

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 0658

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT, SNAR, CO
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH LIBERAL PARTY PRE-CANDIDATE
TURBAY

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: DEPSPITETHE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT JULIO CESAR TURBAY AYALA IS THE TRAFFICKERS' CANDIDATE, I HAVE BECOME CONVINCED THAT THE ANSWER IS MORE COMPLEX AND THAT HE IS PROBABLY AN HONEST POLITICIAN OPERATING IN A CORRUPT MILIEU. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS OPPONENT, FORMER PRESIDENT LLERAS WHO WAS BILLED AS STATESMANLIKE AND HONEST, APPEARS FROM RECENT INFORMATION TO BE INVOLVED WITH QUESTIONABLE DRUG TRAFFIC ASSOCIATIONS. IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF COLOMBIAN SOCIETY POLITICS, THIS IS PROBABLY INEVITABLE. IN ANY CASE, TURBAY APPEARS A LIKELY WINNER AND WE MUST DEAL WITH HIM. IN FACT, THE EMEGENCE OF POLITICALLY ACTIVE TRAFFICKERS WITH ENORMOUS LIQUIDITY IS FRIGHTENING TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS AND IS PROBABLY THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN INCREASING US-COLOMBIAN COOPERATION IN NARCOTICS INTERDICTION.

2. THE CONVENTIMNAL WISDOM IS THAT JULIO CESAR TURBAY AYALA, WHO IS LEADING IN THE CONTEST FOR THE LIBERRL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, IS THE PREFERRED CANDIDATE OF NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS IN COLOMBIA. THE CONTEST HAS BEEN CAST IN TERMS OF THE CORRUPT MACHINE

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POLITICIAN VERSUS THE HONEST STATESMANLIKE FORMER PRESIDENT. RUMORS CONCERNING TURBAY RANGE FROM THE ALLEGATION THAT HE IS OR HAS BEEN AN ACTIVE TRAFFICKER TO THE ASSERTION THAT WHILE HE MAY BE "CLEAN" HIMSELF, SOME OF HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE LINKS TO THE DRUG TRAFFICKERS. IT IS SAID THAT HE HAS RECEIVED IMPORTANT MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM SUCH CIRCLES. AFTER HEARING THESE THINGS

DURING MY BRIEFING SESSIONS IN WASHINGTON AND HAVING THEM REITERATED HERE FROM PARTISAN SOURCES, I WAS PREPARED TO BE EXTREMELY SKEPTICAL CONCERNING ANY FACET OF TURBAY'S ACTIVITIES. MY CONCERN WAS HIGHTENED BY THE FACT THAT IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY EVIDENT THAT TURBAY IS RUNNING WELL AHEAD OF HIS LIBERAL OPPONENT, FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS RESTREPO, AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO SWEEP THE ELECTIONS AGAINST CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE, BELISARIO BETANCOUR, BARRING PRESENTLY UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES.

3. HAVING NOW HAD AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ABOUT A THREE-HOUR CONVERSATION WITH TURBAY, I AM CONFRONTED WITH THE USUAL TRUISM THAT REALITY IS OFTEN MORE COMPLEX THAN THEORY. I WAS IMPRESSED IN SPITE OF MYSELF. TURBAY IS HIGHLY ARTICULATE, VERY INTELLIGENT AND -- DESPITE THE NECESSARILY IMPRESSIONISTIC NATURE OF MY OBSERVATIONS -- COMES ACROSS AS A VERY OPEN AND HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED POLITICIAN. HE ADDRESSED THE RUMORED CHARGES WHICH I RAISED DIRECTLY WITH HIM. HE FLATLY DENIED THE ALLEGATIONS AND CLAIMED THAT THEY WERE THE RESULT OF A WHISPER CAMPAIGN INSTITUTUED BY THE LLERAS CAMP. HE VIEWED SUCH TACTICS AS AN INDICATION OF THE DESPPERATION OF THE LLERAS GROUP AND SAID THAT SOME OF THE CLAIMS WERE SO EXTRAVAGANT THAT THEY HAD A BOOMERANG EFFECT GARNERING HIM SUBSTANTIAL SYMPATHY.

