COLOMBIA'S BOLD GAMBLE FOR PEACE

Brian Michael Jenkins

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The Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138

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The hotel in Bogota advises its guests not to go jogging alone. It is not because of the altitude. Security is the issue.

Security measures--some highly visible, some more discreet--are very much in evidence. But they don't guarantee protection. A short while ago, a Colombian businessman was kidnapped in the hotel's coffee shop. Another was abducted from his office in Bogota, in front of more than a hundred workers, and whisked into a car on a major thoroughfare where traffic had been temporarily blocked; the operation took less than a minute. Last year, while shocked students looked on, terrorists kidnapped a young girl, the daughter of a wealthy family, from a classroom at one of Bogota's major universities.

The country has recently suffered a wave of kidnappings, one Colombian official admitted. According to testimony by the Commander-in-Chief of the army, 19 kidnappings were reported in 1982, 192 in 1983, and 141 in the first seven months of 1984, something like one a day--by guerrilla groups, by common criminals pretending to be guerrillas, by guerrillas pretending to be common criminals.

Press reports reflect only a fraction of the total volume of activity, but in Colombia there is an incentive not to report kidnappings. Colombian law does not prohibit the payment of ransom, but as a matter of policy it opposes ransom payments that bring millions of dollars to the guerrillas, and government authorities have on several occasions intervened to prevent payoffs. One police official said that kidnappings put police who know about them in a difficult position. The police are obliged to try to prevent ransom payments, but they realize that the companies or the families of the hostages are going to do everything they can to obtain the hostages' safe release. And the police do not want to endanger the victims. Government policy did not prevent the payment of over $1 million for the return of the President's brother, who was kidnapped in 1983. In practice, kidnappers and the families of hostages generally try to conduct their negotiations without notifying police, sensitive to both sides' need for security, while

police maintain a low profile. Relying on their own informants, cautious kidnappers may even warn families when their telephones are being tapped by government authorities.

THE KIDNAPPERS: CRIMINALS OR TERRORISTS?

Common criminals usually charge less than guerrillas for their hostages. They do not have the hideouts or the logistical support to hold hostages for a long time, and they are not usually skillful negotiators. But they are more dangerous to deal with, in the view of one negotiator who has dealt with both kinds. They treat hostages badly. If they get frightened, they may kill the hostage and run. Even when paid, they may not release the hostage alive.

The guerrillas apparently share this view of criminal kidnappers. In a document reportedly discovered by Colombian authorities, the high command of one of Colombia's major guerrilla groups revealed that to publicly disassociate itself from kidnapping but still meet its financial needs, the group would, if necessary, continue its kidnapping operations under a new name. The fictitious group would pose as a common criminal group. To maintain this fiction, members involved in kidnappings would not call each other comrade or *companero*, nor would they mention the names of the guerrilla group's leaders or places where the group was known to have its bases, or leave Marxist literature lying around. To complete the illusion, the kidnappers were to use foul language and terms related to the drug traffic, and they were to mistreat the hostages.

One experienced negotiator, however, feels certain that he can easily distinguish between a criminal kidnapping and a guerrilla operation, and that most of the recent major abductions are the work of the guerrillas. Guerrilla kidnappings are sophisticated operations, carried out with precision. The guerrillas keep their hostages for a long time before even beginning negotiations, "like cattle in a pasture until each comes up for its turn to be sold," and they are willing and able to prolong negotiations or suspend them for lengthy periods in order to increase pressure on the hostages' families.

They are patient negotiators, and they do their homework. If a family's representative tells them that the family cannot possibly pay the amount of ransom demanded, the kidnappers may inform him exactly where the money is or how it can be raised. They have accurate financial information, apparently often derived from inside sources. They usually even know if the hostage's family or company carries ransom insurance and the face value of the policy. And they do not easily fall for other bargaining ploys.

One Colombian businessman who has negotiated numerous ransoms firmly believes that in one recent case, the kidnappers employed a professional negotiator, or someone well-trained in the art of negotiations, familiar with every technique, able to cut off almost every avenue of maneuver and maintain the psychological advantage. "I was willing to pay a large sum just to meet this man," he said.

MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR RANSOMS

A former Colombian head of state whose brother was kidnapped and released 10 months later, after the family had paid a large ransom, told the press in September 1984 that guerrillas received $1.5 million in ransom during the past two years. Negotiators involved in recent cases consider that to be a gross understatement--at least ten times lower than actual figures. While farmers and ranchers in rural areas may be kidnapped and ransomed for as little as $10,000, multimillion-dollar demands--in one case $30 million--and million-dollar-plus payoffs--in one case $6 million--occur regularly. Four kidnappings in the past 19 months resulted in more than $10 million in ransom payments.

