

Andean Report by Miguel Angel Piedra

A new border war?

A look at who is helping Colombia's narco-guerrillas' effort to trigger a border war between Colombia and Venezuela.

On February 26, a Colombian guerrilla squad attacked the border post at Cararabo on the Venezuelan side, and massacred eight marine infantrymen. In response, officials of the Venezuelan government blamed Colombian authorities for negligence in patrolling the area, and even asked for indemnification for the families of the victims.

Amid this climate of tension between the two countries, the secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party, Alejandro Peña Esclusa, issued a March 1 communiqué calling for an investigation into the possible participation of retired Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez in the Cararabo massacre. Peña Esclusa's call was read the next day on the leading television news station, Channel 2.

His statement charged that Chávez, a leader of the frustrated military coup against the Carlos Andrés Pérez government on Feb. 4, 1992, had participated only days earlier in several protest demonstrations near Cararabo against Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera's border development policies. Elements of the Colombian guerrilla movements were detected in those protests. Further, said Peña, "Chávez has been meeting repeatedly with the Colombian guerrillas . . . and last December, he was received like a head of state by Fidel Castro himself." Over the years, Castro has sponsored, trained, and financed Colombia's various guerrilla movements, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN).

On March 7, Chávez was ques-

tioned by reporters regarding Peña's statements. In response, Chávez avoided the question and instead demanded a military trial of President Caldera for failing to meet the needs of the border regions and, therefore, for responsibility for the massacre. This attitude toward Caldera "stands in contrast to Chávez's behavior toward Fidel Castro, whom Chávez calls 'my chief,'" said Peña the next day.

Chávez's diversionary tactic didn't work. On March 10, the Caracas daily *2001* reported on the front page that the attack on Cararabo was led by a Venezuelan lieutenant linked to Chávez named Francisco León, who had deserted the Venezuelan National Guard two years earlier to join the Colombian guerrillas. León took with him a large quantity of weapons.

"Commander Chávez Linked to ELN Guerrilla Group in Colombia," was the front-page headline of the Venezuelan daily *Ultimas Noticias* on March 13. Referring to a wire report from ANSA, datelined Bogotá, the article draws on information given by a high-level Colombian government official to the magazine *Cambio 16*, which notes that "according to information gathered by the Colombian authorities, Colonel Chávez has decided to focus his activities on the heated border area. . . . He has met with the ELN several times and this is considered a delicate matter."

Chávez responded, "This is absolutely false. It is a lie. My movement and I do everything in public." Asked where he thought these accusations

were coming from, Chávez said, "Surely from Colombian military intelligence, together with Venezuelan military intelligence which, like all military intelligence, always points at everything except what it should be pointing at."

One item worth pointing at is what the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional* reported on March 12, which is that Chávez had dined with British attaché Paul Webster Hare. *EIR* has extensively documented the role of the British in orchestrating border wars and in supporting Ibero-American guerrilla movements.

There has been a lot of talk about granting Venezuelan troops the right of "hot pursuit" to go after Colombian terrorist raiders. Aside from the unconstitutionality of such a move and the dangerous precedent it sets, it also represents a potential trigger for full-scale war should pursuing troops overstep their bounds, wittingly or otherwise. The fact remains that the only response to the narco-terrorism wreaking havoc on both sides of the border is for each country to mobilize and deploy its Armed Forces to do what they are constitutionally mandated to do: defend the national sovereignty and destroy the enemies of the nation.

In Colombia, that means ending the Samper government's absurd efforts to set up "peace talks" and "amnesties" for the rampaging kidnapers and assassins of the FARC and ELN, and launching an all-out drive to stop, arrest, and jail these criminals. In Venezuela, it is the political support apparatus for these terrorists which must be exposed and dismantled. The Caldera government took an important step in that direction on March 15, when it ordered the arrest of 30 Chávez supporters for plotting destabilization and a possible overthrow of the government.