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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1744
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 0459
RUEHDP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 1406
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RUEHNSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR 0185
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CONTROLS
CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 06 BOGOTA 02837

DEPT FOR ARA/PPC AND S/IL
DEA FOR OF, OFL, DO, AO, AX, OC, NK
NSC ALSO FOR RICHARD FEINBERG
CINCSO AND CINCLANT ALSO FOR POLAD
DOL FOR ILAB
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********** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE **********/

TAGS: KPRP, PINS, SNAR, PHUM, ELAB, ASEC, CO

SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE -- IT'S "EVERYONE
- VS. EVERYONE" IN A DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD

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1. SUMMARY: COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE HAS GROWN SO COMPLEX THAT
IT'S BEEN CHARACTERIZED AS "EVERYONE AGAINST EVERYONE."
MANY OF THE PERPETRATORS, VICTIMS, TACTICS AND MOTIVES
CHANGE FROM REGION TO REGION. THE VIOLENT IN COLOMBIA
TEND TO PREY ON ONE ANOTHER, MAKING THE COUNTRY A
DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD, AND THE VIOLENCE TENDS TO GROW
EXPONENTIALLY AS THE VICTIMS -- INCLUDING LANDOWNERS,
BUSINESSMEN AND WEALTHY TRAFFICKERS -- TAKE UP ARMS IN
SELF DEFENSE. THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION REALIZES THAT A
STRONG CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE IS THE CONTINUING HISTORICAL
WEAKNESS OF THE STATE, ESPECIALLY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND
THE SECURITY FORCES. THE GOVERNMENT IS CONTINUING MAJOR
EFFORTS TO BEEF UP THOSE AREAS. THE STATE'S INABILITY TO
PUNISH THE PERPETRATORS IS A MAJOR PROBLEM. THAT
HISTORICAL IMPUNITY AND THE COUNTRY'S SOCIAL ILLS ARE A
DEADLY COMBINATION. ACCORDING TO DEFENSE MINISTER RAFAEL
Pardo, DESPITE THE FACT THAT 70 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION
LIVES IN CITIES, THE MAJORITY OF THE VIOLENCE OCCURS IN
RURAL AREAS, WHERE IN MANY CASES THERE'S NO PERMANENT
POLICE PRESENCE. Rounding out the mix of colombia's three
principal warring adversaries -- the state, the guerrillas
and narco-traffickers -- are common criminals.

STATISTICS SHOW THAT, WHILE THE INSURGENTS AND NARCOS ARE
CLEARLY THE MORE DANGEROUS AND LETHAL AND RECEIVE THE MOST
ATTENTION, COMMON CRIME AFFECTS THE POPULATION MUCH MORE.
THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIETAL CHANGE
IS REQUIRED; WITHOUT IT, PEACE WITH THE GUERRILLAS AND THE
DEMISE OF PABLO ESCOBAR WON'T EVEN COME CLOSE TO ENDING
THE BLOODY LETTING. END SUMMARY.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

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2. FOLLOWING IS A LESS-THAN-ALL-INCLUSIVE LIST OF VARIOUS
TYPES OF VIOLENCE COMMON TO COLOMBIA AT THIS TIME:

-- A VIOLENT POLITICAL SCENE. THE CHRONIC, PERPETUAL
(since 1949) POLITICAL WAR BETWEEN THE INSURGENCY AND THE
STATE AND ITS SECURITY FORCES.

-- GUERRILLAS WHO OPERATE AS LOCAL WARLORDS. THE

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VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY THE GUERRILLAS AGAINST SOCIETY, MUCH OF WHICH IS ECONOMIC IN NATURE (E.G., RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS AND EXTORTION) AND SERVES AS A MEANS OF RAISING FUNDS FOR THE SELF-SUFFICIENT INSURGENCY.

-- THE GUERRILLAS’ TERRORISM AGAINST THE ECONOMIC AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE, I.E., SABOTAGE OF PETROLEUM INSTALLATIONS, ENERGY AND COMMUNICATIONS TOWERS, BRIDGES, ETC.

