

# Assault on Ibero-American militaries enters new stage

by Valerie Rush

In a nationwide television address on April 25, Argentine Army commander Gen. Martín Balza offered a mea culpa in the name of his country's military institution for conducting what has been dubbed by the international press and human rights mafia as a "dirty war" against terrorism in the 1970s. That "illegal repression," claimed General Balza, stemmed from a "messianic ideology" rooted deep within the Armed Forces which see themselves as "the sole reserve of the Fatherland." Balza added, "It is disingenuous to try to find a single individual to fault, since the blame ultimately lies in the collective unconscious of the entire nation."

Ironically, in denouncing "messianism" in the military, General Balza was explicitly targeting one individual who represents a rallying point for nationalist military forces in Argentina and around the continent—Col. Mohamed Ali Seineldín. Currently a political prisoner in Argentina, Colonel Seineldín, who opposed the 1976 military coup as an unlawful "break in the constitutional order," has been repeatedly accused of having a "messianic" complex precisely because of his definition of the Armed Forces as a bulwark of the nation "dedicated to safeguarding its highest interests."

Balza's confession was hailed by human rights lobbyists, "former" terrorists, and others as setting a precedent which should now be emulated in other countries whose armed forces are still afflicted with the "messianic" belief that their role is to defend the political, economic, and territorial sovereignty of their nation against the "new world order" crowd around the United Nations and International Monetary Fund. Over two years ago, *EIR* warned that attacks on the military would lead in this direction (see *Documentation*). Now, as Horacio Verbitsky, the former head of intelligence for the Montonero terrorists of the 1970s, put it in the leftist daily *Página 12*, Balza's message has "changed the political scene" in Argentina by creating a "collective conscience" from which there is no turning back.

This same concept of "collective guilt" was imposed on postwar Germany by London's intelligence warfare division known as the Tavistock Institute. Not only has that "collective guilt" charge shrouded a proud national heritage for half a century, but, more importantly, it has deliberately obscured the real British roots of Nazism. If Tavistock and its one-worldist sponsors succeed in obscuring the truth about Argentina's war against subversion, with the help of various

and sundry cowards both inside and outside the military, the result will not be "national reconciliation," as these cowards claim, but rather the descent of Argentina into a maelstrom of renewed terrorist violence and civil war.

For, unlike Nazi Germany, Argentina in the 1970s was faced with a bloody offensive sponsored by foreign-backed terrorists, which specifically targeted the military for annihilation. (The destruction of the Argentine military has, in fact, always been a British obsession; that obsession led to the 1982 Malvinas War, and has not yet ended.) Those terrorist forces waged brutal irregular warfare against several Ibero-American nations; in Colombia and Peru, they are still doing so today. The targeted governments and defense forces had to either respond, or roll over and play dead. Were excesses committed in individual cases by government forces? Undoubtedly. And yet, we are now being told that national defense forces committed to defending their country from a rampaging terrorist enemy were nothing more than a Nazi killing machine which institutionally committed crimes against humanity. Why?

## A nation under siege

In an April 13 letter to the editor published in *La Nación*, former Planning Minister for the 1976-83 military junta Gen. Ramón Díz Bessone (ret.) wrote about the "other side of the coin" of the so-called dirty war, the side that no one ever talks about: how, before the junta came to power, the country was under siege from armed guerrillas who on a daily basis murdered innocent civilians and military personnel, kidnapped businessmen, indiscriminately set off car bombs, and used every tool of irregular warfare to destroy the nation. Atrocities committed included putting a bomb under the bed of the Buenos Aires chief of police in 1976, holding victims in "people's jails," and then torturing and strangling them, and so on. Sixty-eight guerrilla camps were dismantled in Tucumán province alone, reported General Díaz Bessone. "Fortunately for the country," the general reminds us, "the guerrillas were defeated."

In his August 1991 testimony to the court which sentenced him to life imprisonment, Colonel Seineldín identified the political trap that was set for his country's Armed Forces. He observed that, starting in the mid-1970s, the international financial elites moved to replace productive economy with

a world economy "of speculation and dependency," while simultaneously launching an attack on "the historic and traditional pillars" of the nation-state, including the Armed Forces. Thus, says Seineldín, in 1976 "the fight against terrorism began, but at the same time, we observed that from those very same international financial centers, the human rights campaign was orchestrated. . . . Thus, the success obtained in the anti-terrorist war would, in the future, become a political defeat. . . . We then understood that the Armed Forces had fallen into the trap."

