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ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-10 ACDE-00 INLB-01 AID-00 ACQ-01 INL-01  
OASY-00 SRPP-00 DS-00 EB-00 OIGO-01 TEDE-00 INR-00  
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R 182216Z NOV 96  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2894  
INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM  
NSC WASHDC  
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USIA WASHDC 0715  
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NDIC JOHNSTOWN PA  
DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD  
SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//  
DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
FBI WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BOGOTA 011325

STATE FOR ARA/AND, INL, L/LEI  
NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS  
ONDCP FOR BILL BOZIN

CONFIDENTIAL  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEA FOR OF, OFL, OC, AX  
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FBI FOR CID/IRS/IRU2  
USIA FOR AR, I/GAR  
TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL:11/18/01  
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, SNAR, MOPS, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA

REF: (A) BOGOTA 9248 (B) BOGOTA DAO 282217Z (C) BOGOTA 10496  
(D) BOGOTA 10833 (E) BOGOTA 10710 (NOTAL) (F) BOGOTA 9692

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY POL/ECONOFF PEG WILLINGHAM. REASON  
1.5(D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY IS ON THE RISE IN  
COLOMBIA. ALTHOUGH THE GOC DENIES LINKS TO PARAMILITARIES, SOME  
COLLABORATION WITH THE MILITARY ON A LOCAL LEVEL VERY LIKELY  
TAKES PLACE. PARAMILITARIES PRIMARILY TARGET GUERRILLAS BUT HAVE  
ALSO BEEN EMPLOYED BY NARCOTRAFFICKERS AND ALLEGEDLY ENGAGE IN  
REPRESSION OF PEASANTS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS. WEALTHY  
COLOMBIANS, TIRED OF BEING KIDNAP TARGETS, PRIVATELY APPLAUD  
RECENT PARAMILITARY REVENGE KIDNAPPINGS OF GUERRILLA RELATIVES.  
GIVEN THE GOC'S INABILITY TO PROVIDE SECURITY THROUGHOUT MUCH OF  
THE COUNTRY, AND A CONCOMITANT INCREASE IN GUERRILLA ACTIVITY,  
PARAMILITARIES ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO FLOURISH. EXTRAJUDICIAL  
KILLINGS, REVENGE KIDNAPPINGS, DISPLACEMENT OF HUNDREDS OF  
CIVILIANS, AND THE EROSION OF THE RULE OF LAW WILL BE THE RESULT.  
END SUMMARY.

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3. (C) PARAMILITARIES ARE NOTHING NEW IN A COUNTRY WHOSE  
HISTORY HAS BEEN MARKED FOR DECADES BY INTERNAL CONFLICT AND  
UNUSUALLY HIGH LEVELS OF VIOLENCE. SINCE AS LONG AGO AS THE WAR  
OF A THOUSAND DAYS (1899-1902) AND THE YEARS OF INTERNECINE  
STRIFE KNOWN AS "LA VIOLENCIA" (WHICH BEGAN IN 1948), RIVAL

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LANDOWNERS HAVE EMPLOYED BANDS OF ARMED MEN TO FIGHT THEIR BATTLES. HOWEVER, AS THE 1996 DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT (REF E) REFLECTS, PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY IS ON THE INCREASE AND IS UNLIKELY TO ABATE ANYTIME SOON. SEVERAL FACTORS ACCOUNT FOR THIS TROUBLING DEVELOPMENT. THE GOC'S INABILITY TO PROVIDE SECURITY THROUGHOUT MUCH OF COLOMBIA HAS ALLOWED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY AND CRIMINAL LAWLESSNESS TO FLOURISH. THOSE WITH THE MONEY TO BUY THEIR OWN "JUSTICE" -- WEALTHY LANDOWNERS, CATTLE RANCHERS, EMERALD MINERS, BUSINESS OWNERS, AND NARCOTRAFFICKERS -- HIRE ARMED VIGILANTES TO PROTECT THEIR LIVES AND THEIR PROPERTY. SOME OF THESE "SELF-DEFENSE" GROUPS ARE SIMPLY THAT; OTHERS AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE SPECTRUM HAVE BECOME DEATH SQUADS.

