

Colombian Army (see box).

It is not only these children who have been deprived of their most fundamental right to protection by the state, insisted Bedoya. The Colombian government has also abandoned the 100,000 people who live in the five vast municipalities that President Pastrana has already surrendered to the FARC. Their children are stolen from them. They are daily terrorized, their property no longer their own. They face summary execution if they complain. And no one is safe. Just recently, the constitutionally elected mayor of the municipality of Vistahermosa was assassinated by the FARC, after he publicly denounced their terror tactics.

As Bedoya has also pointed out, there are an estimated 1,500 kidnap victims from around the country, who have been brought to the FARC's "de-militarized" jungle zone, until they are ransomed, or abandoned to their fate. With no military or police presence in the 42,000-square-kilometer area, the FARC kidnapers can operate with utter impunity.

When Pastrana, under pressure from his own military, urged the FARC to accept the presence of an "international verification committee" in the five-municipality area under its control, to guarantee that human and civil rights were being respected, the FARC had at first agreed, even proposing its own list of names for the committee. Only later did it reject the idea of such a verification committee, protesting that it was a U.S.-inspired "intervention," and announce an "indefinite suspension" of its non-existent negotiations with the government. Desperate to arrive in Washington with good news, President Pastrana had his "peace commissioner" Víctor Ricardo publicly announce on the eve of his departure, that international verification was not a required condition for peace talks. Pastrana's capitulation notwithstanding, the FARC was unmoved and the President was forced to come to Washington with a frozen "peace process."

The war spreads

While Bedoya was touring Ibero-America and the United States, the very forces out to destroy Colombia were conducting their own counter-deployment. FARC leaders travelled to neighboring Ecuador, to Brazil, and to Cuba, where they denounced U.S. "interventionism." Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who has openly taken the side of the FARC, has deployed his Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel on a continental tour, supposedly to garner support for a continental conference on "peace in Colombia." What Chávez means by such a "peace" was best expressed by his personal protest over a Colombian Army raid of a FARC safe-house in a region bordering Venezuela. During the raid, two Venezuelans in the hideout were killed, and another four arrested, including the son of a prominent "leftist" journalist. The four claim that they were merely holding a meeting on "human rights." The Chávez government has denounced Colombia's military for violating the four terrorists' human rights, and is demanding their immediate release.

Interview with USIA

'United, we can finish off narco-terrorism'

On Sept. 10, Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.) was interviewed on the United States Information Agency's (USIA) "Foro Interamericano" (Inter-American Forum) television program, under the headline "General Bedoya Proposes War on Narco-Terrorism: 'United We Can Finish Them Off.'" EIR translated the following transcript of the introduction and interview.

Reporter: The Colombian government's proposed peace dialogue with the guerrillas has stagnated, while President Andrés Pastrana is preparing a new integral strategy. Once that plan is ready, it will be examined by the United States, to determine future assistance to this troubled South American country. Washington has ruled out a direct U.S. military intervention into the Colombian conflict.

Together with Colombian Gen. Harold Bedoya, we'll analyze the alternatives available to his country. General Bedoya was Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and the Presidential candidate of the Fuerza Colombia Movement.

Before we start, let's look at the following.

Announcer: While Colombian President Andrés Pastrana prepares a new strategy in Bogotá to confront the drug trade, and restart peace talks with the guerrillas, in Washington, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Colombian Army, and former Defense Minister, Gen. Harold Bedoya, harshly criticized Pastrana's approach and, in a press conference, proposed a military solution to his country's conflict.

Bedoya at his Sept. 7 press conference at the National Press Club in Washington: What I am saying precisely, what I am proposing, is that an alliance be formed, and a political-military decision be made to destroy these criminal organizations—defeat them, destroy them, recover our territory, destroy the laboratories, and give Colombians back the freedoms they have lost in that territory [the demilitarized zone], and in general terms, to try and pursue those organizations. But this isn't being done right now, because the government is protecting that territory.

Announcer: General Bedoya, who met with U.S. legislators, thinks that a well-equipped Colombian Army could defeat both the drug trade and the guerrillas.