In fact, a key figure in setting that trap was the military junta's finance minister, José Martínez de Hoz, a leading Anglophile and David Rockefeller intimate who more than any single violator of human rights in the Argentine military truly deserves a war-crimes trial.

The mistake the military junta made, under pressure from the British-led human rights lobbies, was in not declaring open war against the terrorists, but running it instead as a secret war which was therefore difficult to oversee and control. María Lilia Genta, wife of an Army doctor during the years of the war against subversion, and daughter of a Catholic philosopher murdered by the guerrillas in 1974, wrote a letter to *EIR* on March 22, in which she draws the critical distinction between a "just war" and a "dirty war" (see *Documentation*). In that letter, she insists that, "in the name of truth, we must recognize that behind all this painful and intricate affair there was a political—not military—error by the military junta that assumed power in 1976. No one in that junta wanted to call a spade a spade, that is, *to call war, war*. There lies the crux of the problem. But the fact is that there *was* a war, with two very different fronts. . . . It was the official political fear of saying the word *war* that made it possible to talk about repression."

### Now, the legal offensive

Ironically, the very fact that the junta failed to respond to the terrorists' offensive with a *declared war* within a formal juridical framework, provided the pretext for those same forces of chaos and destabilization to resurface today and to seek, with the full backing of the international human rights non-governmental organizations, the very destruction of the nation-state which they failed to achieve in the 1970s. Within days of General Balza's "confession," television commentator Mariano Grondona brought two "former" terrorists, one a Montonero leader and one from the Revolutionary People's Army, onto his show to say they repented of nothing and would commit terrorism again if necessary.

Grondona, a longtime mouthpiece for British geopolitics in Argentina, is the man who earlier this year provided former Navy officer Adolfo Scilingo a forum for making the first admission of atrocities committed against the terrorists in the 1970s. It was the orchestrated outcry around Scilingo's dramatic "confessions" that eventually led to General Balza's televised performance.

And on May 2, amnestied Montonero chieftain Mario Firmenich told a television interviewer that he had no regrets about kidnapping and killing Argentine Gen. José Pedro Aramburu in 1970. "It was an act that was not decided by us," said Firmenich. "It was decided by the people." He explained that his Montoneros were facing an "authoritarian and militaristic culture . . . and in that context, political violence was always legitimate."

Human rights lawyers and the so-called "victims groups" they advise have begun to clamor for taking the offensive to the next stage. Collective admission of guilt is insufficient, they say, and insist on being given the names of the guilty ones, their purge from the military, and their punishment. Along with the military, the Catholic Church is also under attack. There are growing demands that military chaplains who allegedly condoned the atrocities, and bishops who supposedly tolerated them, be identified and defrocked. 1980s Nobel Peace Prize-winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel went public to insist that General Balza's confessions were "inadequate." "We don't support this form of collective distribution of guilt. The victims were not responsible, nor were all of us," he said.

At the same time that human rights networks are advising "victims groups" to take their cases to international courts to force the Argentine government to reopen trials against military personnel, they are also demanding the overturning of two Executive orders decreed in the 1980s by then-President Raúl Alfonsín and current President Carlos Menem, which granted pardons and exemptions from prosecution to military personnel involved in the 1970s war. One of those decrees is based on the universal military doctrine of "due obedience"; its repeal would set a disastrous precedent for the continent.

### The escalation

In the aftermath of Balza's confessions, human rights organizations, backed by elements of the Catholic Church linked to the Marxist theology of liberation, have been activated to demand the humiliation of other Ibero-American militaries. For example, Benjamín Cuéllar, director of the Human Rights Institute of the liberation theology-centered Central American University in San Salvador, said General Balza's confessions would have repercussions across the continent. A similar admission of guilt by the Salvadoran military, he said, would help achieve national reconciliation. Other human rights figures described Balza's statements as setting "an important precedent that should be emulated here and elsewhere." The Salvadoran church, a captive of theology liberation, has demanded that the Armed Forces of that country "publicly confess their sins."

