

Andean Report by José Carlos Méndez

Pro-terrorist mooted for security post

Venezuela's new President wants to name José Vicente Rangel to the post of solicitor general.

On Jan. 24, Venezuela's President-elect Carlos Andrés Pérez told *El Diario de Caracas* that the appointment of José Vicente Rangel as solicitor general would be an excellent choice of "an extraordinarily well-thought-of man, since we are dealing with a man who has demonstrated independence, good judgment, and loftiness of ideals. . . . I speak regularly with him." Pérez explained that as President, he could not interfere with the naming of the solicitor, since "that is a function of the Congress; but as a leader of a political party, I can give my opinion."

But naming the pro-terrorist José Vicente Rangel as solicitor general is like putting the M-19 guerrillas in charge of national security. Rangel's history as a white-collar subversive goes back to the 1970s, when, according to intelligence sources, he was the intermediary for money that Fidel Castro sent to the Venezuelan guerrilla movement, with whose amnestied chiefs Rangel maintains good relations, as he does with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Once the Venezuelan guerrillas were amnestied, Rangel turned into a perennial presidential candidate for mix-and-match coalitions of the Communist left, and although he has never won the presidency, his candidacies enabled him to win numerous posts in Congress, until 1983, when he received too few votes to qualify. Then he turned to journalism, which he used to run a smear campaign against the Venezuelan Armed Forces and other nationalist forces opposing narco-terrorism.

Baptized by the daily *El Nacional*

"the professional muckraker," Rangel fulfilled expectations when in early February 1988 he declared on Radio Caracas Television that the ongoing presidential election campaigns were financed by the drug trade. Although he presented no evidence, he triggered a scandal, which he then employed to smear then-Justice Minister José Manzo González, a strong advocate of continent-wide action against narco-terrorism and drug-money laundering.

Rangel and his allies accused the minister of collaborating with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the creation of an illegal anti-drug "secret police." Manzo González responded to the dirty campaign against him with an interview, published March 19 in the daily *El Nacional*, which charged that "this campaign has a strange similarity to that carried out in Colombia, first against [Justice] Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who was assassinated, and then against his replacement, Dr. Enrique Parejo González."

In another interview, Manzo charged that one of Rangel's daughters, Gisela Rangel Avalos, was a defense lawyer for one of the most renowned drug traffickers in the country, and that this had everything to do with Rangel's attacks against him. Nonetheless, abandoned by the government of President Jaime Lusinchi, Manzo González was forced to resign on March 28, 1988.

With this notch in his belt, Rangel turned his sights on the Armed Forces, accusing them of corruption and demanding the resignation of then-Defense Minister Gen. Eliodoro

Guerrero Gómez. So outrageous were his charges that Rangel was interrogated twice by the DIM (military intelligence), and word began to circulate of his impending incarceration if he didn't present concrete proof of his charges.

It was at this point that presidential candidate Carlos Andrés Pérez came to his defense, saying: "We cannot permit the military question to become a taboo, or military secrecy to take away the right of a citizen to denounce anything he considers improper. . . . It would seem to me to be an exaggeration, were Dr. Rangel to be subject to trial."

With this backup, Rangel moved to try to sabotage ongoing negotiations for a joint anti-terrorist campaign involving the defense forces of Colombia and Venezuela along their shared border.

Rangel had long been on record opposing the use of the military in fighting narco-terrorism. When the Colombian military was deployed in November 1985 to recover the Justice Palace besieged by the M-19 terrorists, Rangel penned a violent attack on then-Colombian President Belisario Betancur, accusing him of violating human rights, while making no mention of the dozen Supreme Court judges butchered by the M-19 assassins. When Colombian narco-terrorists crossed the border on June 12, 1987 to murder nearly a dozen Venezuelan soldiers, Rangel claimed that the assassins were actually Colombian soldiers.

Once asked to identify the sources of his intelligence, Rangel boasted of having a better network of informants than the Venezuelan state. Rangel's method of infiltrating his informants into government agencies clearly depends on high-level political protection from the inside.