

Andean Report by Javier Almario and Carlos Méndez

On political defeatism

The Colombian military is warning that the country's politicians don't want to win the war against subversion.

There is a serious risk that, because of the psychological effect of the guerrillas on the clergy, politics, the unions, and other sectors of national life, the state is assuming a political defeat" by terrorism, warned the Defense Ministry in its "Memorandum to the National Congress (1988-1989)," written by former Defense Minister Gen. Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz.

The report, published Aug. 1 by the Bogotá daily *El Siglo*, also charges that some members of the Armed Forces are abstaining from combat "out of fear of followup action by the judiciary which, at times, due to failure to understand the nature of military operations, allows itself to become entangled in subversion's snares and strategies."

Gen. Jesús Armando Arias Cabrales, the new Army commander, asserted that one cannot enter combat with a defeatist attitude, such as the government's negotiating with narco-terrorists instead of winning the war against them. "If we are filled with pessimism, if we take the path of defeat, we are not going to achieve anything. There are organizations which have declared war on the country. Not on the government. And under those conditions, our purpose, as in sports, is to win. . . . It would be foolhardy to enter a war without the intention of winning," said Arias Cabrales.

The general warned that the country is not merely facing a problem of "a group of lawless individuals, resorting to brutality, to ambush, and to criminality. Subversion has much

broader manifestations, and we can see how they are played out in the political, economic, social, and labor arenas. Therefore, the Army and police, taking unified and forthright action against these organizations, are not going to win the war. The war must be won through action, by applying the capacities of the state on all fronts."

However, President Virgilio Barco is not listening to his own military's warnings: He is listening to the siren songs of the narco-terrorist groups controlled by Moscow and Havana. On Aug. 3, in a national broadcast, Barco announced that his government is committed to holding a referendum as the guerrillas demanded, so that, *without need for congressional debate*, their reform proposals could be approved. The referendum would be whether to create a "National Electoral Jurisdiction" for amnestied guerrillas and those who are in dialogue with the government, so that these "former" terrorists can be elected to Congress, despite having few votes. In effect, the referendum would create a non-geographical election district to service Colombia's pro-terrorist "constituency."

Such a decision would not only constitute an open reward for narco-terrorism, but would thoroughly discredit the electoral institution and trample the electoral will of the citizenry, which has already been terrorized by means of death threats and executions from the narco-terrorists into allowing the candidates of the Patriotic Union—the electoral arm of the

drug-linked FARC guerrillas—to be elected to Congress.

The referendum would also seek approval for a so-called "right to peace," which would turn the Barco government's permanent "peace dialogue" with the guerrillas into a "national mandate" binding upon future governments as well.

As if this weren't sufficient cause for despair, the Council of State has just established a new interpretation of the law according to which every time the Armed Forces' use of arms results in a death, that action would be considered *a priori* an "undue use" of force. In effect, the Army is now obliged to seek the Council of State's permission to use its weapons each time it encounters terrorists in battle. The only problem is that by the time the Council of State determines that weapons may be used, Colombian soldiers will already be dead.

That the narco-terrorists' professed willingness for dialogue with the government is, as the military memorandum states, "a strategy for opening up new political space and creating the conditions for generalized armed warfare," readily evident. On July 17, government delegates and leaders of the narco-terrorist M-19 signed a document celebrating the "success" of the first stage of the M-19's alleged reintegration into civilian life. Almost immediately, M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro León Gómez sent a letter to President Barco, conditioning the just-signed agreement upon modification of Article 87 of the Constitution, to permit the national referendum so that "the people" can vote up the terrorists' proposed reforms.

Pizarro was explicit in his letter: "Until now we have taken the [peace] process to heart, *but the M-19 always reserves the right to define what it is going to do. . . .*"