4. (C) GIVEN THE SHADOWY NATURE OF THE SUBJECT, EMBASSY HAS BEEN UNABLE TO SECURE MUCH HARD DATA, SUCH AS THE NUMBERS OF PARAMILITARIES OPERATING IN COLOMBIA. ANY PORTRAIT WE PAINT OF PARAMILITARISM IN COLOMBIA IS THEREFORE INCOMPLETE. HOWEVER, ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE ABOUT PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES ABOUNDS. A MEMBER OF THE GOC PEACE COMMISSION TOLD POL/ECONOFF "OFF THE RECORD" IN OCTOBER THAT THE COMMISSION WAS WORKING ON A "WHITE PAPER" ON PARAMILITARIES, BUT NOTED THAT INFORMATION WAS HARD TO OBTAIN. HE HALF-JOKINGLY ADDED THAT, IN VIEW OF THE SENSITIVITY OF THE SUBJECT, PARTICULARLY ON THE PART OF THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY, HE WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN IF THE COMMISSION EVER RELEASED THE WHITE PAPER.

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 LEGAL ORIGINS  
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5. (U) A 1964 LAW ESTABLISHED LEGAL SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO THE ARMED FORCES. A 1978 NATIONAL SECURITY STATUTE ENACTED DURING THE TURBAY ADMINISTRATION ALSO PERMITTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SELF-DEFENSE (AUTO-DEFENSAS) GROUPS. IN 1989, HOWEVER, IN THE WAKE OF INCREASED VIOLENCE LINKED TO PARAMILITARIES WORKING FOR NARCOTRAFFICKERS, PRESIDENT BARCO ISSUED A DECREE OUTLAWING SUCH GROUPS.

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LINKS TO THE MILITARY  
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6. (C) AS REF B REPORTED, WHILE THE GOC DENIES SUPPORTING PARAMILITARIES, COLLABORATION WITH THE SECURITY FORCES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL VERY LIKELY OCCURS. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, PARAMILITARIES HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN ALLOWED TO USE ARMY BASES TO

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L-01 ADS-00 PM-00 P-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-09  
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R 182216Z NOV 96  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2895  
INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM

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 DEA WASHDC  
 DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
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 DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD  
 SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//  
 DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 05 BOGOTA 011325

STATE FOR ARA/AND, INL, L/LEI  
 NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS  
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 SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
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E.O. 12958: DECL:11/18/01  
 TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, SNAR, MOPS, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
 SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA

STAGE OPERATIONS, HAVE FLOWN IN ARMY HELICOPTERS, AND HAVE EVEN BEEN GIVEN LISTS OF TARGETS BY MILITARY MEMBERS. CONSTRAINED -- TO A CERTAIN EXTENT -- BY HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AND FRUSTRATED BY A JUDICIAL SYSTEM THAT, IN THEIR EYES, FAILS TO DEAL ADEQUATELY WITH GUERRILLAS, SOME MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY HAVE WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIGHT THE WAR BY PROXY. PARAMILITARY DEFACTORS HAVE TOLD JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES ABOUT THEIR LINKS WITH ARMY, POLICE, AND LOCAL LANDOWNERS.

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7. (C) IN AN OCTOBER 16 MEETING WITH EMBOFF [REDACTED]

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CONFIRMED THAT MILITARY AUTHORITIES HAD WORKED "CLOSELY" WITH SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS IN THE 1980'S TO "RID THE AREA" OF GUERRILLAS. COLOMBIAN ARMY COMMANDER (AND, AS OF DECEMBER 1, CHIEF OF MILITARY FORCES) GENERAL HAROLD BEDOYA HAS PUBLICLY REJECTED CHARGES OF ARMY-PARAMILITARY COOPERATION, BUT HE REPORTEDLY HAD TIES TO PARAMILITARY GROUPS IN THE 1970'S AND 1980'S. AS POST HAS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, RETIRED GENERAL FAROUK YANINE IS UNDER DETENTION ON CHARGES OF KNOWINGLY ALLOWING PARAMILITARY GROUPS TO KILL SUSPECTED GUERRILLA COLLABORATORS.  
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[REDACTED] HAVE INDICATED THAT GENERAL IVAN RAMIREZ, COMMANDER OF THE ARMY'S FIRST DIVISION, HEADQUARTERED ON THE ATLANTIC COAST, HAS DIRECT LINKS WITH PARAMILITARIES OPERATING IN THE GUAJIRA PENINSULA AND CESAR DEPARTMENT. ONE OF THE HEADS OF THE PARAMILITARIES THERE IS GIOVANNI MANCUSO, [REDACTED]

