

Washington and Moscow worry over nationalist upsurge in Argentina

by Cynthia Rush

In the aftermath of the December 1988 military action by nationalist Col. Mohamed Ali Seineldín, Washington policymakers are nervously watching developments in Argentina. Colonel Seineldín's successful challenge to the Alfonsín government's anti-military policies, combined with an explosive debt crisis and the May 1989 presidential elections which could see a victory by the opposition Peronist party, has created a situation which the pro-Soviet Project Democracy apparatus in the United States considers to be out of control.

State Department socialists and like-minded policymakers fear that Argentina's continued submission to the International Monetary Fund, and the dismantling of independent political institutions carried out over the past five years, will be jeopardized by the constellation of forces which has been shaped very rapidly as a result of Seineldín's patriotic action.

What was it that this hero of the 1982 Malvinas War unleashed in Argentina?

During the weekend of Dec. 3-4, Seineldín and 400 loyal troops took over the Infantry School at the Campo de Mayo military base in Buenos Aires, and then moved on to the suburban base at Villa Martelli to make their point that the government must alter its policy toward the armed forces. Social democrat Raúl Alfonsín has used his term in office to carry out Project Democracy's demand that the institution of the armed forces be dismantled—not only in Argentina, but throughout Ibero-America.

Seineldín's action was not an attempt to alter the nation's constitutional order, as local and international press lyingly insisted. The colonel stated that his action was intended to force the government to seriously address such issues as the military budget, wages, and halting the trials of officers accused of human rights violations. He also demanded the resignation of Gen. José Dante Caridi, the monetarist Army chief of staff who had purged the Army of many nationalist officers and failed to stand up to the government's anti-military onslaught.

Alfonsín sent General Caridi out to Villa Martelli with

orders to repress Seineldín and his troops. Instead, Caridi met with the colonel, after which the military action quickly ended. Caridi announced, "We both realized that our aspirations coincided" and that bloodshed was unnecessary. Immediately following this action, the government granted a 20% wage increase for Army personnel, and a \$100 year-end bonus.

On Dec. 21, Caridi resigned as chief of staff, as the nationalists had demanded, and was replaced by Gen. Francisco Gassino, head of Argentina's military institutes (war colleges and training academies). Gassino has a reputation as a hardliner, who has been loyal to the government. However, sources in Buenos Aires say that the new chief of staff is nonetheless open to resolving the Army's internal problems and to representing the institution's aspirations.

Following Gassino's appointment, five other generals of greater seniority announced their resignations, and more are expected to follow.

Washington panics

President Alfonsín has repeatedly asserted that his government has made no concessions to nationalist officers. On Dec. 21, he gave a major address to a special session of Congress in which he rejected calls for amnesty for officers jailed for human rights violations during the 1976-83 military government. Argentina, he said, "was not willing to tolerate a vindication of state terrorism . . . to do so would be to go against the principles of democratic government."

Many observers saw Alfonsín's speech as an attempt to retake the initiative, after three weeks in which the government appeared to be bending to military demands. Just a few days earlier, however, his own defense minister, Horacio Jaunarena, asserted that the military's desire to be respected and recognized for its efforts in the 1970s war against subversion was "a logical aspiration," adding that what is usually referred to as the "dirty war" was "necessary." At the same time, Vice President Victor Martínez stated publicly that "genocide did not occur" during the "war against subver-

sion,” and that “the military in general is not genocidal.”

As evidenced by the degree of teeth-gnashing over these developments in both the local and international press, Alfonsín and the social democracy have taken it on the chin. U.S. Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci was so concerned about the situation, that he made it the topic of his year-end letter to Jaunarena, warning that Argentina’s future security relationship with the United States would depend on maintaining a “democratic” form of government.

In an article in the Jan. 3 issue of the *Washington Times*, author Martin Sieff lamented that “although he is currently behind bars, Colonel Seineldín was the real victor in the mutiny,” and chastised Alfonsín for failing to “break his country’s sinister rhythm of extremist popular movements and military takeovers.”

