

Colombian military resists plot to dismantle Armed Forces

by Javier Almario

Major General Manuel José Bonett, commander of the Colombian Army's Second Division, and Maj. Gen. Juan Salcedo Lora, Army Inspector General, in two recent articles—entitled “Why Do We Resist So Much?” and “In the End, Do We Obey or Not?”—exposed an international plot “operating through the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the U.S. Congress and the Non-Governmental Organizations,” with the purpose of eliminating the armed forces of Colombia and the other Ibero-American countries, and handing over political power to the drug traffickers and terrorists. The articles appeared in what was to have been the first issue of the Army's official newspaper, *En Guardia (On Guard)*.

The articles were only revealed to the public when the daily *El Tiempo* leaked their contents, since the government rushed to confiscate the publication before it could circulate, arguing that the government cannot permit “in any form and in any context, the public expression of opinion by the military regarding fundamental guidelines of the national government.” According to Defense Minister Fernando Botero Zea, “the Armed Forces do not discuss . . . do not deliberate, because they are the guardians of others' rights to deliberate, argue, and polemicize.” Rather they must limit themselves to obeying and “following faithfully presidential directions regarding public order and loyally adhering to the peace and reconciliation strategy under way. The Armed Forces are at the service of the government's peace policy,” as if the military were the armed branch of whatever government happens to be in power, and not of the nation as a whole.

The government-military showdown was triggered by a packet of legislation presented by the Samper Pizano government, designed to exempt members of the Armed Forces from carrying out their superiors' orders. Thus, the irony of the article's title, “In the End, Do We Obey or Not?”

Monkey wrench in the works

The timely political intervention of the two active-service generals threw a monkey wrench into the works, halting congressional approval of a part of the bill which would have

caused the total dismemberment of the Colombian Armed Forces by eliminating the concepts of military legal jurisdiction and due obedience, two fundamental tenets of military functioning throughout the world. The generals' intervention also made clear the level of discontent within the Armed Forces with the Samper Pizano government, and caused a public confrontation the likes of which has not been seen since President Belisario Betancur fired his defense minister, Gen. Fernando Landázabal Reyes, 12 years ago.

Ever since the Samper government was inaugurated on Aug. 7, Defense Minister Botero has decided that the priority for the Armed Forces was neither combatting the Marxist narco-terrorist fronts nor the drug trade, but “respecting human rights,” as this is understood by Amnesty International and the other U.N.-affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose primary aim is to defend terrorists.

One of the laws being debated in Congress proposes to punish “forced disappearances,” a bill prepared by Amnesty International and the other “human rights” NGOs for the presumed purpose of legally punishing military personnel and public officials who capture and “disappear” other persons, on the assumption that this is a common military practice.

The bill is superfluous, given that such practice is already defined as a crime in laws concerning kidnapping and assassination. What was the last straw for the Colombian generals is one article in the bill which refers to cases of “forced disappearance” in which a subordinate who carries out such an order would also be considered responsible under the law; subordinates are therefore directed to disobey the orders of superiors on their own discretion.

Four days after Minister Botero's public chastisement of the generals who wrote the newspaper articles, the Senate voted down, by a 53 to 21 margin, the controversial article on “due obedience.” This is seen as a political victory for Generals Salcedo and Bonett. And, while the generals were expected to be fired, the Samper government has decided to await the regular December promotions to remove the generals who dared to express an opinion.

Protecting the guerrillas

But this is not the only congressional bill aimed at destroying the military. The government also sent Congress a bill for debate which would pass into law the II Protocols of the 1949 Geneva Convention, which were designed to “regulate” behavior between states at war, but not for the kind of irregular warfare that exists in Colombia. The protocol would force the Armed Forces to “respect the civilian population” but would require no such obligation from the terrorist groups ravaging Colombia, because they can just as easily be a part of that “civilian population” as they can be “wartime combatants,” as they choose. Approval of the protocol would also give the terrorists a status superior to “belligerent,” that of a state within the state.

