

Andean Report by Alfonso Bueno

Caught with his pants down?

Venezuela's CAP may be involved in a weapons-peddling scandal involving his mistress and his security chief.

Venezuela's Socialist President Carlos Andrés Pérez (or CAP, as he is known) has spent the past six weeks in tours outside the country. He stopped in Nicaragua en route to Washington, and then in Colombia. He returned briefly to Caracas to attend the Fifth Andean Presidential Summit, and then was off to Belgium, Germany, and France. In each place, he acted like a spokesman for Bush's "new world order," attacking the idea of national sovereignty, and the role of the military in defending it.

Back in Venezuela, however, he found himself in trouble. At the end of April, Social Christian deputy Oscar Yañez, president of the communications media subcommittee of the House of Deputies, warned CAP that "if you don't improve your behavior," he would face a scandal surpassing that which undermined ex-President Jaime Lusinchi, over his girlfriend Blanca Ibañez, who became the powerful secretary of the presidency. Yañez warned CAP about "the case of Mrs. Cecilia Matos," CAP's long-time mistress and political companion, noting that he was raising the issue only "insofar as adultery endangers the military or political security of the country."

But Pérez didn't clean up his act. The day he left for Washington, he granted political asylum to three members of Colombia's Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group (CGSB). The narco-terrorists had entered the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá for the purpose of forcing a "peace dialogue" with the Gaviria

government of Colombia on "neutral territory." CAP welcomed them, and volunteered that Venezuela should be that "neutral territory."

The CGSB fund themselves by kidnaping and cocaine trafficking, much of it run out of a large base in the Colombian department of Arauca, which borders Venezuela. The terrorists regularly kidnap Venezuelan cattlemen for ransom, killing them if they refuse to pay. It is hardly surprising that CAP's negotiating on behalf of these narco-terrorists has upset military men in both Venezuela and Colombia.

Some say it is anger over this policy that has led to the arms and drug-trafficking scandals in which several CAP cronies are now embroiled. Fort Tiuna, the general headquarters of the Venezuelan Armed Forces, has played a role in the exposés, it is said.

This includes the scandal known as the Navy frigate deal. In mid-May, the daily *El Nacional* printed an intimate conversation between retired Vice Adm. Carlos Larrazábal and a Mrs. Gardenia Martínez, a representative of Margold Corp., a military-supplies vendor. In the conversation, Larrazábal promised to pressure the father of his son-in-law, Defense Minister and Vice Adm. Héctor Jurado Toro, to provide the company with a contract. Garden-variety influence peddling? Not just that.

It was later revealed that the owner of Margold is Orlando García, head of CAP's civilian security. Questioned on this, CAP said his security chief hasn't sold "even a little knife" to the Armed Forces.

Not García perhaps, but, according, to Army commander Gen. Carlos Julio Peñaloza, who testified before the Chamber of Deputies defense committee, Gardenia has. In the process, according to Peñaloza, she has also defrauded the state and violated contracts.

It seems CAP, Orlando García, and Gardenia go way back. García met CAP in 1950, when the Cuban government of Prío Socarrás agreed to accept Venezuela's social democratic exiles. CAP arrived in Cuba as the secretary to Rómulo Betancourt, the old Democratic Action leader. When he left Cuba, said García, he went with CAP and Betancourt to Costa Rica, and has been CAP's confidant ever since.

García was put in charge of the security of presidential sweetheart Cecilia Matos and her daughters, the Pérez Matos girls—and her mother, Mrs. Victoria Matos, who turns out to be a friend of Vice Adm. Jurado Toro. Some say that Cecilia is tight with García and his business associate Gardenia, and that any investigation of their influence peddling would have to look into Cecilia's possible role in this.

By June, CAP found himself in worse trouble, when police revealed they had found a BMW owned by the head of Military Intelligence, Gen. Herminio Fuenmayor, in the driveway of a member of a drug ring they were dismantling. The general protested he knew nothing of the drug ring, and had imported the car only so a friend could avoid paying taxes on it.

Fuenmayor claimed that his predicament was a result of the same "conspiracy" which sought to discredit the government in the Navy frigate deal, all being run (he said) as a "destabilization campaign" against the government. "High officials" of the Armed Forces are involved in this, he charged.

But CAP decided it were more prudent to fire Fuenmayor.