

As Alfredo Rangel [translator's note: a right-wing columnist] said in his column last Friday, the FARC, by sustaining military action for more than a week, has already demonstrated that it is far from the military defeat that the triumphalist voices of the government have proclaimed. Rather than retreating when counterattacked, they have prolonged and consolidated their presence in the region. This is a serious reverse for President Uribe's "democratic security" counterinsurgency policy.

Just as the massive attack on Marquetalia that drove the FARC out of their first stronghold in 1964 resulted in Marulanda's [TN: Marulanda is the current commander of FARC] guerrillas crossing the mountains of Tolima to arrive in Meta; as the "takeover" of Casa Verde in 1990 resulted in the FARC's moving to Caguan; so today Plan Patriota [TN: An major offensive by the Colombian Army against FARC-controlled areas in the South] seems to have resulted in the FARC looking at Cauca, Putumayo, and Narino as their new strategic corridors, with outlets to the Pacific and proximity to Ecuador.

But, for many strategic reasons that they might have had for attacking Toribio within the "logic" of the war, the FARC are committing the very same error that Uribe has committed: thinking that the logic of the conflict is military and not political. And what they may be winning on the field of battle, they are destroying on the field of legitimacy.

The attack directly in the heart of Proyecto Nasa, winner of the National Peace Prize, symbol of nonviolent resistance to war, is not only a violation of indigenous autonomy, built over many years of communal processes: it is also a violation of the right of the civilian population to not be involved in hostilities. The FARC has once again made itself look like Uribe's government, which also does not want to recognize the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado and its decision for "active neutrality".

It is evident that if the displacement and material destruction have harmed the indigenous communities, this new chapter in their centuries-old resistance will only strengthen their organization and make their decision to defend their autonomy still more firm.

This new attack, with its contempt for politics and international humanitarian law will only deepen the isolation of the FARC and its distance from the people. I wanted to believe that as the past few years have gone by without any political kidnappings since those that occurred 3 years ago in Valle del Cauca and without acts of urban terrorism like the El Nogal bombing 2 years ago, that the FARC had achieved a level of sensitivity to the popular disgust with such practices. But the use of gas pipe-bombs and other innovations against civilian areas has reminded me that for FARC, the logic of war prevails.

In the country deep issues about the future, like the Free Trade Agreement, Uribe's re-election, paramilitarism, are being debated. Aside from the usual denunciations ("Down with them!") the FARC have been conspicuously absent from the national debate.

For a long time, the FARC's only political initiative has been its "humanitarian accord" with the government "just one more issue in the war. In its rigidity the FARC is a rival to Uribe, and it is making the impression that neither party is interested in the victims, only in their own strategic

goals.

In contrast to the ELN, which publicly celebrated the election of social movement candidate Lucho Garzon to the mayor's office of Bogota in 2003, Angelino Garzon to the governorship of the department of Valle del Cauca, Sergio Fajardo in Medellin, and the processes of consolidation in the democratic left, the FARC have been silent on the recent changes in the Colombian political landscape.

The FARC has emerged from their long military lull with great success on the tactical terrain of the military confrontation. Their political lull could well be the principal factor in their strategic demise.

Even worse than not speaking though, is not listening. I don't understand a guerrilla organization that is indifferent to what the people say can aspire to be the army of the people.

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