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ACTION ARA-00

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JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND WDD/S/VAN VLIET
FBI FOR CID/IRS/IRUZ
USIA FOR AR, I/GAR
TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: 07/31/02
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, MARR, MASS, SNAR, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO
SUBJECT: BEDOYA'S DEPARTURE: HOW, WHY, WHAT IT MEANS

REF: (A) BOGOTA 7119 (B) BOGOTA 7122

(U) CLASSIFIED BY POL/ECONOFF RICHARD HAWKINS. REASON: 1.5 (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: GEN. HAROLD BEDOYA'S SUDDEN DISMISSAL AS CHIEF OF THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY FORCES BY PRESIDENT ERNESTO SAMPER ON JULY 24 HAD BEEN GESTATING A LONG WHILE, BUT THE TIMING CAUGHT EVERYONE BY SURPRISE. AS THE DUST SETTLES FROM THE POLITICAL NEAR-CRISIS, IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT SAMPER DID MUCH MORE IN FIRING BEDOYA THAN GET RID OF A POWERFUL AND STUBBORN OPPONENT. IN FACT, THAT DISMISSAL SIGNALLED A STRONG PUSH BY SAMPER AND HIS CLOSEST SUPPORTERS TO LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR A PEACE PROCESS IN COLOMBIA. SAMPER WILL BE REMEMBERED BY VIRTUE OF HIS MARCO ASSOCIATIONS, THE INTERNATIONAL DISREPUTE HE HAS BROUGHT TO COLOMBIA, AND HIS FAILURE TO DELIVER ON CENTRAL PROMISES OF HIS CAMPAIGN SUCH AS IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING CONDITIONS, LOWERING OF INFLATION, AND GENERATION OF NEW EMPLOYMENT. IN THE AUTUMN OF THE SINGLE TERM ALLOWED HIM UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, HE IS PLAYING HIS LAST HIGH CARD IN AN URGENT BID TO BE ASSOCIATED IN HISTORY WITH HIS EFFORTS TOWARD PEACE AND IN FAVOR

OF HUMAN RIGHTS. SAMPER AND HIS ADMINISTRATION WILL PUSH HARD ON THE PEACE PROCESS WHICH, FOR NOW, HAS OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT. END SUMMARY.

WHY WAS BEDOYA IN COMMAND?

2. (C) A REVIEW OF BEDOYA'S PREVIOUS POSITIONS BEFORE ASSUMING COMMAND OF THE MILITARY FORCES GIVES SOME CLUE TO HOW HE WAS VIEWED BY HIS CIVILIAN SUPERIORS. AS MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON, HE OCCUPIED A POSITION TRADITIONALLY HELD BY A SENIOR OFFICER WHOSE CAREER IS NEAR AN END AND WHO IS BEING LET DOWN EASY. RECENT PRESS REPORTS HAVE CLARIFIED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF BEDOYA'S SELECTION. IT WAS FERNANDO BOTERO, SAMPER'S CAMPAIGN MANAGER AND THEN-NEWLY APPOINTED DEFENSE MINISTER, WHO INSISTED MG BEDOYA BE BROUGHT BACK TO ASSUME COMMAND OF THE ARMY, A DEMAND WHICH SAMPER RESISTED VIGOROUSLY BEFORE FINALLY GIVING IN. BEDOYA SERVED AS ARMY COMMANDER FOR A YEAR BEFORE HIS PROMOTION TO FULL GENERAL AND ANOTHER YEAR BEFORE TAKING CHARGE OF THE MILITARY FORCES IN DECEMBER 1996.

PUBLIC RECORD OF THE SAMPER-BEDOYA CONFRONTATION

3. (C) ON JULY 9, 1995, A MEMO FROM THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND TO DEFENSE MINISTER FERNANDO BOTERO WAS LEAKED TO THE PRESS. IN THAT MEMO THE GENERALS DISAGREED WITH THE PLAN TO DEMILITARIZE LA URIBE, AN AREA OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO BOTH THE ARMY AND THE GUERRILLAS AS A FORMER INSURGENT STRONGHOLD WHICH THE ARMY HAD TAKEN BACK BY

