

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Terrorists play yo-yo with Barco

Colombia's narco-guerrillas have the government mired in peace talks while building up their armies for a takeover.

Colombia's drug-running terrorists are pursuing a twofold strategy to lead to seizure of power. On the one hand, Moscow's irregulars hope to keep Colombia's political and military institutions disarmed through vaguely formulated offers of truces, cease-fires, and "dialogue" with the Barco government. At the same time, terrorist actions eat away at the country's defenses and economy, sowing cynicism and despair.

The vital Covénas oil port and pipeline terminus on Colombia's Atlantic Coast was hit June 16 by National Liberation Army (ELN) terrorists, destroying the pumping and weighing stations and nearly blowing up 1 million barrels of stored oil. Oil exports from Colombia were suspended for a month and national production fell 50% as a result of the attack. Fuel prices were raised 10% nationwide, the second price hike this year, in an attempt to recover over \$100 million in damages to Covénas. Mines and Energy Minister Oscar Vallejo Mejía revealed June 25 that several years of ELN dynamite attacks on the Covénas-Caño Limón pipeline have led to the loss of 420,000 barrels of oil, more than double that spilled in the Prince William Sound, Alaska, and nearly \$50 million in damages to state oil company facilities.

Nonetheless, Comptroller Rodolfo González held a press conference June 25 to demand a "dialogue" with the ELN on its proposal to nationalize the oil industry. Repeating the ELN's arguments that the oil multinationals are looting Colombia, González argued: "If there is an action by an in-

surgent group which is proposing some political alternatives, why not talk, why not have dialogue, why not see if it is true that their proposals will tend to improve the country's profits from oil?"

The Barco government has just given radio-telecommunications equipment to the narco-terrorist M-19 guerrillas, to give them direct access to the office of the presidency in the event "unauthorized" army combat with M-19 commandos should take place. It was the M-19 that carried out the bloody 1985 siege of the Colombian Justice Palace in which 100 died, including half the Supreme Court magistrates. Yet Virgilio Barco's administration, in its zeal to hold "peace talks" with its enemies, has pardoned the M-19 for that mafia-financed slaughter.

The latest M-19 "concession" in the peace talks has been its offer to dismantle its numerous fronts—but it still refuses to hand over its weapons! In a June 12 meeting with the President's peace adviser, M-19 chieftain Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez insisted that retaining their weapons should not pose any problems, since "weapons don't fire themselves. What is important is that there be the political will by both parties to respect the [truce] agreements."

Not everyone is as easily gulled as President Barco and his "advisers." The Public Order Tribunal has just upheld a lower court order for the M-19 national leadership to stand trial for the 1988 kidnaping of ex-presidential candidate Alvaro Gómez Hurtado and the murder of his bodyguard. It re-

mains to be seen if Barco will invoke executive privilege to cancel the arrest warrants and risk a showdown with the judiciary.

While the M-19 has the government mired in an illusory "peace process," its colleagues in the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Body are forging a parallel government intended ultimately to replace the constitutional government. Denouncing the M-19's "treason" for entering into official dialogue with the Barco regime, the Moscow-run FARC guerrillas are holding their own peace talks with a so-called Commission of Notables including the head of the industrialists' association Fabio Echeverri Correa; Archbishop Dario Castrillón; and prominent newspaper editor Hernando Santos.

On June 7, M-19 leader Pizarro revealed that he would meet with Colombian Communist Party chief Gilberto Vieira—Moscow's conduit for orders to the FARC—to discuss their differences in strategy. By promoting the illusory split, the M-19 and FARC are playing the Barco government like a yo-yo, winning time for their own strategies while blocking the formulation of a winning plan by the government.

Many private citizens—despairing of any serious counterinsurgency plan to come from the presidency—have begun holding private talks with terrorists. The practice of striking local deals with the rebels has apparently become so widespread that on June 15, Interior Minister Raúl Orejuela Bueno put out an official disclaimer to all state governors, warning that "the government . . . neither supports, nor endorses, nor guarantees agreements or commitments between guerrillas and non-governmental sectors that are not inscribed within the conditions established for dialogue with the guerrillas."