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TAGS: PINS, PTER, MARR, MOPS, ASEC, CO
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN THE MID-MAGDALENA REGION
OF COLOMBIA

1. [REDACTED] ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: THE LARGE MID-MAGDALENA (MAGDALENA MEDIO)
AREA IN CENTRAL COLOMBIA, WHICH HAS HAD A LENGTHY
HISTORY OF VIOLENCE, IS CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING A
REIGN OF TERROR. LOCAL RANCHERS HAVE ORGANIZED
VIGILANTE BANDS WHICH HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR
SEVERAL HUNDRED DEATHS OVER THE LAST YEAR AND
DRIVEN THOUSANDS OF CAMPESINOS FROM THEIR HOMES.
OSTENSIBLY THE VIGILANTES AIM TO ELIMINATE
GUERRILLAS AND SYMPATHIZERS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY
ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC), WHICH HAVE LONG
INFESTED THE REGION. THERE ARE INDICATIONS, HOWEVER,

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THAT THE VIGILANTE GROUPS HAVE ALSO BEEN USED TO
DRIVE PEASANTS OFF THE LAND, PERMITTING THE MAJOR
RANCHERS TO CONSOLIDATE AND EXPAND THEIR LANDHOLDINGS.
ARMY UNITS ARE ACTIVELY COOPERATING WITH THE
VIGILANTES, AND THE FARC SEEMS TO BE ON THE
DEFENSIVE. ALARMED BY THE SITUATION, THE GOC HAS

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APPOINTED A HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR THE AREA AND PROPOSED CREATION OF A MID-MAGDALENA REGIONAL AUTONOMOUS CORPORATION WITH A FUNDING OF U.S. DOLS 50 MILLION, BUT ITS PLANS TO ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE, THE INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF LAND, SO FAR ARE INADEQUATE. NATIONALLY, THE MID-MAGDALENA VIOLENCE IS HAVING SERIOUS POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS FOR PRESIDENT BETANCUR AND HIS ADMINISTRATION, WHILE LOCALLY THE VIOLENCE HAS BADLY DISRUPTED THE REGION'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE. SO LONG AS THE MID-MAGDALENA AND SIMILAR AREAS LIE BEYOND THE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE GOC, AND THE GRIEVANCES OF THE CAMPESINOS ARE NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESSED, GUERRILLA INSURGENCY AND RURAL VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA WILL CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

3. FOR 35 YEARS AND MORE THE MID-MAGDALENA REGION OF COLOMBIA HAS BEEN THE SCENE OF VIOLENCE AND LAWLESSNESS. THIS AREA HAS AT LEAST 200,000 INHABITANTS AND STRETCHES OVER 20,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS OF LOW COUNTRY AND UPLANDS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE MAGDALENA RIVER FROM ABOUT PUERTO WILCHES IN NORTHERN SANTANDER DEPARTMENT TO BELOW PUERTO BOYACA IN THE DEPARTMENT OF BOYACA. THIS FERTILE AREA LIES BETWEEN THE CORDILLERA ORIENTAL TO THE EAST AND THE CORDILLERA CENTRAL TO THE WEST AND IS CHARACTERIZED BY LARGE CATTLE RANCHES AND LANDHOLDINGS WHICH ARE NOT FULLY UTILIZED. ALTHOUGH

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ONLY A LITTLE OVER 100 MILES FROM BOGOTA AS THE CROW FLIES (BUT ACROSS HIGH MOUNTAINS), THE MID-MAGDALENA IS REMOTE FROM COLOMBIA'S POPULOUS AREAS, AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN WEAK. AN OFFICIAL ESTIMATE HAS 90 PCT OF THE AREA'S TOTAL OF 30,000 LANDHOLDINGS OCCUPYING 30 PCT OF THE REGION'S LAND. A LARGE PART OF THE POPULATION INHABITS 10 PCT OF THE LAND, MOSTLY LOCATED ON THE INFERTILE SPURS OF THE CORDILLERAS. CLEARLY, A COMPARATIVELY FEW PEOPLE OWN MUCH OF THE LAND IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, AND THERE IS A LARGE POPULATION OF SHARECROPPERS, SQUATTERS AND PERSONS LIVING ON MARGINAL LANDS. ALTHOUGH THE MID-MAGDALENA IS PREDOMINANTLY A RURAL AREA, COLOMBIA'S IMPORTANT PETROLEUM INDUSTRY IS LOCATED NEAR BARRANCABERMEJA, THE REGION'S LARGEST CITY.