FORCE. ON JULY 10 SAMPER REMINDED PARTICIPANTS AT THE SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY OF THE NAVAL ACADEMY, "I AM IN COMMAND HERE." ON APRIL 15, 1996, GUERRILLAS SLAUGHTERED THIRTY SOLDIERS RIDING IN AN UNPROTECTED CONVOY NEAR PUERRES, NARIÑO DEPARTMENT. ON AUGUST 30, 1996, ELEMENTS OF THE COLOMBIAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES (FARC) ATTACKED THE MILITARY BASE AT LAS DELICIAS, PUTUMAYO, LEAVING 31 DEAD AND KIDNAPPING 60 SOLDIERS. BEDOYA BLAMED THE DISASTER ON FAILURE OF INTELLIGENCE, BUT PRESS ACCOUNTS ALSO SUGGESTED FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP. ON NOVEMBER 13, 1996, THE FARC PROPOSED DEMILITARIZATION OF 13,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS IN CAQUETA AS A CONDITION FOR FREEING THE CAPTIVES. ON DECEMBER 6, THE MILITARY FORCES BEGAN ON CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT ORDERS TO DEMILITARIZE UNILATERALLY A PART OF CAQUETA WHICH HAD NOT BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE FARC, AND THE LATTER REFUSED TO PLAY ALONG; THAT EFFORT DIED. GUILLERMO ALBERTO GONZALEZ WAS NAMED DEFENSE MINISTER ON JANUARY 10, 1997, AS BEDOYA, THEN ACTING MINISTER, AFFIRMED THAT A MINISTER OF DEFENSE MUST BE "SPOTLESS." GONZALEZ TOOK OFFICE ON FEBRUARY 3. SIX WEEKS LATER, HE WAS GONE AMID ACCUSATIONS OF HAVING TAKEN MARCO MONEY FOR A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN. BEDOYA WAS AGAIN ACTING MINISTER, CALLING FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF MILITIAS TO FIGHT THE GUERRILLAS.

UNTIL CURRENT DEFIN ECHEVERRI ASSUMED OFFICE ON APRIL 10. ON APRIL 24, SAMPER NAMED JOSE NOE RIOS AS GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATOR FOR THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS; BEDOYA GRUMBLED PRIVATELY BUT LOUDLY THAT AN INSURGENT SYMPATHIZER HAD NO PLACE IN THE GOC. JUNE 15 SAW THE LIBERATION OF THE 60 SOLDIERS OF LAS DELICIAS AND ANOTHER TEN MARINES, CAPTURED IN CHOCHO, AT CARTAGENA DEL CHAIRA, AMID A LARGE ZONE DEMILITARIZED FOR 32 DAYS AS AGREED WITH THE FARC. BEDOYA SAID PUBLICLY ON JUNE 16 THAT THE HANDOVER EVENT WAS "A CIRCUS WITH A LOT OF CLOWNS." HE DID NOT DENY THAT HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

WERE INCLUDED IN THAT CHARACTERIZATION. ON JUNE 17 JOSE NOE RIOS CALLED BEDOYA'S WORDS "PURE ENVY." ON JUNE 18 SAMPER RECEIVED THE NEWLY RELEASED SOLDIERS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, WHILE THE GENERALS STAYED AWAY. ON JUNE 19, IN RESPONSE TO A LEADING PRESS QUESTION, BEDOYA SAID HE WAS READY TO SERVE THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE IN ANY WAY THEY WISHED, INCLUDING AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

RUNUP TO THE CRISIS

4. (C) ON JUNE 18, THE EVENING BEFORE BEDOYA SHOWED SOME OPENNESS TO A PRESIDENTIAL BID, HE MET IN THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE WITH SAMPER, DEFENSE MINISTER ECHEVERRI, JOSE NOE RIOS, PEACE ADVISER

