
Colombia

Military rejects capitulation to M-19

by Valerie Rush

The political class in Colombia is currently engaged in a "dialogue" extravaganza with the same narco-terrorists whose tactics of ambush, sabotage, kidnaping, and assassination have made that nation nearly ungovernable. While the population has watched in stunned silence, leading representatives of nearly every major business federation, trade union, political party, and even the Catholic Church in Colombia have traipsed off to Panama City, where the M-19 terrorists—the authors of the kidnaping of former Conservative Party presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado—are holding court.

The M-19's condition for Gómez's release, a July 29 Church-sponsored "peace summit" of all representative sectors in Colombia, was the subject of the July 14 Panama negotiations, and fully agreed to by all participants. Gómez was released to his family the night of July 20, and the government is now being urged to guarantee the security of his kidnapers at the July 29 summit—at which the M-19's chieftains would personally dictate the terms of Colombia's new political and social "reforms."

Just one day before the Panama charade, Colombian Defense Minister Gen. Rafael Samudio Molina declared that as long as the environment of war in his country continued, "there can be no dialogue" with the narco-terrorist guerrillas. He was speaking during a tour of military facilities in Medellín, headquarters of the counterinsurgent IV Army Brigade which had suffered a loss of 15 soldiers in a guerrilla ambush just days earlier.

Despite its initial readiness to join the M-19's orchestrated negotiations in Panama City, the government of President Virgilio Barco got the military's message and backed off, refusing to send a representative. The terrorists immediately gave a press conference denouncing the government's refusal to "dialogue" as an act of "illegitimacy" and insisting that the *real* government consisted of those gathered in Panama. A media poll of Colombian politicians accusing the defense minister of endangering the life of the kidnap victim was published. Then, the Panama "dialogue" participants issued a communiqué urging the government's participation.

The Barco government issued its own communiqué on July 15 expressing "satisfaction" with the results of the Panama talks, and adding that its eventual participation in the "national salvation summit" would have as a prerequisite "a climate free of pressures." In other words, that Gómez Hur-

tado be released before that date.

That same day, the military issued its second warning to the government, this time from Armed Forces Commander Gen. Jaime Manuel Guerrero Paz, who told reporters, "There can be no dialogue with blackmailers." General Guerrero Paz rejected the July 29 summit concession, saying "My God! Asking favors from the M-19! We are going to ask them the favor of dialoguing with us in order to let Alvaro Gómez Hurtado go? From the moment they took Gómez hostage, dialogue was wrong." He added that the last time the government had tried a truce and dialogue with subversion, the military had paid the price in lives lost to a refreshed and re-equipped guerrilla army.

General Guerrero also told journalists that if the M-19 leaders entered Colombian territory to participate in the summit, those with outstanding arrest warrants against them would be detained. "Against anyone for whom there is a conviction or arrest warrant, the laws, penal codes, and Constitution indicate the direction to follow." The general pointedly remarked, "We [the armed forces] follow the dictates of the nation's ruler, who has asserted that he will act within the confines of the Constitution."

On July 18, the daily *El Tiempo* reported that a Bogotá judge had issued warrants for the arrest of the M-19's three top leaders, using the appearance of their signatures on the document issued in Panama promising Alvaro Gómez's release as *prima facie* evidence of their "intellectual authorship" of the kidnaping. The next day, both the judge and the Attorney General of Colombia issued denials that the arrest warrants existed.

Former President speaks out

Thus far, the only resistance to this narco-terrorist takeover bid—apart from the military itself—has been expressed by former Colombian President and critic of the Barco government Carlos Lleras Restrepo. The octagenarian Lleras wrote an editorial for his weekly magazine *Nueva Frontera*, denouncing the "dialogue" with the kidnapers as "more like the haggling over ransom payment." Lleras denounced those who met with the M-19 in Panama as a bunch of "clerics, guerrillas, resuscitated leftists, and a few rebel Conservatives," along with a handful of "political prostitutes," known as "lizards" in Colombia. He questioned how such an "arbitrarily constituted group" can purport to replace the government.

One such "lizard" is journalist Antonio Caballero, who was recalled from Spain by his M-19 friends to initiate the negotiation process over Gómez's release. In an article in the Colombian weekly *Semana* appearing July 19, Caballero said that the M-19 was justified in its efforts "to achieve the peace through an act of war." He added, "At issue is not Alvaro Gómez's life, but his works. Gómez has . . . probably been the principal intellectual promoter of political violence." In a later "clarification," Caballero denied that he was an M-19 member.