4. THE MID-MAGDALENA HAS A LONG TRADITION OF

"RADICAL LIBERALISM." BANDIT LEADERS, PROMISING LAND REFORM AND WEALTH-SHARING; WERE SIGNIFICANT FORCES IN THE AREA DURING THE 1950'S. THE 4,000 PLUS PETROLEUM WORKERS AT BARRANCABERMEJA HAVE A TRADITION OF RADICALISM. THE MOIR (INDEPENDENT REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS MOVEMENT, A NON-VIOLENT PRO-CHINA MARXIST-LENINIST POLITICAL ORGANIZATION) HAS SOME STRENGTH IN BARRANCABERMEJA, PUERTO BERRIO, AND OTHER MID-MAGDALENA TOWNS. THE MID-MAGDALENA HAS ALSO LONG BEEN A STRONGHOLD OF COMMUNIST GUERRILLA ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC), WHOSE IV, XI AND XII FRONTS, WITH A TOTAL OF ABOUT 450 ARMED GUERRILLAS, HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE AREA FOR OVER 20 YEARS, EXTORTING, KIDNAPPING AND MURDERING

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THEIR OPPONENTS. COMMUNIST AND LEFTIST INFLUENCE ON LOCAL POLITICS HAS BEEN STRONG, AND MANY, IF NOT MOST, OF THE INHABITANTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, HAVE EITHER SUPPORTED THE COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS OUT OF CONVICTION OR HAVE COLLABORATED WITH THEM OUT OF FEAR. IN PARTICULAR, MANY LOCAL SCHOOLTEACHERS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SYMPATHETIC TO THE COMMUNISTS. FOR A LONG TIME THE RANCHERS IN THE AREA, I.E., THE BETTER-OFF, HAVE BEEN THREATENED WITH KIDNAPPING BY THE FARC UNLESS THEY

PAID TRIBUTE TO IT. COLOMBIAN ARMY SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT LAST YEAR THE FARC WAS EXTORTING AS MUCH AS U.S. DOLS 300,000 FROM THE AREA EACH MONTH.

5. AS REPORTED BY THE EMBASSY'S DEFENSE ATTACHE IN JUNE 1983, DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS NARCOTICS MANUFACTURERS HAVE INTRODUCED COCA TO THE LOWER SLOPES OF THE EASTERN CORDILLERA, AND THE FARC

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HAS BEEN TAXING THESE CULTIVATIONS AS AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF REVENUE. ACCORDING TO A RECENT ARTICLE IN THE WEEKLY BOGOTA MAGAZINE SEMANA, NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS HAVE INVESTED IN LARGE PROPERTIES IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, AND HAVE BEEN SUPPLYING THE MONEY TO VIGILANTE GROUPS ESTABLISHED BY THE RANCHERS DESCRIBED IN PARAGRAPH 6 BELOW. THE DRUG DEALERS ARE APPARENTLY WORKING BOTH SIDES IN THE MID-MAGDALENA REGION.

