

Andean Report by Valerie Rush

Military challenges Barco

Colombia's anti-drug military insists, "You don't defeat the enemy with dialogue, but with courage."

The anti-drug forces inside the Colombian military which are running ongoing anti-drug raids in that country have now directly challenged the Barco government's policy of "narco-tolerance."

Less than a month ago, President Virgilio Barco guardedly told the media that he opposed "direct dialogue" with the cocaine kingpins, after his own attorney general came out for amnesty negotiations with the narcos and legalization of the drug trade. Yet Barco never denounced, much less fired, Attorney General Alfredo Márquez Gutiérrez. It took the military to turn up sufficient evidence against Márquez to force his March 23 resignation. At a subsequent press conference, Márquez admitted to longstanding connections to the mob.

In March 2 statements to the media, Defense Minister Gen. Manuel J. Guerrero Paz declared that the military absolutely opposes any form of dialogue—with the drug traffickers or with the terrorist groups with whom they have allied. "Moral principles that have reigned in Colombia do not permit dialogue with certain groups," he said, "because they have truly distanced themselves from any moral concept. I believe that dialogue is not the path to solving this problem. We must confront the threat with courage, decision, and commitment."

The defense minister also referred to the government's ongoing policy of dialogue with the country's narco-terrorist groups: "Dialogue with the guerrillas has been fruitless. . . . I am a friend of dialogue, but only when it is frank and sincere. What sincerity

can a drug trafficker offer when he sits down to dialogue?" It was no accident that the military's first raids on the Medellín Cartel properties last month were actually conducted in pursuit of M-19 terrorists, reported to be conspiring with the narcos on a new terror plot.

General Jaime Ruiz Barrera, the commander of the Medellín-based IV Army Brigade which has been on the front lines in the war with the Medellín Cartel, has given a series of press conferences in recent weeks which have made public a small fraction of the evidence that military intelligence is collecting against mafia-corrupted elements within political and business layers. Exemplary is one revelation from confiscated documents and tape recordings of the existence of a Cartel spy in the attorney general's office. Other evidence revealed also implicated former national tax director Alba Lucía Orozco de Triana in taking mob bribes.

Numerous other initials of individuals working with the mob have turned up in those documents. Gen. Ruiz Barrera has told the media that those names are now fully known to military intelligence, but are not ready for release. There can be little doubt that the military would not hesitate to release those names, should the Barco administration try to "legally" pull the rug out from under their anti-drug operations.

General Ruiz also reported that at least 61 military raids were carried out in Medellín in the last week of March, with 331 arrested and vast arsenals seized. In addition to uncovering the

names of government infiltrators, business collaborators, and military spies working for the Cartel, evidence of the Cartel's real estate manipulations over the past 10 years are now also coming to light. The use of vast estates as covert airstrips for trafficking operations were disguised by the mafia with multiple title transfers over years.

Forewarned that the Medellín Cartel has hired 15 lawyers to lodge human rights violations complaints against the military, the Defense Ministry has preemptively sponsored its first human rights seminar at the Nueva Granada military university, at which the president, attorney general's office, and Church are represented—in addition to the armed forces.

The military's refusal to be distracted from its anti-drug offensive is generating widespread nervousness—and threats—from the "citizens above suspicion" who run political cover for the drug mafia. Among them, no doubt, is former Colombian president Alfonso López Michelsen, who held secret amnesty negotiations with the infamous Medellín Cartel of cocaine traffickers back in 1984, just after the mafia assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. López was later discovered to have accepted campaign contributions from Cartel leaders like Carlos Lehder, currently on trial in Florida.

It was, not surprisingly, the López Michelsen-linked daily *El Tiempo*, which offered grudging admiration for Gen. Ruiz Barrera in its March 3 editorial. Describing the general as a "Rambo," the editorial continues: "Without truce, the general pursues the narcos, and no one can deny that this fight is one of life or death—and more of death for those who confront the drug trade. The general knows the risks."