1.4(B), 1.4(D)

1.4(B), 1.4(D)

8. (C) AT LEAST ONE HIGH-RANKING OFFICER APPEARS TO RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF PARAMILITARISM, HOWEVER. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMY'S 17TH BRIGADE IN URABA SAID THAT SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS WERE JUST AS DANGEROUS AS THE GUERRILLAS. HE WARNED THAT THESE GROUPS MAY RECRUIT EX-GUERRILLAS, CREATE A PRIVATE SYSTEM OF VIGILANTES, AND ULTIMATELY "CREATE GREATER CHAOS FOR LEGITIMATE AUTHORITIES AND ... CIVILIANS."

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LINKS TO NARCOS  
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9. (C) PARAMILITARISM HAS ALSO BEEN GIVEN A BOOST BY THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE. WHILE NARCOTRAFFICKERS HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH MANY GUERRILLA FRONTS, SHIFTING ALLIANCES HAVE ALSO LED TO RELIANCE ON PARAMILITARIES. LIKE OTHER WEALTHY COLOMBIANS, DRUG LORDS HAVE BEEN TARGETS OF EXTORTION. MEDELLIN CARTEL MEMBERS OUTRAGED AT THE GUERRILLA KIDNAPPING OF AN OCHOA FAMILY MEMBER FORMED MAS (MUERTE A SECUESTRADORES) IN 1982. FINANCED AND ARMED

BY NARCOTRAFFICKERS, MAS KILLED A NUMBER OF GUERRILLAS AND OTHERS TARGETED BY THE CARTEL. IN A 1986 REPORT TO CONGRESS, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL CALLED MAS "AN AUTHENTIC PARAMILITARY MOVEMENT" AND ASSERTED THAT THE MILITARY USED THEM AS A MEANS OF

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 "MULTIPLYING THEIR CAPACITY FOR ACTION" WHO "CAN DO UNOFFICIALLY WHAT CANNOT BE DONE OFFICIALLY." ACCORDING TO A PROMINENT COLOMBIAN ACADEMIC, MAS AND OTHER PARAMILITARY GROUPS OPERATING IN THE GUERRILLA-CONTROLLED MAGDALENA MEDIO REGION IN THE 1980'S ALSO ALLEGEDLY RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE MEDELLIN CARTEL, INCLUDING ANTI-GUERRILLA TRAINING FROM FOREIGN MERCENARIES. THE MAGDALENA MEDIO, AN AGRICULTURALLY FERTILE AREA AND HOME TO A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE OIL INDUSTRY, WAS WHERE GENERAL YANINE ALLEGEDLY COLLUDED WITH PARAMILITARIES IN THE 1980'S. ALTHOUGH GUERRILLAS STILL OPERATE THERE, COUNTER-INSURGENCY EFFORTS (BOTH LICIT AND ILLICIT) SUCCEEDED IN ABATING SOME OF THEIR ACTIVITIES. WHILE PARAMILITARY GROUPS UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO OPERATE THERE, THEIR LEADERSHIP IS LESS WELL KNOWN THAN THE NOTORIOUS CASTANO BROTHERS OF NORTHERN COLOMBIA.

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 THE CASTANO BROTHERS  
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10. (C) AS REPORTED IN REF A, TWO OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS PARAMILITARY LEADERS IN COLOMBIA ARE BROTHERS CARLOS AND FIDEL

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R 182216Z NOV 96  
 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2896  
 INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
 USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM  
 NSC WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 05 BOGOTA 011325

STATE FOR ARA/AND, INL, L/LEI  
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E.O. 12958: DECL:11/18/01  
 TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, SNAR, MOPS, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
 SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA

CASTANO OF ANTIOQUIA. THEIR "AUTODEFENSAS CAMPESINAS DE CORDOBA Y URABA" (ACCU) OPERATES IN SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA: THEIR "HOME BASE" OF NORTHERN ANTIOQUIA AND CORDOBA, AS WELL AS IN CESAR AND LA GUAJIRA, WHICH BORDER VENEZUELA. THE CASTANOS AND THEIR FOLLOWERS HAVE BEEN LINKED TO NUMEROUS MASSACRES AND KIDNAPPINGS; THEY CURRENTLY HOLD AT LEAST TEN RELATIVES OF GUERRILLAS KIDNAPPED SINCE JULY. REF C REPORTS ON A RECENT ACCU FORAY;