Bedoya: To do that, countries have to help Colombia, and the Colombian Army. I also told [the Congressmen] that our Army is heroic. Today, an army without an adequate budget, equipment, weapons, without communications or he-

licopters — the U.S. could easily give us the helicopters — yet that army is waging war [against the guerrillas].

Announcer: Both in the Congress as well as at the White House, there will be a debate in coming weeks over future assistance to Colombia. Washington has repeatedly expressed its concern over human rights violations, presumably committed by members of the Colombian Armed Forces in its anti-guerrilla war.

[End of the introductory report. The interview begins.]

Q: General Bedoya, what is the main purpose of your visit to Washington?

Bedoya: My main purpose is to have contact with the American community, the Congress and, in general, with the government, to explain my country's reality. Unfortunately, the violence which has erupted recently has gone beyond our borders, and there are now thousands of Colombians fleeing to the United States, most of them illegally. One of the things I wanted to ask is that, while we deal with this problem of violence and terrorism, the United States grant political refugee status to those Colombians, and help us solve this problem. This is a drug problem — the enemy of the world — which is not only destroying us, but also Americans, and the world generally.

Q: What results have your visit and your meetings had?

Bedoya: Excellent. I've had, or will have, the opportunity to meet with 12 Congressmen, and another four Congressional staffers, and all of them have asked me a lot of questions about Colombia. They are dismayed, in terms of the support given to Colombia's absurd peace process with the terrorist mafias and the drug trade. They want to give Colombia more direct aid, especially now that they understand that the only thing these drug-trafficking organizations want is to increase their income, and logically, destabilize not only Colombia, but the entire region.

Q: You've visited Washington a number of times, in different capacities. Tell me, what do you think the perception of Colombia is today, compared to previous years, and to what degree is it understood as a very critical situation — or has your message yet to be heard?

Bedoya: [The understanding] is total. Look, as of yesterday, I'd met with eight Congressmen and two staffers. They are 99% conscious of the fact that this is a very delicate problem, which is affecting the United States, and they want to help to resolve it, because they are convinced that they've been deceived. That is the biggest problem: The United States was deceived by a peace process that wasn't what they expected. The U.S. thought that the drug trade and terrorism would be stopped, along with the drug crops and laboratories. But the reality is that these have increased, and the U.S. wants to help, but not to continue to back [the peace process], but to resolve it from a political-military standpoint. Because behind all this,

FIGURE 1

Colombia is being handed over to the FARC narco-terrorists



and it is very important that Americans understand this, there is political corruption which accepts all this, so things remain as they are.

Q: There are important officials like Thomas Pickering, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, who has said clearly that Colombia's solution can't be a military one, that the situation is now so difficult, that there can't be a military solution.

Bedoya: No. It has to be a political-military solution. That's why I've said from the outset, that there's political corruption which I saw in the previous government, and certainly still exists today. By solving the problem of the drug trade and terrorism in Colombia, we'll solve the political problem of corruption, which exists right now in the legal system, in the Congress, and in the government itself.

So, there has to necessarily be military action, and lawfully, the main effort has to be carried out by the Colombian Army, the Armed Forces, supported by the United States with

the right kind of equipment—modern and appropriate equipment. And that's another problem I see. The plan now is to give Colombia aircraft which are completely inappropriate, and this will lead us to another failure and to a military crisis worse than what we have right now.

Q: There is great confusion in the U.S. Congress and in Washington in general, over what is really happening in Colombia. As you correctly note, many people are confused. Others say, "Okay. There's Plan A, to negotiate with the guerrillas and the people involved in the conflict." But what Colombia also needs is a Plan B, and that has to be a military plan. On the other hand, they then tack on amendments stipulating that weapons will go to the police instead of to the Army. So there's total confusion in terms of who should get the aid, and how to give it.

Is this a correct evaluation? Do you see it that way? How can we get past this, such that there is a Plan B in which weapons get to the Army and not the police, and these divisions are overcome.

