

Soviet allies in Americas on the move

by Gretchen Small

Since mid-November 1990, two of the armed insurgencies in the Americas with the closest ties to the KGB-military hardliners in Moscow, the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador and the Communist Party's Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), have been engaged in unrelenting military offensives. Yet even after the FMLN shot down a U.S. helicopter on Jan. 2 and executed two U.S. servicemen who survived the crash, Washington shows no sign of recognition that the ongoing hardline shift in Moscow also means trouble in the Western Hemisphere.

For several years, the U.S. has centered its so-called "democratic agenda" for the Americas on three points: imposition of free trade policies at the expense of local industry and production; negotiations on power-sharing with insurgencies in Central America and the Andes; and reduction or elimination of national military institutions in the region. All of this has been premised on the line that, under the U.S. global deal with the Soviets, Moscow has cut off its assets in the Americas.

The simultaneity of the offensive by the FARC and the FMLN demonstrates the bankruptcy of that agenda. The FMLN launched its nationwide military offensive on Nov. 20, ostensibly to improve its position at the negotiating table. Although little covered in the U.S. media, fighting has been fierce. Some 400 Salvadorans had died by Jan. 2, including 25 civilians killed when the FMLN attacked military bases in populated areas. The FARC offensive received media attention at the beginning of January, when FARC squads killed 36 policemen in the first three days of 1991. The advocates of negotiation whatever the cost, claimed the military "provoked" the FARC, by seizing the FARC "Green House" jungle headquarters in December.

Not so, Colombian National Security Adviser Rafael Parado Rueda pointed out on Jan. 4. The nationwide FARC ambushes, kidnappings, and attacks on towns began approximately six weeks before, he noted. This places the opening of the FARC offensive at precisely the time as that of the FMLN.

To dismiss the coincidence of action as "local affairs" would be foolish. The majority of the leadership of the FARC and the FMLN, which remain the largest armed communist insurgencies in the Americas along with Shining Path of Peru, have remained firmly in the camp of the anti-perestroika forces in the communist camp. Before his death last year, FARC commander Jacobo Arenas reportedly told his troops

that Gorbachov—and thus his adherents—were CIA agents. The FMLN has historically worked closely with Cuba, whose Fidel Castro offered himself as international leader of the anti-perestroika faction.

The proponents of the "diminished threat" line have gone so far overboard in their efforts to sell their policy, that in the November/December 1990 issue of *The American Enterprise* magazine, "conservative" think tanker Mark Falcoff simply eliminated the FARC problem from the map entirely. Falcoff wrote that there is only one "serious guerrilla insurgency in South America today," Shining Path, since all others "either have been crushed by the military . . . or have demobilized voluntarily."

Military remains Washington's 'enemy'

The Bush administration has responded to the FMLN's shooting down of a U.S. helicopter by rattling the sword of the "Thornburgh Doctrine," i.e., the threat of U.S. intervention. Thus the State Department is now seeking an indictment of one of the FMLN commanders, Joaquín Villalobos, so that U.S. agents can arrest him—if they find him. The idea, according to a senior State Department official, is to "strike a psychological blow against the rebel commander," the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Jan. 15.

But the State Department is continuing its active support for the FMLN campaign to force the government to dismantle the Armed Forces of El Salvador, and replace them with a disarmed police force. U.S. aid to El Salvador remains conditional on the government's participation in "peace talks" run by the U.N., and the U.N. envoy running those talks, Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's personal aide Alvaro de Soto, has taken up the FMLN's anti-military demand as his own. On Jan. 11, the *Wall Street Journal* published a commentary by De Soto in which he argued that "incidents" cannot be allowed to get in the way of those negotiations. The FMLN's rampages are "wartime negotiations. . . . The FMLN considers military pressure essential to push those negotiations forward," De Soto wrote. "The talks are on track," including on "critical questions," such as "the demilitarization of society and the reform of the Armed Forces."

El Salvador is not the only country where the military, not the terrorists, is the target of attack. With United Nations participation, by Feb. 26, all five Central American countries are supported to have drawn up goals for the reduction of weaponry and men under arms.

The incoming President of Guatemala, Protestant evangelist Jorge Serrano, has already announced that one of his first acts will be to reach a deal with the FMLN's allies in his country, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The military has opposed this strategy of handing the insurgents the tools to set the political agenda of the country, and so it will have to be "reformed" and hardliners purged, Serrano has announced.