[REDACTED] TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE 9 PEOPLE KIDNAPPED IN THAT INCIDENT HAVE BEEN MURDERED, AND MEDIA REPORTS INDICATE THAT FIFTY FAMILIES HAVE FLED THE TARGETED TOWN. FIDEL CASTANO (AKA "RAMBO", NADDIS 1782546), A ONETIME ASSOCIATE OF PABLO ESCOBAR, TRAFFICKED IN COCAINE BUT LATER TURNED AGAINST ESCOBAR AND HELPED TO FOUND "LOS PEPES" -- PEOPLE PERSECUTED BY PABLO ESCOBAR. GUERRILLAS OF THE FARC 4TH FRONT KIDNAPPED AND MURDERED FIDEL'S FATHER IN 1981, EVEN THOUGH THE CASTANO FAMILY HAD PAID A RANSOM. THE CASTANOS THEN DECLARED WAR ON THE GUERRILLAS AND HAVE BEEN WAGING THE BATTLE EVER SINCE, INITIALLY SEEKING ARMY ASSISTANCE BUT EVENTUALLY BECOMING MORE AUTONOMOUS. ALTHOUGH PORTRAYING THEMSELVES AS MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO SEEK JUSTICE, THE CASTANOS

1.4(D)

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HAVE PROFITED GREATLY FROM THEIR ACTIVITIES, REPORTEDLY ACQUIRING THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF LAND IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA.

11. (C) WHILE IT NOMINALLY TARGETS GUERRILLAS, THE ACCU (WHICH COMPRISES ABOUT 2,500 MEN, [REDACTED] HAS ALLEGEDLY KILLED FAR MORE CIVILIAN NONCOMBATANTS. FIDEL AND HIS YOUNGER BROTHER CARLOS ARE BOTH WANTED FOR SEVERAL MURDERS. FIDEL HAS NOT BEEN SEEN PUBLICLY FOR SOME TIME, BUT RUMORS OF HIS DEATH HAVE NOT BEEN CONFIRMED AND HE MAY SIMPLY BE IN HIDING TO AVOID PROSECUTION. GOC JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT ARRESTED CARLOS, DESPITE OUTSTANDING WARRANTS, AND INTERIOR MINISTER HORACIO SERPA MET WITH HIM IN MARCH 1996, PURPORTEDLY TO DISCUSS DEMOBILIZING THE PARAMILITARIES UNDER THE CASTANOS' CONTROL. HOWEVER, THE DISCUSSIONS PROVED FRUITLESS. FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE CASTANOS' INFLUENCE IS THAT, AS REPORTED IN REF F, EPL GUERRILLAS SURRENDERED TO CARLOS CASTANO RATHER THAN TO THE ARMY.

1.4(D)

12. (C) CARLOS CASTANO, FAR FROM CONCEALING HIS ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES, HAS CONFIRMED THEM [REDACTED] AND, MORE CIRCUMSPECTLY, IN A LENGTHY FEBRUARY 1996 PRESS INTERVIEW. ACCORDING TO THE LATTER, THE MEN WORKING FOR THE CASTANOS HAVE MILITARY EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING SOME FORMER GUERRILLAS. CASTANO DECLARED THAT HIS MEN HAVE ADOPTED IRREGULAR TACTICS IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE GUERRILLAS, AND ARE MUCH MORE MOBILE AND DARING THAN THE ARMY. CASTANO SAID THAT, UNLIKE THE MEDELLIN CARTEL, HE DOES NOT RECRUIT "HITMEN INTERESTED ONLY IN QUICK MONEY AND POWER." HE ADDED, "WE ARE NOT SEEKING TO DESTABILIZE THE CURRENT SYSTEM NOR PERSONAL ENRICHMENT," BUT ARE SIMPLY RESPONDING TO THE GUERRILLA THREAT. CASTANO SAID THAT HE ALSO "REGULATES" SMALLER GROUPS OF SELF-DEFENDERS, FORBIDDING THEM TO CARRY ARMS WITHOUT ADVISING THE ACCU FIRST.