Bedoya: Well, the reality is clear. Colombia's problem is one of terrorist organizations which are very well armed, well equipped, and very well trained in guerrilla warfare—

Q: And with all the money in the world—

Bedoya: With all that money, and combat ability. So, they

have to be confronted militarily. The police can be involved in police, but not military, work. Sometimes police and military tasks are confused. Now, Plan B is what I'm proposing to the U.S.—a Marshall Plan which consists of a political-military alliance, especially between the U.S. and Colombia, and of course with our neighboring countries, in which the greatest effort would be carried out by Colombia, supported with technology (transport, satellite communications, etc.) to defeat these criminal organizations. We also need an economic alliance to create agricultural development poles, but not in the jungle. We have to protect the jungle, and defend it as a natural resource of water and oxygen which the world needs.

The United States can do it. Colombia can do it. What we need is for Colombia and the United States to show the political will to support this solution.

Q: May I ask you a question as a military man, and not as a politician? If this isn't resolved now, if a solution isn't found soon, won't more resources be needed? If it's not an invasion, won't an intervention by someone with greater strength be needed to stop this thing?

Bedoya: The problem is, that this has to be resolved, and as soon as possible. If it isn't, that territory [the demilitarized zone] could end up being a narco-terrorist Amazonian Republic which will plunge not only Colombia, but all of South America, into problems. We'll have problems in Panama,

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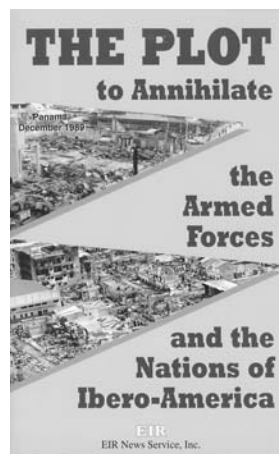
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—James Zackrisson, *Defense Force Quarterly*

It's urgent. If the United States doesn't do what it should do, it will suffer the consequences. First, here we have millions of Americans sick from drug consumption. Terrorism will occur here. Panama will be destabilized. So, the United States must make a decision very soon.

Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, and in the United States, because right now Colombia is at the center of the war on drug-trafficking. That is, it's the drug trade's theater of operations, and the whole world is the international mafias' war theater—they're here, in Europe, and in the Southern Cone. But Colombia is the heart of the problem, such that, if we get rid of the heart of the problem, the world's problem will be solved.

Q: General, speaking of that, there's an issue you know perfectly well, and that is perhaps the big obstacle to this alliance being formed, or to the aid arriving as rapidly or as soon as you think necessary, and that is the problem of human rights. There's an amendment which says that all assistance must go to military units free of any accusation of human rights violations. Even [White House drug policy adviser] Gen. [Barry] McCaffrey, who has so strongly supported the Colombian Armed Forces, recognizes that while this may not be a real problem, it is at least a problem of the perception, or image of Colombia's Armed Forces, that they violate human rights, and that they have to do something to clean up that image.

A recent Congressional document, from the research department, states that the units in the areas of the most intense combat against the drug trade, in large part haven't undergone that examination by the United States, prior to granting any assistance, precisely due to human rights violations.

Bedoya: The truth is that these drug-trafficking, terrorist organizations have the financial means by which to bribe judges, to point fingers, buy witnesses, and drown in accusations those soldiers who are fighting the drug trade. So, it's important that it be known that the Colombian Army is no violator of human rights. There are accusations, but what I can say about them is that when they are investigated, they are found to be sophisms, gossip, and lies. There are very few cases that have proved to have been human rights violations.

The reality is that these wars, such as the one we're waging against these mafias, will face obstacles, and it would be good for the United States to decide to lend this support—that's why I call it political-military—so that it be resolved as quickly as possible, like Kosovo. I mean, how would it be if U.S. Gen. [Wesley] Clark were accused of violating human rights because he ordered bombs dropped which missed the target, but it wasn't his fault? If we don't support Colombia, this war will never be won.

Q: What's your opinion of President Pastrana and his peace plan? Why do you assume that the plan has no chance of succeeding?

