

A step forward in Colombia: naming the enemy as narco-terrorism

by Valerie Rush

As December opened, Colombia's President and commander of the armed forces moved to put an end to a Soviet-run campaign to portray Colombia's military, not narco-terrorism, as the enemy of Colombia's democracy and national well-being. That Soviet disinformation campaign has been joined by U.S. pro-dope journalists and Project Democracy's networks in the Western Hemisphere, all charging that Colombia's military is under control of the drug traffickers and is the primary cause of the violence that is sweeping the country.

The identification of *narco-terrorism* as the principal arm of Soviet-run warfare in the Western Hemisphere is the crucial strategic question defining policy in every country in the region. Upon the recognition—or failure to admit—that narcotics and terrorism are a unified instrument of warfare, hangs the proper location of the role of the armed forces in defending the very existence of the nations of the hemisphere.

To date, the U.S. State Department and U.S. military have refused to declare that narco-terrorism the enemy.

On Nov. 27, Gen. Manuel Guerrero, commander of Colombia's armed forces, declared that the military considers "the combination of drug-trafficking and subversion" as the enemy which the Colombian nation must defeat in order to survive. The statement answered drug mafias' efforts to paint themselves as possible allies of the military in the war against "guerrillas."

The general urged citizens to rally behind a national front against narco-terrorism: "We Colombians cannot permit ourselves to be intimidated by these people who are corrupting our authorities, the Colombian people, and our youth, with this filthy business of the drug trade. We cannot allow . . . our people to be corrupted with their money . . . and their selective terrorism."

On Dec. 3, President Virgilio Barco went one step further, identifying the anti-military campaign as a central part of the narco-terrorists' irregular warfare against the state. The true "dirty war" in Colombia is that "campaign aimed at weakening the legitimacy of the armed forces and, with that, the conduct of the government," Barco explained in his speech to the José María Córdoba Military Academy.

He elaborated: "The truth is that we are suffering a 'dirty war' against the government, against the armed forces, against society, against democracy, against civilization. . . . The

campaign designed to weaken the legitimacy of authority . . . is promoted by agents of organized crime, by terrorists of varied origins, by demented groups. This dirty war seeks to impede the exercise of freedom of expression, to terrify the authorities and the citizenry. . . . I believe that it seeks unjustly to make us forget the fundamental role of the armed forces in the consolidation of our democracy."

Barco reiterated General Guerrero's call for national unity against narco-terrorism: "The evils we must tirelessly combat are terrorism and drug trafficking. This fight, which involves the commitment of significant human and budgetary resources, must nonetheless be waged in fulfillment of an unpostponable obligation to the poor of our society; in payment of a social debt which for too long we have been negligent in paying."

In an exclusive interview with *EIR*, Elena de Ramírez, the widow of one of Colombia's most effective anti-drug fighters, addresses the same problem. Her husband, Col. Jaime Ramírez Gómez of the national anti-narcotics police, was the right-hand man of former Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who led Colombia's war on drugs until the drug mob shot him down in 1984.

Ramírez's intelligence work made possible the March 1984 capture of Tranquilandia, the first "cocaine city" to be discovered in the Colombian Amazon, as well as the highly successful 1985 Operation Condor I anti-drug raid in Peru, conducted jointly by Colombian and Peruvian forces. Ramírez, too, was assassinated by mafia hitmen in November 1986, just as he was about to be promoted to general. As his wife bitterly observes, the refusal to grant Ramírez a posthumous promotion has served as a "disincentive" to other law-enforcement agents committed to fighting drugs.

The terrorists' dirty war

Despite Barco's recognition of who is really running the "dirty war" in Colombia, he is up against an array of forces determined to give narco-terrorism the lead in that country. When the Colombian head of state arrived in Acapulco, Mexico on Nov. 27 for a presidential summit on the common problems facing the continent, he was met with a demand on the part of the Socialist Party of Mexico (PSM), founded by the Mexican Communist Party, that he be declared *persona non grata* by the Mexican government, and his visa can-

celled! The PSM accused Barco of "sponsoring a military solution to the crisis threatening the country," and called for "international pressure to stop the bloodbath."

