here in Peru today. Peru has made the political decisions that have enabled the people to live in peace and tranquility. I believe that Colombia should make that kind of decision, and move forward with judicial, military decisions. . . .

Q: Can everything that was done in our country be applied in Colombia?

Bedoya: Of course it can, if there were a government and a

decision made to take on these organizations, and to return to Colombians the right to life and to their freedoms. . . . Unfortunately, the United States has a double standard—which is bad for them—which is to negotiate with terrorists and with drug traffickers; they want the Colombians to do that. And the policy of the United States, of President Clinton, is to back a peace policy which is a policy of negotiating with the drug trade and of negotiating with terrorism.

Q: What you are saying, General, is very serious. Do you believe that this is the policy of President Clinton?

Bedoya: Of course, because he has said so. He is supporting a peace policy, which is not with political criminals, but with drug-trafficking and terrorist criminals, as [the United States] itself has classified them in Congress. Further, we had here the visit of the U.S. ambassador, who was in those territories of cocaine and terror. The same with the delegate of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and of Wall Street, who was in the laboratories, negotiating with [the FARC]. . . .

Q: But, is this proven?

Bedoya: Yes, he was there. If the president of the United States [New York] stock exchange [Richard Grasso] goes to the drug-trafficking territories, these are territories where coca is produced in vast quantities, and where the same IMF demanded that Colombia take into account \$700 million [of drug money] in the country's GNP. So, if that gentleman came, and we weren't told what went on, but everyone can guess that it necessarily had to do with drug money, well, we are destabilizing not merely the national economy, but the economy of the entire world. . . .

Q: Thank you very much, General Bedoya. I don't know if you would like to make a final comment?

Bedoya: Yes. . . . I can only hope that the Peruvian people, like the Latin American people, the Ibero-American people, understand that if the people are not protected, if this plague of drug trafficking and terrorism is not fought, our people could return to being slaves, just as we were 180 years ago, or we could return to the era of the 1980s and 1990s, when international terrorism was destroying us.

Q: What Latin American leaders do Colombians admire?

Bedoya: I think the most admired President in Colombia is President [Alberto] Fujimori, because he succeeded in salvaging the country from violence, from crime, from the drug trade, and from the terror in which it was submerged some years ago. It would be an example for all of America for leaders like him to emerge, because the crisis in which we are living is very similar to that of Peru, and this beloved country of Peru is today flourishing, it is a peaceful country, with happy people who have a stable future. That is what Colombia has lost, and that is what it needs. We need many Fujimoris in America, and a Fujimori in Colombia.

FIGURE 1
The FARC's 'Coca Republic'