6. IN 1982 THE VICTIMS OF FARC EXTORTION DECIDED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS BY ORGANIZING ANTI-COMMUNIST VIGILANTE GROUPS.. FIRST APPEARING IN JULY 1982, THE VIGILANTE MOVEMENT RECEIVED A STRONG IMPETUS IN DECEMBER OF THAT YEAR FOLLOWING THE MURDER BY COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS OF THE SON OF A PROMINENT RANCHER--THE FATHER HIMSELF HAVING BEEN KIDNAPPED BY GUERRILLAS AND RANSOMED SHORTLY BEFORE. THERE ARE NOW AT LEAST FIVE IDENTIFIED, HEAVILY-ARMED VIGILANTE BANDS: THE MAS (WHOSE ACRONYM, STANDING FOR "DEATH TO KIDNAPPERS," LINKS IT TO SIMILAR VIGILANTE ORGANIZATIONS BEARING THE SAME NAME OPERATING ELSEWHERE IN COLOMBIA); THE "EMERION" (EMBRYO); THE "MENUDO" (SMALL FRY); THE "TIZNADOS" (SMUDGED ONES); AND THE "COMITES DE DEFENSA CAMPESINA" (COMMITTEES FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE). THE AVOWED PURPOSE OF THE VIGILANTE GROUPS IS TO "CLEAN UP THE REGION BEFORE NEXT DECEMBER."

7. ACCORDING TO A RECENT TWO-PART ARTICLE IN THE WEEKLY BOGOTA MAGAZINE CROMOS, THE MAS APPEARED IN THE MID-MAGDALENA REGION IN JULY 1982. IT OPERATES IN GROUPS OF 20 OR 30 PEOPLE AND, WITH AS MANY AS 500 MEMBERS, IS THE LARGEST, MOST

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ACTIVE AND MOST FEARED OF THE VIGILANTE BANDS. IT OPERATES IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL AREAS, IS WELL ARMED WITH LIGHT WEAPONS AND USES CAMOUFLAGED CLOTHING. THIS GROUP WARNS ITS INTENDED VICTIMS BY NOTE TO LEAVE THE AREA OR DIE. FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS THE MAS HAS CONCENTRATED ITS ACTIVITIES IN THE PUERTO BERRIO AREA, IN THE CENTER OF THE MID-MAGDALENA, AND IS BELIEVED TO HAVE MURDERED AT LEAST 80 PERSONS.

8. ALSO ACCORDING TO CROMOS, THE "EMBRION" GROUP APPEARED ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO AND HAS ABOUT 200 MEMBERS, MEN AGED 25-35. IT OPERATES IN RURAL AREAS NEAR BARRANCABERMEJA, SAN VICENTE DE CHUCURI, PUERTO BERRIO, LANDAZURI, PUERTO BOYACA, PUERTO WILCHES, SAN RAFAEL DE CHUCURI, VUELTA ACUNA AND PUERTO ARAUJO. ITS MODUS OPERANDI IS TO SEIZE ITS VICTIMS IN DAYLIGHT, ESPECIALLY ON SUNDAYS, MURDER THEM, AND THEN THROW THEIR BODIES INTO THE MAGDALENA RIVER. ITS PARTICULAR TARGETS ARE LOCAL SCHOOLTEACHERS, WHOM "EMBRION" ACCUSES OF "HAVING CONVERTED THE SCHOOLROOMS INTO BARRACKS FOR SUBVERSION." THE NUMBER OF "EMBRION'S" VICTIMS IS UNKNOWN.

9. THE "MENUDO" GROUP, SO-CALLED BECAUSE THE MEMBERS ALLEGEDLY ARE TEEN-AGERS, WAS FORMED IN APRIL OR MAY 1983, ACCORDING TO THE SAME SOURCE. IT NOW NUMBERS ABOUT 80 AND GOES AFTER INDIVIDUALS WITH HISTORIES OF LEFTIST INVOLVEMENT. IT STRIKES WITHOUT WARNING, AND AT LEAST 600 FAMILIES HAVE LEFT THEIR SMALL HOLDINGS BECAUSE OF THIS GROUP'S THREATS AGAINST THEM AS SUPPORTERS OF, OR COLLABORATORS WITH THE FARC. THE VICTIMS OF THIS GROUP ARE SHOT IN THE CHEST OR HEAD. IT OPERATES MAINLY AROUND PUERTO BERRIO, PUERTO OLAYA,



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PUERTO ARAUJO, SAN JUAN, PUERTO CARARE AND
 SAN RAFAEL DE CHUCURI.

