

Venezuela, Colombia restart joint anti-drug work; Communists go crazy

by Carlos Méndez and Valerie Rush

On Jan. 21, Colombian Interior Minister César Gaviria Trujillo and Venezuelan Interior Minister José Angel Ciliberto met—along with representatives of the military and police forces of their respective countries—to sign a treaty to “reactivate the existing agreement between Colombian and Venezuelan defense ministries, signed in February of 1984, which establishes collaboration between the armed forces of both countries along their common border.”

The 1,000-kilometer border has been turned into a “no man’s land” ruled by outlaw gangs of subversives and drug traffickers who take advantage of the jungle-covered and mountainous terrain to evade repression by either government.

This renewed military cooperation not only has the potential to do serious damage to Soviet-sponsored narco-terrorism, but also to mend frayed relations between the two countries, which last year came to the brink of war over contested territory. In Venezuela, the accord has smoked out the political protectors of the drug-running interests, to the point of provoking a mudslinging contest in Venezuela’s ongoing presidential campaign.

Venezuelan newspapers reported that the new treaty also established “the substantial increase of military contingents of both countries along the border [and] the accelerated increase of intelligence cooperation among the security corps of both countries.”

The day after the signing of the treaty, the Venezuelan daily *El Mundo* reported that 3,000 Venezuelan soldiers and officers had been mobilized throughout the border states, “to fight to the death against the drug trade, the guerrilla warfare, kidnaping, and contraband.”

On Jan. 29, Venezuelan Defense Minister Eliodoro Guerrero Gómez announced to his troops during the inauguration of a new frontier fort, “We declare, as of today, war without quarter . . . against any activity of the drug trade, banditry, subversion or contraband,” and he appealed to the Colombian military to join forces “to keep the border in peace.”

Of special concern has been a recent dramatic escalation in narco-terrorist violence—ambushes of military patrols and kidnaping of Venezuelan cattlemen—carried out by the National Liberation Army (ELN) and Colombian Revolutionary

Armed Forces (FARC), two of Colombia’s four major terrorist organizations. On Dec. 14, the Venezuelan ranchers association reported that 30 cattlemen had been kidnaped by Colombian guerrillas, the majority of them forced to ransom themselves with amounts of \$3 million and up.

The enemy enters, stage left

The response to the new cooperation accord and expected crackdown on the drug outlaws, was not long in coming. Professional provocateur José Vicente Rangel, a former Venezuelan congressman and known Cuban agent, was interviewed on television in Caracas on Feb. 7. Rangel charged that the presidential campaigns of the two leading political parties—the ruling Democratic Action (AD) and the opposition Christian Democratic COPEI—were financed by drug money.

The elections are in November of this year, and while the parties have chosen their official nominees, there is widespread internal dissension in both camps. This has made the presidential race uncommonly hot even at this early stage.

Rangel’s accusations hit like a rock thrown at a hornets’ nest, with political representatives of all stripes indignantly denying the charges and demanding that Rangel “make his charges concrete and provide the names,” or retract.

While it is an open secret that Venezuela is a major money-laundering center for the drug mob, Rangel’s intentions had little to do with fighting the drug problem, as we shall see. In response to demands that he name names or retract his charges, Rangel said that “the reactions to my statements have been infantile, since the drug trade doesn’t leave fingerprints,” and he insisted that “I am neither policeman, nor judge, nor prosecutor. Let the competent authorities do the investigating.”

Rangel then proceeded to hold a high-profile meeting with Venezuelan Attorney General Serpa Arcas, to present a document which allegedly specified his charges. The document was leaked to the daily *El Nacional*, property of the Communist pro-Qaddafi family of Otero Silva, which published a serial review of its contents under the byline of leftist Fabricio Ojeda. Politicians named in the *El Nacional* coverage as financed by the mob included a number of leading

Democratic Action Party figures.

When challenged by the ADers for proof of the accusations, *El Nacional* blithely published a "clarification" by Rangel that his document had not named the individuals appearing in the newspaper story, but that they should nonetheless be investigated. "There are no innocents," he claimed.

While Rangel's trial-by-press scenario was unfolding, a photograph appeared in the newspaper *El Nuevo País*, showing COPEI presidential candidate Eduardo Fernández at a fundraising party with two known drug traffickers, who reportedly gave the candidate 5 million bolivares (roughly \$165,000).