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DANIEL GARCIA-PEÑA, AND TWO INVESTIGATORS. THE MEETING'S PURPOSE WAS TO CONDUCT A SOBER ANALYSIS OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LIBERATION. RIOS EMPHASIZED THREE POINTS: THE MYTH THAT THE FARC WOULD NEVER NEGOTIATE WITH THE SAMPER GOVERNMENT WAS DEAD; THE GOC AND THE GUERRILLAS HAD TESTED EACH OTHER'S INTENTIONS, AND BOTH HAD COMPLIED TO THE LETTER WITH THE NEGOTIATED AGREEMENT; AND THE SUPPORT OF THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE FOR THE AGREEMENT WAS IMPRESSIVE. SAMPER IMMEDIATELY ANNOUNCED HE WAS GOING TO BEGIN A PEACE PROCESS. A FEW DAYS BEFORE, HE HAD TOLD THE GENERALS IN A PRIVATE MEETING HE UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFICULT POSITION THE DEMILITARIZATION PUT THEM IN, BUT AFTER EIGHT MONTHS NO OTHER SOLUTION WAS IN SIGHT. DESPITE THEIR MANY ASSURANCES THAT THEY WOULD FIND THE CAPTURED SOLDIERS, THE MILITARY NEVER DELIVERED. AS SAMPER WENT PUBLIC ON JUNE 23 WITH HIS INTENTION TO PURSUE PEACE, BEDOYA SAID ONE COULDN'T SIT DOWN WITH "NARCOS AND BANDITS." (NOTE: MG BONETT, THEN ARMY COMMANDER, PUBLICLY SUPPORTED THIS POSITION. END NOTE.) OTHER EVENTS HEATED THE ALREADY SIMMERING POT, INCLUDING BONETT'S EXONERATION OF FORMER

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APPARENTLY MISCALCULATED RIGHT TO THE END. HIS BEWILDERED AND SORROWFUL SUBORDINATES GREETED HIS FINAL EXIT FROM HIS OFFICE WITH A MOVING FAREWELL DEMONSTRATION. SERRANO NOTED THAT GENERALS ALIGNED WITH BONETT GOT THE COMMAND POSTS AND THOSE OF BEDOYA'S CAMP, SUCH AS RAMIREZ, GOT SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS.

THE REST OF THE MILITARY: LOYAL BUT OUT OF STEP

GENERAL YANINE OF INVOLVEMENT IN A PARAMILITARY MASSACRE AND THE OPEN LETTER TO SAMPER FROM THE HEADS OF THE FOUR GREAT ECONOMIC CONGLOMERATES SUPPORTING A PEACE INITIATIVE, AMONG OTHERS. MEANWHILE, THE FARC AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN) CONTINUED GAINING GROUND, KILLING TWENTY SOLDIERS IN A HELICOPTER SHOOTDOWN IN ARAUCA (COMMENT: ANOTHER CASE OF MILITARY POOR PLANNING AND INEPT LEADERSHIP. END COMMENT) AND MAINTAINING STEADY PRESSURE BY ATTACKS, ROADBLOCKS, AND KIDNAPPINGS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

6. (C) BEDOYA'S VIEWS ARE WIDELY SHARED AMONG THE SENIOR MILITARY COMMAND. BONETT IS NOT THE ONLY OTHER GENERAL WITH A VISCERAL DISTASTE FOR ANY ACCOMMODATION TO THE GUERRILLAS. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NEVER ANY DANGER OF A COUP DURING THE SAMPER-BEDOYA CONFRONTATION. THAT IS WHY, WHEN THE GENERALS SAT DOWN TOGETHER ON THE EVENING OF JULY 24, THE BIG QUESTION WAS NOT "LET'S COUP," BUT WHAT TO DO. BEDOYA MUST HAVE KNOWN THE DEPTH OF LOYALTY HIS FELLOW OFFICERS FEEL TOWARD THEIR COUNTRY AND THEIR DUTY, SO WHAT COULD HE HAVE BEEN THINKING WHEN HE DEFIED SAMPER? ALL REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE MILITARY COMMAND AS A BODY WAS OFFENDED AND INJURED BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FIRING OF THEIR COMMANDER. HOWEVER, IN FACT, THE MILITARY HAS FOR SEVERAL YEARS BEEN OUT OF STEP WITH THE TIMES AND THE NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY. THE GENERALS HAVE OPPOSED PEACE PLANS WHILE FAILING TO ESTABLISH ANY MILITARY STRATEGY FOR CONFRONTING THE GUERRILLA THREAT. INDEED, UNDER BEDOYA AND BONETT, THE ARMY'S RECORD IN THE FIELD AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS HAS CONTINUED TO BE ONE OF REACTION AND IS WORSE THAN EVER. BUT IN FAIRNESS TO THE ARMY, THE LACK OF A MILITARY STRATEGY BEGINS WITH AN APPARENT GOVERNMENT-WIDE FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND AND COUNTER THE GUERRILLAS' AGENDA.

