

Colombian President Barco surrenders to narco-terrorists

by Robyn Quijano

The Colombian government's retreat in the two weeks following the successful defusing of the Oct. 27 general strike, and a forced shake-up in the military command, has threatened to leave that nation, under the worst communist subversive assault in its history, without the leadership it needs to survive. "The Army's hands are tied," warned one retired general, after hardline anti-terrorist Defense Minister Rafael Samudio was forced to resign. "The terrorists have launched a total war with the aim of seizing power. The government's talk of a peace initiative under these circumstances is like negotiating surrender," said a Colombian political analyst.

As President Virgilio Barco, along with Cabinet ministers and military officials, attended mass on Nov. 6, in a quiet commemoration of the third anniversary of the Nov. 6-7, 1985 narco-terrorist massacre of 11 Supreme Court judges, the nation was again facing a terrorist offensive.

On Nov. 4, Defense Minister Samudio was forced to resign. He had been a target of the terrorists since 1985, when he participated in the operation to retake the Justice Palace in Bogotá, where the M-19 terrorists were holding all the Supreme Court judges and dozens of others hostage.

Samudio was forced out of office after President Barco had refused to back the military in a counteroffensive against the current assault, whose high point was to have been the Oct. 27 communist-backed general strike. While Barco was at a presidential summit in Punta del Este, Uruguay, Acting President César Gaviria collaborated with the military, imposing tough emergency measures that made the strike 95% ineffective. That collaboration and the tough policy was welcomed by the Colombians, tired of the continuous violence. But President Barco refused to learn the lessons of the averted strike.

In his letter of resignation, General Samudio stated: "I have the moral authority to demand at this time decisive action on the part of the Armed Forces." General Samudio's public conflict with President Barco began with statements he made at the funeral of six soldiers from the Army's Corps of Engineers, who had been ambushed and massacred by the Soviet-run FARC guerrillas. At the funeral for the six men,

Samudio warned that the martyrdom of officials and soldiers cannot continue. "I believe that the subversives are demanding a military response, and we are going to give them one," he said. "I exhort [everyone], from the commander of military forces to the last soldier, to go on a total offensive, to destroy the enemy, to eliminate him, and to break his will to fight. . . . I don't know if there is dialogue at this moment. I know that the military forces are going to answer with the arms that the nation has given us."

After Samudio spoke, the Barco government reiterated its intention to continue a "dialogue" with the terrorists. Barco responded to the defense minister by saying that armed confrontation "is not the solution for Colombia," and that the government's "peace initiative will continue." He said that respect for human rights is fundamental for the country and its armed institutions. He did not mention the civil rights of the military men who have been massacred, nor of the hundreds of thousands of Colombians who remain without electricity because of dynamited electrical grids, nor of the thousands murdered by the terrorist bands. Barco thus echoed the line of Amnesty International and the "human rights" lobby, which serves as the lawyers for terrorism.

Fernando Landazábal Reyes, the former defense minister, called the ouster of Samudio a "victory for the enemies of Colombia." "I have the feeling," he told the Bogotá daily *Espectador*, "that the political powers make alliances with the extreme left under the pretext of seeking peace, in order to facilitate the victory of Colombia's enemies." The government's position "is a recognition of the spirit of unconditional surrender in the face of the armed insurgents. The minister is leaving for defending the lives of his soldiers," Landazábal warned.

A nation in fear

While Colombia is reeling from two weeks of a brutal terrorist offensive, whose aim was to destroy the electrical grids throughout the country, the government continues to talk of its "peace initiative" with the enemy.

On Nov. 6, Attorney General Horacio Serpa Uribe told

the international press corps that it is hard to guarantee judicial impartiality in cases against the drug mafia, "because everyone in Colombia is afraid, and you need a high degree of civic courage and character not to be intimidated."

Serpa Uribe unwittingly gave a perfect description of what is lacking in the present government. President Barco's insistence that a war will not be fought against the terrorists, at the same time that the terrorists pursue and step up their offensive against the people and the economic infrastructure of Colombia, has left the citizens terrified.

