INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

2. WHEN TWELVE JUDICIAL OFFICIALS WERE MASSACRED AT LA...
ROCHELA JANUARY 18 BY AN UNKNOWN GROUP OF GUNMEN FOR UNKNOWN REASONS, "PARAMILITARY" GROUPS SUDDENLY BECAME MORE THAN A HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM -- THEY BECAME ANOTHER ENEMY OF THE STATE, ALONG WITH THE NARCOS AND THE GUERRILLAS. THIS CABLE LOOKS AT WHAT IS KNOWN OF THE EMERGENCE, MOTIVATIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF THESE GROUPS. WHAT WE HAVE FOUND IS THAT:

-- THE MAJORITY OF THE 140 SO-CALLED PARAMILITARY GROUPS LISTED BY THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER 1987 ARE SIMPLY VIOLENCE-FOR-HIRE BUSINESSES OR NON-POLITICAL "CLEAN UP" ORGANIZATIONS;

-- MOST OF THE REST ARE RIGHT AND LEFT-WING HIT SQUADS;

-- LEFTIST GUERRILLAS HAVE GENERALLY TAKEN ON THE CHARACTER OF CRIMINAL BANDITS WHO PRACTICE EXTORTION, KIDNAPPING, ROBBERY, AND ARE OFTEN INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING TO FINANCE THEIR OPERATIONS. SOME SPLINTER GROUPS HAVE FORSAKEN IDEOLOGY ALTOGETHER;

-- PRIVATE RIGHT-WING GROUPS, ORIGINALLY ORGANIZED TO FIGHT LEFTIST GUERRILLA BANDITS AND OPPOSE COMMUNISM, HAVE IN MANY CASES DEGENERATED INTO BANDITRY, WHILE OTHERS HAVE ASSUMED THE CHARACTER OF REBEL FORCES WHO WANT TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE ONGOING PEACE PROCESS.

-- MANY GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THOSE FINANCED BY NARCOTICS (AND PERHAPS EMERALD) MONEY, USE SOPHISTICATED INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONAL METHODS.

-- THE GOVERNMENT, WHILE INCREASINGLY WORRIED ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF PRIVATE ARMED GROUPS, HAS THUS FAR BEEN ABLE TO DO LITTLE MORE THAN HARASS THEM, OCCASIONALLY MAKING ARRESTS AND, RARELY, DESTROYING AN ORGANIZATION.

A THREAT TO THE STATE

3. PRIOR TO THE LA ROCHELA INCIDENT, VICTIMS OF MASSACRES WERE BELIEVED TO BE MOSTLY GUERRILLA SYMPATHIZERS, LEFT WING POLITICIANS, GROUPS OF EMERALD MINERS, NARCO-HITMEN, OR "UNDESIRABLES." THE WEAK COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM HAD MADE ONLY FEEBLE STABS AT
BRINGING THE PERPETRATORS TO JUSTICE. UNTIL JANUARY 18, MANY HAD ACTUALLY CONSIDERED THE KILLERS AS "VIGILANTES," DOING THE JUDICIAL WORK THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT COULD NOT DO. WITH LA ROCHELA, THE USURPATION OF DULY CONSTITUTED LAW WAS TOTAL. THE MESSAGE WAS SENT THAT OFFICIAL COLOMBIA, HAVING SHIRKED ITS RESPONSIBILITY FOR SO LONG, SHOULD NOT INTERFERE IN PRIVATE WARS AND VENDETTAS. 88 BOGOTA 18290 NOTED THAT IN DECEMBER 1988 FIVE DAS AGENTS WERE MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUNMEN FOR UNKNOWN REASONS IN CORDOBA WHILE INVESTIGATING CATTLE RUSTLING. THE PREVAILING ASSUMPTION NOW IS THAT THEY WERE ALSO KILLED FOR THEIR PART IN INVESTIGATING MASSACRES IN THAT AREA.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS MULTIPLY LIKE RABBITS

4. THE NUMBER OF GROUPS, VARIETY OF MOTIVATIONS, AND LACK OF HARD INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTE TO AN OBSCURITY WHERE, FOR ANY ONE MAJOR INCIDENT, THERE MAY BE FIVE OR SIX "USUAL SUSPECTS." GUERRILLA AND RIGHT WING GROUPS, NARCOTICS AND EMERALD TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS FIGHT EACH OTHER AND FIGHT AMONG THEMSELVES. AN ENTIRE...
SUBJECT: PRIVATE JUSTICE--PRIVATE VIOLENCE: ARMED GROUPS

INDUSTRY HAS GROWN UP TO PROVIDE VIOLENCE ON DEMAND. GUERRILLAS BLAME THE GOVERNMENT, THE GOVERNMENT BLAMES THE GUERRILLAS, AND EVERYBODY BLAMES THE NARCOS. A COMMON TACTIC IS TO COMMIT AN ACT AND IMMEDIATELY CALL THE NEWSPAPERS CLAIMING TO BE SOMEBODY ELSE. THE REAL SOMEBODY ELSE CALLS BACK WITH A DISCLAIMER AND THE PRESIDENT PROMISES A FULL INVESTIGATION. IT IS ALL FORGOTTEN WHEN THE NEXT MAJOR INCIDENT OCCURS.

