
Colombia

Govt. Seeks Continental Anti-Terror Mobilization

by Valerie Rush

The political shock caused by the Feb. 7 terrorist bombing of Bogotá's elite Club El Nogal has not only served as a warning to Colombia's political and economic elites that that nation's war on narco-terrorism is no longer confined to the mountains and urban ghettos. That bombing is also serving as a wake-up call to a world distracted by a propaganda war over Iraq, that a genuine terrorist threat capable of destabilizing an entire continent is boiling over on its front burner.

The car-bombing of the Club El Nogal, in the most prestigious neighborhood of Bogotá, occurred on a Friday evening, when nearly 700 people—including bankers, congressmen, ambassadors, and their families—were attending parties, dinners, sports clubs, and political meetings in the 10-story building. The 350 pounds of explosives blew out the walls and facade of the building, and set fires raging on every floor. Thirty-five people were killed and 150 injured. Casualties included a number of children in the building's day-care center.

'World Has Helped the Drug Trade'

In a statement broadcast the next day, President Alvaro Uribe declared, "What happened last night is a wake-up call to the international community, some of whom have been far too accommodating with Colombian terrorists, receiving them in their countries, providing them channels of communication, recognizing them as legitimate interlocutors. The world has helped to finance [terrorism] with the drug trade, has guarded its money in international banks. That world must change."

President Uribe has undertaken to bring about that change with a high-level diplomatic offensive designed to convince—and if necessary, embarrass—the nations of the world into putting their money where their mouth is, in helping Colombia with the financial, technical, and intelligence resources required to put an end to the narco-terrorist insurgency threatening to engulf the Andean region.

On Tuesday, Feb. 11, Uribe met with the presidents of Central America at a heads-of-state summit urgently convened in Panama. There, he presented a proposal that the nations represented declare the FARC a "terrorist organization," a move that would then commit those nations to implementing the measures of UN Security Council Resolution

1373, including seizure of bank accounts and assets, and the arrest of any members of the FARC within their borders. The proposal was immediately endorsed by every President at the meeting, as well as by Argentina's foreign minister, who was attending as an official observer.

On Wednesday, Feb. 12, Colombian Vice-President Francisco Santos presented the same proposal to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, motivated with the argument that there must not be a single corner of the continent where the FARC can find refuge. "This is not the FARC against Colombia, but the FARC against everyone," Santos insisted.

The Council approved a draft resolution based on Santos' proposal, which is now circulating to the member states. The resolution emphasizes that "those responsible for aiding, supporting, or harboring the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of these acts are equally complicit."

A proposal similar to that approved by the Central American states, was submitted by Uribe in the form of a letter to the Presidents of Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. All four countries share common borders with Colombia, and their territory has often been used by the FARC to escape hot pursuit in Colombia, as well as to coordinate with terrorists in those countries. Significantly, three of the four Presidents of these countries bordering Colombia—Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, the newly elected Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, and Lucio Gutiérrez of Ecuador—fall under the umbrella of the pro-terrorist São Paulo Forum, of which the FARC is a long-standing member. None of the four have yet endorsed Uribe's proposal.

Upping the Pressure on Bush

Colombian Defense Minister Martha Lucía Ramírez was also deployed to Washington to lobby for serious war-time assistance, in the form of money, equipment, and real-time intelligence sharing. Although Washington officially included the FARC on its "international terrorist" list last year, it still tailors its aid to Colombia to a strategy of trying to force the FARC to the negotiating table, rather than outright military defeat of the narco-terrorists. The result of such an approach has been such FARC "bargaining strategies" as the Club El Nogal bombing.

The FARC's latest negotiating demands, incredibly, include an "humanitarian exchange" of their kidnap victims—some of whom have been held for years—for the hundreds of FARC "combatants" held in Colombian jails, and the designation of a new demilitarized zone to "facilitate talks." The last such zone—the size of Switzerland—that was handed over to the FARC under the previous Pastrana government, was used by the narco-terrorists as a concentration camp for its hostages, a depot for stolen cars and in-transit cocaine shipments, a training ground run by international terrorists in assassination and use of explosives, and a launching pad for murderous attacks on neighboring towns.