/****** BEGINNING OF SECTION 002 ******/

-- VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZED CRIME (MAFIAS) AGAINST POLITICIANS, JUDICIAL OFFICIALS, POLICE, SOLDIERS, JOURNALISTS, THE ELITES AND SOMETIMES RANDOMLY AGAINST THE GENERAL PUBLIC. MAFIOSOS ATTACK ALL THESE GROUPS TO INTIMIDATE, EXACT REVENGE OR TO ACHIEVE IMPUNITY, WHETHER TO ESCAPE PUNISHMENT FOR A SPECIFIC CRIME OR TO AFFECT JUDICIAL OR POLICY DECISIONS AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. WHILE THIS TYPE OF VIOLENCE IS MOSTLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE "NARCO-TERRORISM" OF THE LEADING TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS, IT ALSO HAS BEEN PERPETRATED, IF NOT ON THE SAME SCALE, BY MUCH SMALLER CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS, E.G., THE "GASOLINE CARTEL," WHICH SURREPTITIOUSLY TAPS ECOPETROL’S PIPELINES.


-- THE INTERNECINE, DISCIPLINARY AND PARA-JUDICIAL VIOLENCE COMMON TO THE UNDERWORLD AT ALL LEVELS, WHICH INCLUDES MURDER, TORTURE, EXTORTION AND KIDNAPPING.

-- VIOLENT ACTS, INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, PERPETRATED BY OVERZEALOUS SECURITY FORCE PERSONNEL, USUALLY LINKED TO COUNTER-INSURGENCY EFFORTS. THIS IS SOMETIMES ACCIDENTAL (E.G., CAMPESINOS LITERALLY OR FIGURATIVELY CAUGHT IN THE CROSS FIRE), BUT SOMETIMES INTENTIONAL (E.G., THE TORTURE AND ASSASSINATION OF GUERRILLA-LINKED POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVISTS, INCLUDING TRADE UNIONISTS).

-- THE VIOLENCE OF SELF-DEFENSE AND PARAMILITARY GROUPS. THESE ARE USUALLY SMALL BUT WELL-ARMED PRIVATE ARMIES OWNED AND OPERATED MOSTLY IN RURAL AREAS BY LARGE LANDOWNERS, INCLUDING NARCOs. THOSE GROUPS ARE OFTEN USED BY LARGE LANDHOLDERS AS A WEAPON IN LAND DISPUTES AGAINST CAMPESINOS AND INDIANS. THE TERM PARAMILITARY GROUPS BECAME POPULAR IN THE 1980s TO REFER TO SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS WITH LINKS TO THE SECURITY FORCES.

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-- THE "SOCIAL CLEANING" KILLINGS BY SMALL, ANONYMOUS, ARMED BANDS (SOMETIMES COMPOSED OF POLICE OFFICERS) MOSTLY AGAINST INDIGENTS AND STREET KIDS, BUT ALSO AGAINST LOW-LEVEL DRUG VENDORS, ADDICTS, HOMOSEXUALS, PROSTITUTES AND OTHER "UNDESIRABLES." THE GROUPS SOMETIMES WORK FOR HIRE FOR BUSINESSMEN AND PROPERTY OWNERS TO "CLEAN UP" THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS.

-- PROFESSIONAL ASSASSINS (SICARIOS). THESE YOUNG, LOWER-CLASS KILLERS CAN BE HIRED BY ANYONE FROM A JEALOUS HUSBAND TO PABLO ESCOBAR TO KILL ANYONE FROM HIS WIFE'S LOVER TO A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. TRUE "HITMEN," THEY ARE COLD BLOODED MURDERERS WHO WILL TAKE ON ANY CONTRACT IF THE PRICE IS RIGHT.

-- THE POPULAR MILITIAS, I.E., THE NEW-STYLE URBAN GUERRILLA FRONTS CREATED BY THE PARC, ELN, EPL AND M-19 IN LOWER-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS IN AN ATTEMPT TO DEVELOP AN URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE. THE MILITIAS, WHICH VIRTUALLY CONTROL SOME BARRIOS, OPERATE AS VIGILANTE GROUPS IN THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS. PARTICULARLY IN MEDELLIN, THEY HAVE Fought A WAR TO THE DEATH WITH THE TRAFFICKING-SYMBIOTIC BANDS OF YOUNG SICARIOS AND OTHER HOODLUMS THAT HAVE PREYED ON THE RESIDENTS FOR DECADES. THEY ALSO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR "CLEANUP" KILLINGS OF DEALERS, ADDICTS, RAPISTS AND OTHER CRIMINAL ELEMENTS. FOR FUNDING, THE MILITIAS CLASSICALLY EXTORT LOCAL BUSINESSES FOR PROTECTION MONEY. THE MILITIAS HAVE ACTED AS THE SPOOKS OF THEIR PARENT GUERRILLA GROUPS' EFFORTS TO TAKE OVER THE CITIES, MOSTLY THROUGH TERRORISM. THEY ALSO GATHER THE NECESSARY INTELLIGENCE AND CARRY OUT THE ATTACKS (OFTEN SMALL BOMBINGS), WHICH OFTEN TAKE PLACE OUTSIDE THEIR POOR BARRIOS.

-- RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS, WHETHER BY GUERRILLAS OR COMMON CRIMINALS. THIS HIGHLY PROFITABLE INDUSTRY HAS GROWN INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED, EXHIBITING A HIGH LEVEL OF SPECIALIZATION IN PLANNING AND EXECUTION. AUTHORITIES REPORT (AND WE BELIEVE) THAT THERE IS COLLABORATION BETWEEN COMMON-CRIMINAL KIDNAP RINGS AND INSURGENTS AND/OR TRAFFICKERS; IN SOME CASES; KIDNAP "SPECIALISTS" CARRY OUT AN ABDUCTION, THEN SELL THE VICTIM TO GUERRILLAS OR TRAFFICKERS, WHO IN TURN NEGOTIATE THE RANSOM WITH THE VICTIM'S FAMILY OR EMPLOYER.

-- SIMPLE MURDER FOR ANY VARIETY OF REASONS. MURDER OVERTOOK CANCER AS THE COUNTRY'S LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN 1990, AND CONTINUES TO CLIMB ANNUALLY. AT ALL LEVELS,

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THIS TYPE OF VIOLENCE IS USED TO SETTLE DISPUTES, EXACT.
REVENGE, ETC.

-- THE "DIRTY WAR" OF EXTERMINATION AGAINST ACTIVISTS OF
THE EX-GUERRILLA GROUP, EPL, BY THEIR STILL-ARMED
COMRADES, THE EPL DISSIDENTS, WITH THE HELP OF FARC
BOLIVARIAN MILITIAS, PRIMARILY IN THE BANANA-RICH URABA
REGION. THIS IS A SYSTEMATIC CAMPAIGN TO SEEK OUT AND
KILL ALL EPL MEMBERS WHO "CAME IN" WHEN THE EPL REACHED A
PEACE ACCORD WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN 1991.

-- ROAD PIRACY, I.E., THE STOPPING OF TRUCKS ON THE
NATION'S HIGHWAYS AS WELL AS IN THE CITIES TO ROB, MOSTLY
BY SPECIALIZED COMMON-CRIMINAL BANDS, IS A BOOMING BUSINESS.

-- THE ASSAULT OF BOTH INTER- AND INTRA-CITY BUSES BY
ARMED COMMON-CRIMINAL GANGS, TO ROB THE PASSENGERS.

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YOU'D NEED A SCORECARD TO TRACK THE PLAYERS
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3. THE ABOVE PRESENTS A TRULY FRIGHTENING PICTURE OF THE
VIOLENCE IN THIS COUNTRY. A SIMPLE READING COULD LEAD ONE
TO CONCLUDE THAT THE COUNTRY IS OUT OF CONTROL. THAT'S
FAR FROM TRUE. COLOMBIA IS A PROSPEROUS, FUNCTIONING
DEMOCRACY THAT TRAGICALLY SEEMS TO HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE
WITH A VERY HIGH LEVEL OF MAYHEM. COLOMBIA'S ELITE IS
PRO-AMERICAN AND SOPHISTICATED. THE MIDDLE CLASS
REPRESENTS AN INDUSTRIOUS, TRAINED WORK FORCE. FOREIGN
BUSINESSES AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT ARE WELCOMED. THE
ECONOMY IS ROBUST AND CONSERVATIVELY MANAGED, ALTHOUGH AS
IN OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, THERE IS A DESPERATELY
POOR CLASS. BOGOTA, "THE ATHENS OF SOUTH AMERICA," IS A
BEAUTIFUL CLEAN CITY WITH SOME OF LATIN AMERICA'S BEST
UNIVERSITIES. THIS IS NOT BEIRUT, WHERE WAR RAGED IN THE
STREETS. IT IS A COSMOPOLITAN PLACE WHERE DEATH IN MANY
FORMS LURKS CONSTANTLY FOR THE UNWARY OR UNPROTECTED.