The *Washington Post* apparently agrees with the communists. On Nov. 14 it devoted lengthy coverage to "alleged" military collaboration with the Medellín Cartel of drug traffickers in Colombia. The article quoted one political figure saying that "narcotics traffickers are working with other land-owners and cattlemen, and with sectors of the state security forces, in unleashing a dirty war against the left."

Within his own government, Barco is surrounded with allies of Moscow's "irregular warriors." The President's own human rights adviser is Alvaro Tirado Mejía, formerly a left-wing journalist and currently dedicated to launching an "offensive" in favor of human rights, to include special courses for the armed services and military intelligence forces on human rights.

Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, former head of the Colombian human rights committee and an ex-minister, wrote in the daily *El Espectador* that Tirado Mejía showed special courage in admitting that state security groups violated human rights in Colombia. "The problem for the government," he said, "and especially for the chief of state, is to accept the importance and veracity" of Tirado Mejía's speech.

Strait-jacketing the armed forces

The issue of narco-terrorism and the role of the armed forces dominated this year's annual meeting of Army commanders of the Americas, held Nov. 12-15 in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Most of the conference was held behind closed doors, but attempts to influence the outcome of the conference from without were many.

A document circulated in Mar del Plata by the Project Democracy faction within Argentina's Peronist Party known as the "reformists" demanded that the Army chiefs "not invoke the fight against narco-terrorism" to justify a "revitalization of the doctrine of 'national security.'" The document insisted that police and security forces be primarily responsible for repressing the drug trade, and that if "other means" were to be employed, it had to be a decision of individual governments.

The Brazilian daily *Jornal do Brasil* reported on Nov. 17 that while Argentina's President Raúl Alfonsín had "exhorted the commanders of American armies meeting in Mar del Plata to find solutions that will put an end to terrorism and the drug trade," he did so from the standpoint of those that view the military itself as a threat to democracy.

Three days later, Alfonsín, a favorite of the Socialist International, was given the "W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award" by Project Democracy's National Democratic Institute in Washington. For decades, Alfonsín has been obsessed with dismantling the military, writing a proposal as early as 1971 that called for the 75% reduction of the Argentine military forces over the course of the succeeding decade. His government has reduced the military budget to the point

Interview: Elena de Ramírez

Extradition crucial to war on drugs

Javier Almarío and Maximiliano Londoño spoke in Bogotá with Mrs. Elena de Ramírez, widow of Col. Jaime Ramírez García, the former chief of the anti-narcotics division of the Colombian National Police, on the anniversary of her husband's assassination by narco-terrorists. In collaboration with Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Colonel Ramírez struck major blows against the drug traffickers, such as the break-up of Tranquilandia, a cocaine complex in the Colombian jungle where 14 tons of pure cocaine were captured and 45 traffickers arrested, in March 1984.

EIR: One year after Colonel Ramírez's assassination, how do you see the country? Has it reacted against the drug traffic?

Elena Ramírez: A year after Jaime's death I see that, unfortunately, the step that has been taken has gone backward, and it is a big one. We have regressed very strongly in the field of attacking drug trafficking.

EIR: What things have changed with respect to what Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla had achieved, with Colonel Ramírez's collaboration?

Elena Ramírez: When they were working, fortunately there was a group that was against drug trafficking, such as Minister Lara Bonilla; there also was the collaboration of [U.S.] Ambassador Lewis Tambs. A time came when President Belisario Betancur attacked the drug traffic. Things advanced a lot. The drug traffickers were running,

that no money for re-equipment or ammunition exists. Recruitment to the military in Argentina has dropped precipitously as a result.

