

Uribe and the Specter of Fujimori in Colombia

by Maximiliano Londoño Penilla

The author is president of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) in Colombia.

Despite the brutal austerity programs decreed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Colombia, thus far with the consent and cooperation of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez's economic cabinet, the Colombian population still maintains the hope that President Uribe represents a phase change for the history of the country—at least in so far as beginning the process of overturning the narco-terrorist empire that has reigned in Colombia for nearly 25 years.

Clearly, in a country where the rate of real unemployment has surpassed 50%, if a serious national economic reconstruction program is not urgently undertaken, efforts to reestablish order and justice will be in vain. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that with a mere four months in office, President Uribe's voluntarism—that is, his refusal to yield advantages to the various armies of narco-terrorists—has remoralized the Armed Forces and police who, for the first time in decades, have an ally in the Executive branch. That same voluntarism has also remoralized a good portion of the population. They are hoping to see the multinational of kidnapping (more than 3,000 take place each year) eliminated, so that they can once again freely use the highways of their country, and not remain trapped in the cities, for fear of falling victim to a mass kidnapping or terrorist attack by the FARC, ELN, or illegal self-defense groups, should they “dare” to try to travel to another city.

A Winning Alliance?

The Colombian Army's recent rescue, safe and sound, of Zipaquirá bishop and president of the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM), Monsignor Jorge Enrique Jiménez—kidnapped by the FARC along with Pachoparish priest Desiderio Orjuela, proves that with the will, terrorists can be confronted and defeated. The population is ready to support the Armed Forces and police, if the government's thrust is clear and unequivocal: victory. One might say that the ghost of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori has begun to haunt Colombia. It was Fujimori who, in the 1990s, defeated both the Shining Path and MRTA terrorists, and the drug trade, on the basis of a solid alliance between a determined Executive, nationalist military forces, and a fully committed population. Fujimori was not overthrown by his people, but

by Wall Street interests addicted to dirty money, State Department operatives, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the short time Uribe has occupied the Presidency of Colombia, he has already demonstrated a commitment to victory against narco-terrorism. His readiness to wage this war was what guaranteed that he would have the necessary electoral support in the May election. As soon as he took office, he decreed a state of emergency, under which he adopted legislation—albeit temporary, since it has not yet been passed by Congress—to facilitate action by the military and police, giving them back the initiative against organized crime.

By contrast, when the current secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), César Gaviria, served as Colombia's President, he forged an agreement with the drug cartels, under which they would supposedly surrender to the justice system. In exchange, a new constitution was written according to the specifications of Medellín Cartel boss Pablo Escobar and Cali Cartel heads Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela, under which the codes (already permissive to drug traffickers and terrorists) became worse.

Thus, after a mere seven years of “voluntary” jail time, the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers recently attempted to legally activate their “get out of jail free” cards. President Uribe and Interior Minister Fernando Londoño Hoyos did everything in their power to prevent the drug lords from being let go, but in the end, Gilberto Rodríguez won his release. Miguel is still in prison because the Uribe government managed, at the 13th hour, to find a forgotten legal procedure which slapped an additional four-year prison sentence on him.

Uribe's efforts to forestall a corrupt judicial maneuver in the case of the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers was met by a campaign, run both at home and abroad, to paint him as “authoritarian,” and as “violating the independence of separate branches of government.” In effect, the NGOs have accused him of being “a new Fujimori,” because of his willingness to challenge the corrupt legal structure which has enabled narco-terrorism to flourish in the country.

In late November, Uribe confronted this again, when the Supreme Court overturned an emergency presidential decree granting the military and police war-time powers against the narcoterrorist armed bands in two terror-ridden zones of the country, Arauca and Saravena, which encompass 27 municipalities. Even as the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional, enforcement aspects of the decree—such as raiding terrorist hideouts and detaining suspected terrorists without judicial warrants—Uribe was readying a new decree, not only reinstating the overturned military/police powers, but expanding the *“zones of exception”* which the decree encompassed.

Again, this power struggle between a determined executive and a corrupt judiciary is reminiscent of the battle in Peru, where President Fujimori was ultimately left with no choice, but either to surrender his nation to the narcoterrorists, or shut down the courts which were working against the national interests.