1.4(D)

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13. (C) CASTANO TOLD HIS INTERVIEWER THAT "AS SOON AS THERE ARE NO MORE GUERRILLAS WE'LL TURN IN OUR ARMS IMMEDIATELY." HOWEVER, [REDACTED] HAS TOLD EMBASSY THAT CASTANO'S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO CONTROL ALL OF NORTHERN COLOMBIA. IN A NOVEMBER 1 MEETING WITH EMBOFFS, [REDACTED] SAID PARAMILITARISM IS A GROWING CONCERN [REDACTED] IN COLOMBIA. THEY BELIEVE

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1.4(D)

PARAMILITARIES ARE IN COLLUSION WITH THE MILITARY TO SOME DEGREE, BUT THE SECURITY FORCES ARE UNABLE TO CONTROL THE PARAMILITARIES. THEY NOTED THAT CASTANO IS THE "ONLY REAL SECURITY PRESENCE" IN NORTHERN URABA. HE OPERATES FREELY AND, [REDACTED] WITH THE TACIT BLESSING OF GOC AUTHORITIES. HIS OFFICE IN MONTERIA IS RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE POLICE STATION AND HE MAY TRAVEL BY ARMY HELICOPTER AROUND THE REGION. HOWEVER, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] CASTANO HARBORS LITTLE RESPECT FOR THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY, INCLUDING THE LOCAL BRIGADE COMMANDER IN URABA, AND IS AN INDEPENDENT ACTOR IN AN AREA WHERE THE STATE'S AUTHORITY IS WEAK. [REDACTED] SUGGESTED THAT, REPREHENSIBLE THOUGH THEY ARE, CASTANO AND HIS ILK HAVE GROWN TOO STRONG TO IGNORE IN ANY LASTING RESOLUTION OF THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL CONFLICT. IN THE MEANTIME, [REDACTED] FOCUSES ON URGING CASTANO TO "HUMANIZE"

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INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
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USIA WASHDC 0718  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 04 OF 05 BOGOTA 011325

STATE FOR ARA/AND, INL, L/LEI  
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TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, SNAR, MOPS, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA

THE CONFLICT AND MODERATE THE LEVEL OF ABUSES HIS FOLLOWERS  
COMMIT. THEY ALSO NOTED THAT THEY ARE AWARE OF TEN PARAMILITARY  
MEMBERS CURRENTLY IN PRISON IN BOGOTA, EVIDENCE THAT SOME

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PARAMILITARIES (WE DO NOT KNOW FROM WHAT REGIONS) ARE OCCASIONALLY PUNISHED FOR THEIR MISDEEDS.

14. (C) LIKE THE MAFIA OF OLD, CASTANO BROOKS NO PETTY CRIME IN AREAS UNDER HIS CONTROL AND LOCALS REPORTEDLY APPRECIATE THEIR RELATIVE SECURITY, ALTHOUGH THEY ALSO FEAR HIS COERCIVE TACTICS.

[REDACTED] SAID CASTANO DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THEIR WORK AND ALLOWS THEM TO VISIT THE TEN KIDNAPPED RELATIVES OF GUERRILLAS CURRENTLY UNDER HIS CONTROL. HE REFUSES TO RELEASE THESE CAPTIVES BUT SWEARS [REDACTED] THAT HE TREATS THEM WELL AND HAS NO PLANS TO KILL THEM. CASTANO UNABASHEDLY ADMITS [REDACTED] THAT HE HAS KILLED AND KIDNAPPED PEOPLE, BUT APPEARS TO HAVE HIS OWN "CODE OF HONOR," DENYING OTHER CRIMES ATTRIBUTED TO HIM AND DENOUNCING THE PARAMILITARIES OPERATING ON HACIENDA BELLACRUZ (SEE BELOW). THIS CODE OF HONOR HAS NOT PREVENTED HIM AND HIS MEN FROM THREATENING AND KILLING PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF GUERRILLA COLLABORATION, HOWEVER. [REDACTED] LAMENTED THAT MANY PEOPLE

1.4(D)

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 CAUGHT BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE PARAMILITARIES HAVE BEEN DISPLACED IN CESAR DEPARTMENT AND OTHER AREAS WHERE THE ACCU OPERATES, AND MORE WILL FOLLOW. CASTANO TOLD [REDACTED] THAT SOME PEOPLE WILL EVENTUALLY BE "ALLOWED" TO RETURN ONCE THE GUERRILLAS ARE "CLEANED OUT," BUT OTHERS WHO ARE NOT "TRUSTWORTHY" WILL BE BANNED PERMANENTLY.

