

# Can Venezuela stay free of terrorism?

by Dennis Small

Venezuela today is a virtual island of calm in a region of the world wracked by left and right terrorism of every description. Security specialists in that country describe the level of political violence as nothing worse than "background noise": an occasional guerrilla raid on a remote National Guard post; a bank robbery every now and then; periodic meetings of the "revolutionary left" which are moderately attended and emphatically uninspiring.

But the calm is deceptive. Venezuela in fact harbors some of the world's most dangerous terrorist groupings, of both the right and the left, who use that country as a kind of "rest and relaxation center" for their top cadre. Venezuela is a place where these groups *plan out* rather than execute their international terrorist activities. In this way the country is much like Switzerland in Europe, or Uruguay in South America.

One example of this is the Basque separatist group **ETA**, whose single largest foreign concentration is in Venezuela. Dozens of ETA cadre roam the streets of Caracas freely, meet among themselves to discuss their activities back home, and use their host country as a place to meet representatives of other foreign terrorist groups and their financial and political backers. Venezuelan security authorities claim that they closely monitor the ETA activists in their country and keep them on a tight leash, but Spanish authorities are displeased at this arrangement.

Right-wing Cuban exiles linked to the terrorist **Alpha 66** and **Omega 7** also use Venezuela as a base of operations. The infamous 1976 bombing of a Cubana airlines plane, which killed over 70 people, was reportedly plotted and coordinated out of Caracas. Venezuela has become home to tens of thousands of Cuban exiles who left their country after the 1959 Castro revolution.

Perhaps most significant are the activities of the Libyans and associated Arab radical groups. In November 1981, a major public event was held in Venezuela in honor of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and his revolutionary "Green Book." The event brought together over 600 individuals representing Venezuela's left, the Palestine Liberation Organization, American black separatists, the Polish Solidarity Union, Namibian liberation forces,

Salvadoran guerrillas, and bearded mullahs—not to mention less-known groupings like the Canary Islands Liberation Movement and Capuchin priests from the island of Malta.

The event was presided over by Qaddafi representatives **Abdel Hamid Faraj Mansur** and **Jalah Ibrahim Musa Ibrahim Nasser**; by **Jesús Pérez** of Venezuela's MAS party; and by **Luis Alberto Farías**, a sociologist who is a leader of the ultra-left Venezuelan Revolutionary Party. A central topic of discussion was the cooperation of revolutionary activities in the Arab world and Central America.

Reliable Venezuelan sources told *EIR* that they have detected a broader pickup in Libyan-led activities in Venezuela over recent months, focused on establishing contacts among the Venezuelan left and winning supporters to their cause. The Lebanese Christian **Kapchi brothers** were identified as an important logistical capability in this effort, since they operate a "travel agency," provide legal services, and help print radical Arab literature in Venezuela.

Another angle currently under investigation concerns the **Banco del Caribe** and its founder and president, **N. D. Dao**. Dao is a Lebanese immigrant, and his bank is affiliated to the Byblos Bank Sal of Lebanon, whose president is Camille Chamoun.

Although Venezuela has served as a staging ground for international terrorist activities for some time, this function has increased markedly in the three years that Luis Herrera Campins has been President. His predecessor Carlos Andrés Pérez had declared open warfare against the country's terrorist groups and outlawed them, but the more conservative Herrera government, ironically, declared an amnesty for all the groups that Pérez had banned. Herrera reportedly reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with the leftists that he would declare amnesty for them and give them some elbow room, so long as they didn't engage in domestic terrorist activities against his administration.

There are indications that this deal is now being broken by the terrorists. Earlier this year, a group of highly skilled but unknown terrorists simultaneously hijacked three Venezuelan airplanes and flew them to Cuba. Venezuelan security authorities are perplexed and alarmed at this development: they don't know who ran the operation, and it certainly was not on the agenda as part of their "gentlemen's agreement."

U.S. sources have also told *EIR* to expect a wave of urban terrorism in Venezuela, unlike any seen there in the recent period. Mexican sources confirmed this prediction, adding that the purpose of the terror wave would be to keep Venezuelan President Herrera Campins "in line," lest he adopt a Central American policy at odds with that being carried out by U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig.