Peru: Military Crisis Unfolds In Aftermath Of Congressional Human Rights Investigations

Erika Harding

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation
Peru: Military Crisis Unfolds In Aftermath Of Congressional Human Rights Investigations

by Erika Harding

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, May 14, 1993

The Peruvian military is in a state of crisis following accusations by a top Army commander that Army chief Gen. Nicolas de Bari Hermoza Rios and presidential advisor Vladimiro Montesinos ordered the assassination of nine La Cantuta university students and a professor in July 1992. The charges were made by Gen. Rodolfo Robles Espinoza, who held the third highest position in the Army hierarchy. Robles also accused a special squad led by Montesinos of responsibility for other serious human rights abuses, including the murder of two Japanese agricultural engineers in Huaral in 1991 and the massacre of 15 people in Lima that same year. Robles's allegations are very similar to those presented to opposition deputy Henry Pease by an anonymous group of Army officers calling themselves the "Sleeping Lion." The documents from this group were presented to the constituent congress (Congreso Constituyente Democratico, CCD) by Pease on April 2. The CCD subsequently decided to conduct an investigation into the case. Hermoza responded by accusing a group of opposition legislators of being "allies of Sendero," and of attempting to defame the military institution (see NotiSur 04/21/93). Following this showdown between the armed forces and the CCD in which tanks and other military vehicles took to the streets of Lima in a show of military strength Robles passed confidential information regarding the La Cantuta massacre to the military judge assigned to investigate the case. Robles said that soon afterwards, he was summoned by Hermoza and told he was being transferred to a post abroad, in effect a substantial demotion. Robles requested that his sons, both Army officers, be given permission to travel with him, a request which was refused. Robles said he then began receiving anonymous death threats and telephone calls daring him to stage a coup d'etat. "The plan was to push me to do something stupid and then they could accuse me of being an insurgent, throw me in jail and cover up the case," he told the New York Times. "When my friends warned me that they would try to harm my two sons, who are loyal Army officers, I knew it was time to get out." Realizing that the incriminating information he had provided to the military judge had been disclosed to the military high command, Robles and his family sought refuge in the US Embassy in Lima on May 5. Two days later Robles and his family were flown to Buenos Aires aboard an Argentine Air Force jet. During the period when Robles was at the US Embassy compound, Peruvian radio carried reports of an attempted coup, led by Robles, that had been put down by loyal troops without bloodshed. The reports were quickly denied by presidential spokesperson Carlos Orellana. Meanwhile, Robles publicized his accusations through a letter read to reporters by his wife, Nelly Montoya. According to the letter, Hermoza was aware of the activities carried out by the Montesinos-led death squad and approved of its actions, and is now attempting to block all investigations into the killings. "The reputation of the entire Peruvian Army is being damaged by attempts to protect the existence of this band of criminals, this hit squad," said Robles. "Most of us are fighting a clean fight against terrorism. Why should the entire army put its neck on the line for this group?" Robles told the New York Times that he does not believe President Alberto Fujimori was aware of the squad's existence. "I think this is something his advisers created and did not tell him about," he said. After the allegations made by Robles came out publicly, Fujimori issued a statement in support of both Hermoza and Montesinos.
reiterating that the two have been the architects of his government's successful counterterrorism policy. Nonetheless, members of the opposition have called on Fujimori to remove Hermoza and Montesinos. The President rejected the request, however, claiming the declarations by Robles are simply unproven allegations that reflect resentment toward his superiors. Fujimori added that he is in full command of the armed forces, and that the Peruvian military is completely obedient to civilian authority. Fujimori denied that the recent charges or previous indications of military rebellion, such as the November 1992 coup attempt, in any way indicated a lack of unity within the military. Meanwhile, the military has formally cashiered Robles, issuing charges against him for desertion, insubordination, insulting a senior officer, and abuse of authority. His two sons, one a lieutenant and the other a major, have also been charged with desertion. Despite such military intimidation, the CCD is actively pursuing the matter. A special CCD delegation travelled to Argentina record Robles's testimony on the La Cantuta massacre and other prominent cases currently under investigation. The CCD report on La Cantuta was scheduled for presentation by May 15, but the investigations have been stalled by the refusal of high-level military officers to testify. Hermoza has stated that the CCD's investigating commission lacks the necessary authority to examine the case. Hermoza has characterized La Cantuta as a military matter which clearly falls under the jurisdiction of the military courts. In the meantime, CCD president Jaime Yoshiyama, a member of the pro-government Cambio 90-Nueva Mayoria coalition, travelled to Washington on May 11 to meet with US President Bill Clinton and congressional leaders. Yoshiyama assured Clinton that the military fully accepts the supremacy of civilian authority and that there will be no further attempts by the armed forces to destabilize the government. Yoshiyama added that the CCD "has the political will and determination to end the human rights abuses attributed to the government security forces." Yoshiyama was accompanied by opposition legislator Francisco Tudela, who expressed concern over the recent developments involving the military. Tudela reportedly told Clinton that Fujimori would have been better off dismissing Hermoza as an example to the rest of the armed forces. Tudela also complained about military attempts to block the CCD's investigations into La Cantuta, but said he believes the investigation will be completed, "despite the resistance." (See interviews in this issue of NotiSur.) [Sources: Notimex 05/05/93, 05/06/93; Deutsche Presse Agentur, 05/06/93; Actualidad Peruana (Pro Human Rights Association, APRODEH, Lima), 04/24-05/07/93; Agence France-Presse, 05/07/93, 05/08/93, 05/10/93, 05/12/93; New York Times, 05/12/93; Spanish news service EFE, 05/08-13/93]