Victims during the past two years include the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, the son of another wealthy family, the brother of a former President of Colombia, and the brother of the current President. All were kidnapped by guerrillas; all were released after large ransoms were paid.

Assassinations are also a problem, although these are directed against government officials, rather than business executives or wealthy individuals. American diplomats and diplomatic facilities and American corporations have also been the targets of bombings. In May 1984, a

powerful car bomb exploded near the residence of the American ambassador in Bogota. One guerrilla group demanded the departure of the ambassador as a condition for signing a ceasefire with the government.

Finally, Bogota and other cities in Colombia suffer an extraordinarily high rate of violent crime. Some of the crime derives from the high unemployment rate and desperate economic situation of many Colombians. Hotel guests are warned not to wear "provocative jewelry" on the streets of Bogota. Some of the crime is related to the extensive narcotics traffic in Colombia. The drug traffickers, called *narcotraficantes,* kill each other and anyone who gets in their way. On May 1, gunmen acting on behalf of Colombia's drug kings assassinated Colombia's Minister of Justice because he was pursuing them too vigorously. They also have threatened the current Minister of Justice, although apparently without effect, since he too has been vigorous in trying to reduce the drug traffic.

With these kinds of threats, it is not surprising that those who might be targets of guerrillas, drug traffickers, or ordinary criminals are extremely security-conscious. Families with money, businessmen, diplomats, and government officials live behind high walls and reinforced doors. They alter their routes and schedules. Many ride in armored cars. Armed guards surround public buildings, business offices, and private residences. High-rise buildings are considered safer than other houses. Bogota's yellow pages contain ten pages of *vigilantes*--private security police, men and women, trained and available to guard offices and residences and provide armed escort. A certain degree of fear is always there. "You feel it. It wears you down," said one diplomat in Bogota.

COLOMBIA'S PROGRAM FOR PEACE

On the other side of the walls, people are painting doves. With supreme irony, as if the violence had not increased, Colombia is currently celebrating peace, or at least the promise of peace. But whether that promise ever becomes reality remains to be seen.

After more than 20 years of guerrilla warfare and a level of political violence comparable to that seen in Uruguay and Argentina a decade ago, the Colombian government has embarked upon a peace process

that is without precedent in the world. The process formally began two years ago with the passage of an amnesty law.

Controversial at the time, the amnesty law was no hastily conceived, half-baked, naive offer, as some contended. Neither was it a purely cynical attempt to satisfy popular sentiments, placate liberal elements, or place the blame for all future violence on the shoulders of the guerrillas. I visited Colombia two months after the law took effect. I was skeptical, but discussions with Colombian officials--some proponents, others perhaps more skeptical than I--convinced me that the amnesty was the product of careful thought. Its architects were both realistic and pragmatic. They knew exactly what they wanted and what they could achieve.

Colombia had three times before granted amnesty in an attempt to end its endemic political violence. In 1954, the government declared an amnesty to heal the wounds of what Colombian historians refer to simply as *La Violencia* (The Violence), a period of bitter internecine political warfare that had left 200,000 persons dead since 1948. In 1958, another amnesty was offered as part of an effort to reunite the nation after the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. In 1981, President Turbay offered a third amnesty, calculated to end two decades of guerrilla warfare. The first two amnesties were offered after the conflicts had been resolved; the third was offered while the struggle continued. It failed, acording to architects of the present amnesty, because it imposed too many conditions. Determined not to repeat the same mistake, the authors of the 1982 amnesty law have made its provisions very generous.

The law offers unconditional amnesty for all acts of rebellion and all crimes connected with the rebellion. It excludes only the murder of defenseless persons, atrocities such as indiscriminate murder or disfigurement, and gratuitous acts of violence such as rape.

The line to be drawn between ordinary criminal activity and acts of terrorism, on the one hand, and actions connected with the rebellion, on the other, was an issue of some debate. Combat actions presented no problem, but what about murders and kidnappings? If they were excluded, the amnesty would not be acceptable to the guerrillas who have routinely engaged in both. To solve the problem, the law excludes the murder of defenseless persons, but the government has tacitly recognized that

assassinations of government officials have been part of the guerrillas' efforts to take power and may therefore be considered part of the rebellion. The government has also recognized that murders of ordinary persons have been carried out in the course of bank robberies, to extort money, and to eliminate informers. Thus, these murders were committed by the guerrillas to obtain money and weapons and to maintain clandestinity and may be considered connected with the rebellion. The law amnesties all such actions.

