

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Terror resurgence in Southern Cone

The surfacing of a continent-wide terrorist/kidnaping ring could destabilize the nations of the Southern Cone.

The kidnaping by an international terrorist group of businessman Albinio Diniz, owner of the largest supermarket chain in Ibero-America, suggests that the terrorism which plagued the Southern Cone at the end of the 1960s is being revived. The bloody narco-terrorism which infests the Andean spine is now trying to spread into the southern reaches of the continent.

On Dec. 17, the day of the already tense presidential election in Brazil, São Paulo police rescued Diniz, and captured most of his abductors. Diniz had been kidnaped one week earlier. According to information released by federal police authorities, the kidnaping was carried out by a very powerful and highly trained group. The director general of the Federal Police, Romeu Tuma, said on Dec. 18 that the group "was psychologically prepared, knew how to execute a kidnaping, and knew how to keep the pressure on the police." The São Paulo delegate in charge of the investigation said, "The band has a very well organized structure, [and] is divided into cells that do not know each other and do not communicate among themselves."

The terrorists possessed extraordinary combat capacity. They knew in detail all the radio frequencies of the São Paulo police, possessed detailed information on the functioning of the National Intelligence Service (SNI), the presidential military cabinet (in charge of presidential security), of army intelligence services, and had numerous high-caliber weapons.

The kidnapers, a veritable com-

mando unit, were of various nationalities. Head of the band is an Argentine with links to the terrorists who carried out the bloody assault on Argentina's La Tabalada military barracks in January 1989. And just like the 50 international terrorists who attacked La Tablada, the kidnapers also had Cuban and Nicaraguan trainees, as well as "human rights" activists, among them. According to police director Tuma, the kidnapers included two Canadians—who were "human rights" militants operating in Central America—and a Brazilian who had received military training in Cuba and Nicaragua. Another was a Belgian journalist who fled, along with several Brazilians. Others were members of the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), the Manuel Rodríguez Front, and the Organization of Armed Resistance (ORA), all from Chile. ORA, in particular, has the support of the Peruvian Shining Path terrorists.

"Chile's investigative police suspect that the group has participated in kidnapings in Venezuela, Argentina, and France," police investigator Tuma told the daily *O Estado de São Paulo* Dec. 26. Tuma traveled to Chile specifically to investigate the origins of the terrorists.

As the result of ongoing Brazilian investigations into the group, it has been learned that the same group had kidnaped another São Paulo businessman, publisher Luiz Sales, just six months earlier. However, all indications are that the gang's operations began at least two years ago, with the kidnaping of the vice president of

Bradesco Bank, Beltrán Martínez.

Brazil had been free of terrorist assaults for more than a decade, but this ended in 1986, when terrorism began to resurface in the same cities which had served as the infrastructure for terrorism in the late 1960s and early 1970s—namely, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul (bordering Argentina). On Dec. 18, *Jornal do Brasil* reported that the Argentine police had found evidence that some of the \$5 million in ransom money from the kidnaping of Beltrán had been used to finance the La Tablada assault, in which at least one Brazilian—trained in Nicaragua—had died. The newspaper added that Argentine investigators have begun to explore the links of these terrorists to drug trafficking.

According to other reports, a Chile-Brazil connection surfaced in December 1987, when the Chilean terrorist group Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (which emerged in 1980 as the armed wing of the Chilean Communist Party) kidnaped Col. Carlos Carreño, an executive of a weapons factory, in Santiago. Carreño was later released in São Paulo.

What has become increasingly clear, as police director Tuma has claimed, is that the terrorists are preparing a broader offensive. It was widely observed in Brazil that the Albinio Diniz rescue occurred—amid great media fanfare—on precisely the day of Brazil's hotly contested presidential election. It was also revealed in the Brazilian press that had anything gone wrong with the kidnaping, the gang had been prepared to murder Diniz and leave his body to be found on election day.

Given the fragile political and economic stability of the Southern Cone, and especially of Brazil and Argentina, a terrorist wave could produce destabilizations of major proportions.