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AMONG THE POINTS HE MADE WERE THE FOLLOWING:

A. IF THERE WERE ANY PROOF AT ALL OF THE NUMEROUS ALLEGATIONS, HIS OPPOENTS WOULD HAVE BROUGHT IT FORTH. EVEN THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER, ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO, WAS NOT IMMUNE FROM CHARGES FOR WHICH THERE WAS EVIDENCE AND HE NOW FACES ARREST (BOGOTA 0559). IN THIS CONNECTION, OUR OWN INTELLIGENCE HOLDINGS TEND TO CONFIRM THIS. WHILE THERE IS AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT TURBAY'S NEPHEW, ANIBAL TURBAY, IS HEAVILY INVOLVED IN TRAFFICKING, TURBAY'S MEMO TO ME (BOGOTA 457)ARTCULLY DISASSOCIATE S THE CANDIDATE FROM ANY LINK WITH THIS FAMILY BLACK SHEEP. A RECENT CONVERSATION I HAD WITH A CRUSTY ANTI-TURBAY HIGH OFFICIAL OF THE NATIONAL POLICE CAUSES ME TO BELIEVE THAT THIS PARTICULAR OFFICIAL'S ATTITUDE WAS GENERATED BY THE NEPHEW'S NEFARIOUS ACTIVITIES. HE HAD ALSO STATED THAT MEMBERS OF THE LEBANESE COMMUNITY WHO WERE STRONGLY SUPPORTING TURBAY (ONE OF THEIR OWN AND NOT AN INCONSIDERABLE REASON FOR SOME OF THE OPPOSITION TO TURBAY AMONG THE COLOMBIAN ELITE) HAVE A DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH REPRESENTATION AMONG TRAFFICKERS. I CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT IF THERE WERE ANY EVIDENCE AGAINST TURBAY, IT WOULD

HAVE LONG SINCE BEEN USED.

B. TURBAY HAS CHALLENGED LLERAS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS TO A "MORAL DEBATE" AND HAS DONE SO AGAIN AS RECENTLY AS YESTERDAY. THIS WOULD CONSIST OF FULL DISCLOSURE OF BANK ACCOUNTS -- INCLUDING A DISCUSSION OF FOREIGN ACCOUNTS ILLEGAL IN COLOMBIA -- INCOME TAX DECLARATIONS, REAL ESTATE HOLDINGS, ETC. TURBAY CLAIMED THAT HIS NET WORTH ALLOWING FOR INFLATION HAS REMAINED CONSTANT FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS. HE IMPLIED STRONGLY THAT LLERAS' OWN FULL DISCLOSURE WOULD BE HIGHLY REVEALING AND DAMAGING.

C. TURBAY RECITED A LENGTHY LIST OF HIS SUPPORTERS WHICH INCLUDED PRESTIGIOUS POLITICIANS, UNIVERSTIY FIGURES,
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AUTHORS, INTELLECTUALS AND JOURNALISTS.

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HELD FORTH AT SOME LENGH CONCERNING HIS STANDS ON CORRUPTION, LAW AND ORDER, AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND COMMITTED HIMSELF SPECIFICALLY TO CLOSE COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION WITH THE U.S. IN NARCOTICS INTERDICTION.

4. TURBAY THEN COMMENTED ON THE ASSOCIATIONS OF HIS OPPONENT, CARLOS LLERAS. HE CITED A TRIP BY LLERAS TO SANTA MARTA, AN AREA KNOWN AS A FOCAL POINT OF