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 PARAMILITARIES VS. PEASANTS, POLITICIANS  
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15. (C) IN ADDITION TO COMBATTING GUERRILLAS AND PROTECTING NARCOTRAFFICKERS, PARAMILITARIES HAVE ALLEGEDLY BEEN USED TO INTIMIDATE AND MURDER PEASANTS INVOLVED IN LAND DISPUTES WITH WEALTHY LANDOWNERS. IN THE COMPETITION FOR SCARCE LAND (ONLY 12 OF COLOMBIAN TERRITORY IS ARABLE), SMALL FARMERS AND PEASANTS HAVE BEEN SQUEEZED. REF D REPORTS ON ACCUSATIONS THAT PARAMILITARY MEMBERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR KILLINGS AND DISPLACEMENTS AT THE BELLACRUZ ESTATE OWNED BY CARLOS MARULANDA, THE GOC'S RECENTLY RESIGNED AMBASSADOR TO THE EUROPEAN UNION. PARAMILITARIES ARE ALSO BELIEVED RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MURDERS OF

LEFT-WING POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, WITH THE TACIT APPROVAL OF THE MILITARY IN SOME CASES. EMBASSY REPORTING FROM 1990 DESCRIBED FIDEL CASTANO AS THE MAIN SUSPECT IN THE MURDERS OF A NUMBER OF LEFTIST POLITICAL FIGURES. A RECENT MAGAZINE ARTICLE LINKED EMERALD MAGNATE AND SUSPECTED PARAMILITARY CHIEF VICTOR CARRANZA TO THE NOVEMBER 1995 MURDER OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY PATRIARCH ALVARO GOMEZ HURTADO. CARRANZA, WHOSE ACTIVITIES WERE REPORTED IN REF A, HAS VEHEMENTLY DENIED THE CHARGE, NOTING THAT HE WAS A POLITICAL SUPPORTER OF GOMEZ. (NOTE: CARRANZA IS BASED IN VILLAVICENCIO, META DEPARTMENT, BUT OPERATES EMERALD MINES IN

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WEALTHY COLOMBIANS SYMPATHETIC, SAMPER EQUIVOCAL  
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16. (C) TIRED OF BEING TARGETS OF KIDNAPPINGS BY GUERRILLAS SEEKING HIGH RANSOMS, WEALTHY COLOMBIANS HAVE PRIVATELY TOLD EMBOFFS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THEY WELCOME RECENT PARAMILITARY REVENGE KIDNAPPINGS OF GUERRILLA RELATIVES (THE MOST RECENT OF WHICH TOOK PLACE NOVEMBER 12). A POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR AT BOGOTA'S JAVERIANA UNIVERSITY, WHOSE STUDENT BODY IS GENERALLY MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS, TOLD POL/ECONOFF THAT SEVERAL OF HIS STUDENTS HAVE HAD RELATIVES KIDNAPPED AND/OR KILLED BY GUERRILLAS AND HAVE ALSO VOICED SUPPORT FOR THE REVENGE KIDNAPPINGS, SAYING "NOW THEY KNOW WHAT WE FELT WHEN THEY KIDNAPPED OUR FAMILY MEMBERS." A HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT TOLD POL/ECONOFF THAT HE HAS FRIENDS WHO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS BUT WHO FEEL COMPELLED TO PROVIDE FUNDS FOR PARAMILITARIES OPERATING IN ANTIOQUIA BECAUSE THE GOC HAS FAILED TO ESTABLISH LAW AND ORDER. WHILE SUCH SENTIMENTS ARE UNDERSTANDABLE, THEY

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CIA WASHDC  
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STATE FOR ARA/AND, INL, L/LEI  
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 SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
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 JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND NDDS/VAN VLIET  
 FBI FOR CID/IRS/IRU2  
 USIA FOR AR, I/GAR  
 TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL:11/18/01  
 TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, SNAR, MOPS, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
 SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES IN COLOMBIA

SUGGEST THAT COLOMBIA'S POLITICAL CLASS IS UNLIKELY TO RECOGNIZE THE LONG-TERM THREAT POSED BY PARAMILITARISM. COMMENTING ON EUROPEAN UNION CRITICISM OF PARAMILITARY ABUSES, PRESIDENT SAMPER TOLD THE PRESS NOVEMBER 1, "ALTHOUGH IT'S TRUE THAT THE BADLY NAMED PARAMILITARY GROUPS HAVE GROWN IN HIGH PROPORTION, AS A RESPONSE OF SOCIAL GROUPS TO KIDNAPPING AND EXTORTION BY ARMED REBELS, THE STATE HAS NOT SUPPORTED THEM, DOES NOT SUPPORT THEM, AND WILL NOT SUPPORT THEM." WHILE THE LATTER PART OF HIS REMARK CLEARLY DISTANCES THE GOC FROM PARAMILITARIES, THE FIRST PART SEEMS TO JUSTIFY THEIR SUPPORTERS.

