

Venezuelan Army chief warns 'corrupt democracy' is breeding civil war

by Gretchen Small

The extreme fragility of the current political map of Ibero-America was exposed on June 20 in an unexpected corner: Venezuela. In the ceremony transferring command to his successor, outgoing Army commander Gen. Carlos Julio Peñaloza issued a dramatic call to the "decent majority" in the country to join the armed forces in a crusade against rampant corruption, before others, less concerned with liberty, act to cleanse the country's political institutions through "blood and fire."

Corruption, from drug trafficking to extortion, has become so widespread in Venezuela that national security is threatened, he charged. If things continue as they are, there will be civil war "between the corrupt minority whose moral degradation is visible but which has enormous resources, and the decent majority which suffers daily."

What goes under the name of "democracy" these days in Venezuela, responded with fury. The general's speech was published only in one dissident newspaper, *El Nuevo País*, and the press conference he gave at the end of the ceremony was blacked out entirely. The defense minister, speaking for President Carlos Andrés Pérez, announced that the government was studying what "sanctions" could be applied against the general for speaking out. Pérez railed that it was an "insolent aberration to say that democracy is corrupt."

Peñaloza evidently did not speak only for himself, and the government was forced to back off, at least for now, from punishing its most outspoken critic to date.

Rot permeating the country

No one doubted that Peñaloza's description of corruption referenced the President, among others, whose advisers and personal staff have spent the past two months denying mounting evidence that they are involved in arms profiteering and drug running. The head of presidential security, Orlando García, a Cuban-Venezuelan who has run Pérez's personal security for more than three decades, tendered his resignation in mid-June, when it became no longer possible for him to deny charges by Peñaloza and others that García and his former mistress, Gardenia Martínez, along with a number of retired military officers, were involved in bilking the state through fraudulent arms contracts. Press accounts said that the President's own mistress, Cecilia Matos, was involved. Despite proof of graft and influence-peddling, Pérez has yet

to accept García's resignation.

Pérez was forced, however, to fire a close friend and ally, Gen. Herminio Fuenmayor, as head of the Department of Military Intelligence, after police caught him doing favors for a drug-trafficking ring.

New revelations of drug trafficking involving the cream of Venezuelan "society" were reported in June. The penetration of Venezuelan institutions by drugs is shown in the case of Adolfo Martínez Torres, a former governor of Caracas and interior minister, who has been accused by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Venezuelan officials of heading a band of drug-runners made up of young members of upper class families (Brillembourg, Arape, Baladares Branger, Morett, and Pabón), some of whom are now in jail in the U.S., Canada, and Switzerland. The ring set up a car-smuggling operation as a cover for their cocaine trafficking.

Adolfo's brother, Nelson Ramírez Torres, is the lawyer for a Cuban-Venezuelan banker, Orlando Castro, allied with Pérez's circles, who attempted to take over the Banco de Venezuela, one of the nation's biggest banks, last year. Nelson says his brother is a "victim of a plot" run by the owners of the Banco de Venezuela, but his credibility was tarnished with the news that the DEA is investigating the \$400,000 he received in "honoraria" for defending the wife of a now-jailed drug trafficker.

As June closed, the news broke that the largest stock brokerage house in Venezuela, Incambios Valores, headed by banker Angel Buenano, served as the launderers for the Ramírez Torres ring. A worried president of the Caracas stock market, Juan Domingo Cordero, acknowledged that Buenano has played a leading role in Venezuela's capital markets, telling *El Nacional* June 25, "The truth is that the Venezuelan financial system lacks the necessary controls to avoid or control money laundering. . . . Drug trafficking has penetrated the financial system and the stock market cannot be exempt from this."

'Democracy' as a weapon of war

Such truths as presented by Peñaloza are seldom heard about Venezuela's "democracy," hailed as one of Washington's greatest political success stories. Pérez has traveled the world as a spokesman for George Bush's new world order,

the virtues of "limited sovereignty," and the need to replace such "archaic" institutions as the national military by supranational forces.