DRUG TRAFFICKING. LERAS IS SAID TO HAVE ADDRESSED HIS SUPPORTERS FROM A BALCONY IN THE COMPANY OF ULVEDA PIETRI, THE WELL-KNOWN MISTRESS OF A NOTORIOUS TRAFFICKER WHOSE PSEUDONYM IS "CAPTAIN BLACK". HE SAID THAT LLERAS' CONGRESSIONAL LIST FOR THE FEBRUARY PSEUDO-PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE GUAJIRA, AN AREA WELL-KNOWN FOR ITS LAWLESSNESS AND AS A SOURCE OF MARIJUANA WAS LED BY MIGUEL PINEDA BARRIOS, THE SCION OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS TRAFFICKING FAMILY IN THE AREA. WE HAD RECEIVED THIS PARTICULAR REPORT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE AND WERE TOLD THAT THIS WAS THE PRINCIPAL REASON FOR THE INCLUSION IN PRESIDENT LOPEZ' NEW YEAR SPEECH OF REMARKS TO THE EFFECT THAT NONE OF THE CANDIDATES COULD PRESUME TO HAVE IMPECABLE RECORDS WITH REGARD TO ASSOCIATIONS (BOGOTA 0128). TURBAY STATED THAT ONE OF LLERAS' CLOSEST ASSOCIATES AND KEY FUND
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RAISERS IS FORMER CONSUL GENERAL IN NEW YORK, GUSTAVO GAVIRIA GONZALEZ. GAVIRIA, HE SAID, IS UNABLE TO OBTAIN A U.S. VISA TO OPERATE HIS COFFEE IMPORT FIRM IN NEW YORK BECAUSE OF HIS ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES. ONE OF CARLOS LLERAS' SONS IS THE NEW YORK MANAGER FOR THE FIRM. WE HAVE IN FACT DENIED GAVIRIA A VISA SINCE WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE HE HAS ENGAGED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING (76DEA28937) AND HE IS KNOWN TO BE AN IMPORTANT LLERAS FUND RAISER. WE CANNOT CONFIRM WHETHER LLERAS' SON MANAGES GAVIRIA'S BUSINESS IN NEW YORK.

5. IT WOULD BE EASY TO CONCLUDE FROM THE ABOVE THAT PERHAPS BOTH GENTLEMEN ARE CROOKS AND THAT WE WOULD BE IN TROUBLE NO MATTER WHO WINS. IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MILIEU OF COLOMBIA HAS DEVELOPED TO A POINT THAT IT IS VITUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO ORGANIZE A POLITICAL GROUP THAT WOULD NOT CONTAIN ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH TRAFFICKERS. THIS IS NOT NECESSARILY ALL BAD. THE FACT THAT TRAFFICKERS HAVE ENORMOUS LIQUIDITY AND ARE BECOMING ACTIVE POLITICALLY (THE MAYOR OF BOGOTA GAVE ME HIS ESTIMATE THAT THE NEXT LEGISLATURE WILL HAVE AT LEASE 10 DEPUTIES WHO WILL BE BEHOLDEN DIRECTLY TO TRAFFICKERS) IS SCARING ANY NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS. I AM CONVINCED THAT THIS FACTOR AND THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGE TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE TRADITIONAL RULING ELITE ARE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE GROWING CONCERN WITH REGARD TO THE TRAFFIC AND THE INCRESASING COOPERATION WE ARE RECEIVING IN ITS INTERDICTION.

6. TURBAY IS LIKELY TO BE COLOMBIA'S NEXT PRESIDENT AND

I BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO INCLUDE THAT FACTOR IN OUR
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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IN ORDER TO MAKE THE BEST OF
IT. HE IS CLEARLY SENSITIVE TO THE WHISPERED
ACCUSTATION THAT HE IS THE CANDIDATE OF THE DRUG TRAFFICKERS.
ASSUMING EVEN A RELATIVE HOESTY ON HIS PART, THIS
SENSITIVITY WILL BE TO OUR ADVANTAGE IN ACHIEVEING
GREATER GOC COOPERATION AGAINST TRAFFICKING, IF HE SHOULD
BE ELECTED. I AM PRESENTLY INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT
HE IS BASICALLY A SOUND INDIVIDUAL, FUNCTIONING PRAG-
MATICALLY IN A CORRUPT MILIEU. HIS OBSERVATIONS
CONCERNING THE LLERAS WHISPER CAMPAIGN APPEAR TO HAVE
THE RING OF TRUTH. I INTEND TO MEET FURTHER WITH
TURBAY IN ORDER TO FURTHER SOLIDIFY HIS COMMITMENT TO
A COMPREHENSIVE NARCOTICS INTERDICTION PROGRAM.
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