

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Narco-terrorists push Colombian chaos

They are trying to set up Colombia's Betancur for a military backlash against his peace program.

The Gnostic-cult guerrilla forces of the April 19 Movement (M-19) have joined with the self-confessed Nazi cocaine trafficker, Carlos Lehder, in a series of terrorist assaults against military personnel and installations across Colombia. The latest guerrilla action was an assassination attempt against Colombian Armed Forces Commander Gen. Rafael Samudio Molina.

The intention is to drive the harried patriotic majority of the armed forces into alliance with a tiny Gnostic faction of the military working in collaboration with the narco-terrorists to destabilize the Betancur government and destroy his determined efforts to pacify violence-torn rural regions.

The attack on General Molina, sources say, was in fact a kidnap attempt, whereby the guerrillas hoped to trap President Betancur into negotiations for the general's release. The guerrillas hoped to ensnare Betancur now into a granting of amnesty to the country's drug mafia that former President López Michelsen was unable to pull off last year. The added element, of course, would be an enraged military ready to be driven to extremes by pro-coup elements in its midst.

Thus the statements of General Molina, upon leaving the hospital, served as an important balm for aroused military tempers. He said, "We are going to analyze this challenge from the M-19. . . . The analysis must be calm, because we are a public force. We are not a group of common criminals. We are a professional army.

The attempted kidnap/murder of

General Molina Oct. 23 was but the latest outrage committed by the well-armed narco-guerrillas. Only days earlier, a combined 100-man guerrilla commando made up of the M-19, the Ricardo Franco Front, and the Quintin Lame Brigade launched a rocket attack on the army barracks of the city of Armenia.

The newly formed Quintin Lame Brigade is the terrorist arm of fugitive cocaine king Carlos Lehder. Armenia, the capital city of Quindio province, is Lehder's hometown and the center of operations for his above-ground political front, the Latin Civic Movement.

The Armenia attack, which scandalized the country for its brazenness, itself followed on the heels of an earlier 300-man combined guerrilla assault on the southwestern city of Miranda, which terrorized its 15,000 inhabitants for hours. Bloody ambushes of both military and police patrols have become regular occurrences in many parts of the country, and at least four soldiers are currently held captive by the M-19. Rubbing salt in the military's wounds, the M-19 is requesting that negotiations for the soldiers' release include someone from the defense ministry. Gen. Vega Uribe responded bluntly, "We don't negotiate with criminals!"

The situation has become sufficiently volatile that two former defense ministers, both fired for insubordination to their Presidents, were able to hold a highly publicized roundtable discussion in which they denounced "the politicians" for creating

disorder in the country, and virtually called for a coup.

Gen. Fernando Landazábal, who was forcibly retired by Betancur for opposing his peace initiatives, furiously denounced the truce agreement as "the greatest deception in the history of the country." He went on to denounce the constitutional prohibition on military involvement in policy deliberation, as invoked by Betancur, for "creating an army of slaves," and the ready charge of "communist" was thrown at Betancur's administration for "denying freedom of thought" to the armed forces.

The anti-Betancur newspaper *El Tiempo* devoted its letters column Sept. 25 to a commentary by the head of the Association of Retired Military Officers, Manuel Riveros, in which the country's reservists are called upon to "group yourselves regionally and prepare to back the military institutions." Riveros attacks a situation in which "the guerrilla puts conditions to the government, such as demands for . . . amnesty and truce . . ." and demands that the country "turn around the compass so that it points again in the right direction. . . . The fatherland needs us, and we pledge to defend it to the death."

All this, amid growing popular discontent with the austerity program dictated by the International Monetary Fund and imposed without a murmur by the Betancur administration—not only without a murmur, but proudly, with the twisted logic that the "adjustments" are self-imposed and therefore acceptable.

As long as the 14% official unemployment rate—the result of severe decapitalization of the Colombian economy—continues to climb, the President will not only finish his last year in office as a very lame "lame duck," but may lose the nation in the process.