What worries the right-wing social democratic factions for whom Sieff is a spokesman, is not just that Seineldín’s bold action could lead to a reorganization of Army leadership along nationalist lines, as suggested by General Caridi’s departure and the subsequent resignations of other generals. They fear that if these military leaders link up with the traditionally nationalist Peronist movement, and Peronist candidate Carlos Menem wins next May’s presidential elections, the resulting combination is not likely to be controlled from either Washington or Moscow.

The realization that such a combination would also have profound effects on nationalists elsewhere in Ibero-America is seen in Sieff’s and other press attacks on Seineldín’s ties to other “far-right” figures in Central America—notably Panama’s Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega—who haven’t yielded to Project Democracy’s assault on their nations.

The attacks on Seineldín’s devout Catholicism also reveal these factions’ fear of a strengthening of the Catholic cultural matrix which has traditionally characterized Argentine society as well as the Peronist movement. Sieff fulminates over the fact that Seineldín’s troops “carried images of the Virgin and prominent crucifixes, while repeating their abhorrence of ‘communist subversives.’ ”

A ‘self-coup’?

One of the options available to Alfonsín and his backers to prevent this nationalist combination from coming to power, is to deliberately provoke a response from military factions opposing Colonel Seineldín, unleash civil conflict, and go into exile abroad claiming to be the victim of military persecution. In September 1988, sources close to the Menem camp suggested that Alfonsín might resort to an *autogolpe*, a self-coup, to prevent a Peronist victory in next May’s elections.

More recently, an unnamed adviser to Carlos Menem, quoted in the Dec. 21 issue of *Somos* magazine, reiterated the concern of Peronist circles that Alfonsín is now actively considering this option. “I don’t think he’s figured out that his image would deteriorate if he gave in completely to this kind of a proposal,” this adviser remarked. “Probably he’s

decided to burn his bridges and portray himself abroad as a victim of ‘military power.’ ”

This source added that it was significant that two of Alfonsín’s most trusted political operatives, Foreign Minister Dante Caputo and Interior Minister Enrique Nosiglia, are both currently outside the country with no planned date of return, suggesting that they might be there to form part of a government in exile.

Narco-terrorist threat

Like its cothinkers from Project Democracy, the Soviet government does not consider the existence of nationalist military or political institutions in Argentina to be coherent with its strategic goals. It is prepared to unleash the same weapons of terrorism and drug-trafficking visible in other Ibero-American nations, and return Argentina to the right-left terror it suffered during the 1970s, if that’s what it takes to destroy the nation state and Catholic cultural matrix.

During Colonel Seineldín’s military action, the Argentine Communist Party and affiliated Marxist and ecologist groupings were among the most vocal supporters of Alfonsín’s “democracy.” Representatives of these groups gathered in front of the Villa Martelli base to violently confront Seineldín’s troops, and to demand that the government arm them to confront “the fascists.” In demonstrations held at Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo a few days later, these same groups called for the creation of armed resistance, claiming that “to resist is to fight,” and evoking the memory of the 1960s guerrilla leader Che Guevara.

Anti-drug activists in Buenos Aires have told *EIR* that former members of the terrorist Montoneros group and members of the Trotskyist Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) have been arrested in recent drug busts. Members of a dissident faction of the Montoneros were also involved in a carefully orchestrated, commando-style bank robbery, which occurred in the Mataderos section of Buenos Aires in early December. A few days later, unknown individuals bombed the Communist Party headquarters in Buenos Aires, indicating the potential for the development of right-left terror.

More “respectable” members of this narco-terrorist apparatus include Rogelio García Lupo, a journalist of impeccable Nazi-communist credentials. Forty years ago, García Lupo was an avowed fascist in Buenos Aires; but after undergoing a Damascus Road conversion, he helped found the Cuban press agency Prensa Latina in 1959, and has served as a mouthpiece for Cuban/Soviet views ever since.

In the Dec. 22 issue of the leftist *El Nuevo Periodista* magazine, García Lupo attacks Seineldín as a fascist, war-mongering Druze (a reference to the colonel’s Lebanese family background), whose conversion to Catholicism was merely an act of opportunism to permit his entry into the Argentine Army. A few years ago, the same García Lupo authored a vitriolic attack on *EIR* founder Lyndon H. LaRouche, identifying him as “the North American Perón.”