El Salvador's military disagrees. Defense Minister Gen. Humberto Corado declared on May 2, "There is no reason for us to apologize, because we did nothing unlawful. . . . In any case, all Salvadorans who took part in the conflict in

one way or another would have to accept that excesses were committed” on both sides.

In Haiti, dictator Jean-Bertrand Aristide has just announced the elimination of even the 1,500-man remnant of an army that he had initially agreed to preserve, because a poll indicated that “that is what the people want.” Standing at Aristide’s side as he spoke was Costa Rican ex-President Oscar Arias, a militant demilitarizer who declared that eliminating the Army in next-door Dominican Republic was the next step. A well-informed political column in the Dominican daily *Hoy* responded, “The Dominican Armed Forces, in the organized chaos in which this nation lives, constitute perhaps the most solid and respected institution. And that should not be played with.”

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## Documentation

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# ‘Just war’ versus a ‘dirty war’

*The following letter was sent to EIR by Mrs. María Lilia Genta, on March 22, 1995.*

I have the double honor of being the daughter of the Catholic philosopher Jordán B. Genta, who was murdered on Oct. 27, 1974 by Marxist guerrillas, and the wife of an Army doctor who was a captain during the years of the war against subversion, better called “the war which never existed.”

Recently, according to certain news and television programs, the opinion of certain brilliant political commentators, and society in general, it seems that one fine day, just for the heck of it, the Argentine military went crazy and launched a witchhunt out of “pure malevolence” (surely they inherited this from the genocidal Nazis!) against sweet young women and pious young men, all of them as innocent as a St. Maria Goretti or St. Tarcisius, and tortured them, put them on the “picana,” raped the women (and why not the men, too?), and later, in the festive spirit of a sporting event, threw them from planes into the river. We might even be tempted to think that these “monsters,” incarnations of Satan, wouldn’t have thrown their “victims” dead or even asleep into the sea, but rather kept them alive and awake in order to derive greater satisfaction from the act while feeding their military sadism. It reminds me of a Boris Karloff movie.

Irony to one side, there is an enormous fallacy here and a no less enormous hypocrisy which almost everyone appears willing to tolerate in silence. In the name of truth, we should recognize that in the origin of this whole painful and intricate

affair, there is a *political—not military—mistake* by the military junta which took power in 1976. This junta did not for anything want to call a spade a spade, that is, call a *war, war*. That is the root of the problem.

But the truth is that there was a *war* with two very distinct fronts. An irregular army (ERP, FAR, Montoneros) launched the offensive against the Argentine nation, and the Argentine Armed Forces responded to that offensive with the goal of “total annihilation” of the armed enemy in defense of the nation. The official government fear of pronouncing the word *war* led to the possibility of speaking of repression. From the pages of *Cabildo* magazine (I could cite numerous articles), we tirelessly warned the government of the *Proceso* [the 1976-83 military junta] that there is no alternative to calling things by their right name, at the same time that we demanded an adequate legal framework for the actions carried out as part of the counteroffensive. Fortunately, our demands at that time haven’t led us today to adopt the simple and hypocritical position of seeking benefit from what has taken place.

Let me make clear that I am referring exclusively to political mistakes; I have great respect for those officers who fought with their men, and who never gave orders that they wouldn’t also carry out themselves and who were exemplary leaders. I shall name only three of them—not because there aren’t others who showed similar courage—but because paradigmatically they all represent different political ideas which also differ from mine: General Vilas, a Peronist, the first commander of Operation Independence in Tucumán; Gen. Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, a liberal, commander of the III Army Corps; and General Ramón Camps, a conservative, then a colonel, and chief of police of the province of Buenos Aires. I name them because they prove that the *permanent* defense of the Fatherland brings out the highest qualities common to men, in this case exemplary military leadership. There were, of course, armchair commanders, but we don’t even remember their names. We know very well that extreme situations bring out the best in each person, and war is an extreme situation.

On the battlefield of this war, there were no banners or trumpets, or shining armor. The enemy chose the tactics: ambush, stealth, obligatory silence, the jungle, and the cement jungle. For the wives, and I include myself here, the worst was the loneliness and the inability to communicate with our closest friends and family members. One “leak” could ruin an operation. Nor could we directly communicate with our husbands. . . . Perhaps those of us who had read about similar wars—almost all of them of our own era—here or in any other part of the world, had built up a better intellectual armor. But emotionally, we were all similarly affected. Who speaks of our nights of waiting, of our fear, and our attempts to hide our terror from our children? In memory of the forgotten Captain Leonetti (killed in a battle with ERP leader Santucho), I want to pay homage to those young officers and non-commissioned officers who valiantly

fought this *just war* in Argentina's defense.