10. ACCORDING TO CROMOS, THE "TIZNADOS" OPERATE
 IN THE AREA ABOUT CIMITARRA, IN THE SOUTHERN PART
 OF SANTANDER DEPARTMENT. IT COMPRISES ABOUT 200
 MEN (WHO BLACKEN THEIR FACES BEFORE THEIR
 OPERATIONS) AND BEARS THE SAME NAME AS A FAMOUS
 LIBERAL MILITARY FORMATION WHICH FOUGHT IN THE
 "THOUSAND DAYS WAR" BETWEEN THE LIBERAL AND
 CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL PARTIES AT THE BEGINNING OF
 THIS CENTURY. IT FIRST WARNS ITS VICTIMS, ALLEGEDLY
 USUALLY LEFTIST MILITANTS OR PERSONS WITH
 CRIMINAL RECORDS. THIS GROUP REPORTEDLY HAS KILLED
 MORE THAN 80 PEOPLE BY SHOOTING THEM IN THE HEAD.
 THE EMBASSY, HOWEVER, HAS INFORMATION INDICATING
 THAT THE "TIZNADOS" ARE NO MORE THAN COMMON
 CRIMINALS AND ARE NOT NECESSARILY ASSOCIATED WITH
 ANTI-COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES. IF SO, THIS GROUP'S

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ACTIVITIES MAY BE SIMPLE BANDITRY OR AIMED AT
 DRIVING CAMPESINOS FROM THEIR LAND.

11. FINALLY, THE "COMITES DE DEFENSA CAMPESINA,"
 ACCORDING TO CROMOS, IS A GROUP OF 120 MEN AND WOMEN
 ESTABLISHED IN APRIL 1983 WHICH OPERATES NEAR PUERTO
 BERRIO, BARRANCABERMEJA, SAN VICENTE DE CHUCURI,
 PUERTO OLAYA AND YONDO. MEMBERS DRESS IN GREEN,
 WEAR CAPS AND WARN THEIR INTENDED VICTIMS. IT
 HAS MURDERED AT LEAST 40 CAMPESINOS CONSIDERED TO
 BE GUERRILLA ALLIES. IT LEVIES A MONTHLY
 MONEY TAX ON THOSE WHO LIVE IN ITS AREAS OF OPERATIONS,
 AND RANCHERS SYMPATHETIC TO ITS OPERATIONS
 CONTRIBUTE TO ITS UPKEEP. ITS MOTTO IS "CLEAN
 UP THE SUBVERSIVES IN THE AREA, COST WHAT IT
 MAY."

12. THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO OTHER REPORTED
 VIGILANTE GROUPS IN THE AREA, THE "GRILLOS"

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(CRICKETS) AND THE "ALFA 83," ABOUT WHICH THERE IS LITTLE INFORMATION.

13. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE MID-MAGDALENA IS CURRENTLY THE MOST DANGEROUS AREA IN COLOMBIA. THE FARC CLAIMS THAT MORE THAN 226 PERSONS IN THE AREA HAVE BEEN KILLED SINCE DECEMBER 1982, AND JUSTICE MINISTER LARA STATED THAT 347 HOMICIDES HAVE BEEN REPORTED OFFICIALLY, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT GIVE A TIME FRAME. THE TRUE FIGURE MAY BE MUCH HIGHER, PERHAPS AS MANY AS 500. MANY OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MURDERED WITH THE EXTREME BRUTALITY WHICH HAS TRADITIONALLY CHARACTERIZED RURAL VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA. TERROR REIGNS IN THE AREA, AND HUNDREDS OF CAMPESINOS HAVE FLED THE LAND, FEARFUL OF BEING MURDERED AS GUERRILLA SUPPORTERS OR SYMPATHIZERS. PUERTO

