

# Demand grows in Argentina for pardon for Colonel Seineldín

by Cynthia R. Rush

On Dec. 21, 1995, all of Argentina's news media carried as their lead story the report that President Carlos Saúl Menem was perhaps hours away from granting a pardon to jailed Army nationalist Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín, as well as to 19 leftist terrorists belonging to the All for the Fatherland Movement (MTP). Colonel Seineldín, and another 120 Army *carapintadas* ("painted faces"), the term used to refer to Army nationalists, are imprisoned on charges stemming from their participation in the Dec. 3, 1990 uprising against the Army high-command, which they accused of dismantling the military institution. In 1989, the MTPers were convicted and jailed for their bloody assault on the La Tablada Army base in Buenos Aires in January of that year.

Although the pardon has not materialized as of this writing, the media report set off a national debate over whether it should be granted. It particularly provoked hysteria among national and international groupings committed to Argentina's and Ibero-America's demilitarization, which view Colonel Seineldín as the embodiment of everything they want to destroy, while defending such narco-terrorist groups as the MTP. Typically, many of the attacks against the Argentine patriot came from circles in and around the local chapter of B'nai B'rith, which, along with its international affiliates, such as the U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, has disseminated the lie that Colonel Seineldín is anti-Semitic, with Nazi inclinations. The pro-Cuban daily *Página 12* also peddled the B'nai B'rith line.

A hero of Argentina's 1982 Malvinas War against its historic enemy, Great Britain, Colonel Seineldín was jailed not because of any crime he committed, but because he acted to defend one of his nation's fundamental institutions, and told the truth about the fate awaiting Argentina were it to continue on the destructive policy path it had chosen. It is instructive that one of the most important interventions on behalf of Seineldín and his jailed compatriots was made by another patriot, the late former President Arturo Frondizi, in an Oct. 19, 1994 letter he addressed to President Menem, and in subsequent communications with His Holiness, Pope John Paul II.

President Frondizi reiterated the findings of the Buenos Aires Federal Court, that Colonel Seineldín's December 1990 actions were an attempt to defend the institution of the Armed Forces, and not to stage a coup. In the interview which follows, published in the Argentine weekly *Informe Reservado*, the colonel makes that same point, and indicates that he has

spent five years in jail because he and his comrades "have not negotiated their ideals." A pardon would be an act of "strict justice" for officers who acted in accordance with the highest moral principles, he said.

A statement urging President Menem to pardon Colonel Seineldín and his comrades, has begun to circulate and gather signatures in Ibero-America. The statement emphasizes that Dr. Frondizi's intervention on behalf of the imprisoned Army officers "had as its decided and irrenounceable goals, [defense] of the interests of Ibero-America's nations, the dignity of its peoples . . . and the rehabilitation of the Armed Forces. . . . President Carlos Saúl Menem's recent public recognition of the courage shown by Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín, in the defense of Argentina's sovereignty in the Malvinas War, should be considered the synthesis of an objective analysis of the nation's political reality. For the reasons stated here, we . . . support the request for a pardon made by former President Arturo Frondizi for all the men of the Armed Forces now serving sentences for the Dec. 3, 1990 uprising; we consider this an act of strict justice and a factor toward reconciliation, requiring a favorable resolution in accordance with the constitutional norms established exclusively for such an instance."

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## Documentation

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*The interview with Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín excerpted here was published by the Argentine fortnightly Informe Reservado on Jan. 12.*

**Q:** Colonel Seineldín, how are you spending your time in jail? Are you writing a book, or carrying out some specific research? What's your state of mind?

**Seineldín:** I spend my time in detention together with other comrades who have not negotiated their ideals, accompanied and encouraged by the feeling that comes from carrying out one's duty. Also, we have the peace of mind of having acted as becomes soldiers from an Army that originated in the national mystique, which, even before 1810, was the most important sign that marked the Argentine military. We also owe much to the spiritual support and the sacrifices of our families and, in my particular case, to the splendid solidarity, full of conviction, of my abnegated wife and children.

My state of mind is excellent. It is sustained by the hope

that we Argentines will find, sooner or later, those points of agreement and the necessary internal peace to avoid the splintering of the fatherland and the undermining of our sovereignty, which are the aims of international usury.

**Q:** Colonel, do you think it would be an act of justice for President [Carlos] Menem to grant a pardon to you and your comrades before the end of the year?