President Samper is preparing still another bill designed to eliminate the concept of “military legal jurisdiction,” which provides for military personnel to be tried in military courts. According to Samper himself, a civil judge would first determine if the presumed crime was committed as part of active service or not. If the judge rules it was not, the case would pass to the jurisdiction of civilian criminal courts, where the terrorists are adept at a multitude of blackmail techniques, threats, and tricks against judges, in order to hinder any military action. The bill would also give the Attorney General’s office—already considered a branch of British intelligence’s Amnesty International—greater meddling powers into military justice by imposing the accusatory system, with prosecutors named by civilian authority. In practice, it would spell the virtual elimination of courts-martial.

Such legislation has been demanded by the terrorists who have been negotiating a bloodsoaked “peace” with Colombia’s political elites since 1982, even to the point of successfully demanding the redeployment or firing of army officials who have proven most effective against them. Samper is seeking a cloak-and-dagger deal with the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the People’s Liberation Army (EPL) at all costs. Samper has even called on the United Nations to mediate an El Salvador-style “peace process” to turn Colombia into an official U.N. colony, which would begin by setting loose all the terrorist chieftains the Armed Forces have captured in recent years.

General Bonett’s article charges that those who accuse the Armed Forces of violating human rights “are the leading violators and assassins in the country,” who only seek to present the Army as “the bad guys in the movie,” while the assassinations, kidnappings, disappearances, thefts, blackmail, and extortion practices by the terrorists are presented as only “forms of revolutionary struggle.” Why, asks General Bonett, don’t “our human rights, our men, have defenders; why have our peasants who have been killed and mutilated by [terrorist] mines merited no scandals, no accusations?”

“Internationally fashionable currents, with a hazy appearance and innocent image, are rushing against military

justice in Colombia,” says General Salcedo in his article. “No one, much less these muckrakers, has stopped to ask if this same military justice exists in their own countries.” There is a campaign, says Salcedo, not only against the Armed Forces but “against the country itself, using the springboard of international organizations to attack Colombia.”

Salcedo charges that arguing for the disappearance of the Armed Forces “plants the seed that the military is unnecessary as an institution,” because the East-West conflict is over, conflicts between the countries of the Americas are very few, and “nothing justifies the enormous budgets to sustain an increasingly unneeded military apparatus.” To achieve their purpose, these forces “weave the finest threads to present military justice as but a protective shield for human rights violators.”

In criticizing, without actually mentioning them, the government’s various legislative proposals, Salcedo argues that “it is no secret to anyone that if orders are not carried out, the militia is finished. So, doing away with due obedience is the best and most direct form of euthanasia against the bothersome military. Why bothersome? To whom? Who benefits? Is everyone to come up with an answer and when a reasonable justification is arrived at, then invite the 100 guerrilla fronts that exist in the country to disarm as the legal armed forces have done? Are the bothersome Search Brigades [charged with fighting the drug cartels] to vanish and let the deeply moved cartel assassins submit to justice? Are the unnecessary Anti-Extortion and Anti-Kidnapping Units to lay down their threatening arms and kidnapping will spontaneously become extinct? Why not? It costs nothing to dream!”

In order to function, says Salcedo, any army needs its own legal jurisdiction and due obedience, so that it will carry out orders even when that means risking one’s life. Armies “were born thus in world history and so reason dictates, unless one is alleging that due obedience to the dictates of reason also does not exist.”

Documentation

The following are excerpts from a Sept. 29 national television broadcast by the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) in Colombia. Speaking on the plot to destroy Ibero-America’s Armed Forces were Maximiliano Londoño Penilla, a former MSIA presidential candidate in Colombia, and Gen. Hernando Zuluaga García (ret.), head of the National Participation Movement (MPN), an organization of retired military officers, and a former senatorial candidate.

Londoño: There is a plot to annihilate the Armed Forces and to destroy the nations of Ibero-America. The British

oligarchy, seeing the imminent collapse of the international monetary and financial system, has decided to convert the United Nations into the center of a new world empire, in which the very concept of the sovereign nation-state is eliminated. . . . After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in the East, organizations like the Inter-American Dialogue have emphasized that it is necessary to dismantle the Ibero-American armies, supposedly because the Cold War is over and these armies no longer have reason to exist. . . .

