

to live in peace and quiet. No people wants war, which is destructive for everybody. I appeal to the people of the United States, that they should make their voice heard, we don't want a war! Everbody go home! There is no threat to Europe, if there were a threat we would have been the first to denounce it.

Q: Do you think there can be tolerance between Christianity and Islam?

Bidawid: Sure, we have lived for so many centuries in mutual tolerance. Today there exists in Islam this intolerant and fanatic tendency. But Lebanon, for example, is the model country of religious coexistence. Today Lebanon is being destroyed by a foreigners' war, it's not a civil war. They want to "Islamize" Lebanon.

It is said that a Muslim cannot be ruled by an Infidel, i.e. a Christian President. But this peaceful coexistence, even at the executive level, has gone on for centuries and centuries in Lebanon. That's the motive. Not that in Iraq we have not had problems: nations evolve, people travel more and they get to know other countries, and they realize the world has changed. Above all, this world needs peace and development!

Argentina's Menem scored as 'traitor'

by Cynthia R. Rush

During a Washington press conference on Oct. 1, Argentine President Carlos Menem was visibly annoyed when *EIR* correspondent Carlos Wesley asked him whether Argentine military officers weren't angry at having to be deployed to the Persian Gulf as allies of the same Anglo-American forces responsible for the 1982 Malvinas War against Argentina. Menem has deployed two Navy ships to the Gulf to join the international blockade against Iraq, explaining that Argentina has now joined George Bush's "new world order."

Accusing Wesley, a Panamanian, of asking an "ill-intentioned question," Menem defensively responded, "I want to tell you that right now, officers in the Republic of Argentina are lining up, begging to be sent to the Persian Gulf." In response to another question by Wesley about whether Argentina was receiving financial assistance from the Kuwaiti government in exchange for participating in the U.N. blockade of Iraq, President Menem indignantly replied, "Argentina is not a mercenary nation." In early September, Kuwait's energy minister toured Ibero-America, offering investments to any government that would join the blockade against Iraq.

However, upon arriving in Buenos Aires from a trip to New York and Washington on Oct. 3, President Menem had a different tale to tell. In an interview with a Buenos Aires radio station, he bragged that "it is very possible that Kuwaiti investments will shortly be arriving in our country, because that nation is very interested in our agricultural sector, and their armed forces may be re-equipping themselves and will buy some of our weapons."

And what of the military officers standing in line begging to be sent to the Gulf? The Oct. 5 issue of the weekly *El Informador Público* reports on a study prepared by the private Foundation for the Study of a Growing Argentina (FEPAC), indicating that 80% of the Army and Air Force's non-commissioned officers are opposed to any Argentine intervention in the Persian Gulf. In the Navy, 60% are opposed. In the officer corps, the percentages are 60% for the Army, 70% for the Air Force, and 50% for the Navy.

Object of ridicule

Menem has tailored his domestic economic policy and foreign policy entirely to the strategic interests of the Bush

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administration and the international banking community in hopes that this would net Argentina a new international image of respectability, as well as some concrete financial assistance. In an interview in the Sept. 21 *El Cronista*, Defense Minister Humberto Romero admitted that Argentina had completely abandoned its traditional foreign policy position of non-alignment, lamenting, "What can we do in this kind of international situation in which there are no longer two blocs, but only one. . . ? Could we possibly follow a third way? One can be opposed [to a policy], but we shouldn't be absurd."

About the only thing that Menem's obedience to the Anglo-American establishment has earned him, however, is a large degree of ridicule, particularly from the rest of Ibero-America. The same issue of *El Informador Público* reports that upon reaching the Brazilian port of Recife, the two Argentine ships steaming toward the Gulf could not refuel because dock workers refused to load ships that were part of a "belligerent South American force." The ships, the *Almirante Brown* and the *Spiro*, finally were able to refuel thanks only to the intervention of the U.S. embassy in Brazil, which arranged for them to purchase fuel at three times the international price.

Brazil's Navy Minister, Adm. Mario Cesar Flores, had no kind words for the Argentine naval force. In comments made to the daily *Folha de São Paulo*, Flores remarked that the Argentine deployment was "merely symbolic" because in military terms, "the Argentine forces aren't much good for anything. . . . In a situation of combat, they become confused."

Things didn't go much better for Menem when he visited Venezuela in late September. Fearing the Argentine President's reputation for causing bad luck to those around him—known in Argentina as *mufa*—many Venezuelan deputies refused to show up at the official reception welcoming him. Teodoro Petkoff, of the leftist MAS party, snidely remarked, "I think that we are going to have to bring in some practitioners of witchcraft to cleanse the nation of the bad influences which this gentleman may leave behind."

On a more serious note, the Sept. 28 issue of the Caracas daily *El Meridiano* called Menem a "traitor to the Latin American cause . . . and to the Third World" for sending ships to the Gulf. Former Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera, who met with Menem on Sept. 28, expressed to him "the concern which many Latin Americans feel over the fact that Argentina is getting involved in the Mideast conflict, from which Latin America should remain absent." Caldera, who maintains strong ties to the Vatican, also criticized the neo-liberal economic policy which Menem has imposed in Argentina.

Financial disaster

Menem's sacrificing of domestic living standards and production to make foreign debt payments has not helped

Argentina get new loans. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has just informed the government that it will not grant a \$240 million tranche of its standby agreement, because Argentina hasn't "done enough" to comply with IMF goals on inflation and the fiscal deficit. The IMF decision could mean that other lending agencies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank will also renege on promised funds.

The Bush administration has made clear that it has no intention of rewarding Argentina's Menem with funds for his decision to join the blockade against Iraq. The lack of incoming credits, combined with the collapse of domestic production and the sharp decline in tax revenues and wages, makes the continued implementation of the IMF-backed "Erman V" economic austerity program highly questionable. Trade union strike activity to protest the program is growing rapidly. Major economic upheaval is expected in the country before year's end.

The plans to privatize state sector companies, the cornerstone of the government's economic program, are also running into trouble. Manufacturers Hanover, the bank for Bell Atlantic, failed to come up with \$2.3 billion in Argentina's foreign debt paper by Oct. 4 and had to pull out of the deal privatizing the state telephone company ENTEL. Although the Italian consortium STET has now stepped in, they have asked for at least 30 days to review the contract, delaying the deal and causing Menem political embarrassment. The government's political opposition is charging that the ENTEL privatization is a total sellout to creditors.

'Armored democracy'

About the only option Menem has available is to impose the "armored democracy" recipe proposed by former Reagan administration official Elliott Abrams—a "democracy" in which IMF policy can be enforced by the military. Given the opposition among the ranks to IMF policy and to Menem's efforts to dismantle the Armed Forces, this is not a reliable option. However, sources in Buenos Aires have told *EIR* that the widely publicized but false Oct. 3 report that nationalist Army leader Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín had gone "underground" was intended to heighten the climate of unrest, and perhaps provide a pretext for the government to declare a state of siege, arguing that the Malvinas War hero was planning a rebellion or even a coup.

Colonel Seineldín, who opposes the Argentine deployment to the Gulf, is widely admired by military and civilian nationalists for his uncompromising stand in defense of national sovereignty. Precisely for that reason, the Anglo-American establishment considers him to be a major obstacle to their plan of subordinating Argentina completely to their strategic interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Informador Público* reports that the colonel has been warned of possible attempts on his life.