TOE TO TOE: CNP GENERAL SERRANO'S VERSION

5. (S) AMBASSADOR MET WITH NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTOR MG SERRANO ON SATURDAY, JULY 26, AND DISCUSSED THE BEDOYA DISMISSAL. SERRANO HAD GATHERED CONSIDERABLE INFORMATION ON THE EVENTS AFTER THE FACT. ACCORDING TO SERRANO, BEDOYA AND BONETT HAD SERIOUS DIFFERENCES BEHIND THE SCENES. SERRANO RECALLED THE RUMORS THAT BEDOYA AND BONETT WERE CIRCULATING LETTERS, EACH AIMED AT GAINING SUPPORTERS AMONG THE GENERALS, AND SAID THOSE RUMORS WERE TRUE. (COMMENT: OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES STILL CANNOT CONFIRM INDEPENDENTLY THE EXISTENCE OF THE LETTERS. END COMMENT.) SERRANO WONDERED ALOUD TO WHAT EXTENT BONETT COOPERATED IN GETTING RID OF BEDOYA. HE SAID THE MOVE TO REPLACE BEDOYA HAD BEEN PLANNED FOR EARLIER IN JULY AND WOULD HAVE INCLUDED DISMISSAL OF GENERALS BONETT AND RAMIREZ, A BEDOYA LOYALIST. (COMMENT: RAMIREZ IS FORMER INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR FOR BOTH THE ARMY AND MILITARY FORCES, AND IN THE FORMER ROLE OVERSAW THE TWENTIETH INTELLIGENCE BRIGADE, SUSPECTED OF NARCO, PARAMILITARY, AND DEATH SQUAD TIES. HE IS NOW INSPECTOR

FORCES OF CHANGE AND RESISTANCE

7. (S) BONETT AND MOST OF HIS SENIOR MILITARY CONFERRERS SHARE MANY OF BEDOYA'S VIEWS, THOUGH MAYBE NOT HIS SIMPLICITY OF ANALYSIS. BONETT, IF HE GETS HIS THIRD STAR, WILL BE IN COMMAND FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER CALENDAR YEAR. AT LEAST UNTIL HIS PROMOTION, HE WILL PROBABLY NOT OPPOSE SAMPER PUBLICLY, BUT HE MAY BE NO MORE TRACTABLE IN PRIVATE THAN WAS BEDOYA; BONETT HAS A REPUTATION FOR

MERCURIAL TEMPERAMENT. THE THINLY VEILED MILITARY INTRANSIGENCE TOWARD CIVILIAN AUTHORITY WHICH HE AND BEDOYA EXEMPLIFY DATES BACK TO THE DAYS OF DICTATOR GENERAL ROJAS PINILLA, FOLLOWING WHICH THE MILITARY ENTERED INTO A TACIT AGREEMENT WITH CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT: WE WON'T TELL YOU HOW TO RUN THE COUNTRY IF YOU LET US MANAGE MILITARY MATTERS. THE RESULT WAS STAGNATION IN MILITARY THINKING AND DEAFNESS TO CUES FROM OUTSIDE THE RANKS. AS AN EXAMPLE, THE ARMY RESISTED THE IDEA OF COUNTERNARCOTICS OPERATIONS FOR MANY YEARS, UNTIL IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT THEY WOULD OTHERWISE RECEIVE NO

GENERAL OF THE ARMY. SERRANO HAS BEEN LOBBYING FOR SOME TIME TO GET RID OF RAMIREZ. END COMMENT). SERRANO CLAIMED NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF EVENTS BUT SAID IT IS NOW CLEAR THAT THE MASS DISMISSAL WAS PUT OFF UNTIL AFTER THE INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS OF JULY 28, WHEN SAMPER ANNOUNCED PLANS TO MOVE TOWARD PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND INSTITUTE CHANGES IN THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE. IT WAS ONLY WHEN BEDOYA DEFIED SAMPER'S REQUEST TO RESIGN THAT THE PRESIDENT DECIDED TO OFFER THE JOB TO BONETT AND KEEP THE OTHER GENERALS. ONE INSUBORDINATE COMMANDER IS A PROBLEM, TWO OR MORE WOULD CONSTITUTE A DE FACTO COUP. ACCORDING TO SERRANO, IN A MEETING OF MANY GENERALS LATE ON JULY 24, WHEN RETIRED GENERAL ALVARO VALENCIA ASKED BONETT IF HE WOULD ACCEPT THE TOP JOB, THE LATTER CLAIMED HE WAS TOO CONFUSED TO DECIDE, AND WENT HOME. TWO HOURS LATER HE CALLED SAMPER TO SAY HE WOULD ACCEPT, AND HE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO PLEAD FOR A THIRD STAR (NOTE: THIS IS A FULL GENERAL IN THE COLOMBIAN ARMY; THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY HAS NO FOUR-STAR OFFICERS. END NOTE). SAMPER SIGNED BEDOYA'S DISMISSAL LATE AT NIGHT ON JULY 24. ON JULY 25 BEDOYA FOUND HIMSELF ALONE WITH AN AIDE IN CHOCO, HIS PUBLIC RECEPTION THERE CANCELLED. HE ARRIVED BACK IN BOGOTA TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE BONETT'S SWEARING-IN. BEDOYA