17. (C) EVERY COLOMBIAN ACADEMIC AND FOREIGN NGO REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTED FOR THIS CABLE EXPRESSED SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT THE INCREASE OF PARAMILITARISM. (ONE PREDICTED, ONLY HALF IN JEST, THAT AS BOTH PARAMILITARIES AND GUERRILLAS GROW STRONGER, SURVIVORS OF THEIR INEVITABLE, APOCALYPTIC CONFRONTATION WILL BE LEFT TO FOUND A NEW, PURGED COLOMBIA.) AS GUERRILLA ACTIVITY INCREASES, AND THE GOC FAILS TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY, A PARAMILITARY BACKLASH IS ALMOST INEVITABLE. COLOMBIANS ARE SICK OF GUERRILLA DEPREDATIONS AND MAY BE WILLING TO TURN A BLIND EYE

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 TO THE GROWTH OF PARAMILITARISM AND REGARD IT AS A NECESSARY  
 EVIL, ALTHOUGH RECENT HEADLINES ABOUT FAROUK YANINE AND THE  
 HACIENDA BELLACRUZ CASES HAVE HEIGHTENED PUBLIC AWARENESS.

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18. (C) A RECENT, CONTROVERSIAL ADDITION TO THE GOC'S SECURITY SYSTEM ARE RURAL COOPERATIVES OF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY (COOPERATIVOS DE VIGILANCIA Y SEGURIDAD RURAL), KNOWN BY THEIR SPANISH ACRONYM, CONVIVIR. WHEN FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER FERNANDO BOTERO INFORMED THE AMBASSADOR ABOUT PLANS TO CREATE THESE GROUPS, THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THEIR PURPOSE AND FUNCTION. THE GOC STATES THAT THESE GROUPS, OFFICIALLY INAUGURATED IN APRIL 1995, ARE LEGAL AND CAN USE PISTOLS AND SHOTGUNS, ALTHOUGH NOT RIFLES, TO PROTECT THEMSELVES WHILE PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES TO THE MILITARY AND POLICE. CRITICS WARN THAT THE CONVIVIRS WILL DEGENERATE INTO LEGALIZED PARAMILITARIES. SEPTEL WILL EXAMINE THE ROLE OF THE CONVIVIRS.

19. (C) FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, PARAMILITARIES WILL CONTINUE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, REVENGE KIDNAPPINGS, AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF HUNDREDS OF CIVILIANS. PROMINENT JOURNALIST MARIA JIMENA DUZAN, IN A RECENT ARTICLE, WARNED THAT "LEGITIMIZING THE DIRTY WAR" BY USING PARAMILITARIES TO FIGHT THE ARMY'S BATTLES WOULD ONLY LEAD TO A "PYRRHIC VICTORY ... BECAUSE THE MORE THE PARAS ARE ENCOURAGED, THE LESS CONTROL OUR ARMED FORCES HAVE OVER PUBLIC ORDER." [REDACTED] EQUATES PARAMILITARISM WITH THE "FEUDALIZATION" OF COLOMBIA -- THE

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 ESTABLISHMENT OF QUASI-INDEPENDENT FIEFDOMS WHERE THE WORD OF THE

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PARAMILITARY "CAUDILLO" IS LAW. THEIR ACTIVITIES MAY SEEM  
CONVENIENT TO COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES UNABLE TO EXERT CONTROL OVER  
THEIR TERRITORY -- BUT THIS SHORT-TERM "CURE" WILL CAUSE LONG-  
TERM PROBLEMS. UNTIL THE GOC ASSERTS GREATER AUTHORITY OVER THE  
COUNTRY -- NOT A LIKELY PROSPECT -- PARAMILITARIES WILL CONTINUE  
TO FILL THE VACUUM. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR  
PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY AND REPORT PERIODICALLY. FRECHETTE

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