**Seineldín:** I would consider it an act of strict justice for a pardon to be granted before the end of the year, even if I am not included, that would benefit all of my comrades who are serving sentences for the uprising of Dec. 3, 1990. On the subject, I would again ask people to review the arguments set forth in the letter sent by former President Arturo Frondizi, to President Carlos Saúl Menem, on Oct. 19, 1994. Unfortunately, the reasoning set forth there, was not publicized widely by the government or the media.

But, it should be recalled, more so after five years of imprisonment, that in his request that we be pardoned, Dr. Frondizi made a clear reference to the finding of the Federal Court, "that the actions of Dec. 3, 1990, were not an anti-democratic coup d'état and, even less so, an attempt to permanently change the democratic system of government." It was clearly established at the trial, that the uprising in question, "had the characteristics of an act of resistance to a policy of destroying the Armed Forces," which was inherited by President Carlos Menem at the start of his first administration.

**Q:** What would you think if Enrique Gorriaran Merlo and the other people involved in the La Tablada uprising were to be included in the pardon?

**Seineldín:** I don't think I should comment on this issue, since no analysis would be correct and legitimate if premised on linking together and equating subversives with soldiers. This matter has been very precisely defined by former Maj. Hugo Reynaldo Abete, who is also imprisoned in Magdalena. To make such a comparison is to bring into question the authority of the Armed Forces. At no time should that authority be put at risk, even in the face of any disagreements that may exist at any level of the leadership. The institution of the Armed Forces is above any of the individuals that make it up, their mistakes or successes. It has been well said, that without the Armed Forces, the fatherland loses one of the fundamental conditions for the existence of the nation-state, which is that of ensuring that there is a monopoly over the use of force in society.

**Q:** What is your view of the military being involved in politics? Do you support the existence of civil-military movements? From this standpoint, how do you view the Panamanian experience, or that led by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela?

**Seineldín:** If national independence was the historical reason for the existence of our Armed Forces, then they must also participate in the formulation of national policies. To give you an example, when Gen. Manuel Nicolás Savio, in

the name of national self-determination, said "international economic pressure is even more fierce than military pressure," and that it was implacable, he was expressing a conception of high policy. These words, stated in 1942 before the Argentine Industrial Union, were not a reason to put him in jail. He sought, with his steel plan, to substitute imports and, by doing this, he challenged multinational interests.

In this way, General Savio sent a clear signal that there is no valid military doctrine "if it is not part of a national doctrine." The Armed Forces, which the country's domestic and foreign enemies, such as the Inter-American Dialogue, only define in connection with coups d'état in Ibero-America, are a vital component of national politics, to build, along with the government in power which obtains its legitimacy from the will of the people, an independent nation. The only party of the Armed Forces is the nation.

That does not mean that a State that is faithful to its founding fathers should surrender the legitimate use of force to protect its territorial, economic, and political sovereignty, as well as to defend itself from armed subversion, which today is reinforced by drug trafficking and the generalized corruption among the leadership of the continent.

I think that the answer to the second part of your question is contained in the letter I sent on June 18, 1995 to Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera, through his country's embassy in Argentina. That came about because some Venezuelan and Argentine media sought to implicate me in alleged coup activities with former Maj. Hugo Chávez Frías. For your information, I am attaching a copy of the letter to your questionnaire. In it, it is made very clear that my imprisoned comrades and I totally reject Marxist guerrillas, financial dictatorship, and drug trafficking, at the same time that we defend the honor and the power of the Armed Forces.

**Q:** What should be the national defense policy of the Armed Forces today? Do you think the Armed Forces should be involved in fighting drug trafficking? Is it all right to participate in United Nations' interventions?

**Seineldín:** There is always the possibility of new conflicts, which is why national defense requires preparedness and planning. The burning political-military issue of recent times has been the controversy between planning for national conflicts, as against global deterrence. I think it would be mistaken for our nation to do away completely with strategic planning. Such thinking stems from a pacifist conception that does not correspond to reality and which aims to keep the Ibero-American republics in a defenseless state, surrendering national decisions to supranational bodies, which coheres with the dominance by a single planetary power.

Regarding the participation of the Armed Forces in the war against drug trafficking, I must again refer you to the aforementioned argument, a copy of which is attached. By reading it, and from the first part of my answer to this question, it should be simple to deduce what I think about participating in U.N. missions.