HAVE GUN, MOTORCYCLE, WILL TRAVEL

5. IN OCTOBER 1987 THEN MINGOV GAVIRIA PRESENTED HIS FAMOUS LIST OF 140 "PARAMILITARY" GROUPS TO THE CONGRESS. THE REPORT LISTED ALL THE VIOLENT GROUPS IN COLOMBIA TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT COULD ATTACH A NAME. ONLY A FEW WERE WELL KNOWN, SUCH AS MAS (DEATH TO KIDNAPPERS) AND LOS PRISCOS (A GROUP OF ASSASSINS FOR HIRE).

6. AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAMES REVEALS FIVE MAJOR CATEGORIES OF VIOLENT GROUPS, AS FOLLOWS:

-- 53 VIOLENCE-FOR-HIRE ORGANIZATIONS, (E.G. THE BAD ONES, THE CRICKETS, THE FALCONS);

-- 31 "CLEAN UP" SQUADS, NOTABLY IN SOME OF THE LARGER PROVINCIAL CITIES, WHICH KILL UNDESIRABLES (E.G. LOVE FOR MEDELLIN, THE BLACK HAND) OR GROUPS DIRECTED AGAINST A PARTICULAR NON-POLITICAL GROUP (E.G. DEATH TO
HOMOSEXUALS, DEATH TO CRIMINALS, SELF DEFENSE OF THE
PROPERTY OF NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS);

-- 24 LEFTIST HIT SQUADS, (E.G. REVOLUTIONARY COMMANDOS
OF COLOMBIA, STUDENT COMMITTEE OF REVOLUTIONARY UNION);

-- 20 HIT SQUADS OF INDETERMINATE POLITICAL ORIENTATION,
(NAMES USUALLY CONTAIN THE WORD "DEMOCRATIC" WHICH COULD
PLACE THEM EITHER LEFT, RIGHT, OR CENTER);

-- 12 ANTI-LEFTIST HIT SQUADS, (E.G. MAS, COLOMBIAN
ANTI-COMMUNIST ALLIANCE, COUNTER REVOLUTIONARY
ORGANIZATION).

7. IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT THESE ARE ALL
STRUCTURED ORGANIZATIONS. RATHER, THEY COME AND GO,
SHARE MEMBERS, SOMETIMES ORGANIZE FOR POLITICAL REASONS
AND OFTEN END UP AS COMMON CRIMINALS. MANY MAY HAVE
NEVER COMMITTED A VIOLENT ACT BUT THEIR NAMES BECAME
KNOWN TO GOVERNMENT INTELLIGENCE SERVICES ANYWAY. MANY
OF THE ASSASSIN-FOR-HIRE GROUPS WORK PRINCIPALLY FOR
NARCOS BUT HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO KILL POLITICIANS OF ALL
STRIPES AND ENGAGE IN BANK ROBBERY AND EXTORTION. ON
JANUARY 26 AN ENTIRE SIX MAN GROUP KNOWN AS "LOS TESOS"
(THE ROUGH SPOTS) WAS CAPTURED IN BOGOTA. PRESS
ACCOUNTS SAID THEY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR BETWEEN 20 AND
30 MURDERS OF RANCHERS, BUSINESSMEN AND POLITICIANS,
PLUS THE KILLING OF A DAS AGENT. POLICE CLAIMED THEY
WERE IN THE CAPITAL TO KILL AN IMPORTANT POLITICIAN
WHOSE SECURITY WAS UPGRADED. THE POLICE ARE STILL
UNSURE WHO WAS PAYING THEM, BUT THEY WERE CAUGHT WITH
TELEPHONE NUMBERS FROM EVERY MAJOR COLOMBIAN CITY PLUS
SPAIN, THE UNITED STATES, AND URUGUAY. IT IS POSSIBLE
THAT AS THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE HEATS UP, THESE GROUPS
WILL BECOME MORE AND MORE ACTIVE.

THE REAL "SELF DEFENSE" GROUPS

8. THE PHRASE "SELF DEFENSE" GROUP, LIKE "PARAMILITARY"
HAS BEEN MUCH ABUSED IN COLOMBIA. THE PARC GUERRILLA
ORGANIZATION ORIGINALLY BEGAN AS A LIBERAL SELF DEFENSE
GROUP AT WAR WITH THE CONSERVATIVES DURING "LA
VIOLENCIA" OF THE 1950'S. SELF DEFENSE IN THE EIGHTIES
HAS COME TO MEAN DEFENSE AGAINST WHAT DAS COMMANDER

GENERAL MAZA DESCRIBES AS "PARA-GUERRILLA" GROUPS.