Deciding how to treat kidnappings presented a greater problem for the architects of the amnesty. "A thousand homicides do not arouse public opinion as much as ten kidnappings," one Colombian official admitted. At the same time, to exclude kidnappings from the amnesty would doom it to failure, since all of the guerrilla groups had engaged in kidnapping. The government decided to include kidnappings, recognizing that the guerrillas used the ransoms to finance the purchase of weapons; thus kidnappings were part of the rebellion. Kidnappings by guerrillas were deemed to be political acts because they had a political motive.

Recognizing assassinations and kidnappings as political acts that are part of armed rebellion does, to a certain degree, legitimize them. Thus Colombia has come closer to espousing the common leftist Third World assertion that such acts of terrorism, which the United States and Western European nations want to treat as crimes, are legitimate actions if politically motivated. This represents a worldwide trend toward considering terrorism a legitimate mode of conflict.

Colombian officials concede that the current amnesty law goes far beyond international law. It does so for political reasons. Throughout the debate, political considerations consistently overrode legal considerations.

The amnesty was a genuine attempt, made in good faith, to persuade at least some of the guerrillas to lay down their arms. It also had more limited objectives: It was intended to provide peasants and others who had collaborated with the guerrillas out of sympathy or fear with an opportunity to leave the guerrillas. Colombian officials also expressed the hope that the amnesty would cause divisions within the ranks of the guerrillas and would bring some respite in the fighting. And some

thought that it would insure public support for future government actions if the guerrillas rejected the offer and continued the violence. As one defense official said, "If the guerrillas reject this amnesty, they lose all political pretensions. They show themselves to be *traficantes de violencia* (traffickers of violence) who, like traffickers of drugs, are pure criminals deserving no mercy."

THE RESULTS OF THE AMNESTY

What results did the amnesty achieve? It is difficult to estimate how many took advantage of it and left the guerrilla groups. The amnesty did not require guerrillas to formally present themselves; those who wanted to quit could simply bury their rifles and go home. The amnesty erased the slate up to November 20, 1982, and those who quit then were home free. Those who continued to fight against the government after November 20 were technically committing crimes for which they could be prosecuted, but even here the government indicated its willingness to be magnanimous and overlook the violations of those who eventually quit.

Ex-guerrillas who wanted to receive government benefits in the form of land and low-interest loans could present themselves to authorities. Some armed units did come in *en masse,* and some peasants claimed to be ex-guerrillas in order to obtain the benefits. In a 1984 interview, President Betancur stated that "of the 6,000 or 7,000 guerrillas, about a third have taken up the amnesty." That is a rather optimistic assessment, according to most observers, and Betancur's estimate of total guerrilla strength is low if he includes the infrastructure that the amnesty was designed to reach. Most observers estimate guerrilla strength at between 15,000 and 20,000; this includes the guerrillas' infrastructure. About one-third of the total strength are fighters.

Although the amnesty did provoke some divisions within the guerrilla ranks, the groups preserved their fighting strength, and the level of violence actually increased. The number of kidnappings rose dramatically in 1983 and even more dramatically in 1984. The acting Minister of Defense recently noted that one-fourth of all the soldiers killed during the past 20 years of combat against the guerrillas died in the last two years. Some part of this escalation might reflect a desire

on the part of the guerrillas to demonstrate that they could still fight in order to negotiate from a position of strength.

If the amnesty was virtually unconditional, what was left to negotiate? I asked this question two years ago. The guerrillas remained suspicious of the offer, Colombian officials told me. They recalled that some of those who laid down their weapons and accepted the 1958 amnesty were subsequently killed. The government also recognized that the leaders of the guerrilla organizations had commitments to their own soldiers and constituents. They hadn't fought for 20 years merely for the privilege of quitting. To preserve their own position of leadership, if nothing else, they had to deliver something. In addition to guarantees of security for the fighters, guerrilla leaders sought promises that the government would improve conditions in the rural areas.

The only way the guerrillas could guarantee their own safety was to keep their weapons. They wanted a ceasefire, not just an amnesty. Negotiating ceasefires with the various guerrilla groups became the next order of business.

THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENTS

Some have cynically remarked that having to negotiate ceasefires is evidence that the amnesty failed. The mostly secret negotiations between the guerrillas and intermediaries representing the government took place in Colombia and various Latin American capitals. President Betancur personally met with guerrilla leaders in Madrid in October 1983. The guerrillas sought to extract as many promises as possible from the government and to obtain status from the negotiating process itself. (One group proposed that the President come to the jungle to meet them!) Ultimately, ceasefires were signed with most of the groups. *FARC* (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the largest guerrilla organization, claiming 2,000 to 4,000 fighters and 10,000 active supporters, signed a ceasefire in late March 1984, which took effect on May 28. *M-19* (the April 19th Movement), the second largest group, and the *EPL* (Popular Liberation Army) signed on August 23. This ceasefire formally took effect on August 30. That left only the *ELN* (National Liberation Army), which has recently signaled its willingness to enter

negotiations, and dissident factions of *FARC* that rejected the ceasefire and are still fighting.

Basically, the agreements require only the suspension of combat operations. The guerrillas can maintain their military formations and keep their weapons. They may continue to occupy the territory they occupied at the time they signed the agreements, unmolested by the army, but they are not confined to any part of the country. They may freely enter the urban areas with their weapons. A commission will verify that neither side violates the terms of the ceasefires.

The government will try over the next year to transform the ceasefires into a genuine peace accord that includes the disarming and demobilization of the guerrilla armies and their reintegration into the political process. One Colombian observer likened this effort to the confidence-building measures of the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce the chances of inadvertent war between them.

Part of the peace process includes a national dialog--a meeting of representatives of the government, the guerrillas, peasants, labor unions, businesses, and other sectors of society to discuss political and economic issues. "It'll be held at the national stadium," joked one politician. The joking betrays a degree of uncertainty and concern. Nobody knows exactly what form this national dialog will take. How will the participants be selected? Who will set the agenda? What authority will it have? Such uncertainties make professional politicians who are accustomed to working within the established political machinery uneasy. To some, the national dialog smacks of the corporatism imposed by Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, and Salazar in Portugal, where the state closely controlled economic activity while maintaining the form of capitalism. One former cabinet minister noted that Belisario Betancur had at one time, many years ago, flirted with fascism.

It is noteworthy that the Colombian government uses the word "peace" to describe what is going on. The guerrillas merely call it a ceasefire. The government regards the amnesty, the ceasefire agreements, the verification commissions, and the national dialog as steps in a process that leads inexorably toward peace--or it must at least create that illusion. The guerrilla leaders who signed the accords regard the ceasefire as a temporary suspension of open

hostilities or at most a change of tactics in their unceasing struggle for power--or they must appear to think so in front of their own followers. The government must pretend that the guerrillas have laid down their rifles even though they have not. The guerrillas must pretend that they have not put down their guns even though, for now, they have.

FAITH AND FEAR

During a recent return visit to Colombia, I had the opportunity to speak with cabinet ministers, political leaders, police and military officials, diplomats, businessmen, and journalists--enough contacts to get at least an impression of how the peace process is being viewed. The people I spoke with can be divided into believers, hopeful agnostics, and skeptics. A theological taxonomy applies here. No one knows, or even professes to know, how the peace process is going to turn out. Indeed, what impressed me most was the high degree of uncertainty and the lack of concrete knowledge underlying all discussions. Several critics told me that the government had been blind in its pursuit of peace. They meant to imply that the government had been so obsessed with achieving some kind of agreement with the guerrillas that it had ignored all other pressing national issues, but their comment could just as easily reflect the absence of information. Here was a government that has been negotiating with Colombia's guerrilla groups for over a year, but unless everyone was being disingenuous, nobody appeared to know exactly how strong the guerrillas were. Government officials could only speculate as to why the guerrillas had agreed to sign the ceasefires and whether they would abide by them. No one had the vaguest idea of the guerrillas' actual or potential political strength, how they might pursue their aims in a political contest, how well they might fare, or what might cause them to return to the mountains and renew the armed struggle.

The first unknown is excusable. Guerrilla mathematics, as we learned in Vietnam, can be a tricky business. But the remaining unknowns seem odd coming from successful politicians, who must at least know how to count, and who are presumed to know how to assess the potential strengths and weaknesses of their political adversaries.

The faithful, the supporters of President Belisario Betancur, professed faith that the process would lead to peace. They could not say how this would come about. There is no secret government plan to achieve peace; that achievement is regarded as a process, not a plan. The process cannot be revealed, because no one knows how it is supposed to work or because revealing the process would spoil the trick.