General Peñaloza's call to arms, however, is only the most explicit statement voiced so far, of a rebellion brewing in the military throughout the Americas against the form of "democracy" championed by Washington which has served—deliberately—to bring about the disintegration of nation-states. From Mexico on down, military men are ever more loudly agreeing with Peñaloza, that "leadership of the state is too important to leave it only to the politicians."

The rebellion is aimed squarely at the imperial policies coming out of Washington. The day Peñaloza spoke, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Bernard Aronson was busy telling the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs that "the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, long freed from colonial domination, have embraced democracy as the only legitimate form of government." At the annual meeting of the Organization of American States, held in Santiago, Chile June 3-8, U.S. diplomats had teamed up with Pérez's diplomats, to ram through a resolution committing governments in the region to consider collective action against any country in which "democracy" is overturned.

Yet in the past decade, "democracy" has come to mean freedom for disease, drug-traffickers, narco-terrorists, and foreign looters—and no one else. The system of representative government conceived of by the U.S. Founding Fathers, premised on national sovereignty and answerable only to natural law, is diametrically opposed to the concept of *sovereignty of the people* put forward as "democracy" by the Anglo-American crowd now running policy in Washington. Sovereignty "of the people," raised in opposition to *national* sovereignty, is nothing but that most dictatorial of concepts, the rule of men, not law. As has occurred throughout human history, that translates into simply the rule of the most powerful.

Washington, impressed with its imperial power, has twisted "democracy" into the means to destroy any national institution which stands in the way of the new world order. That has made the military their number one enemy in Ibero-America because, as Peñaloza said, "What distinguishes the military institution is its capacity to wage war in defense of the Fatherland's vital interests."

Under the new order, the only "vital interest" allowed to governments, is that of meeting foreign debt payments. This definition of democracy was made explicit by none other than the chief of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Michel Camdessus, who told an International Labor Organization conference on June 11, "It is the experience of the Fund, that progress in democratization makes the launching of economic reforms easier."

Thus, the worldwide anti-Bolshevik resistance movement, which arose in China and Eastern Europe in 1989 under the banner of democracy, is now raising its flag in

Ibero-America. But here, resistance is being waged in the name of a war on phony IMF "democracy."

War in the Amazon?

Peñaloza's warning that bloody civil war will result if the free-for-all looting continues unchecked, is true for the entire region. The breakdown of institutions has now reached the point where the question is no longer whether the current form of governments can continue to rule—it can't, for long—but whether national movements such as that called for by Peñaloza, uniting civilian and military patriots, can seize leadership over the social upheavals now brewing, before bestial war of each-against-all engulfs the whole region.

The most intense battle for sovereignty against the IMF, is taking place in Brazil, and has international financiers worried. "Brazil is the swing country" in determining whether the IMF reforms and "free trade" can sweep South America, the London *Guardian* said June 25.

The problem the IMF has in Brazil, is military resistance to President Fernando Collor's efforts to put through new world order policies, which has galvanized civilian support for the nationalist program (see *EIR*, June 28). That resistance extends from the auctioning off of Brazil's strategic industries to foreign interests, to efforts to turn the Amazon heartland of Brazil into a foreign-controlled enclave.

A Brazilian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) was established in June to investigate such plans to "internationalize" the Amazon. *Correio Braziliense* reported June 18 that the threat of the "limited sovereignty" doctrine being raised internationally, was top on the agenda of discussions during a tour by a group of 15 congressmen of military outposts in the Amazon region in June. The commander of the Amazon region, Gen. Antenor de Santa Cruz Abreu, reminded the congressmen that the Amazon had been the object of foreign greed since the days of the 17th-century pirates. Efforts to set up multinational "Indian" parks today, intervention by foreign missionaries, European Community intervention against Brazil's gigantic Carajás mining project, the U.S. Treasury's threats to cut off assistance if Brazil attempts to complete the Brazilian-Peruvian highway through the Amazon, are no different, the general stated. "Economic interests" are behind these attacks.

After one military-civilian meeting, Congressman Mauricio Campos, president of the House Committee on National Security, repudiated "the actions of international groups that have been investing in ecology to cover up for their interests in the niobium, gold, uranium, and cassiterite reserves in the Amazon." Sen. Irapuan Costa, Jr., president of the Senate Commission on Foreign Relations and National Security, defended the role of the Brazilian Army in the Amazon. The presence of the military is felt "not as protectors of the borders," but "with more or equal intensity in the field of education and health. . . . The Army dedicates 90% of its activities to service civilians, in all the Amazon region," he said.

