

International Intelligence

Colombian Military Rescues FARC Hostages

Fifty Colombian Army soldiers invaded a mountain encampment of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and freed five kidnap victims, whom the FARC had held in the “demilitarized zone” that the government of President Andrés Pastrana had ceded to the narco-terrorists.

According to an Aug. 15 report in *El Tiempo*, the five, including 73-year-old journalist Guillermo Cortés, had been held for up to nine months. Cortés was unstinting in his praise for the rescuers, who had travelled by mule to bring the captives down the mountains to a town where military helicopters could pick them up. “This was a brilliant operation by the Army. I do believe in the Colombian Army,” he said.

The officer in charge of the rescue, Gen. Francisco Rene Pedraza, told the press that, until a few weeks ago, the hostages had been held in “FARClandia,” the so-called DMZ, which is off-limits to government forces, giving the lie to the FARC’s pretenses that they were not using the DMZ as a concentration camp for kidnap victims. Indeed, the FARC had denied kidnapping Cortés, despite intercepted phone calls in which FARC leaders discussed his ransom. Thus far, the government has chosen to accept the new lies from FARC leaders Manuel Marulanda and Raúl Reyes that they will “investigate” charges that kidnap victims are being held in the DMZ.

Putin To Cut Nuclear, Not Conventional Forces

President Vladimir Putin agreed to unilateral cuts in the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal, in favor of building up conventional forces, at the Aug. 11 meeting of the Russian Security Council. His decision marks a watershed in a two-year struggle between Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, a former head of the Strategic Rocket Force, and the politically ambitious Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Anatoli Kvashnin.

The *Washington Post* on Aug. 13 reported that the nuclear cuts will eventually

reduce the strategic missile arsenal to 1,500, largely through attrition of missiles that reach the end of their service life. The savings will be put toward the modernization of Russia’s conventional forces. Russia has a total defense budget of \$4.5 billion, two-thirds of which was being spent on the nuclear force.

EIR’s weekly European newsletter *Strategic Alert* on July 24, reported on the struggle, which broke into the open on July 12-13, when Russian news services quoted Sergeev denouncing Kvashnin’s plan for downgrading the strategic missile forces, as “psychotic,” and accusing Kvashnin of acting “like a NATO employee.” Kvashnin is regarded as a likely candidate to succeed Sergeev, and apparently has considerable support from Putin, with strategic issues determining Russia’s future as a world military power, at stake. The split, which observers say can end only in the departure of one or the other, comes amid uncertainty around U.S. intentions to deploy strategic anti-missile defenses, and possible Russian responses, which would involve major new investments.

At the center is economic policy: Although Putin supports the military industry and advanced research capabilities, the emphasis has been on boosting export earnings, rather than pushing armed forces modernization to fuel an internal economic revival, requiring a general mobilization of the civilian economy.

OAS’s Gaviria Threatens Peru with ‘Democracy’

Organization of American States General Secretary César Gaviria threatened to intervene as a “mediator” if the Peruvian government of Alberto Fujimori does not make concessions to the opposition headed by Alejandro Toledo. Peruvians voted heavily to return Fujimori to a third term on May 28, rejecting Toledo, and drawing the ire of the international “democracy” mafia. Gaviria, former President of Colombia, was in Peru in early August, along with former Dominican Republic Foreign Minister Eduardo La Torre, who will head the OAS’s “permanent” mission to Peru to pressure Fujimori

to get on with “democratization.”

At a Lima press conference on Aug. 9, Gaviria threatened, that should the government be found “intransigent,” the OAS would drop its role as “facilitator, and would have to mediate, make statements, and inform member countries.” Gaviria said that he agreed with the opposition that the government should have already moved toward adopting measures sought by the opposition, and he complained that the opposition’s interests had not been taken into account when Congressional committees were formed. The two held separate meetings with Fujimori; with Alejandro Toledo, and his immediate circle; and with a broader group of opposition leaders. The government presented a “chronogram” for dialogue on proposed institutional changes over the next three years; the opposition had its own, much shorter timeframe.

In between “facilitating” democracy, Gaviria absolved the organizers of a protest march on Inauguration Day, July 28, of the violence that left 6 dead, 420 injured, and extensive property damage in downtown Lima. In his press conference, Gaviria said that the OAS “presumes that the organizers of the march are innocent and free of any act of violence.”

Drought, Floods Starving Millions in Africa

Tens of thousands of people in Swaziland face starvation as the country’s food stocks have run out, after this year’s harvest was destroyed by flooding in February. An estimated 14,000 rural villagers have run out of food and thousands more are at risk unless the country receives at least 23,000 tons of maize to offset deficits caused by floods earlier in the year, the Swaziland Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives said on Aug. 10. African Eye News Service reported that Swaziland’s national maize production was 71,000 metric tons—a 37% drop from the previous year’s output.

In neighboring Mozambique, 40,000 people in the central province of Sofala, where farmers have lost almost all of the second planting season, face starvation, a government spokesman said on Aug. 12.