A new defense law proposed by Alfonsín's Radical Party, exemplifies the strategic importance of the debate over narco-terrorism. The text of the new law currently under debate by the Congress was released to the Argentine press in time to coincide with the Mar del Plata conference. It states that the sole task of Argentina's military is to prepare to defend the

fleeing the country, because cultivation, transport, and shipments were attacked; the drug traffic was being hit hard from every side. The nation was made conscious of the damage that was being done.

EIR: In which areas?

Elena Ramírez: In the field that everyone knows: in extradition. That is the most important and the one the [drug traffickers] fear the most. That is definitive: extradition. And also, you realize that the confiscations being done now are not the same; the operatives, everything . . . everything has shrunk. The government has not shown collaboration with the people who want to fight drugs; the incentive which has to be given to the persons who attack it, has not been given from any side. And I don't see right now any leader trying to attack drug trafficking.

EIR: Did Colonel Ramírez suffer from this disincentive?

Elena Ramírez: Yes. During his life he suffered it, because he, having fulfilled all the requirements to enroll in the course to become a general, had a hard time getting into it. He had much opposition to being enrolled into the generals' course, precisely because of the work he was doing. . . . There was always opposition, from many persons, and then, when he finally did take the course and was supposed to be promoted, his promotion was delayed.

EIR: The defense minister said that they did not give him the promotion posthumously because he did not die in combat.

Elena Ramírez: I completely disagree, because the police statutes say that when someone dies in combat, that person is immediately to be promoted to the next higher rank, and Jaime fought narcotic trafficking to the last moment. And there was combat going on even at that moment, because some of the agents who were near the site where my husband, Col. Jaime Ramírez was assassinated, responded to the hired gunmen. So a combat did take place; an ambush, which is a combat. As far as merits are concerned, it is also said that Jaime was qualified as

the number-one officer in the world in fighting the drug traffick.

EIR: How do you believe this affects the National Police?

Elena Ramírez: Frankly, as I had the opportunity to express when they told me they were not going to promote Jaime, I told top officials of the police that this was not right, because it is a disincentive for people who are interested in fighting drugs. That they would be saying: "I fight against such criminal people, and after exposing my life, that of my loved ones, my career, everything, and my effort is not compensated." Then they say: "Is it worth going on fighting for this, or not?" I believe that this has been something that unmotivates the subordinates and many officials who would have been in a situation to fight against this evil.

EIR: When Pope John Paul II was in Colombia and spoke against the drug traffic, people reacted very positively. When Minister Lara Bonilla was killed, people reacted against the drug traffic, as well as when they killed the editor of *El Espectador*, Don Guillermo Cano. Do you think that this reaction has not been exploited to combat this scourge?

Elena Ramírez: In the case of Minister Lara Bonilla, the people's reaction was indeed taken advantage of, because President Belisario Betancur listened to the outcry of the people, and that was when they applied the extradition treaty. But recently, everything has been "blah, blah, blah," and they have not really listened to the people.

EIR: What was the effect that Colonel Ramírez's fight had at the international level, and what recognition did he have?

Elena Ramírez: Internationally, Jaime was a leader; he was one of the persons who urged the formation of this front of nations to unify against the drug traffic, and it was, I think, a very intelligent solution on his part. It was recognized in other countries more than in Colombia.

country against *foreign* enemies, and therefore *prohibits* the military from any domestic role!

One Radical senator attending the opening session of the military conference, explained that the defense law would prohibit the country's armed forces from participating in repression against "eventual insurrectionary movements." He added that the bill currently under consideration "will expressly prohibit the Armed Forces from elaborating a hypothesis of internal conflict."

Ironically, that program differed not one iota from that put forward by a group of communist-linked "human rights" activists from Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, and Colombia, who came to Buenos Aires while the Mar del Plata conference was taking place, to plan how to convoke "an international tribunal . . . to judge military and state terrorism in Latin America." Attending from Colombia, was Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, a deputy elected by the Colombian Communist Party's electoral front, the Patriotic Union.