THESE ARE THE GUERRILLA AGENTS WHO EXTORT, KIDNAP, AND
ASSASSINATE. THEY INFILTRATE UNIONS AND CAMPEÑOS GROUPS, SOWING DISCONTENT, AND "TAXING" THE MEMBERS.

THE GOC, LACKING A WORKING JUDICIAL SYSTEM, AND UNWILLING TO OPERATE BEYOND THE LAW, PROVIDES LITTLE PROTECTION AGAINST THIS ACTIVITY. ALTHOUGH THE CURRENT LAW HAS PROVISIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SELF DEFENSE GROUPS UNDER CERTAIN STRICT PROCEDURES, ACCORDING TO THE VICE PROCURADOR, OMAR HENRY VELASCO, THERE ARE NO LEGALLY CONSTITUTED SELF DEFENSE GROUPS.


10. IN AT LEAST ONE CASE, A LOCAL ARMY COMMANDER HELPED ORGANIZE A CIVILIAN ARMED GROUP WITH OFFENSIVE CAPABILITIES. THE PREVIOUS COMMANDER OF THE MONTERIA, CORDOBA REGION TOLD EMBOFF IN MARCH 1988 THAT HE RELIED ON THE COOPERATION OF LOCAL RANCHERS (SOME OF WHOM ARE NARCOS) FOR INTELLIGENCE ON GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS. A LOCAL RANCHER CONFIRMED THIS TO A BARRANQUILLA CONSULAR OFFICER THIS JANUARY. HE SAID THE RANCHERS HAVE ORGANIZED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AS THEY TRAVEL AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE. ARMED ARMY RESERVISTS OFTEN SUPPLY SECURITY FOR THEM. THE RANCHER OPENLY ADMITTED THAT THE ARMY AND THE DAS (CIVILIAN INVESTIGATIVE ORGANIZATION) HELPED ORGANIZE AND TRAIN CIVILIAN ARMED GROUPS WHO HAVE CONDUCTED RAIDS AGAINST GUERRILLAS AND HAVE DRIVEN THEM...
OUT OF SOME AREAS. THE SOURCE COMPLAINED THAT THE NEW ARMY COMMANDER IS NO LONGER COOPERATING (SEE BELOW). THIS MAY HAVE PROMPTED THE HEAD OF THE MONTERIA CATTLEMAN'S ASSOCIATION TO SEVERELY AND PUBLICLY CRITICIZE THE MILITARY FOR ITS INABILITY TO BRING SECURITY TO THE REGION (BOGOTA 1662).

COMMUNIST HATERS


NARCO-FINANCED ANTI-GUERRILLA SQUADS

12. THE MOST POWERFUL PRIVATE ARMED GROUPS ARE IN THE MIDDLE MAGDALENA RIVER REGION CENTERED ON THE TOWN OF PUERTO BOYACA. A MAJOR CATTLE RANCHING INDUSTRY HAS DEVELOPED THERE IN THE LAST 30 YEARS. THE FARC, Flush CONFIDENTIAL