Bedoya: Because it's been a total failure. Look, President Pastrana made a promise to these organizations before he became President. He visited them, made deals with them, and as soon as he became President, he began to repay them for the help he thinks he got from them—giving them territory, laboratories, clandestine airstrips, crops. It's now been a year in which kidnappings, terrorism, drug production and exports, and generalized violence have all increased, and we've now got problems with countries like Venezuela, Brazil, and Peru.

So the Colombian crisis is terrifying. We have a negative GDP growth of 6.5% so far this year; unemployment is 20%, and Colombians are fleeing to other countries, but especially to the United States. No one wants this. In all surveys, Colombians say they disagree, that they want the terrorists to be stopped. Cabinet ministers have resigned. The government kicked out [Defense] Minister Lloreda because he protested, and 17 generals almost left in a crisis last month.

Q: Do you believe that with the resources the U.S. could provide, that the Colombian Army could definitively defeat the guerrillas and the drug trade?

Bedoya: Yes, if there is political-military support—with U.S. political support, with Colombian political support, and with the support of the whole region. The point is that this is not a Colombian mafia; it's an international mafia. United, we can finish them off.

Q: One more question. The U.S. is worried that Howard Base in Panama no longer exists, and now they want to put more U.S. military equipment in Colombia. Would this be advisable? Would you recommend it?

Bedoya: This is very serious. If the Colombian problem isn't resolved, Panama's security will be affected. The U.S. doesn't have to send troops to Colombia. Providing technical and logistical aid is the most important, and don't send out signals that coca is good, as one Wall Street faction did—Mr. Richard Grasso [president of the New York Stock Exchange] practically walked into the laboratories to negotiate with Wall Street's money. No one can fathom what Wall Street and the International Monetary Fund are doing, demanding that Colombia include drug trade revenues as part of GDP!

That makes us a narco-democracy, in which drugs here, and in the world, are practically being legalized.

Q: However, how realistic is it, knowing how slow the process is here to get aid sent to Colombia, for all the reasons we've mentioned, how realistic is it to think that the aid will get there in time?

Bedoya: It's urgent. If the United States doesn't do what it should do, it will suffer the consequences. First, here we have millions of Americans sick from drug consumption. Terrorism will occur here. Panama will be destabilized. So, the United States must make a decision very soon. Every minute, every day, every second that passes, means that the problem will be solved with more [drug] money, more deaths, more terrorism and, of course, more drug-trafficking.

Q: Something else you mentioned. You're a big critic of President Pastrana's peace process. But it's also true that you were a Presidential candidate, and that Pastrana was the one elected, because of his peace message. Perhaps at that moment, many Colombians felt they had had enough of death and violence, of military conflict, including the paramilitary element which is a very serious problem. That wasn't getting us anywhere, so they elected Pastrana, precisely because of his campaign for peace, for negotiation,

and a negotiated solution to the Colombian conflict. I know there's been a great deal of skepticism, but he is also the President, and I don't know how useful it is not to back that campaign. He's been in the Presidency for a year.

What do you think? Isn't it sometimes better to try to find a negotiated solution to this conflict that's been going on for so many years in Colombia?

Bedoya: The truth is that behind this, there's a problem of political corruption. He is a politician and there is a lot of corruption. Colombia has been invaded by corrupt politicians. This was also true of the previous government. Are we going to negotiate with drug traffickers? The only thing the drug trade wants is to protect its business, produce more drugs and, outside of that, arm itself and destabilize [countries].

This is a mistaken policy, and the whole world knows it. The Americans feel deceived—this is what the Congressmen told me—and I think that in Colombia, no one agrees with it, as the polls indicate. Our hope is to resolve this as soon as possible, because there could even be a problem of a civil war in Colombia, as well as a regional problem.

Q: But the problem, General, is that the policy of the State Department and the administration—Clinton has said it—continues to be to officially support Pastrana's peace process.