MORE U.S. MILITARY AID BECAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS. AT THAT POINT, IN CONVENTIONAL MILITARY THOUGHT AND WORD, EVERY GUERRILLA BECAME A NARCOTRAFFICKER. THE CURRENT MILITARY ATTITUDE TOWARD BEDOYA'S DISMISSAL AND POTENTIAL CHANGES IN THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE OWES MUCH TO THIS LONGSTANDING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE. THE KEY QUESTION IS, IS BONETT THE LEADER WHO CAN BRING FLEXIBILITY AND NEW IDEAS TO THE MILITARY? ON THE ANSWER HANGS HIS CAREER, ALONG WITH ANY HOPE OF LURING OR DRIVING THE GUERRILLAS TO THE BARGAINING TABLE.

"REASONS OF STATE"

8. (C) SAMPER AND ECHEVERRI GAVE NO CONCRETE REASONS FOR BEDOYA'S DISMISSAL, CITING ONLY "REASONS OF STATE" AND SAYING THAT SUCH

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REASONS WERE NOT FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION. IT IS CLEAR THAT PEACE ADVISORS IN THE SAMPER GOVERNMENT INSISTED NO PEACE PROCESS COULD BE STARTED WITH BEDOYA UNDERMINING IT. BEDOYA BELIEVED AND SAID THAT HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT WERE THEMES ADVANCED BY

THE SUBVERSIVES. HE LOBBIED CONGRESS TO BLOCK CHANGES TO COLOMBIA'S OBJECTIONABLE AND OUT-OF-DATE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE AND REFUSED TO ADMIT THE POSSIBILITY THAT RECENT MILITARY DISASTERS WERE SIGNS OF INEPT COMMAND. HE SAID THE ONLY REASON THE GUERRILLAS WANTED THE DEMILITARIZATION OF PART OF CAQUETA WAS TO CONDUCT DRUG TRAFFICKING THERE UNDISTURBED. (COMMENT: REPORTS DO INDICATE INTENSIFIED MOVEMENT OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS AND NARCOTICS PRODUCTS THROUGH THE AREA DURING DEMILITARIZATION. END COMMENT.)

WHY THE FIRING AT THIS POINT--OTHER THEORIES

9. (C) SEVERAL OTHER POSSIBLE REASONS FOR BEDOYA'S DISMISSAL HAVE BEEN ADVANCED. NONE MAKES SENSE. THE ACCUSATION THAT SAMPER FIRED HIM UNDER POLITICAL PRESSURE FROM THE GUERRILLAS IS JUST MILITARY SOUR GRAPES. THE IDEA THAT THE FIRING WAS A SMOKESCREEN TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE CORNERSTONE TRIAL IN MIAMI MISSES THE MARK AS WELL. ATTEMPTS BY THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO LINK THE FIRING TO NEGOTIATIONS OVER END-USE MONITORING (EUM) ARE LIKEWISE UNTRUE, ALTHOUGH THAT PROCESS WAS UNDOUBTEDLY ACCELERATED BY THE CHANGE OF COMMAND. ALL DURING THE EUM NEGOTIATIONS, BEDOYA HAD HIS DEFENSE MINISTERS INTIMIDATED; NEITHER ESQUERRA, GONZALEZ, NOR ECHEVERRI WOULD TAKE HIM ON. WITH BEDOYA'S LAWYER TRYING TO GIVE LEGAL SUBSTANCE TO HIS OBSTINACY, THE MINISTERS WERE NOT BOLD ENOUGH TO BRING HIM INTO LINE. (COMMENT: BOTERO, WHO KNEW POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS WELL, WAS MUCH MORE WILLING TO TAKE ON THE GENERALS. BOTERO BROUGHT SERRANO BACK TO COLOMBIA FROM A SIDE TRACK AS AN ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON IN 1994, AND HE SURELY THOUGHT THAT RESCUING BEDOYA WAS AN EQUALLY WISE DECISION. BOTERO WAS A HARD-LINER AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS, ONE OF THOSE WHO FOUNDED THE

