

Brazil military defies Anglo-American policy

by Cynthia Rush

Leaders of Brazil's Armed Forces have given President Itamar Franco 30 days to respond to their demands regarding the status and future of the military. During the first half of March, military leaders held high-profile meetings, as well as personal discussions with Franco, to address Anglo-American plans to dismantle the institution of the Armed Forces. The presidents of the Army, Navy, and Air Force clubs, representing retired officers, presented Franco with a document outlining their grievances and describing the serious state of unrest existing inside the institution in a private meeting on March 8.

A volatile March 10 Extraordinary Assembly of the Military Club held two days later in Rio de Janeiro warned the President that if he fails to act decisively, "We cannot predict the irritating effect on troop morale." The March 15 *Tribuna da Imprensa* underscored that the Armed Forces' leadership now feels respect for the President, but if the climate of disrespect for the military is allowed to continue, this positive attitude toward Franco could change.

Brazil's military officers and rank and file are enraged at the plans, coming primarily out of Washington, to redefine their role in line with the needs of the Anglo-American new world order. The document handed Franco by retired officers states that "confirmation of our lack of preparedness in the face of the attitudes of the world's powers with their 'new world order,' causes us to conclude that sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity may be seriously threatened."

The mood of the military was evident at the assembly, where 1,000 angry officers gathered in what one observer described as "like a 1968 student meeting." The final document produced by that meeting sharply attacked plans to "modify the traditional constitutional mission of the Armed Forces, eliminating the participation of same in internal security . . . and reducing the Armed Forces' operational capability" on a variety of pretexts.

The document also addressed the fact that the defense budget has been cut significantly, lowering wages to the point that many are forced to seek second jobs to support their families, making equipment maintenance and training of the troops impossible, and creating a dangerous demoralization in the ranks. It notes that Brazilians are proud of their Armed

Forces, and that it is incumbent on the commander in chief, namely Franco, to "strengthen and protect them so that they are able to fulfill their constitutional mission."

Members of the Military Club are requesting that their president, Gen. Nilton Cerqueira (ret.), be granted special powers enabling him to work through the cabinet's military ministers and with President Franco to put forward "concrete measures which protect the nation, the Armed Forces, and its members from the nefarious effects of a criminal policy . . . which is incompatible with its honor and dignity."

No to 'technological apartheid'

One of the issues that military leaders find most offensive is the Anglo-American policy of denying Brazil and its Armed Forces the right to obtain and develop advanced technology and scientific know-how.

Brigadier Hugo Piva, the retired Air Force officer who was demonized by Anglo-American media during the 1991 Persian Gulf war because of his technical assistance to Iraq, discussed this issue in an interview published recently in *Veja* magazine. Several of Brazil's important technological projects, such as the Satellite Launcher Vehicle (VLS), have failed, he explained, because past governments succumbed to "international pressures" and set the country back 20 years. "We had a First World team, but today we are behind," Piva said, adding that former President Fernando Collor de Mello committed "the irreparable crime" of doing away with research and development. "This can be reversed, but it will take . . . at least 20 years of hard work."

Responding to Anglo-American diatribes against the spread of "weapons of mass destruction," Piva emphasized that a national armaments industry is essential. "We need an armaments industry because it is a state-of-the-art industry which drives others. Brazil today exports manufactured goods as a result of the technology which the arms industry brought to the country."

The Extraordinary Assembly document makes the same point, stating that "foreign pressures intended to prevent scientific-technological development in the area of military materials, cannot be ignored." The purpose of such pressures, it explains, is to reduce the military to a drug-fighting force "under a supranational command, and [to] prevent it from attaining a level of efficiency compatible with Brazil's strategic status." In statements reported in the March 15 *Tribuna da Imprensa*, General Cerqueira warned the United States that Brazil's military leaders "shall never accept" the role of an anti-drug police force to which the Anglo-Americans want to relegate them.

As a further warning to the Washington establishment, Piva emphasized in his *Veja* interview that "it's idiocy to say that the Armed Forces aren't necessary. . . . Never in the history of humanity has a nation been built without an armed forces. Either it has its own armed forces, or it will find itself taking orders from its neighbor's."