FOUR BASQUE terrorists from ETA were “honored” at a rally of 10,000 people in Bilbao on Aug. 13, a week after the car in which they were transporting explosives blew up, killing all four. Spanish press rained down criticism on the regional government run by the “moderate” Basque National Party (PNV), which had permitted the rally to occur.

MEXICAN President-elect Vicente Fox has been exposed for using at least 30 children, at \$7 a day, to work his ranch in Guanajuato, according to the Aug. 13 daily *Reforma*. The Constitution prohibits children younger than 14 from working, and those from 14-16 can only work six hours a day. The children on Fox’s ranch worked eight-hour days, as seasonal labor with no benefits. Fox, who spent the Aug. 12-13 weekend on the ranch, could not be reached for comment.

THE NATO KFOR mission in Kosovo shut down a Serbian-owned mining and smelting complex near Mitrovica on Aug. 14, under the pretext that it was environmentally unsafe. The shutdown takes place, pending the facility’s reconstruction under NATO-UN control—an ambitious undertaking, considering the dearth of reconstruction efforts anywhere in the Balkans.

THE COLOMBIAN narco-terrorist National Liberation Army (ELN) seized 25 biodiversity researchers on Aug. 14, part of their actions against U.S. President Clinton’s planned visit on Aug. 30. The researchers were interrogated and released. Other ELN actions have included destroying energy towers, burning city buses, and blocking highways.

RUSSIA’S Foreign Ministry called the U.S.-British Aug. 12-13 bombings of Iraq a “violation of international law” on Aug. 15. The strikes against the southern city of Samawa killed several civilians, destroyed residential areas, and depots of food imported under the UN oil-for-food arrangements.

Chemba’s district administrator Francisco Natal said peasants had planted in the expectation of good rains. To alleviate the food shortage threat, the authorities have advised the farmers against selling their last harvest to Malawi, and also to plant drought-resistant crops, such as sweet potatoes and cassava, but that “the hippopotamus also attacked these crops.”

In Kenya, more than 3 million face starvation from drought, because, say aid agencies, the international community has turned a deaf ear to urgent appeals for food. The UN World Food Program and the Kenyan government had requested \$88 million to cover July through December. But, according to the aid agency Oxfam, only a third of the requirements have been met: “There is a serious shortfall for August. There is neither the food nor money for us to meet the huge needs we face in the worst affected areas. We can’t wait until this crisis becomes a catastrophe; we have to act now,” a spokesman said.

It was only after the February floods had killed thousands in Mozambique, that similar callousness from “international donors” became sufficiently embarrassing for aid to be forthcoming.

Sri Lanka’s Bandaranaike Quits as Prime Minister

Sri Lanka’s elder statesman, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, resigned from her largely ceremonial post on Aug. 10, presumably because of her age and poor health. However, there is some suspicion that her departure was orchestrated by her daughter, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who seems to be propitiating the powerful ethnic Sinhala chauvinists, who oppose reforms benefitting the Tamils, which would undermine the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorists.

Kumaratunga picked Minister for Public Administration and Plantation Industries Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, as her new Prime Minister. Wickramanayake is close to the Sinhala chauvinists, and made his first statement by addressing the Parliament in Sinhalese.

On Aug. 11, one of Sri Lanka’s most

powerful Buddhist leaders, Venerable Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi, urged all groups to forge a united front and prevent any government attempt to re-introduce a “most injurious” Constitutional reform bill in Parliament. The reforms, which include granting Tamils citizenship, would devolve power to the regions, one of which could be administered by the Tamils. The fierce opposition to the reforms of Sri Vipassi, who heads one of the four principal Buddhist sects, was a key factor in Colombo’s decision to shelve an Aug. 15 Parliamentary vote on the issue.

Concorde Investigators Scrutinize Metal Strip

The civil commission investigating the reasons behind the July 25 crash of an Air France Concorde jet, has been working to discover where a 40 centimeter metal strip, found 1,600 meters from where the jet took off shortly before it crashed, came from. The commission, working under the Transport Ministry and deploying 40 police officials, has ordered a list of all planes and servicing vehicles that had been on the runway in the four hours before the crash, according to reports in the Paris press on Aug. 10. It is known that the metal strip did not come from the Concorde itself.

According to BBC reports on Aug. 15, the Civil Aviation Authority in Britain has now ordered the grounding of the British Airways Concorde fleet, until the safety of the tires, which have exploded on takeoff in the past, and are under suspicion in the Air France crash, can be determined.

The British magazine *New Scientist* includes an article on a 1998 report on the Concorde engines by BMT Reliability Consultants of Fareham, commissioned by British Airways. France’s *Le Figaro* reported on Aug. 10 that the study defines the risk levels from negligible to catastrophic, and, of the 152 types of risks, they identify 55 as serious. “We must remain prudent,” stated an expert assigned by the French Justice Ministry to the crash investigation. “While well documented, the report does not change anything. . . . We are not working at this point on the engine problems.”