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BERRIO, THE COMMUNITY HARDEST HIT BY THE VIOLENCE, REPORTEDLY IS ALMOST A GHOST TOWN. BETWEEN THE END OF JULY AND MID-AUGUST 1983, 28 MURDERED PERSONS WERE BURIED THERE. BUSINESS IS REPORTEDLY DOWN BY TWO THIRDS, AND AT LEAST 500 PEOPLE HAVE LEFT THE TOWN. MANY SCHOOLTEACHERS, WIDELY BELIEVED BY THE CONSERVATIVES IN THE AREA TO HARBOR PRO-COMMUNIST SENTIMENTS, HAVE BEEN WARNED TO LEAVE PUERTO BERRIO AND ELSEWHERE IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, AND HAVE DONE SO. CONSEQUENTLY, SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IS DOWN A REPORTED 70 PCT IN PUERTO BERRIO, AND IN SANTANDER DEPARTMENT 5,000 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL. THREATENED BY THE VIGILANTES, AT LEAST 15,000 CAMPESINOS REPORTEDLY HAVE LEFT THEIR FARMS IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, AND MANY HAVE HEADED FOR BARRANCABERMEJA, THE LARGEST CITY IN THE AREA. ONE GROUP OF CAMPESINOS IN EARLY AUGUST OCCUPIED A CHURCH IN BARRANCABERMEJA TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR PLIGHT. THEY REFUSED TO SHOW THEIR FACES TO PHOTOGRAPHERS FOR FEAR OF REPRISALS FROM THE VIGILANTES.

14. WHAT BEGAN AS A "CLEAN-UP" OF COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS, THEIR SUPPORTERS AND THEIR SYMPATHIZERS BY THE VIGILANTES REPORTEDLY HAS BROADENED TO INCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE NON-VIOLENT MOIR, CRIMINALS, PETTY MALEFACTORS AND HOMOSEXUALS-- EVERYONE IN FACT WHO IS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO THE VIGILANTES. IN ITS RECENT ARTICLE ON THE

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MID-MAGDALENA THE MAGAZINE SEMANA DESCRIBED THE SITUATION AS "A POLARIZATION OF SOCIETY-- GUERRILLAS AND CAMPESINOS ON ONE SIDE, RANCHERS, MERCHANTS AND PARAMILITARY GROUPS ON THE OTHER-- WHICH ORIGINATED IN RIGID SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES WHICH HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO THE GROWING

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NEEDS OF THE MARGINAL GROUPS."

15. THE REIGN OF TERROR HAS PROCEEDED LARGELY UNIMPEDED BECAUSE THE SECURITY FORCES IN THE REGION DELIBERATELY HAVE NOT INTERFERED WITH THE VIGILANTE BANDS. THESE FORCES CONSIST OF (1) THE COLOMBIAN ARMY'S XIV BRIGADE, ESTABLISHED IN APRIL 1983 AND HEADQUARTERED IN CIMITARRA, WHICH IS COMPRISED OF THREE INFANTRY BATTALIONS, AN ENGINEER BATTALION AND A SERVICE BATTALION (WITH A TOTAL OF 3,000-4,000 MEN), AND (2) A POLICE HEADQUARTERS UNIT, RECENTLY REINFORCED BY COMPANY OF POLICE CARABINEROS (ABOUT 100 PERSONS). THE COLOMBIAN NAVY ALSO HAS SMALL PATROL BOATS ON THE MAGDALENA RIVER. ACCORDING TO AN ARMY SOURCE, EVEN 20 BATTALIONS COULD NOT PATROL THE AREA ADEQUATELY.

16. THE CAUSES OF THE MID-MAGDALENA VIOLENCE ARE SEEN VERY DIFFERENTLY BY THE VARIOUS
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PROTAGONISTS. THE COMMANDER OF THE XIV BRIGADE, BRIGADIER GENERAL DANIEL GARCIA ECHEVERRY, DISINGENUOUSLY TOLD THE PRESS IN MID-AUGUST (BEFORE THE PRESENT PUBLICITY ABOUT THE SITUATION) THAT "WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE IS A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES, WHICH ARE DISARMED, AGAINST THE COMMUNIST PARTY, WHICH IS ARMED THROUGH THE FARC." HE ADDED THAT OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS 453 CAMPESINOS HAD BEEN SHOT BY THE FARC. AN UNNAMED COMMUNIST SPOKESMAN WAS QUOTED IN THE PRESS ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS CALLING THE SITUATION IN THE MID-MAGDALENA "GENOCIDE PERPETRATED BY THE LANDHOLDERS HELPED BY THE FORCES OF THE GOVERNMENT." IN SEPTEMBER DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL FERNANDO LANDAZABAL, ANSWERING CRITICISM IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES THAT THE ARMY IS PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MID-MAGDALENA VIOLENCE, TERMED IT "SUBVERSION AGAINST SUBVERSION." HE VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED THE ARMY'S ACTIONS THERE BUT DID ADMIT THAT HE "COULD NOT DENY THAT THERE HAVE BEEN (ARMY) ELEMENTS WHICH COULD HAVE COMMITTED BLAMEWORTHY ACTS WHICH COULD BE PUNISHED."

