

Argentine military resistance boosts regional security

by Robyn Quijano

Argentina's Col. Mohamed Ali Seineldín, the legendary hero of the 1982 Malvinas War, took military action on the morning of Dec. 2 to save his nation's armed forces as an institution capable of resisting the Moscow-inspired communist onslaught plaguing Ibero-America.

A 96-hour action led by Colonel Seineldín accomplished the restructuring of the military, thereby stalling the destruction of Ibero-America's military forces. This is a blow to the U.S. State Department and its Soviet counterparts, who have a behind-the-scenes deal to dismantle the military capabilities of Ibero-American nations. Ibero-America's military defenses are being torn apart, under pressure from Russian-spawned narco-terrorist guerrillas on one side, and the U.S. bankers' "Project Democracy" apparatus, which uses human rights organizations to bludgeon the armed forces, on the other. Ibero-American governments, one by one, are being pressured to surrender to the subversives' "right" to take over the continent.

Military forces in Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru have been under double assault, from Amnesty International and the international "human rights" lobby, and narco-terrorist guerrillas. The narco-terrorists, armed with high-technology weapons they buy with the millions they get in protection money from the drug mob, have a war plan to seize control of the entire Andean region by 1992. Should the communists gain control of the Andean Spine, they could soon dominate the entire continent. The Ibero-American debt crisis has led to budget cuts in already meager defense expenditures, leaving the armed forces out-gunned by the narco-terrorists.

Seineldín's demands

Argentina's President Raúl Alfonsín had insisted at least three times during the four-day action, that the "rebels" had "surrendered." In fact, there was no surrender, nor any danger of the military coup hyped by the media. Colonel Seineldín took over the large military garrison at Campo de Mayo on Dec. 2, and 14 units around the country rallied to his call to save the army from the assault it



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A riot scene at the National University in Bogotá, Colombia last July; such prolonged student riots feature in the Soviet irregular warfare scenario for carrying out a "Tet Offensive" and capturing control of the country, while the armed forces are steadily undermined.

had been under since Alfonsín took office in 1983.

Colonel Seineldín had stated that his actions do not threaten democracy, but are a military matter. His demands, backed by majority sections of the army, which refused to repress the action, included the restoration of the military budget, an increase in military wages, and amnesty for jailed officers. Officers have been jailed by the Alfonsín government for fighting subversion, for rebellion, and even for having fought the Malvinas War to retake part of their national territory from British usurpation. Chief of Staff General José Dante Caridi had rubber-stamped the near-dismemberment of the army.

When President Alfonsín demanded that General Caridi refuse to negotiate, and repress Seineldín's troops, army units refused. In Córdoba, the 4th Army Airborne Division, with 50 planes, was ordered to move in on Seineldín. The commander, Gen. Adolfo Patricio Etcheun, responded, "Seineldín's ideals are the same as the whole army's."

After the entire army adopted Seineldín's demands as their own, an agreement was reached: Both General Caridi and Colonel Seineldín will resign, and the new army chief of staff will be a general agreeable to the nationalists.

The commander-in-chief, President Alfonsín, in effect found himself with no military force willing to follow his orders. Whatever he tries to say at this point, the people of Argentina realize that Colonel Seineldín forced the President to call off the dismantling of the army.

On Dec. 6, President Alfonsín still insisted that no deals had been made. But political observers agree the army is

united behind Colonel Seineldín's demands, and a deal was Alfonsín's only choice.

Seineldín announced on Dec. 5 that he had dropped the demand for amnesty for all officers because it could cause a constitutional crisis. "We know that on this subject the government is inflexible and that demanding it could break the constitutional system, and we don't want that to happen," he said. "Those who know me know I am not a coup-maker. I can't say the same for the generals who would like to repress me," said Seineldín.

He said that as part of his agreement with General Caridi, he took "full responsibility" for the action. The colonel agreed to be court-martialed, but will not face a civilian court, and the troops and officers who followed him will not be punished.

As of Dec. 9, Colonel Seineldín was in the Palermos barracks in the center of Buenos Aires, under the guard of the Patricios Infantry Regiment, which had backed him throughout the action. According to the *Financial Times* of London, "It is understood that he is far from under lock and key at the barracks, and that Colonel Seineldín has received a number of retired senior army officers. . . . The ranks of some units previously thought loyal to the government have turned towards Colonel Seineldín, including the Grenadiers who traditionally guard the presidential palace."

The strong backing Seineldín enjoys among the lower level officers, and the respect among key generals for his demands, makes it dangerous for him to be martyred. The colonel enjoys a reputation for bravery, and morality.