The trick is to paint a dove and make it real. President Betancur will create the illusion of peace, pretending not to fool these sharp-eyed men from the mountains. He will entertain them by producing from out of thin air a succession of political spheres and rings and colored scarves, while seeming to share with his audience the knowledge that they are wise to his tricks. He will encourage them to try a little political sleight of hand of their own. Underneath this canopy woven of amnesties, accords, commissions, and dialogs, he will transform guerrillas into politicians, his kind but not his equal. It'll be a helluva trick if it works.

It is always difficult to argue with those who readily concede they do not know what will happen but profess faith that everything will turn out well. What can you say? You don't have faith. Well, no one in Colombia can say they don't have faith, at least in public. No one can oppose peace; and with the country yearning for peace, no one wants to be seen belittling any effort to achieve it. Such heresy can be expressed only in private conversations.

The believers do have one very powerful argument. After 20 years of fighting, the army has not been able to defeat the guerrillas. A military solution has not worked. The current course may not bring peace, but the past course has certainly not brought victory.

While the believers profess their faith, the skeptics, in private conversations, reveal their fears. And if the people I spoke with represent the spectrum of opinion, the skeptics clearly outnumber the believers. Those who I thought might wholeheartedly support the current process wholeheartedly expressed their doubts and warned of the dangers. Those I expected to be somewhat skeptical foresaw disaster.

The skeptics do not believe the guerrillas have real political power, but they worry that the government's peace process has given them the aura of political power and has provided them with opportunities for political mischief, which could be especially dangerous during Colombia's current economic crisis.

Several Colombian politicians expressed concern that the guerrillas might seize the initiative in the national dialog and confront the government with a list of popular demands--land, housing, jobs--that all could agree with in principle. The guerrillas could then claim credit for any progress on these issues. But the government would find it extremely difficult to satisfy the entire list, especially during the current economic crisis. Such a failure would discredit the political system. If the system cannot deliver what the people want and what the political parties agree are fair goals, then the problem, the guerrillas can say, must be structural, and the structure must be radically altered, which the guerrillas are prepared to do.

A Colombian businessman outlined another scenario for trouble. He fears that the guerrillas will take advantage of the ceasefire to move into the cities, where they can exploit the poverty, unemployment, and discontent exacerbated by the current economic crisis. In this scenario, the guerrillas will mobilize the legions of poor and unemployed for demonstrations and marches on behalf of popular issues like housing. Ostensibly they will try to keep the demonstrations peaceful, but behind the scenes they may incite squatters' invasions, occupations of factories, or other actions that will require the government to respond forcefully. One shot fired by some nervous policeman will turn confrontation into conflagration. Barricades will go up. Acts of urban terrorism will increase. The situation will become ungovernable.

A TROJAN DOVE

The driving force behind the peace process is President Belisario Betancur. Observers variously describe him as a visionary able to see above the heads of ordinary politicians, a poor administrator with no patience for detail, a romanticist, a man who recalls the poverty of his

youth, a leftist, a potential fascist in the more traditional 1930s sense of the term, a demagogue, a populist, a man with a deep need to be popular with the people, a man who *is* immensely popular with the people. There is in fact no inconsistency in any of these descriptions.

Opinions of his motives also vary. He fervently wants peace. The people fervently want peace, so Betancur wants it. Betancur wants the illusion of peace to hold at least until the end of his term in 1986. The constitution prohibits him from succeeding himself, but he will run again in 1990 as the man who brought peace. He wants the Nobel prize. It will help his chances for reelection.

He believes he can coopt the guerrillas into the political system. According to some, Betancur is naive. He will be duped by the guerrillas; he is the guerrillas' Trojan dove. According to another person I spoke with, the guerrillas are Betancur's Trojan horse. They will discredit the current political system with his covert approval; they will mobilize the masses; they will create the revolution. Betancur will manipulate the entire process. The most popular man in Colombia, he will emerge the leader of the new state.

WHY DID THE GUERRILLAS ACCEPT THE CEASEFIRE?

The government's objectives are clear enough: It wants peace. But why did the guerrillas sign the ceasefire? What persuaded them to come down from the mountains?

One can only speculate about the discussions that may have taken place in the guerrillas' councils. Several factors must have figured in their decision. Like President Betancur, the leaders of the guerrilla movements must consider the country's yearning for peace. They must also recognize that militarily they have not succeeded, and unless some radical change in the balance of forces takes place, they are not likely to succeed. They too must suffer from frustration and fatigue. They may feel that it is time to change strategy, to try a political route. They may hope to achieve in the political arena what they could not achieve by force of arms.

Several government officials suggested that the guerrillas may have received "orders from abroad" to lower the level of violence. It has long been known that Colombia's guerrillas receive assistance from Cuba.