4. A FACTOR MARKING THE EVOLUTION OF COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE
SINCE THE 1950S IS THAT IT HAS BECOME MORE MULTIPLE AND
COMPLEX; TO THE POINT WHERE IT'S MORE APPROPRIATE TO SPEAK
IN THE PLURAL, I.E., OF THE "VIOLENCES." THE VIOLENT AND
THEIR VICTIMS HAVE BECOME SO INTERTWINED, THE ALLIANCES SO
SHIFTING THAT IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE VIOLENCE HAS
REACHED THE POINT OF BEING "EVERYONE AGAINST EVERYONE." ANOTHER FACTOR IS THE REGIONAL NATURE OF MUCH OF THE
BLOODLETTING. BECAUSE COLOMBIA IS A COLLAGE OF REGIONS,

/***** BEGINNING OF SECTION 004 *****/
MANY MANIFESTATIONS OF THE VIOLENCE ARE FAR MORE PROMINENT

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IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY THAN IN OTHERS, GIVING A REGIONAL "TWIST" THAT COMPLICATES ANY ANALYSIS.


THE THREE MAIN ADVERSARIES: STATE, GUERRILLAS, NARCOS -------------------------------


TAKing up arms in self defense -------------------------------

SEPTEMBER. IT'S NO COINCIDENCE THAT THE OCHOAS, ESCOBAR, VARGAS AND CARRANZA ALL HAVE TURNED TO PARAMILITARY GROUPS IN SELF DEFENSE AND USED THEM TO RETALIATE AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES, WITH BLOODY RESULTS.

UNDERSIZED SECURITY FORCES PROVIDE LITTLE SECURITY

8. THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION AGREES WITH PRACTICALLY ALL OBSERVATIONS. THAT A STRONG UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE IS THE CONTINUING HISTORICAL WEAKNESS OF THE STATE AND ITS SECURITY FORCES. THE VIOLENCE IS ALL PERVASIVE AND THE GOVERNMENT CAN'T STOP IT. IT IS A GIVEN IN COLOMBIA, A COLLAGE OF REGIONS SEPARATED BY MOUNTAINS, THAT WHERE THE GOVERNMENT PRESENCE IS WEAK OR

/***** BEGINNING OF SECTION 005 ******/
NON-EXISTENT, LOCAL VIOLENCE SUPPLANTS THE STATE, LEADING OTHERS TO TAKE UP ARMS IN DEFENSE IN A SPIRAL OF MAYHEM AND INSECURITY.
9. COLOMBIA LONG HAS HAD A RELATIVELY SMALL SECURITY FORCE (IN COMPARISON TO OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES) FOR ITS POPULATION AND TOPOGRAPHY. HISTORICALLY, COLOMBIA'S UNDER-SIZED ARMED FORCES HAVEN'T HAD THE CAPACITY TO CONTROL SUBVERSIVE OR OUTLAW GROUPS EVEN WHEN THEY LACKED THE TREMENDOUS FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF TODAY'S TRAFFICKERS AND GUERRILLAS. THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION REALIZES THE PROBLEM, AND HAS CONTINUED TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM, AS WELL AS THE ARMY'S COUNTER-INSURGENCY FORCES. THEY ALSO ARE SYSTEMATICALLY EXPANDING GOVERNMENT CONTROL INTO ISOLATED AND UNDERPOPULATED PARTS OF THE NATIONAL TERRITORY BY MEANS OF INCREASED SECURITY-FORCE PRESENCE.

IMPUNITY AND A LARGE POOR CLASS: A DEADLY DUO

10. ONE MANIFESTATION OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE STATE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE VIOLENCE IS THE UBQUITOUS IMPUNITY THAT REIGNS IN THE COUNTRY, WHERE ALMOST NO ONE BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT CAN GUARANTEE HIS OR HER SECURITY OR THAT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM WILL PUNISH AN OFFENDER. A LEADING COLOMBIAN VIOLENTOLOGIST ONCE TOLD POLOFF THAT AFTER HIS APARTMENT WAS BURGLARIZED, IT DIDN'T EVEN CROSS HIS MIND TO REPORT THE CRIME TO THE POLICE. THE IMPUNITY, BESIDES ENTICING MORE TO TURN TO CRIME, LEADS MANY TO TURN TO VIOLENT PRIVATE-JUSTICE.

