
Interview: Fernando Landazábal

'Danger in Colombia is a guerrilla coup'

General Landazábal, who was formerly defense minister under President Belisario Betancur, granted the following interview to Nora Hamerman on July 5, in Bogotá, Colombia.

EIR: How is the military situation, in Colombia and elsewhere on the continent, seen by the Soviets as an opportunity?

Landazábal: Necessarily, the global strategy from Russia's psychological standpoint with respect to the Third World countries and concretely Latin America, is to attack the armed forces and say that costs have to be cut and that they have to be confined to their quarters, and that the armed forces cannot combat armed subversion or guerrillas because they commit crimes against human rights. So anything that happens in the nation, including common crime, immediately is blamed on the armed forces. With this, they seek to discredit the armed institution by presenting it to public opinion as an undesirable organization. Why? Because in these countries, the military is the most powerful enemy that communism has. All the militaries of Latin America, I would say without exception, have a clear concept of what communism and Marxism-Leninism is, they oppose this doctrine, and since they are forces that support democratic rule, they have to be broken in order to win the revolution. This is the problem we are seeing. This is why they charge "arms race." You can't put a helicopter into the air, because you are accused of violating human rights, of assassinating people, of having paramilitary groups, and all this is a pile of gibberish which is pushed through the mass media, which frequently, especially in Latin American and in Colombia, have served as useful idiots to aggrandize the Marxist theory of the state.

EIR: Would you care to name specific cases here in Colombia of media which have been tools of Soviet propaganda?

Landazábal: I remember, for example, that in the years when the invasion came through Nariño and El Choco in 1981, the [terrorist group] M-19 went to Cuba, they entered and returned through Nariño and El Choco. All the newspa-

pers—*El Tiempo, El Siglo, El Espectador, La República*—brought out two or three editions every day showing the image of the guerrillas and telling their life stories and gave them a tremendous level of coverage. They did not write about a single military chief; they covered the guerrillas, but they did not write about the ones who were winning the war. So here, any person who became a guerrilla, all he had to do was send a letter to the press saying he was going into guerrilla warfare because he disagreed with the government, and that very day it got published on page one of the newspaper. This week, I see that the newspapers are doing an act of contrition, because they realize that they are acting as useful idiots. I don't know to what extent this is already too late.

EIR: This would be in the case of the kidnaping of former presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, where the press announced they would not publish any more of the terrorists' propaganda.

Landazábal: In fact, there are now 200 kidnapings. Every time the guerrillas do something, they get magnified hugely in the spoken and print media and on television. The journalists here go all the way to La Uribe [jungle stronghold of the FARC guerrillas] to talk to the guerrilla chiefs, but not once do they talk to a general, because that is something you cannot do, that is rejected. . . . For this reason the guerrillas have been gaining ground. And this, in turn, has had repercussions in an increase in forces. On the other hand, everything that has to do with the armed forces is supposed to be reined in, and our armed forces practically have no voice in public opinion, because it's not allowed.

EIR: There is a tendency to legitimize the guerrillas as interlocutors in a political dialogue in the country, and the big political parties support this. Can you comment?

Landazábal: Starting with the Belisario Betancur government, they carried out peace programs and I am going to say that the big error of the peace process with the guerrillas was established with what we could call the ideology of peace, based on sophistry and prejudices that overturned the whole conceptual tradition of our internal sovereignty. These prejudices were, that they accepted as causes of subversion the inequalities which do exist in the social arena in all the countries of the world; the false premise was accepted as true, that we had to negotiate to make concessions, because otherwise there would be a war and the war could not be won. The departure point was that everything that happens in the country is the result of internal problems, and consequently is not part of the international revolutionary strategy. The traditional currents of the traditional political parties were told to go into ideological retreat, as the price that had to be paid, in the face of blackmail, to obtain peace among the people. . . . It was accepted and made into an axiom, that the Communist Party and the guerrillas were separate and independent. In reality, they are the same thing, one is the political arm and

other is the military arm. But the military command was separated from the conceptual, analytical, as much tragic as strategic, aspect of subversion, and it was established that this sort of analysis constituted "political deliberation." So, the armed forces shut up. . . .