Proof of this assistance led the Colombian government to break diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1981, but the suggestion of "orders from abroad" admits that Colombia's guerrillas may operate to some degree under foreign direction, something many on the liberal left in Colombia have been loath to concede and others find hard to verify.

This raises the broader issue of what role Cuba plays with regard to the region's guerrillas. Cuba's provision of support in the form of training and weapons is well-documented, but this assistance does not give Cuba control over the guerrillas. However, Cuba does have influence of a more subtle kind deriving from Castro's prestige as a successful revolutionary. A suggestion from Cuba that Colombia's guerrillas should accept a ceasefire would carry weight. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the ELN, which is presumably the most pro-Castro guerrilla faction in Colombia, has thus far rejected the ceasefire.

And why would Cuba advise the guerrillas to abide by the ceasefires, at least for the time being? I got two answers. One was that a reduction in violence was Colombia's reward for pursuing a foreign policy more distant from the United States, more in line with broad Third World interests. More specifically, Colombia seemed about to renew relations with Cuba and further its reentry into Latin American political life, which has been one of Cuba's foreign policy goals for the past 25 years. To contribute to the Colombian government's downfall while wooing its friendship would be inconvenient. The second interpretation is that the instructions to the guerrillas to lay down their arms is a means by which Cuba can assist Colombia in the Contadora negotiations regarding Central America.

Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Panama have been trying to work out a diplomatic agreement to end the fighting in this region and bring about the withdrawal of all foreign armies and advisors. Cuba may support this effort either because it sees the Contadora plan as a means of getting the United States out of Central America, thus clearing the way for a guerrilla victory in El Salvador, or because Cuba itself fears the consequences of continued turmoil in the region and growing U.S. involvement. Colombia's role as cosponsor of a negotiated solution to the fighting is undermined by its inability to negotiate a political

solution to its own guerrilla war. On the other hand, success at home might enhance Colombia's credentials and the perceived feasibility of a negotiated settlement to the Central American conflict.

Beyond the general factors of fatigue, military failure, fear of alienating a population tired of war, and advice from Cuba, each guerrilla group probably had its own combination of reasons for accepting a ceasefire. *M-19's* leaders have long wanted to reenter the political arena. Having proposed an amnesty and ceasefire negotiations, they could not easily back out and maintain their credibility. *FARC*, in the view of Colombian officials, may have been more susceptible to foreign persuasion. Moreover, the growth of the narcotics traffic and ordinary crime has threatened the organization's image. While some *FARC* fronts have benefited economically by providing security for drug traffickers, involvement in drugs has, according to some, undermined *FARC's* political credentials. The organization has to distance itself from the criminals. Finally, the *EPL* probably joined the negotiations because it did not want to be left behind or to face the army alone.

WHAT DO THEY GET?

What do the guerrillas get from the ceasefire accords? If nothing else, they get respite from the fighting, time to rest, recruit, and rearm. The amnesty has to a certain extent legitimized their activities and recognized the political content of their struggle. The ceasefire agreements give the guerrillas considerable status; they have implicitly gained recognition as belligerents on an equal plane with the government. The guerrillas have also gained an opportunity to participate in the political process or, stated more cynically, to mobilize and organize support without interference from the army or the police. In addition, the government has given the guerrillas some concessions, including guaranteed access to the media and possible financial assistance to support their political efforts.

The guerrillas also run risks in agreeing to the ceasefires. After years of armed struggle, the thought of a possible doublecross must enter their minds. Even if they trust Betancur, they must worry that the army might take things into its own hands. *M-19* leaders have expressed their concerns over the possibility of a military coup. That

is not likely, however. It is in the government's interest to maintain the peace, and the government has already demonstrated its determination to allow nothing to derail the peace process. It overlooks the fact that the guerrillas still hold hostages for ransom. It pretends that the guerrillas are not responsible for any of the recent kidnappings, that those actions are all being carried out by common criminals.

Peace, however, can be also dangerous to the guerrillas. Living underground or in mountain hideouts, cut off from normal contacts with society, leaders of terrorist as well as guerrilla groups can fall prey to their own illusions. They may easily exaggerate the extent of their political support. When *M-19* guerrillas arrived in the town of Corinto to celebrate the truce, young men flocked to join the group, in the wave of euphoria that swept through the town. It was a great time to join the guerrillas, to share in the glory of their "victory," to pretend that one was with them when they fought, to impress the girls, without having to suffer the hard life of the mountains or the risk of being shot.