11. IMPUNITY AND A CHRONICALLY POOR CLASS ARE A DEADLY COMBINATION. ANOTHER VIOLENTOLOGIST HAS TOLD POLOFF THAT THE INSURGENCY, NARCO-TRAFFICKING, RANSOM KIDNAPPING AND COMMON CRIME ARE ALL CAMPEÑINO RESPONSES TO THE SAME
PROBLEM, RURAL UNEMPLOYMENT. HE JUST AS WELL COULD HAVE EXTENDED HIS VISION TO THE CITIES, WHERE UNEMPLOYMENT ALSO IS A MAJOR PROBLEM. AS WE PREVIOUSLY HAVE REPORTED, THE LINE BETWEEN ARCH-ENEMY NARCO SICARIOS AND GUERRILLA MILITIAMEN IS A FINE ONE. THE TWO GROW UP AND LIVE IN THE SAME POOR BARRIOS, AND THE ACQUISITION OF MONEY IS A DRIVING FORCE; BOTH NARCO-TRAFFICKERS AND GUERRILLA GROUPS PAY A SALARY. INDEED, COLOMBIAN GUERRILLA GROUPS EARN A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THEIR LIVELIHOOD FROM DRUGS. A BOGOTA NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST RECENTLY LABELED ALL OF COLOMBIA’S VIOLENT AS "SICARIOS," NO MATTER FOR WHOM THEY WORK. "THEIR PROFESSION IS TO KILL. THEIR COMPENSATION IS THE MONEY."

MOST VIOLENCE OCCURS IN RURAL AREAS

12. DESPITE THE FACT THAT 70 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION LIVES IN URBAN AREAS, THE GOVERNMENT SAYS THE MAJORITY OF VIOLENCE OCCURS IN RURAL AREAS. (FYI: HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS PERSISTENTLY SAY THAT CAMPESINOS ARE THE MAIN VICTIMS OF THE VIOLENCE.) DEFENSE MINISTER RAFAEL PARDO, WHO HAS STUDIED COLOMBIA’S VIOLENCE AND IS AN EXPERT ON THE PROBLEM, HAS SAID THAT MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF HOMICIDES AND KIDNAPPINGS AND MORE THAN 70 PERCENT OF TERRORIST ACTS TAKE PLACE IN RURAL AREAS. "IT IS RURAL COLOMBIA THAT WITHOUT A DOUBT IS THE PRINCIPAL SCENE OF THE VIOLENCE AND INSUCURITY IN COLOMBIA," PARDO SAID.

13. OF COURSE AN INFLUENCE ON THE RURAL LAWLESSNESS IS THE ABSENCE OF A PERMANENT SECURITY-FORCE PRESENCE IN MANY AREAS. IF THERE’S ONE REALITY SHARED BY COLOMBIA’S VARIOUS REGIONS, IT IS THE ABSENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT IN RURAL AREAS. COLOMBIA’S NATIONAL POLICE FORCE (CNP) IS CONCENTRATED IN URBAN AREAS, AND THOSE STATIONED IN RURAL AREAS ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE COUNTY SEATS. BOGOTA HAS FAR FEWER POLICE PER 100 RESIDENTS THAN NEW YORK, LONDON OR TOKYO, BUT THE PROBLEM IS FAR GREATER IN RURAL AREAS, WHERE IN MANY JURISDICTIONS THERE IS NO PERMANENT POLICE PRESENCE.

PABLO AND TIROFIJO MAY GO BUT THE VIOLENCE WON’T

14. PEACE WITH THE GUERRILLAS AND/OR THE REMOVAL OF PABLO ESCOBAR WON’T END THE CARNAGE. ESCOBAR’S PARTICULAR VIOLENCE, HOWEVER HORRIFIC, WILL PASS WITH HIS PASSING FROM THE SCENE, AND IN ANY EVENT, TENDS TO BE FOCUSED IN MEDELLIN AND BOGOTA AND INTENDED TO MAKE THE GOC REDUCE ITS PRESSURE ON HIM AND HIS ORGANIZATION. OTHER TYPES OF
VIOLENCE WILL REMAIN. THE INSURGENCY IS PREDOMINANTLY RURAL AND THERE ARE MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEMS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE THAT WON'T BE SOLVED ANYTIME SOON. EQUALLY VIOLENT ARE THE CITIES, WHERE 70 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION NOW RESIDES. CRIME-RIDDEN AND HOME TO POPULAR MILITIAS, SICARIOS AND VIOLENT TRAFFICKERS, THERE WILL BE NO EASY SOLUTION TO THE VIOLENCE THERE EITHER. THE SPECTRE OF CHRONIC COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE, THEREFORE, WILL BE WITH US FOR A LONG TIME. THE GUERRILLAS, ESCOBAR, OR ANY INDIVIDUAL GROUP REPRESENT ONLY PART OF THE PROBLEM.