

Terrorist guerrillas lay siege to Colombia

by Valerie Rush

The Colombian government, under the influence of the international human rights lobby, is enmired in illusory efforts to secure a “democratic” peace for the country. While it engages in endless rewrites of its draft peace proposal to the country’s mocking guerrilla movement, the nation is under permanent siege by Moscow’s “irregular warfare” battalions.

A score or more confrontations are occurring each week between the Colombian military and thousands of heavily armed narco-terrorists, whose leaders are trained for the most part in Moscow, Havana, and Managua. This undeclared war is wreaking havoc with the economic infrastructure of the country and is taking untold numbers of lives. A sampling of such incidents over the course of the past few weeks includes the following:

- A police patrol was lured out of its barracks and ambushed by guerrillas in Putumayo; three were killed. A similar action took place the same day in Cauca; three police agents were killed. A combined assault by the FARC and M-19 guerrilla forces on a police substation and town in Caqueta killed 2 policemen and wounded 12. Five towns in Cauca province were hit simultaneously by FARC guerrillas, with a toll of five dead. In nearly every case, weapons included grenades and rockets.

- The administrative headquarters of Colombia’s Second Division in Bucaramanga, which oversees 30 battalions and 3 brigades in three guerrilla-infested Colombian provinces, was hit by a powerful car-bomb. The Second Division is under the command of Gen. Farouk Yanine Diaz, a renowned counterinsurgency specialist. Ten civilians and 3 military men were wounded. Simultaneously, 15 guerrillas assaulted a military air base in Barranquilla.

- Three armed members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) were shot and killed during an attempted assault on the New Granada Battalion protecting the oil-refining city of Barrancabermeja.

The list goes on. There is not one province in Colombia which is not witnessing heavy combat between guerrilla and military forces, and in several places, peasant exoduses out of conflict zones and into the cities are being reported. Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo reported Sept. 21 that his life has been repeatedly threatened by terrorists and drug runners, that he has escaped several assassination attempts, and that

at least six priests have been murdered in the last few years.

The fighting has intensified since the guerrilla kidnaping of 11 police officers and 11 soldiers in Cordoba on Aug. 23. Despite a successful military encirclement of the several-hundred-man guerrilla unit holding the hostages, the government ordered a military demobilization in the area to permit the release of the kidnap victims on Sept. 16. Not one guerrilla was captured, the country was embroiled in foolish negotiations for weeks, and in the end, the government hailed the hostage release as a “positive response” to its peace initiatives.

A crippled defense capability

The military has not only been hamstrung by a government more concerned with the “human rights” lobbyists peering over its shoulder, than with defense of its national sovereignty; it is also victimized by a finance ministry unwilling to budget for even the most minimal requirements for its troops, by terrorist apologists within the country’s political elites who are on a permanent witchhunt against “military abuse,” and by a justice department which has been repeatedly blackmailed by narco-terrorists into releasing witnesses and burying evidence against the dope cartels gathered through military offensives.

The Armed Forces have repeatedly, if diplomatically, criticized the Barco government’s shackling of their defense responsibilities. Air Force Commander Gen. Alfredo Ortega Caicedo told a military ceremony that the guerrillas could not be trusted in any peace negotiations: “On the one hand, they propose peace, and on the other they shoot bullets.” Armed Forces Commander Gen. Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz declared in a public forum Sept. 2 that “the situation of Colombian violence is the most critical in the Americas, and has as its origin a geostrategic factor—the location of the country within the American continent—which falls within the framework of the East-West conflict.”

As the fighting intensifies, the Colombian economy is being shattered. Major income losses from terror against the oil industry have led to shortages of foreign reserves for debt repayment, leading the government to cut deeply into such budget categories as defense, infrastructure, and social services. This in turn has triggered widespread discontent among the population, which is already living under wartime conditions.

In what could prove the first of many such cases, the oil-refining Pacific port city of Tumaco, near the Ecuadorean border, has just declared its determination to secede from Colombia. Having gone for months without energy, water, education and health services, the inhabitants have grown desperate. The mayor’s office, the police barracks, and other administrative government centers have been sacked and burned, and mobs reportedly infiltrated by guerrillas have left at least one dead and scores wounded. A curfew was imposed and a military chief assigned to keep order.