

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

Venezuelan military under attack

The same "Factor X" which forced out the anti-drug justice minister is now targeting the defense minister.

Right after Venezuelan Justice Minister José Manzo González was forced to resign March 28, José Vicente Rangel, a leftist member of what the press calls "Factor X," accused the Venezuelan armed forces of "corruption." Rangel demanded that Defense Minister Eliodoro Guerrero Gómez resign.

The attack is no coincidence. Manzo waged war against narco-terrorism in Venezuela; and the defense minister has distinguished himself in the battle against narco-terrorist armies along the Colombian-Venezuelan border and in his willingness to collaborate with the Colombian armed forces against that common enemy.

Rangel and "Factor X," on the other hand, are acting upon Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams' overt commitment to weaken all national defense institutions in Ibero-America, on the pretext that effective military forces somehow threaten "democracy" in the region. The "Factor X" mysteriously spoken of in Venezuela's press turns out to be the local outpost of the State Department Socialists' "Project Democracy."

The undermining of Venezuela's institutions also seems related to that country's large-scale role in laundering billions of dollars of narcotics money, a role increased since Gen. Manuel Noriega put the crimp on Dope, Inc.'s money-laundering in Panama two years ago.

Politician Rangel may have really exposed himself when he proclaimed that narcotics traffickers were financing election campaigns. Although

Rangel offered no evidence, others revealed facts suggesting that the presidential candidates of the two major parties, Carlos Andrés Pérez and Eduardo Fernández, both might be linked to international drug trafficking.

Since Manzo's resignation, there has been silence on this matter.

Rangel has to "put up or shut up" on his accusations against the military. Interior Minister José Ángel Ciliberto, who is serving as acting President, issued a communiqué ordering the defense minister to have the Military Intelligence Directorate (DIM) call in Rangel to see whatever evidence he may have for his charges.

Rangel is angry that he has been brought into the DIM twice for interrogation. Acting President Ciliberto mused to the press that Rangel himself might be who ends up "destabilized."

The same people who helped Rangel undermine Justice Minister Manzo are trying to help him escape the noose he has now tied for himself. Ex-President Carlos Andrés Pérez declared, "We can't allow the military question to be taboo; nor can military secrecy be a pretext [to deny] a citizen's right to denounce anything he considers improper." He added, "It seems to me that a trial of Dr. Rangel would be an exaggeration."

Others defending Rangel include former Venezuelan ambassador to the Organization of American States, Hilarión Cardozo, and president of the Democratic Action Party, Gonzalo Barrios.

Rangel, buoyed by such support, went on the television program run by

another of the visible heads of "Factor X," Marcel Granier. On the air, the two mocked the military chiefs. They even predicted, ostensibly in a joking tone, that there would be a change of government in December.

This was their way of insinuating that the military was plotting a coup against Venezuela's elected government.

Rangel claimed on television that the military wanted to "bludgeon" him into submission. He puffed that, if they wanted to court martial him, "or imprison me, go ahead." He claimed that he was not afraid, since he had been "educated in the risks of freedom."

In reality, Rangel, whose daughter Gisela is the lawyer for a jailed top drug trafficker, was educated as the "political arm" of the Venezuelan guerrillas of the 1960s. And, it is said, he conduited Cuban money to them.

More recently, Rangel has devoted himself to protecting the Colombian narco-terrorists and sabotaging all attempts by Colombian and Venezuelan armed forces to collaborate against them.

He has been helped in this by "Factor X's" press outlets. On March 30, *El Diario de Caracas*, the paper owned by Marcel Granier's father-in-law, published an interview with "Comandante Arturo," the chief of Colombia's narco-terrorist National Liberation Army (ELN) forces operating in the border zone. The ELN was created and trained in Cuba, and has enjoyed financing from Soviet agent Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum.

Said "Arturo," "We want you to tell the Venezuelan government to stop participating in Colombia's internal affairs," by giving the Colombian military support. He added that if Venezuela keeps it up, the ELN will once again attack "your border protection bases."