The enraged COPEI executive responded by releasing to the press a photograph of Fernández's AD rival, former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, allegedly mounted on a horse given him as a present by the father of the infamous Ochoa clan, of the cocaine-trafficking Medellín Cartel.

The denials were loud and clear from both quarters, but the war was on.

The 'Manzopol' scandal

The Rangel-*El Nacional* combination had not finished, however. During his Feb. 7 television interview, Rangel had also violently attacked the Venezuelan security forces, and specifically what he termed "Manzopol," the special anti-narcotics police force supposedly created by Justice Minister José Manzo González.

Rangel charged that "Manzopol" was receiving financial assistance from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and that Minister Manzo should resign for "hiding" the existence of the special police corps and its alleged financing by the DEA.

The targeting of Manzo González is not accidental. He has also been one of the strongest proponents of a hemispheric military war against the drug trade, and an advocate of confiscating the mafia's assets. He was a special target for assassination by the Medellín Cartel's Carlos Lehder, and is one of the few surviving anti-drug figures left in the region, since the January 1988 kidnap and murder of Colombian Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos, and his replacement by a mafia-appeaser (see Andean Report, page 61).

It came as no surprise when *El Nacional's* Ojeda published a series of reports during Feb. 10-13, allegedly based on an "internal notebook" of Manzopol. Ojeda's articles published the identities of numerous anti-drug collaborators of Minister Manzo, but put special emphasis on the supposed collaboration between Manzopol and the DEA. He also charged the DEA director in Venezuela with "creating" drug traffickers, and "trafficking in chemicals" confiscated during drug busts. The U.S. embassy issued a denial of the charges.

Among the sources cited by Ojeda were José Vicente Rangel, COPEI congressional leader Paciano Padrón, and former Police Inspector Rafael Rivero Muñoz. Padrón was one of the first to charge that DEA dollars "were taken by

Manzo for Manzopol, and now no one knows how to answer for this money." Padrón was warned by AD Congressman Vladimir Gessen that his attacks on Manzo favored the drug mafia and that Padrón, "without wanting to, could become an informer for the criminal drug syndicate."

Rivero Muñoz is a former collaborator of the DEA who became embittered after losing his post during a change of administrations, and is believed the source of most of Rangel's charges. Rivero Muñoz charged cynically that "the security of Venezuela is in the hands of and manipulated with impunity by a foreign agent, a chicano," referring to DEA chief in Venezuela Roberto Cancelaria.

Rivero Muñoz has also targeted the military collaboration treaty directly, calling it "an aberrant treaty for the extradition of nationals," which allegedly includes provisions for foreign troops in Venezuela to defoliate drug crops with "prohibited dangerous chemicals."

The campaign against Manzo has distinct similarities to the ongoing campaign in Colombia—conducted by the Communist Party of that country and by political layers known for their links to the drug mafia—to target the remnants of Colombian-Drug Enforcement Administration cooperation against drugs. The Communist daily *La Voz* has been the most violent in recent weeks for its attacks on DEA "infiltration" in Colombia, and on Feb. 23, the daily *El Espectador* reported that the director of narcotics matters for the Colombian attorney general's office, Francisco Bernal Castillo, was forced to flee the country under threat of assassination.

That same day, the newspaper *El Siglo* reported that Bernal Castillo was under investigation for "violating national sovereignty," by permitting DEA agents to participate in national police raids against drug traffickers.

Communists go bonkers

While Rangel and his collaborators are smearing Venezuela's anti-drug forces, and driving the nation's political elites into a frenzy of mudslinging, other allies of Soviet narco-terrorism inside Venezuela are going directly at the anti-drug collaboration treaty. *Tribuna Popular*, the newspaper of the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), has been ranting against the agreement since its inception, using the argument that the anti-drug war was but a pretext for "narcomilitarism."

The old pro-Qaddafi figure Domingo Alberto Rangel has published a series of articles attacking the treaty as the inspiration of U.S. Gen. Vernon Walters, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and denouncing President Jaime Lusinchi for doing an about-face on relations with Colombia—first threatening war over contested oil-rich territory, and now "helping them" to fight drugs. Rangel complained that the "revolutionary challenge" in Colombia was now forced to face "three armies"—the Colombian military, the Venezuelan military, and the "Yankees, operating from the Venezuelan side of the border."