17. IN RECENT WEEKS THE TURMOIL IN THE MID-MAGDALENA HAS RECEIVED MUCH PUBLICITY, WITH THE NATIONAL MAGAZINES CROMOS AND SEMANA CARRYING IN-DEPTH ARTICLES ON THE VIOLENCE AND WITH THE PRESS REPORTING ATROCITIES ALMOST DAILY. THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION HAS RESPONDED TO THE AREA'S PROBLEMS WITH A VARIETY OF INITIATIVES. IN LATE AUGUST, DEFENSE MINISTER LANDAZABAL STATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE GUARANTEEING "OPERATION RETURN", A CAMPAIGN TO INDUCE THE PEASANTS TO RETURN TO

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THEIR LAND. THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION, AS PART OF ITS NATIONAL REHABILITATION PLAN, HAS ALSO EARMARKED OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS THREE BILLION PESOS (ABOUT U.S. DOLS 36.7 MILLION) TO INCORA (THE COLOMBIAN AGRARIAN REFORM INSTITUTE) FOR THE PURCHASE OF LAND TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO LANDLESS CAMPESINOS THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA. THE MID-MAGDALENA IS SLATED TO RECEIVE 600 MILLION PESOS (ABOUT U.S. DOLS 7.3 MILLION) FROM THIS AMOUNT AND PLANS TO

DISTRIBUTE 17,000 HECTARES (ABOUT 42,000 ACRES) TO LANDLESS PEASANTS IN THE REGION. ERNESTO MUNOZ OROZCO, THE INSTITUTE'S MANAGER, HAS STATED THAT THE ZONE'S SOCIAL PROBLEM IS "80 PCT CAUSED BY THE POSSESSION OF LAND." YET THE GOC'S PLANNED LAND REFORM IN THE MID-MAGDALENA SEEMS WHOLLY INADEQUATE, GIVEN THE SIZE OF THE AREA AND ITS POPULATION.

18. AT THE END OF AUGUST MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT ALFONSO GOMEZ DESIGNATED ANTONIO DUQUE (CHIEF OF THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DIVISION OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE) AS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR THE MID-MAGDALENA, WITH BROAD POWERS TO COORDINATE ALL GOC ACTIVITIES IN REHABILITATING THE AREA. SHORTLY AFTERWARDS DUQUE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT ONE OF THE MID-MAGDALENA'S BASIC PROBLEMS IS THE "COMPLETE LACK OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS CHARGED WITH CARRYING OUT THE OBJECTIVES OUTLINED BY THE CHIEF OF STATE." IN EARLY SEPTEMBER THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION PROPOSED CREATION OF A MID-MAGDALENA REGIONAL AUTONOMOUS CORPORATION AND ANNOUNCED 4 BILLION PESOS (ABOUT U.S. DOLS 50,000,000) WOULD BE PROVIDED TO FINANCE IT, TO COME FROM GENERAL REVENUES AND SPECIAL NEW TAXES. ON SEPTEMBER 6 THE