THE EMERALD WARS

14. ALMOST FORGOTTEN IN THE NARCO-GUERRILLA-DEATH SQUAD TANGLE IS THE VIOLENCE IN THE EMERALD MINING REGION OF SOUTHERN BOYACA AND NORTHERN CUNDINAMARCA. THIS VIOLENCE HAS SPAWNED ARMED GROUPS EVERY BIT AS RUTHLESS AND SOPHISTICATED AS THOSE FUNDED BY NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS. IN FACT, IT LOOKS LIKE MANY OF THE SAME PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED. THE LA ROCHELA MASSACRE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PART OF THIS. THE JUDGES WERE INVESTIGATING MURDERS OF EMERALD TRAFFICKERS. A GROUP OF SIXTEEN ARMED MEN KNEW EXACTLY WHERE AND WHEN THEY WOULD ARRIVE; THEY LULLED THE OFFICIALS INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY BY CLAIMING TO BE GUERRILLAS (ONE GROUP OF ARMED MEN LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE ANOTHER IN COLOMBIA), AND MURDERED ALL EXCEPT THREE OF THE 15 PERSON INVESTIGATIVE FORCE. THE THREE WOUNDED SURVIVORS WERE ABLE TO LEAD DAS INVESTIGATORS TO SOME OF THE PERPETRATORS. THE LEADER IS THOUGHT TO BE A FORMER GUERRILLA WHO SUBSEQUENTLY WENT TO WORK FOR NARCO DEATH SQUADS IN THE NEARBY MAGDALENA MEDIO AREA.
15. THE RECENT KILLING OF EMERALD KINGPIN AND MEDELLIN CARTEL ASSOCIATE GILBERTO MOLINA (BOGOTA 3223) WAS BREATHTAKING IN ITS SCOPE AND AUDACITY. MOLINA WAS THE ULTIMATE CRIMINAL GODFATHER WHO KILLED HIS ENEMIES AND LAVISHLY REWARDED HIS FRIENDS. HIS FUNERAL WAS THAT OF THE TRUE RULER OF THE EMERALD REGION WITH LOCAL MAYORS AND POLICE INSPECTORS PAYING HOMAGE. DESPITE HIS POWER, A GROUP OF ABOUT 20 HEAVILY ARMED MEN SURPRISED HIM AT HIS COUNTRY HOME ONLY 50 MILES FROM BOGOTA. THEY MURDERED MOLINA AND 18 OF HIS FRIENDS AND BODYGUARDS BEFORE DISAPPEARING WITHOUT A TRACE. THEORIES ABOUNDS AS TO WHO CARRIED OUT THE ACT: THE GUERRILLA'S KILLED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS RUMOURED TO BE INVOLVED WITH ANTI-LEFTIST DEATH SQUADS; OTHER EMERALD TRAFFICKERS KILLED HIM FOR TRYING TO MONOPOLIZE THE BUSINESS; HIS NARCO FRIENDS (RODRIGUEZ GACHA) TURNED ON HIM BECAUSE OF SOME SLIGHT; THE COLOMBIAN ARMY KILLED HIM BECAUSE THE PRESS HAD GOTTEN WIND OF HIS LINKS TO SOME HIGH OFFICIALS. NOBODY

Page 04
Bogota 04835 04 of 05 032315Z

NNNN

Page 01
Bogota 04835 05 of 05 032315Z

ACTION ARA-00

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 AID-00 INR-07 SS-00 OIC-02 H-01
IO-19 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 HA-09 L-03 CTME-00 TRSE-00
PM-10 PA-01 OMB-01 INM-07 INRE-00 USIE-00 SP-02
SNP-01 C-01 PRS-01 TB-01 DS-01 OIG-04 SCT-02
P-02 T-01 /076 W

032324Z APR 89
FM AMBASSADBOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4427
INFO AMBASSADOCARACAS
AMBASSADOLIMA
AMBASSADOQUITO
AMBASSADOPANAMA
AMBASSADO LA PAZ
AMBASSADO ASUNCION
USCINCOSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM

Page - 11
CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE ATTACK, AND THE GOC HAS NOT ANNOUNCED ANY SERIOUS LEADS.

GOVERNMENT REACTION

16. PEACE COUNSELOR RAFAEL PARDO RUEDA HAS TOLD US OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INCREASING CONCERN REGARDING THE STRENGTH OF THESE ARMED VIGILANTE GROUPS. EMBOFFS HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT NEW CHIEF OF THE ARMY, GENERAL NELSON MEJIA, HAS ISSUED STRONG WARNINGS TO LOCAL COMMANDERS TO AVOID ALL COOPERATION WITH THESE GROUPS. THE NEW COMMANDER IN MONTERIA, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS REFUSED TO CONTINUE COOPERATION WITH THE LOCAL RANCHERS, AS HIS PREDECESSOR HAD, ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE RANCHER TOLD A CONSULAR OFFICER. DAO REPORTING HAS VERIFIED THE STORY. PRESIDENT BARCO AND FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL SERPA URIBE HAVE STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE KILLERS, WHETHER FROM THE RIGHT OR THE LEFT. GENERAL MAZA OF DAS CONTINUES TO PRESS HIS INVESTIGATIONS.

OUTLOOK

17. JAWBONING FROM BOGOTA WILL NOT END THE VIOLENCE IN THE RURAL AREAS. THE GOC KNOWS THIS AND IS DEVOTING INCREASING TIME AND RESOURCES TO REFORM THE RULES AND STRENGTHEN THE SECURITY FORCES. IMPROVING THE OUTMODOED AND OUTGUNNED JUDICIAL SYSTEM WOULD MAKE PRIVATE JUSTICE LESS NECESSARY. THE GOVERNMENT IS CURRENTLY EMBARKED ON
A reform program, where it has been able to establish a permanent government/security force presence in an area (the Guaviare and other areas of the eastern plains) violence has been markedly reduced. Where ingrained interests (ranchers, guerrillas, unions and farm workers) do battle, even an increased security presence has not noticeably helped, as in the Uraba region. In areas like Montería and the mid Magdalena River area (from roughly Aguachica in southern Cesar department to Puerto Boyaca and Puerto Salgar in western Boyaca and Cundinamarca departments) the military is likely to remain a part of the problem until local commanders have both the wherewithal to carry out their duties and the certainty that cooperation with extra legal groups will result in punishment.

McLean

NNNN

Page - 13