Ex-presidential candidate and Conservative Party leader Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, who was kidnaped and then released by the M-19 several months ago, hit Barco for his refusal to act like a President in this time of crisis. In an interview with Radio Caracol in Bogotá on Nov. 10, he said, "The government is showing an indifference to the facts. . . . There was a small recovery with the Minister of Government [Acting President during the period of the strike] who maintained serenity and a minimum of presence. Don't forget that in Colombia we have a presidential system . . . and suddenly it's clear that that is where we have the vacancy."

Military under assault

Attorney General Serpa's office has given Colombians more to be fearful about.

On Nov. 8, criminal charges were leveled against Gen. Jesús Armando Arias Cabrales, for his role in leading the retaking of the Justice Palace from the M-19 terrorists in 1985. The M-19's plan was to hold the government hostage and "negotiate" for months, a plan that was sabotaged when then-President Belisario Betancur refused to negotiate, and backed up the military. Any attempt to try General Arias for his role in ending the terrorist siege of the Justice Palace, would tell both the communist guerrillas and the drug cartel who paid the M-19 millions to seize the Justice Palace and burn all the files on the drug-running "extradictables," that their "human rights" will be protected at all costs.

Until Nov. 8, General Arias commanded the Urabá region, the only zone of the country that was totally paralyzed by the Oct. 27 strike, and which was described by the governor as "in a state of war." Arias, hated by the communists for his tough anti-terrorist activity, was removed to a position without troop command.

The military shake-up surrounding the resignation of Gen. Samudio also led to the removal of Gen. Farouk Yanine Díaz as commander of the Army Second Division. He will become deputy chief of staff of the Armed Forces, a post without troop command. The Bogotá daily *La Prensa* characterized this transfer as a victory for the ELN (National Liberation Army) terrorists, who had demanded the removal of General Yanine from his post.

Yanine was known as the toughest military commander in the country, one able successfully to neutralize the ELN. He recently blocked an attack the ELN had planned against

installations of Ecopetrol, the state oil company. Most important, his courage and leadership have remoralized those living within the military zone he commanded, involving them in successful collaboration with the military against the terrorists.

Economic warfare

The head of Colombia's industrial association, Fabio Echeverri Correa, said on Nov. 7, "Everyone knows we are at war. . . . The government has proposed a peace plan that the guerrillas have refused to discuss. . . . [General Samudio] is right, that there must be a military answer to the guerrilla. . . . The time for dialogue is over."

Industrialists have been particularly targeted by the narco-terrorist offensive, since key areas of the country have been blacked out for nearly two weeks—and with no electrical power, there is no industry. The only "economic activity" the terrorists protect is the drug traffic, from which they derive millions of dollars in protection money to finance their war.

Minister of Mines Oscar Mejía Vallejo announced on Nov. 6 that the terrorist sabotage which left Colombia's Atlantic coast without electricity was carried out by workers connected to the ELN. Mejía said that terrorist attacks had caused losses this year of \$366 million, and attacks on oil and gas pipelines have caused damage of more than \$400 million. In the last week of October alone, 16 transmission lines and 35 electrical towers were destroyed.

In the Nov. 3 issue of *Voz*, the Communist Party newspaper, Aníbal Palacios, executive member of the CUT trade union confederation and leader of Frente Popular, the political arm of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), is quoted threatening the government: "Let there be no mistake. We are capable of blacking out the Atlantic Coast if the [CUT's] situation is not resolved favorably." Since the unsuccessful strike called by the CUT, that confederation has split, with its president, Jorge Carrillo, and the democratic sector organizing their own confederation, which harshly attacked the subversion and the manipulation of the trade unions by the communists. The communists and terrorists now have their own union.

The more President Barco backs down, the more the terrorists take the offensive. On Nov. 10, a truck loaded with 40 kilos of dynamite exploded outside the infantry battalion of the IV Brigade of Medellín. The bombing was claimed by the "Martyrs of Urabá" commando of the ELN. Urabá is the zone that General Arias commanded. While the removal of Arias was understood by many to be a gift to the terrorists, they have thanked the government with further assaults.

Although the government has imposed its will on the military for the time being, President Barco's refusal to face the fact that Colombia is already at war, can only lead to a stronger offensive by the narco-terrorist subversives. And the country is getting very tired of surrender.