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CONGRESS BEGAN DEBATE ON THE MID-MAGDALENA. CARLOS HOLGUIN, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS, TOLD THE REPORTING OFFICER SEPTEMBER 6 THAT THE DEBATE WOULD BE "FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY" AND WOULD NOT RESULT IN NEW LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS. HE SAID IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE CORPORATION TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY BECAUSE OF THE NUMEROUS DEPARTMENTAL AND OTHER JURISDICTIONS IN THE AREA. HOLGUIN ADDED THAT THE REGION'S PROBLEMS ARE SO DEEP-SEATED THAT THEY WOULD TAKE YEARS TO SOLVE, EVEN WITH THE BEST OF EFFORTS. CLEARLY, PRESS AND PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE REGION'S PROBLEMS HAS CAUSED THE GOC TO FOCUS ON THEM AS WELL. BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THIS BELATED ATTENTION WILL PROVIDE ADEQUATE MEASURES TO RE-ESTABLISH PUBLIC ORDER AND ADDRESS THE BASIC PROBLEMS OF THE MID-MAGDALENA.

19. MEANTIME, AS REPORTED BY THE EMBASSY'S DEFENSE

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ATTACHE IN JUNE 1983, THE COLOMBIAN ARMY'S XIV BRIGADE HAS HAD SOME SUCCESS AGAINST THE FARC IN RECENT MONTHS. THE RANCHERS AND THE ARMY ARE ACTIVELY COOPERATING WITH EACH OTHER AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS, AND THE ARMY NO LONGER IS PENALIZING THE CAMPESINOS FOR HAVING COOPERATED WITH THE FARC. THE REMOTENESS, SIZE AND LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE MID-MAGDALENA REGION AND THE ARMY'S LACK OF MOBILITY HAVE SERIOUSLY HAMPERED THE ARMY'S OPERATIONS, HOWEVER. THAT THE FARC IN THE REGION IS BEING PRESSED BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE VIGILANTE GROUPS IS EVIDENCED BY PUBLIC CALLS IN THE LATTER PART OF AUGUST FROM FARC AND COMMUNIST PARTY SPOKESMEN FOR A CEASE-FIRE IN THE MID-MAGDALENA. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS INFORMATION THAT THE FARC GUERRILLA SIMPLY MOVED TO MORE OUTLYING AREAS WHEN THE ARMY MOVED IN, AND THAT THE FARC CONTINUES TO CONDUCT OPERATIONS IN THE MID-MAGDALENA.

20. COMMENT: WHILE THE EXACT SITUATION AT PRESENT IN THE MID-MAGDALENA IS CONFUSED AND IN FLUX, WHAT DOES SEEM CLEAR IS THAT THE LOCAL RANCHERS, HEAVILY ARMED SINCE THE END OF LAST YEAR, HAVE BEEN WAGING AN ALL-OUT BLOODY WAR AGAINST THE FARC AND ANYONE THOUGHT TO BE SYMPATHETIC TO IT, THAT THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES ARE COOPERATING WITH THE RANCHERS AGAINST THE FARC, AND THAT THE

RESULTING VIOLENCE HAS CAUSED THOUSANDS OF CAMPESINOS, GROUND BETWEEN THE FARC AND ITS ENEMIES, TO FLEE THE AREA.

21. WHAT IS LESS CLEAR IS EXACTLY WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE CAMPESINOS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS THE VIGILANTE GROUPS IN SOME INSTANCES ARE INTIMIDATING CAMPESINOS INTO SELLING THEIR LAND

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TO THE RANCHERS AT LOW PRICES OR ELSE SIMPLY FORCING THE CAMPESINOS TO ABANDON THEIR LAND, WHICH IS THEN TAKEN UP BY THE RANCHERS. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION RECENTLY OBTAINED BY THE DEFENSE ATTACHE, SOME ARMY UNITS OPERATING IN THE MID-MAGDALENA MAY HAVE (ILLEGALLY) ACCEPTED PAYMENTS FROM THE VIGILANTE GROUPS, THUS GIVING SUBSTANCE TO THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S ADMISION (PARAGRAPH 16 ABOVE). IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE RANCHERS, VIA THEIR VIGILANTES, ARE NOT ONLY SEEKING TO ELIMINATE THEIR OLD ENEMIES, THE COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS AND THEIR ALLIES, WITH THE FULL AND ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE ARMY, BUT ARE SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY THUS AFFORDED TO AGGRANDIZE THEIR ECONOMICAL AND POLITICAL POWER IN THE AREA. THE DEFENSE ATTACHE HAS REPORTED THAT THE ARMY IS FEARFUL THAT THE VIGILANTES MAY TURN ON THE ARMY IF AND WHEN THEIR COMMON ENEMY--THE FARC-- IS DEFEATED. THUS THE PRESENT MID-MAGDALENA TURMOIL APPEARS TO BE IN PART THE LATEST CHAPTER IN AN OLD HISTORY OF CLASS WARFARE BETWEEN LANDHOLDERS AND PEASANTS IN THE AREA.