CONVIVIRS, AND HE MAY HAVE FELT HE NEEDED AN EQUALLY FIRM GENERAL. BUT BEDOYA DELIVERED NOT RESULTS, BUT OBSTINACY. END COMMENT.) BEDOYA ALSO COUNTED TOO MUCH ON SUPPORT FROM WASHINGTON IN CONFRONTING HIS BOSSES. HE THOUGHT HE HAD THE SAME UNWAVERING SUPPORT ENJOYED BY NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTOR GEN. SERRANO, BUT THE REPUTATION OF THE POLICE IN COUNTERNARCOTICS ACTION FAR OUTSHINES THAT OF THE ARMY. SAMPER CALCULATED CORRECTLY THAT BEDOYA'S ANTI-GUERRILLA COMMAND RECORD, PLUS HIS LACK OF SYMPATHY FOR THE USG'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY, WOULD OBTUATE ANY USG OBJECTION.

BEDOYA, THE MAN

10. (S) ACCORDING TO RECENT PRESS ANALYSES, BEDOYA IS EITHER AN HONEST PATRIOT, A REACTIONARY BLOCKHEAD, AN INSUBORDINATE LOU, OR AN UNFORTUNATE VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE. ALL THESE READINGS ARE PROBABLY CORRECT. BUT WHETHER ONE ADMIRE THE MAN OR DETESTED HIM, A GENERAL SENSE OF SADNESS PREVAILS IN COLOMBIA IN THE AFTERMATH OF

HIS DISMISSAL. IN THIS SOCIETY WHERE THERE IS NO MORAL LODESTAR AND EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE, FEW PROMINENT PUBLIC FIGURES STICK UP CONSISTENTLY FOR WHAT THEY BELIEVE, RIGHT OR WRONG. THE HONEST AND INTRACTABLE BEDOYA DID JUST THAT. BEDOYA IS AN IMPRESSIVE MAN IN STATURE AND IN BEARING, AND HIS PEERS PLACE HIM AMONG THE BEST. AS A SENIOR COMMANDER, HOWEVER, HE WAS INARTICULATE, SHOWED LITTLE FLAIR FOR ANALYSIS (AT LEAST IN POLITICAL TERMS), AND OVERSIMPLIFIED COMPLEX ISSUES. IT PAINED HIM TO ADMIT THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES MIGHT COMMIT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OR OTHER CRIMES IMPUGNING MILITARY HONOR. A STRICT CONSTITUTIONALIST,

HE AND HIS LAWYERS USED THAT DOCUMENT AS A SHIELD TO PROTECT THE

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COMMAND ENTRUSTED TO HIM FROM CRITICISM AND CHANGE. HIS HARD LINE MADE OBSERVERS OF ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS DOUBT THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO MOVE TOWARD NEGOTIATION. HIS CONSTANT, BARELY DISGUISED CONTEMPT FOR SAMPER AND THE GOC'S CONCILIATORS WAS EVENTUALLY RETURNED WITH INTEREST BY THE PRESIDENT. IN EVERY GOOD AND BAD SENSE OF THE WORD, HE STOOD LIKE A ROCK. AS ONE FOREIGN COMMENTATOR PUT IT, "BEDOYA DID HIS DUTY AS GOD GAVE HIM THE LIGHT TO SEE IT. UNFORTUNATELY, THE LORD GAVE HIM A DIM BULB."