War is a consequence of original sin. It has accompanied man since the time of Cain and Abel. In all wars, in all times and places, excesses have been committed. To be able to fight in a war with a clear conscience, one must be sure that it is a *just war*. Yes, it is true that the military vicars and chaplains comforted the combatants and their families by talking to them of the *justness* of the war . . . not of the kindness of the sins which they inevitably committed. And who today remembers that that lucid and saintly military Vicar General, Monsignor Tortolo—viciously attacked by certain leftist press—spent his Christmases in Paraná with the families of dead or jailed guerrillas, perhaps among them those who brutally killed the Cáceres Monié couple, whose bodies were mutilated? Monsignor Tortolo was one of a kind. I am waiting for some of those families of Montoneros to publicly acknowledge how much that great bishop comforted and aided them. That would be justice!

Two reflections in closing. First, the journalist Verbitsky,

reportedly a Montonero captain and ex-chief of intelligence (that is, responsible for preparing operations), a charge he has not denied—is he an excellent swimmer or did he get his lifesaver on before they threw him from the plane? Second, a request to the priests of the Catholic flock. At least 99% of the military family is Catholic. Do not abandon this reviled family! If you are going to make a *mea culpa* as the pope has requested, let it also include a sincere repentance and an “honest acceptance of the truth” for the thousands of Christian youth who, guided by certain priests such as [leftist] Father Mujica, made up those “special formations” in the war. And let it also include those ideological priests who preached “armed revolution” and “theology of liberation,” and many more of their ilk, who gave their support to the “idealistic youth.” To suffer a partial amnesia is not possible or just, and much less Christian. In the decade of the 1970s, Argentina already had its “Samuel Ruiz” phenomenon. Forgetting, indifference, or the silence of the priests would be the greatest pain for the military family.

## Legal assault planned on Ibero-American armed forces

For the last several years, the Anglo-American political establishment has directed a propaganda campaign against Ibero-America's armed forces, harping on their supposedly “undemocratic” nature and demanding that the institutions be completely dismantled. Now the Anglo-Americans are threatening to escalate this offensive by taking it into the realm of international law, in violation of the precept of national sovereignty.

A first indication of this strategy was seen in the annual report issued in late March by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which functions under the aegis of the Organization of American States (OAS). The report warned that the Argentine government's laws which granted pardons and exemption from prosecution to military leaders involved in the 1970s war against communist subversion, are “incompatible with its international treaty obligations under the American Convention on Human Rights.” The commission also took issue with amnesties approved in Uruguay and more recently in El Salvador.

The amnesties in Argentina and Uruguay were passed in the late 1980s to help put an end to internal debate which threatened political stability in those countries, following an internationally orchestrated campaign portraying the armed forces as brutal murderers in their war against communist guerrillas.

The amnesty in El Salvador was passed in March, following the issuance of the U.N. Truth Commission report, which accused the Armed Forces of carrying out Nazi-style atrocities over the past 12 years of the war and demanded both the punishment of officers and the dismantling of the military.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher told a House Appropriations subcommittee on March 25 that the United States was studying the possibility of thwarting El Salvador's amnesty law by prosecuting Salvadoran military officers *in U.S. courts* for alleged atrocities committed in their own country. Christopher argued that under international law, foreign nationals—in this case, American citizens whose family members may have been killed in El Salvador—might be able to bring Salvadoran officers to trial in the United States.

A precedent for what Christopher is talking about is seen in the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the Law of Foreign Sovereign Immunity cannot protect the Argentine government from prosecution in U.S. courts by citizens seeking indemnization for alleged torture by the 1976-83 military junta. While refusing to hear an appeal from the Argentine government, the court ruled in March that Argentine citizen José Siderman, now a U.S. resident, has the right to seek \$2.7 million in damages for alleged torture by the military in the mid-1970s.

Implied in this debate is the false premise that there is no difference between what the Armed Forces of El Salvador did over the past 12 years and the crimes of the Nazis in World War II, or what the Serbians are doing today in former Yugoslavia.—*Cynthia R. Rush*