Bedoya: Yes, effectively the United States is responsible for what's happening, that is because President Pastrana—

Q: But you just said that people know that the peace process—

Bedoya: Yes, of course, but the peace process exists because the U.S. government backs it. That is, the U.S. has that responsibility, and that's why it's so important that the United States rectify and correct its mistake, which can't go on for more than a year. In one year, the country has been destroyed. If you go to Colombia, Colombia is dying. The economy, unemployment, violence, the drug trade, terrorism. The same thing is happening in neighboring countries such as Venezuela and Peru, and the same thing will surely happen in Panama. So, a decision very soon, and a rectification in time, could save Colombia and America.

Q: Do you think that the solution will come from the United States. Don't you think there's a solution inside Colombia?

Bedoya: Of course. It's a Colombia-U.S. political-military solution, with all the allies which must rally in the region.

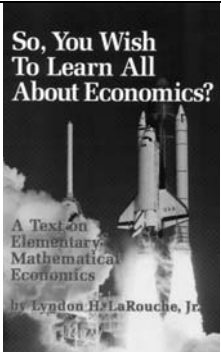
Q: You sound like a Presidential candidate.

Bedoya: I was a Presidential candidate.

Q: But now it sounds like—

Bedoya: I wish I could have prevented this tragedy for Colombians. Unfortunately, political corruption led to a repetition of what occurred in the previous government. We changed Presidents, but the problems are the same.

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Q: Thank you, General, for being with us.

Bedoya: Thank you very much.

Q: We've had with us Gen. Harold Bedoya, former Commander-in-Chief of the Colombian Army.

And that's it for today's show. We especially thank reporters Marcela Sánchez, Marí O'Donnel, and Armando Guzmán for being with us also.

FARC kidnaps children to turn into guerrillas

On Aug. 22, Peru's television Channel 4 broadcast a two-hour special on "Colombia At the Edge of the Abyss," which included an extensive interview with Gen. Harold Bedoya (ret.) of Colombia. One of the program's segments included chilling footage of child terrorists in action, forcibly recruited to the FARC. The segment concluded with interviews of two of the child terrorists in a medical ward, after they were captured by the Army. Below is a translation of that segment.

Announcer: The Colombian FARC, thanks to the drug trade, use minors as part of their militias.

Colombian Military Forces Commander General Tápias: You have also seen 28 minors among these 70 cadavers, which is another accusation which we made: That [the FARC] were incorporating children in the détente zone.

Announcer: These shots caught by an amateur cameraman in a FARC base, show dozens of children, sons and daughters of Colombian peasants, wearing the uniforms of the guerrillas, lining up with a military discipline worthy of

adults, and learning to throw grenades under the watchful eye of their commanders. They explain to them what position to take to throw them, and how to move through the grass without being detected by the enemy. They also give them wood blocks to simulate the weight of the grenades, and show them how to protect themselves from the explosion.

In the mornings, in this FARC base in the Colombian mountains, the children receive political indoctrination. In the afternoon, they are given military instruction; that is, techniques for patrolling, weapons and explosives handling, and ambushes of army patrols.

For all this, the children can receive up to 40,000 pesos a month [a little over \$20]. However, not all of them are paid for their service with the guerrillas. According to the estimates of military sources, some 4,000 Colombian children have been captured by the subversives: a horrifying figure.

Worst of all, is that in the majority of the cases, the children do not take up arms on their own initiative. Generally, the FARC forces parents who live in the interior of the country to hand their children over to the guerrillas.

Adult voice: What is your name? How old are you?

First child: Fifteen. Things are not as they tell us, but are different. They tell us that this is good. Negative. This is not good. This is bad. . . .

Adult voice: I want you to send a message to the child guerrillas, to the young guerrillas who are there. Tell them something.

Second child: I can't send a message to them to leave. Because, what can they do? If they leave, they'll kill them. They have to put up with it until the day they die. That's the way it is. Anyone who flees, they kill.

Announcer: What future awaits these little ones, who at the time when they should be playing with children their age, are in combat in a war which they did not cause? That is difficult to know. Probably, death awaits them. In the best case, over the years, a cold cell in some jail in Colombia.



Peru's Channel 4 showed chilling footage of children in combat drill as soldiers in the FARC ranks.



"Anyone who flees, gets killed," the FARC warns the children it forces into service. Shown here, the body of one of FARC's child-soldiers.