THE FIRING IN CONTEXT: THE BIGGER PICTURE

11. (C) SAMPER KNOWS THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WILL NEVER ACHIEVE PEACE IN THE SHORT TIME LEFT TO IT, BUT HE THINKS HE SEES AN OPPORTUNITY TO ESTABLISH THE BASIS FOR AN EVENTUAL END TO INSURRECTION. BEDOYA WAS AN INSTITUTIONAL AND PERSONAL IMPEDIMENT TO THAT BEGINNING. NONETHELESS, HIS FIRING CAUGHT ALL BY SURPRISE. WHY? BEDOYA HAD DEFIED SAMPER SO MANY TIMES, HAD SO OFTEN BORDERED ON PUBLIC INSUBORDINATION, AND HAD NEVER BEEN FIRED. MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING BEDOYA HIMSELF, CAME TO BELIEVE HE WAS UNTOUCHABLE, THAT SAMPER LACKED THE GUTS TO FIRE HIM. REPORTEDLY, BEDOYA ASKED THE PRESIDENT, HOW CAN YOU FIRE ME WHEN ONDCP DIRECTOR MCCAFFREY JUST SAID I'M A GOOD GUY? BEDOYA MISCALCULATED. HIS MISTAKE HAS NO DOUBT BEEN INSTRUCTIONAL FOR OTHERS WHO MIGHT FEEL INVULNERABLE, POSSIBLY INCLUDING SERRANO. BEDOYA, IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES, CONTINUES TO TALK TO THE PRESS, DEMANDING TO KNOW THE REASONS FOR HIS FIRING. HIS QUIXOTIC PERSISTENCE IS QUAIN, TOUCHING, AND INCREASINGLY RIDICULOUS. DESPITE BEDOYA'S CONTINUED HINTS OF A PRESIDENTIAL BID, POLLS SAY THE PUBLIC THINKS HE WAS DONE WRONG, BUT FEW WOULD

VOTE FOR HIM. (COMMENT: BEDOYA HATED THE POLITICAL SIDE OF MILITARY FORCES COMMAND AND WOULD BE EVEN MORE UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD OF CIVILIAN POLITICS. END COMMENT.)

12. (C) BUT WHERE DID SAMPER FIND THE GRIT TO DO THE DEED? IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE 1997-1998 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, COLOMBIAN PRESS ANALYSTS HAVE BEEN QUICK TO SUM UP THE SAMPER ADMINISTRATION AS A BAD DREAM FROM WHICH THE COUNTRY WILL SOON AWAKEN. ONE COMMENTATOR SAID THAT ON AUGUST 9, 1996, SAMPER WILL BE THE LONELIEST MAN IN SPAIN. BUT SAMPER IS A CONSUMMATE POLITICIAN, SUPERB AT SENSING CHANGES IN THE NATION'S MOOD. HE WEIGHED HIS POSSIBLE OPTIONS AGAINST PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND THE TICKING CLOCK AND DETERMINED TO BET THE FARM ON THE PEACE PROCESS, YANKING THE MILITARY INTO FORMATION BEHIND HIM WITH THE HELP OF HIS PEACE-PROCLAIMING DEFENSE MINISTER. THIS, HE PROBABLY FEELS, IS HIS ONE REMAINING CHANCE TO BE REMEMBERED WELL AS PRESIDENT. WHILE EVERYONE DISMISSED HIM AS TOO WEAK, HE RODE A WAVE OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND PRESS SUPPORT WHICH CARRIED HIM OVER THE ROCK IN HIS PATH.

SAMPER ADMINISTRATION AND GUERRILLAS--U.S. POLICY TOWARD COLOMBIA

13. (C) THE SAMPER GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE GIVEN UP HOPE FOR MILITARY SUCCESS, AND OBSERVERS SHOULD NOT LOOK FOR STRONG ACTION TO GAIN A BETTER POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE GUERRILLAS. THE GOC, WITH OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT, IS MOVING IN THE OTHER DIRECTION, TOWARD PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. HAVING OPENLY STATED ITS WISH TO NEGOTIATE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS LOWERED ITS GUARD. ITS ENEMY HAS NO

REASON TO DO THE SAME, AND MANY REASONS TO INCREASE ITS ATTACKS AND INCURSIONS. BUT WITH LESS THAN A YEAR LEFT OF HIS MANDATE, SAMPER HAS NO TIME TO FORCE HIS OPPONENTS TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. BONETT, ALSO LOOKING FOR HIS PLACE IN HISTORY AS THE MILITARY PEACEMAKER, WILL PROBABLY NOT UNDERMINE SAMPER. THE ONLY LOSERS, IN THE SHORT RUN, ARE THOSE WHO ARE OUT OF STEP: BEDOYA AND, PERHAPS, THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES. IN THE LONGER RUN, IF THE

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MILITARY CANNOT KEEP PACE WITH THE CHANGING TIMES. IT IS THE GOC
AND THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE WHO WILL LOSE. FRECHETTE

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