

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Moscow escalates takeover bid

Colombia's Communists are running circles around the Barco government, in their drive for power.

In the week before and after the New Year, Colombian authorities registered more than a dozen terrorist incidents—ranging from ambushes of military convoys to guerrilla occupations of entire towns. Most of the incidents were carried out by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the largely rural guerrilla army linked to the Moscow-run Colombian Communist Party. During those incidents, at least 11 people—half of them soldiers and police officers—were killed, and another dozen wounded.

At the same time, the FARC issued a call—through one of its chiefs, Jacobo Arenas—for a new truce with the Virgilio Barco government, allegedly to guarantee that first-ever mayoral elections scheduled for March would be “held in peace.” Those elections are expected to give big portions of national territory over to the FARC, or to drug traffickers, or both.

Mayoral posts have traditionally been appointed in Colombia; by throwing these positions open to the “popular vote” in more than 1,000 municipalities, the Barco administration will submit the nation’s electoral process to the financial and armed muscle of Colombia’s criminal class. In essence, narco-terrorism is being offered a free ticket to Colombia’s political trough.

The Barco government’s pretext for playing footsie with the Communists apparently has something to do with the words “dialogue” and “peace,” so much in vogue these days. A tenuous truce signed with the FARC back in 1985 has more holes in it than

Swiss cheese, and yet, President Barco continues to pretend that some “dialogue” exists with the terrorists. Even several bloody FARC ambushes of military convoys in the summer of 1987, claiming the lives of scores of soldiers, only prompted official threats to tear up the truce. Those threats were never concretized.

The FARC’s sponsorship last year of a new, expanded army, calling itself the “Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group,” was touted by the Colombian Communist Party as 1987’s single most important advance in the “people’s struggle.” And yet, President Barco’s newly appointed “peace adviser,” Rafael Pardo Rueda, told the press Jan. 5, “The Coordinating Group is a political agreement. Terrorist actions continue to be carried out by each one of the [member] groups. It is true that some have been claimed by the Coordinating Group. But I believe that it is still a political agreement and not an agreement for military action.” He insisted that the truce signed with the FARC under the previous administration remains in force.

The price Colombia is paying for such empty trappings of democracy is staggering. During 1987, there were 2,300 violent deaths, including members of the armed forces, political leaders, and guerrillas. The FARC’s proposed truce for 1988 would be a temporary one, according to Jacobo Arenas, to last only through the March elections. Once in control of a score—or scores—of municipalities across the country, the FARC can launch civil war in earnest, turning the country into

another El Salvador. And the Barco government’s one-sided truce will avail it nothing then.

The height of narco-terrorist arrogance was expressed when a FARC regional commander, Raul Reyes, was quoted on a 7 p.m. nationwide news broadcast admitting that one of his guerrilla fronts had murdered the highly popular anti-Communist senator from Magdalena, Pablo Emilio Guarín. The guerrilla leader made his startling admission before the press, during a Dec. 9, 1987 meeting with President Barco’s personal representative, a meeting at which the FARC was “generously” handing over three public officials it had earlier kidnaped.

Guarín’s successor in the Senate, Luis Alberto Rubio Rojas, issued a furious public letter to the attorney general of Colombia, in which he denounced the fact that the crime of murder had been confessed to a government representative by admitted kidnapers, and yet nothing was done. He lamented that political expediency had turned the assassination of a senator into what he termed “a second-rate death.”

To make matters worse, peace adviser Pardo Rueda told the media, when asked about Comandante Reyes’s confession, that it was not a confession by the FARC, but by an individual member. Besides, he added, the government “could not draw a political conclusion” from the confession, since “the conclusion must be drawn by the justice system.” Pardo Rueda’s argument was in essence no different from that offered by Justice Minister Low Murtra regarding the scandalous release from jail of top narco Jorge Luis Ochoa; namely, that the executive could bear no responsibility for the decisions of the judiciary in such matters.