The guerrillas have also retained a Robin Hood image among the upper sectors of Colombian society, the result of a combination of idealism, romanticism, and antisemitism. The guerrillas, *M-19*, and *EPL* (more than *FARC*) are seen as idealists who have sacrificed career and comfort and risked their lives for a noble cause. Many deem it important that the guerrilla leaders--again those of *M-19* more than of *FARC*--are well-educated, "cultivated" persons, many of them former university students. One smells snobbery here.

Even the guerrillas' acts of terrorism have not tarnished their image. What about *M-19's* seizure of the Dominican Republic's embassy in 1980? What did threatening the lives of diplomats have to do with improving the lot of the masses? But it was an audacious act, and no one was killed. What about the murders of peasants? Those killed probably refused to help the guerrillas or were helping the government--hardly sufficient cause to be killed. But the deaths of peasants seem remote from Bogota's cocktail circuit. What about the kidnappings? The guerrillas are forced to kidnap in order to finance their struggle, and anyway, if the victim's family pays the ransom, no one is hurt. The fact that many of those who have been kidnapped come from wealthy Jewish

families also moderates the shock among the sons and daughters of Bogota society. This is not their crowd.

Then what about Gloria Lara? She *was* of their crowd, the daughter of a prominent Colombian family, kidnapped, held for months, treated badly, ultimately brutally murdered, but apparently not before she had been raped. She was four months pregnant when they found her body. The kidnapping and murder of Gloria Lara had a great impact on the upper class of Colombian society. To this day, no one is sure who was responsible. At the time, the best-informed sources thought she probably had been kidnapped by one of the many factions of *FARC*--certainly by one of the guerrilla groups, rather than ordinary criminals. Rejecting the disturbing notion that the guerrillas might be brutal murderers, some advanced the theory that Lara had been kidnapped and murdered by *Muerto al secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers), a right-wing terrorist group connected with the army and financed by the drug kings, whose mission is to combat kidnappers and leftist guerrillas. Their supposed objective in killing Lara was to prepare the country psychologically for a wave of repression. It was a shaky theory concocted by people to quell their own fears that the guerrillas might not be so nice.

That was nearly two years ago. The guerrillas are currently riding a wave of popularity. The news media cannot seem to get enough of them. Their pictures fill the magazines. Everybody wants to see these strange men of the forest who so look the part in their olive fatigues, berets, and slouch hats, their colored scarves, rifles slung on their shoulders or submachine guns resting on their chests, the inevitable machetes at their sides, men who call each other *comandante* and *companero*. Some are young boys "drafted" by the guerrillas at the age of 12 or 13, instructed about how the imperialists exploit the poor, and trained to shoot. Many of the older veterans sport beards of varying lengths. One kidnap victim who was forced to spend months in the jungle reported that his smooth-faced kidnappers longed for beards. At times, he caught them narcissistically admiring themselves in the little mirrors they carried at the side of their communications equipment.

Like slogans painted on a wall, their current popularity will fade. In a month or two, the novelty will wear off. The guerrillas will become old hat. People will cease simply watching them and will start listening to what they say. The result will be shock, or more likely, boredom.

The accords the guerrillas signed with the government do not require them to turn in their weapons. Still, technically, they are violating the law. One official suggested a possible compromise. The guerrillas could keep their weapons but could not carry them in public. But the guerrillas must keep their weapons *and* carry them for two reasons--for defense and because it is their weapons that make them different. Without their guns, the guerrillas will look and sound like any other politicians. Without their guns, who will listen to them?

The genuine concern of the guerrillas will be how to stay in the headlines without violence or the threat of violence. It is the violence, not the power of their message, however just or convincing it may be, that brings them attention. The guerrillas have demanded access to the media, and the government has promised such access. But it cannot guarantee their appeal.

There is also the problem of money. The guerrillas finance themselves through bank robberies, kidnappings, extortion, and some participation in the narcotics traffic. Colombian officials estimate that in 1983, the guerrillas obtained approximately $30 million from bank robberies and ransoms. Earlier this year, the American ambassador to Colombia asserted that the guerrillas took in $100 million from their involvement in the drug traffic. (Colombian officials I spoke with agreed that the guerrillas receive money from the drug traffickers but said they could not verify the amount.) Where will the money come from if the guerrillas, in fact, cease all operations? The government has indicated that it would provide some funds for political campaigns, but the guerrillas cannot permit themselves to become totally dependent on government handouts. Government manipulation of their finances could turn the guerrillas into the permanent mendicants of a minority view.

