

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Hit attempt on defense minister

Colombia's communist insurgency has launched an offensive "to the death" against the armed forces.

Terrorists scored a near miss on Nov. 22, when a remote-control bomb intended for the car of Colombian Defense Minister Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz was detonated seconds later than planned, and blew up the security car following a few feet behind the minister's. All four guards in the second car died in the explosion, which occurred very near the defense ministry in Bogotá.

General Guerrero Paz had only recently become defense minister, after his predecessor Gen. Rafael Samudio Molina was fired by President Virgilio Barco after he called for an "end to the martyrdom of the armed forces," an implicit criticism of the government's straitjacketing of the military in its war on subversion. Guerrero Paz, a co-thinker of Samudio's, has been a long-standing target of the Colombian Communist Party, which has demanded his resignation as armed forces commander for years. Throughout the week before the bombing, the Communists had been seeking Guerrero Paz's resignation, for his alleged sponsorship of paramilitary violence.

The murder attempt occurred in the midst of an escalating Communist propaganda campaign to hold the military responsible for a series of rural massacres which evidence suggests was carried out either by the drug mob or their guerrilla allies. The latest scandal was whipped up around a bloody Nov. 11 terrorist assault on the gold-mining town of Segovia, in northwestern Antioquia department. Some 200 heavily armed commandos invaded the town in the midst of a

violent nighttime thunderstorm and proceeded to mow down civilians, many of whom had taken shelter in bars and coffee shops. A toll of some 45 dead and another 30-40 wounded made it one of the worst terrorist incidents in Colombia so far this year.

Antioquia Gov. Antonio Roldán Betancur told the media that the attack was carried out by combined forces of the Maoist ELN (National Liberation Army) and Moscow-run FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces), an assessment confirmed by Gen. Raúl Rojas, commander of the Army's XIV Brigade. Days later, on Nov. 19, Roldán was the target of a failed assassination attempt, when his helicopter was machine-gunned and forced into an emergency landing.

Nonetheless, the Colombian left presented Segovia as the latest victim of the military's "dirty war." The mayor of Segovia, a member of the Communist Party electoral front, the UP (Patriotic Union), charged that the attack had been carried out by right-wing paramilitary forces backed by the army, although only one victim of the Segovia massacre was a member of the UP, and all the rest members of Colombia's traditional political parties. Further, the mayor had been meeting with UP town councilmen at the time of the assault, and yet they were unmolested by the terrorists. An ongoing meeting of radical trade unionists was also undisturbed.

Immediately following the Segovia massacre, both the Colombian Communist Party and the UP leadership issued public statements charg-

ing the military with responsibility, and demanding the resignations of Defense Minister Guerrero Paz, Interior Minister Cesar Gaviria Trujillo (who had successfully orchestrated the defeat of the terrorist-endorsed general strike of Oct. 26), and other cabinet members. The Communists insisted that "struggle in all its forms" be employed to defeat militarism and "state terrorism."

Incredibly, the government appears to be following the Communist Party's scenario to the letter. The Colombian Chamber of Deputies approved a motion, sponsored by UP congressmen but backing by members of the ruling Liberal Party as well, strongly criticizing the military in the area for failing to defend "life, honor, and property." An official investigating commission headed by the justice minister issued a preliminary report suggesting that the Segovia massacre was the work of paramilitary forces. Interior Minister Gaviria declared that "the most likely hypothesis is that it was a paramilitary group."

While the military, in the aftermath of General Samudio's sacking, is backed into a corner, the Barco government has formally endorsed a concept of "regional dialogue" with the same narco-terrorist guerrillas who have declared "total war" against the Colombian state. The man heading up the "regional dialogue" initiative is Alberto Santofimio Botero, whose faction in the Liberal Party has sponsored numerous known drug traffickers for public office, including the head of the infamous cocaine-trafficking Medellín Cartel, Pablo Escobar Gaviria. Santofimio is reliably reported to be using the "dialogue" initiative to pave the way for a presidential bid in 1990, and is already demanding sweeping reforms of the Constitution to permit his narco-terrorist allies to take part in politics.