The command of the military forces was taken over by the civil authority, and a halt was called to the fulfillment of the constitutional mission of the military institution in the tactical arena. Thus, in the Justice Palace [its occupation and firebombing by armed terrorists in November 1985—ed.] the President gave the orders, not the military. . . . The entire process of pacification became locked into the unmodifiable framework of the dialogue imposed in Colombia by the subversives; and through it, they will continue to jerk the state around by blackmailing it. In my opinion, a shift is long overdue. This, in broad outline, is the big error in the peace process we have in Colombia.

EIR: What do you think of the policy of the United States with regard to the question of the destruction of the armed forces in Latin America? For example, the case of Panama, the U.S. effort against this region's armed forces.

Landazábal: In my view, the United States would fall into a historical contradiction and strategic blindness if it tried to destroy the armed forces of the Latin American countries. When the U.S. supports the Contras in Nicaragua, this proves that different armed forces are needed than the ones that are representing communism. But, if the military forces of this continent are being permanently harassed by communism, and they are also going to get harassment from the United States, then they will have to tell us where the world is going and what do they want in the world, because this would be chaos. The armed forces are what supports democracy in Latin America, and if you destroy them, well. . . .

EIR: As we have seen in the United States, the same process has now begun against the military industrial complex with "Pentagate."

Landazábal: In my opinion, it is following precisely Russia's policy, since it is not just the Latin American armies, but now they are trying to denigrate the U.S. Army, in order to present it as an army just like all the others of the Third World, and thus to destroy military power. . . . It is a big global psychological action program they are seeking. It is not that the U.S. military is making illicit contracts—the regulations in the United States don't give an individual room for such things. Besides, the U.S. military institutions are truly to be respected—they won the Second World War. No one can accuse them of stealing watches. This shows that it is malicious propaganda to denigrate the military institution throughout the Americas.

EIR: The historical role of the armed forces can be positive in the field of economic infrastructure, as for example, in the

United States, it was the Army Corps of Engineers that built a lot of the cities, canals, and other great projects that private interests could not have built.

Landazábal: We have tried, and we have the best intention to participate in Colombian development. For example, the engineers were building the Ataco-Palmira-Leguizamo highway, the military engineers managed railways, the troops did great civic action among the civilian population helping them to build aqueducts, sanitation facilities, schools, a great deal of development. In the major zones here the politicians won't allow this because that would give prestige to the armed forces, and in Colombia the politicians don't want the armed forces to get prestige. . . .

When I was defense minister, I organized development commandos which were brigade-type units organized with their base in a battalion of engineers with representatives in the Health Ministry, the Ministry of Public Works, the Agrarian Fund, and the Ministry of Agriculture. Everything was perfectly organized to be able to carry out development of the national territories and the zones affected by violence. The only thing that worked was the military engineers, and I organized battalions in the first year of the government. But when they asked for doctors, there weren't any; when they asked for teachers, there weren't any; we had to take soldiers with high school diplomas and put them to work as teachers in the schools of these regions. So, the Army has had a tremendous will to help the country and to contribute to national development, but the politicians don't allow it, because it loses votes. The politician wants to make the school himself, to gain votes himself, but since he does not do it, he always comes with the promise of what he will do and gets the votes. The Army does not need this. . . .

EIR: Given the gravity of the situation in the country, what are the options?

Landazábal: Here in Colombia, there are many options. The first is that the country has to pull together into a different configuration. Here, people imagine that there could be a military coup. There is not going to be a coup here, the Army is not the coup-making type. What could happen here is an extreme-left coup, when the guerrillas and the Communist Party already have all the peasants in Colombia organized to invade Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cali, and Medellín and behind them come the guerrillas, the country is going to be paralyzed and there will be an extreme-left coup. . . . Today, the whole world, and especially the Europeans, receive any left-wing coup with great jubilation, but not from the right because that would be a crime, but the extreme-left coup, yes, let it happen.

That's the direction we're going in. The triumph of Castro in Cuba is received here with great glee. You see that when someone is kidnaped, the first thing the government does is to go talk to Castro so that he can give the order to let him go.