It is not certain that the leaders of the guerrillas could turn off the kidnappings even if they wanted to. The guerrilla armies are supported by a clandestine network that sustains them financially and logistically. Despite the ceasefires, this clandestine network, much of it in urban areas, is not likely to surface. It comprises a different kind of people, and over time it develops a life of its own. It will remain underground. It will continue to plan and probably carry out operations with or without the leaders' approval.

The leaders of the guerrilla armies risk a lot in suspending military operations. Unlike regular armies, guerrilla armies do not easily adapt to garrison life, where training and military ritual are substituted for combat. A guerrilla who stops fighting ceases to be a guerrilla. Without the glue of action, the cohesion that comes from clandestinity, the shared hardships of combat and being on the run, a guerrilla army may wither or disintegrate as a fighting organization. When I mentioned this to one Colombian official, he smiled. "We are counting on it," he said.

The Colombian army is not so optimistic. Having suffered their heaviest casualties during the two years since the amnesty was declared, the soldiers have yet to see the benefits of the peace process. Moreover, they have had to endure the ignominy of standing by while the guerrillas enter the towns, as if they had won the war. Not that the soldiers complain openly. Indeed, discussions with senior army officers were extraordinarily opaque. Whatever they think privately, officially the army high command supports the peace. But there is tension.

One issue of contention between the President and the army is the government's decision to permit the guerrillas to keep their arms. The acting Minister of Defense complained about this in a recent letter to the President. In the exceedingly polite and beautiful Baroque phrases of formal Spanish, he reminded the President that the Colombian constitution explicitly prohibits private ownership of arms, and the army is sworn to uphold the constitution. The Minister held the legal high ground, but the peace process has left behind a trail of legal anomalies. As before, political pragmatism will defeat legal considerations, and the army will go along.

Rumors of a coup floated about in September, as the guerrillas marched into Corinto, but a coup is extremely unlikely. There is no public support for a coup at the present time. The people want peace. No man on horseback waits in the wings. Unlike many other Latin American countries, Colombia has a fairly well-established principle of civilian supremacy; the army remains loyal to the elected leadership.

THE OUTLOOK

Will the current peace process actually bring an end to decades of political violence in Colombia? Right now, that seems doubtful. Some factions among the guerrillas have already rejected the peace process and have vowed to continue the armed struggle. They are the seeds of new guerrilla organizations. Some guerrilla leaders will find the political prizes sufficient to keep them in town, but not all will obtain power equivalent to the power they exercised in the guerrilla armies. For some, the armed struggle has become a way of life, an enterprise--and one with a considerable cash flow. Facing the pedestrian and less rewarding tasks of civilian life, some will drift back to the mountains, to ordinary banditry, or to new guerrilla organizations.

Does that mean Colombia will revert to a kind of *status quo ante pacem*? Not likely. Having entered the peace process for whatever reasons, the leaders of the guerrilla groups cannot now easily say, "Come on boys, we were deceived. Back to the mountains." No leader can admit such a mistake. And after several months in the towns, not all the fighters would go back. In this regard, *FARC*, whose peasant soldiers occupy and run some of the most remote areas of the country, is in a better position than *M-19*.

Will the nightmares of the skeptics--months or years of protracted political crisis during which the guerrillas acquire greater and greater strength and ultimately take power--come true? Protracted crisis is possible, but two formidable obstacles remain in the way of the guerrillas taking power: the traditional political parties (the liberals and the conservatives) and the army. The parties know how to mobilize people, and if sufficiently threatened, they know how to fight

back. They could persuade the army to resume military operations, or they could again form their own guerrilla armies as they did 40 years ago. Government paralysis in the face of continuing chaos could tempt the army from its barracks.

The most likely outcome probably lies between these extremes. The guerrillas won't win. Some will be coopted. They won't all quit, nor will they all go back. But some will, and the violence will continue. The most moderate elements will join the political process or drop out, leaving behind the most ruthless hardline extremists. The army, if the fighting resumes, may be less constrained, determined not to fail a second time. The political violence may be more savage than before. We may see more urban terrorism.

On the way to the airport, our car sped past a high wall topped with broken glass bottles set into the mortar. A primitive security measure to discourage intruders, it is seen throughout Latin America. Beneath the jagged shards of glass, a spray-painted slogan of the guerrillas: they are with the people. A uniformed vigilante, rifle slung across his chest, leaned against the fading red letters. Next to him was a freshly painted dove, one of hundreds appearing on walls throughout the city as part of a government-encouraged program to celebrate the peace. The scene said it all. Colombia's past and present, hopes and fears, captured in a single glance.