22. THE WIDE LOCAL PUBLICITY BEING GIVEN THE MID-MAGDALENA VIOLENCE, WHICH REMINDS COLOMBIANS THAT LARGE AREAS OF THEIR COUNTRY ARE YET TO BE PACIFIED AND THAT SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, IS HURTING BETANCUR'S IMAGE AS A PEACEMAKER AND EMBARRASSING HIS ADMINISTRATION. ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE MID-MAGDALENA VIOLENCE IS UNDERCUTTING THE GOC'S PRESTIGE AND AUTHORITY AS WELL AS DIVERTING SCARCE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN RESOURCES. ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, IT HAS DISRUPTED THE LIFE OF A FERTILE REGION, RUINING THE LANDED AND SUBSISTENCE ECONOMIES

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AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
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OF THE MID-MAGDALENA AND DEPRESSING COMMERCE
IN ITS CITIES AND TOWNS (BUT WITHOUT HAVING
MUCH IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AS A WHOLE),
REDUCING AVAILABLE FOOD SUPPLIES AND CAUSING
SERIOUS SOCIAL DISLOCATIONS SUCH AS DEPOPULATED
FARMS AND OVERCROWDED CITIES.

23. THE LAWLESSNESS CURRENTLY PREVAILING IN
THIS LARGE AREA OF CENTRAL COLOMBIA POINTS UP
THE FACT THAT EVEN IN 1983--OVER THIRTY YEARS
AFTER THE FAMOUS VIOLENCIA--LARGE PARTS OF THIS
COUNTRY, LARGELY BECAUSE OF GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS
CAUSING REMOTENESS AND ISOLATION, ARE STILL
BEYOND THE REACH OF THE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. IN SOME OF THESE AREAS,
AS IN THE MID-MAGDALENA, (E.G. CAQUETA DEPARTMENT,
WHERE THE FARC AND THE M-19 OPERATE, AND HUILA
DEPARTMENT, WHERE THE FARC, M-19, AND EPL ARE
AT LARGE), GUERRILLA INFLUENCE IS STRONG.

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BUT OTHER HUGE AND REMOTE AREAS OF COLOMBIA,
SUCH AS THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN LLANOS (VICHADA
AND AMAZONAS) ARE SO FAR FREE FROM VIOLENCE
AND GUERRILLA INFESTATION. THIS IS MAINLY
BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL BUT EMPTY. IN THOSE INHABITED
AREAS BEYOND THE GOC'S CONTROL CHARACTERIZED

[REDACTED]

BY A RULING OLIGARCHY OF LARGE LANDOWNERS
DOMINATING LARGE NUMBERS OF POOR, LANDLESS
PEASANTS, STRONG CLASS ANIMOSITIES RANKLE. THIS
HAS BEEN AT THE ROOT OF COLOMBIA'S LONG HISTORY
OF RURAL VIOLENCE. SO LONG AS THESE ANIMOSITIES
ARE NOT RESOLVED AND LARGE AREAS OF COLOMBIA
LIE OUTSIDE EFFECTIVE GOC CONTROL, BEYOND
JUSTICE, LAW AND ORDER, GUERRILLA INSURGENCY AND
RURAL VIOLENCE IN THE MID-MAGDALENA AND ELSEWHERE
IN COLOMBIA WILL CONTINUE. END COMMENT.
TAMBS

[REDACTED]

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