Just as El Salvador was obliged to reduce the size of its army by half, and to purge all of its high-ranking officers, so do the oligarchical families and usurious interests which control the International Monetary Fund intend to reduce the size of armies the world over. The Inter-American Dialogue, made up of 100 notables from the Americas . . . has established four fundamental goals for bringing this about: 1) expand the Free Trade Treaty to include all the countries of America; 2) collectively defend "democracy"; 3) carry out programs that give a human face to the free-market policies; and 4) promote the legalization of drugs. . . .

Thanks to the defamatory campaigns of Amnesty International, the Attorney General's office and the non-governmental organizations, our Armed Forces today appear not as defenders of public order and of national sovereignty, but as a criminal organization dedicated to the torture, kidnapping and murder of Colombians. . . .

Peace must be sown with scientific, technological and industrial progress, not by yielding to the demands of criminals. The principle of legitimate authority must be restored, by the monopoly of force, to root out any kind of private justice. For all these reasons and more . . . we must defend, respect and dignify our Armed Forces, because they are the guarantors of national sovereignty.

Zuluaga: The Colombian army was born with the Fatherland . . . to defend the essence of the nation-state: its independence, its sovereignty, the integrity of its territory, and the constitutional and legal order. How does one carry out such a delicate mission under current circumstances, if the government and other branches of the state function paradoxically like loose cannons . . . and delegate to foreign-inspired non-governmental organizations the leadership of the nation and the imposition of the new order. . . . ?

The strategy is already under way . . . to reduce the Armed Forces; thus the involvement of the Attorney General's office in the special disciplinary regimen . . . the reforms of the career regimen; and the debate against military legal jurisdiction. . . . [They want] an Armed Forces which neither thinks nor fights; which neither deliberates nor imposes law and order; which is civilianized so that it will obey foreign designs, even to the detriment of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, the Constitution, and the entire nation's well-being.

Eyewitness Report

Future of Mexico is at stake in Chiapas

by Marivilia Carrasco and Hugo López Ochoa

The armed "indigenist" movement that rose up in the Mexican border state of Chiapas on Jan. 1 of this year, bearing the name Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), has been portrayed by the international news media as highly popular. Its putative leader, "sub-Comandante Marcos," has been painted in lurid Hollywood colors as a Robin Hood who fights the rich to give to the poor, and who is adored by all of Mexico.

Once again, the major media are at the opposite pole from reality. Mexico's presidential elections of Aug. 21 showed beyond a shadow of doubt that the EZLN is rejected by the vast majority of Mexicans; its electoral arm, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and its presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, received only 17% of the vote. The new President-elect Ernesto Zedillo, of the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), received 50% of the vote in a massive turnout, while Diego Fernández de Ceballos of the conservative National Action Party took 27%.

In Chiapas itself, where the EZLN supported the PRD gubernatorial candidate Amado Avendaño, the Zapatistas were also trounced. Avendaño, founder and director of the leftist newspaper *El Tiempo* of San Cristóbal de las Casas, received only 36% of the vote against PRI candidate Eduardo Robledo Rincón's 51%.

Opposition to EZLN grows

Our recent visit to the Chiapas city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, headquarters of the diocese of schismatic Bishop Samuel Ruiz—better known as the EZLN's "Comandante Samuel"—provided first-hand evidence that the people of Chiapas not only repudiate Zapatista "indigenism," but are organizing themselves to expel the "red bishop" from Chiapas and to prevent their state from being cut away from the nation, as the Zapatistas seek. We were able to interview leaders from a variety of grassroots organizations, such as the San Cristóbal Civic Front (FCS), the Coalition of Citizen Organizations of Chiapas (COCCH), and the Regional Cattlemen's Union of Chiapas (UGR), all of whom played decisive roles in the electoral defeat of the EZLN by organizing a 100% successful pre-election civic strike to protest the vandalism and violence sponsored by the Zapatistas.