Seineldín has become a legend because of his heroic actions during the Malvinas War. He is a devout Roman Catholic who rallied his soldiers with the battle cry, "God and the fatherland or death."

The commando units he trained and led, suffered the fewest casualties, and inflicted the most on the British. This success was partly due to Seineldín's mining his own rear flank. Other stories of the colonel's capabilities have already made it into the history books. The most famous is on the subject of "Operation Rosary."

The invasion of the Malvinas took place as winter set in. The Argentine landing vessels were being battered in a South Atlantic storm, troops were in danger of drowning, and it looked like the capture of the islands was going to end in disaster before it even began.

At that point, then Lt. Colonel Seineldín approached the fleet commander and insisted that the only way to save the operation was to dedicate it to the Virgin Mary. The fleet commander accepted his proposal, and renamed the landing "Operation Rosary." A Reuters wire of Dec. 3, 1988 reports the story from a history of the Malvinas War: "On one occasion he led his men in prayers to the Virgin Mary to calm a storm as they sailed to take up their posts in the Falklands. The storm was said to have abated almost immediately."

Perhaps that is why, when President Alfonsín gave orders to army chief of staff, Gen. José Dante Caridi, to "suffocate" the rebellion immediately, the chief replied, "So I have to fight?"

Seineldín came out of the disastrous Malvinas campaign as virtually the only Argentine officer recognized as a hero. But he was seen as a threat to the plans to dismantle the armed forces slated to be carried out by President Raúl Alfonsín, a Socialist International-linked politician.

So the colonel was assigned to what was considered a backwater posting, Panama, first as military attaché, and later as adviser to Panama's Defense Forces (PDF), at the request of PDF commander, Gen. Manuel Noriega. There, Seineldín helped the Panamanians create their first military academy to train their own officers, and helped train their commandos and special forces. He taught his trainees by example. For his services to the PDF, General Noriega personally pinned a silver medal on Seineldín Nov. 23.

Army refuses to repress rebellion

General Caridi, who has allowed the army to be nearly destroyed under Alfonsín's government, was unable to mobilize a counteroffensive to Seineldín's action from within the army. There was even a move to use federal police against the military, demonstrating the inability of the government to mobilize the armed forces.

Long after Caridi was sent by Alfonsín to put down the rebellion, nine trucks and tanks filled with troops loyal to Colonel Seineldín, left the infantry school at Campo de Mayo, and drove to Villa Marteli, a logistics base and munitions

depot closer to Buenos Aires. Seineldín himself led the taking of the base without a shot. Campo de Mayo was supposed to have been surrounded by government troops by then, but no effort was made to stop the colonel.

According to Reuters, rebel commandos left by Seineldín to hold the infantry school inside the Campo de Mayo complex, said they were prepared to fight to the death and would avenge their leader, if he were killed. "If Seineldín dies, we will effect special operations until everyone who opposes the colonel is assassinated," an officer who identified himself as Captain Brum told reporters.

Seineldín has declared that his men are not in reality the rebels, but the patriotic forces reestablishing respect for the army. The colonel, who was scheduled for promotion to general, was passed over two weeks before, as were all of the nationalist officers. Most of the Argentine high command was filled with liberal monetarist generals, who will threaten any incoming President bent on imposing a nationalist economic policy.

Caridi had personally vetoed Seineldín's promotion to the rank of brigadier-general, for accusing the high command of failing to uphold the honor of the army.

Alfonsín concedes

Hoping the nation would forget that he ordered General Caridi to crush the rebellion at any cost, Alfonsín admitted on Dec. 8 that a dialogue between "rebel" and "loyal" troops was better than a battle, which would have produced "hundreds of deaths." Alfonsín also made a conciliatory reference to the war against subversion: "It is true that there was a fight that was almost a war . . . that was necessary to recover the institutions of the nation."

In an attack aimed at Seineldín, Alfonsín said that he rejects "fundamentalist or messianic" solutions, but he went on to acknowledge the problem of low budgets and low salaries in the military. He blamed the economic crisis for the unhappiness in the military. Anxieties exist within the military that "only a fool could ignore," said Alfonsín. However, the President chose to ignore that the economic crisis has worsened because of his policy of capitulation to foreign bankers and the International Monetary Fund. The President promised that "within the framework of economic penury," faced by all Argentinians, he will seek improvements for the military.

All of this was seen as a way of meeting the demands of Colonel Seineldín while saving face. But it is clear that, if Alfonsín does not come through with his part of the deal, he could face another military action.

"We knew that they were not going to shoot," said a spokesman for Colonel Seineldín. Even though "loyalist" troops had them surrounded, at no point were they really threatened. That is the best insurance the military can get that they finally have an agreement to insure the institution's survival.