'Venezuela needs a moral renaissance'

The following are excerpts of the speech delivered on July 20 in Caracas by Gen. Carlos Julio Peñaloza, outgoing commander of the Army.

. . . A call to the honest and decent majority of our compatriots to enroll in the crusade against the plague of corruption which threatens to slowly, yet relentlessly, destroy our moral bases and our freedom. . . .

Today, freedom's primary enemy is corruption, that monster engendered by the satanic mating of injustice with immorality; that hydra of innumerable heads, such as drug trafficking, extortion, personal insecurity, etc., spreads the deadly virus of moral AIDS irreparably produced by the Fatherland's system of ethical immunity. In only a short time, that plague has become Public Enemy number one, constituting the gravest threat looming over our nation. This offspring is a truly subversive element which, through the destruction of our moral values, attempts to destabilize our democratic system and rob us of our freedom. This disease has been gaining such strength and aggressive capability, that I do not hesitate to state that in Venezuela, a civil war is brewing between the corrupt minority whose moral degradation is visible but which has enormous resources, and the decent majority which daily suffers the corrosive impact of the cunning blows delivered by this degenerate beast. . . .

Corruption reigns among us and threatens us all, to the point that it threatens the very security of the state. . . .

Democracy's dilemma

This now unavoidable truth has provoked opposition from among a growing group of military men and civilians who are convinced that today's democracy is so rotted by corruption that the only way to correct that situation is by force, which, through blood and fire, would purge the corrupt and save the nation. This group feels that the only way to restore the nation's honor is through the blood of those who have stained it, and that to attain that end, it is necessary to do away with democracy and establish an authoritarian regime. If this were to occur, we would again fall victim to despotism and would lose our freedom, the only dam capable

of holding back tyranny's dark waters.

This analysis leads me to raise some questions:

Is it justifiable to sacrifice freedom to defeat corruption?

Aren't we faced with a false dilemma which forces us to choose between a corrupt democracy or an honest dictatorship?

Are there no other options?

Finding the answer to these questions constitutes the highest national priority. . . . The Holy War against corruption has only just begun and will be a long one. Peace is not yet on the horizon. . . . What, then, must the role of the military be?

Blind obedience?

We know only too well that our duty is to be obedient and not deliberate [policy], as the Constitution and Venezuelan law dictate; but this doesn't imply that we obey immoral, illegal, or illegitimate laws, nor that we remain silent when the Nation is in danger. . . . To paraphrase Clemenceau, we can say that just as "war is too important to leave it only to the generals," leadership of the state is too important to leave it only to the politicians.

What distinguishes the military institution is its capacity to wage war in defense of the Nation's vital interests. Today we are waging war against corruption, in defense of our moral values. For that reason, when we are under attack from corruption's followers, we in the military, as always, must be on the front lines of combat, because the Republic demands it of us, and because the ethical cost of not acting would be too great for an institution as important as the National Armed Forces (FAN).

For some, it would appear that this is not a military war, because instead of conventional weapons, we must defend ourselves with moral weapons. But we, the military, cannot avoid this battle, in which we must fight as part of an obligatory moral service. . . . The military is a legitimate and important part of society, and thus an institution which has something to say and must be heard, without this constituting a threat to civil society and democratic institutions. . . .

We all know that in cases like this, to take a moral stand, following the voice of one's conscience, can have bad consequences, but the consequences of not taking that stand can be even worse. . . .

We have to prevent freedom from becoming one of the casualties. At this critical moment for our Nation, therefore, it is indispensable that we the military become soldiers of morality even at the risk of being considered in a state of [policy] deliberation.

We pray to God that our leaders will rebuild and awaken this sleeping democracy which is, dangerously, abhorred by many. If they ignore the advice to correct it, and refuse to take measures to purify it in the short term, then Democracy will be the loser. If a moral renaissance isn't begun soon in Venezuela, anything can happen.