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ACTION ARA-00

INFO	LOG-00	COPY-01	ADS-00	AID-00	INR-10	SS-00	CIAE-00
	DODE-00	H-01	MSC-01	NSCE-00	NSAE-00	HA-09	L-03
	TRSE-00	PM-10	PA-01	OMB-01	INM-07	INRE-00	ACDA-12
	USIE-00	SP-02	SNP-01	C-01	PRS-01	P-02	T-01
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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3975
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PINS, PGOV, CO
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT REACTS TO CONTINUED GUERRILLA
VIOLENCE

REF: BOGOTA 2324

SUMMARY

1. (C) MILITARY OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED AS MAYORS FOR TWO MUNICIPALITIES IN CORDOBA DEPARTMENT FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY 17 AMBUSH OF A MILITARY PATROL. THE ATTACK, STAGED BY GUERRILLAS OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION ARMY (EPL), LEFT THREE DEAD AND FIVE WOUNDED IN THE MILITARY UNIT, INCLUDING THE HIGHEST RANKING OFFICER TO HAVE FALLEN IN COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE DEATH OF COLONEL JAIME GERARDO DIAZ LOPEZ HAS EVOKED GOVERNMENT CONDEMNATION OF THE ATTACKS, MILITARY REACTION CONTINUES TO BE PARTIAL AND REACTIVE, REFLECTING THE ABSENCE OF A LARGER STRATEGY TO COMBAT CONTINUED INSURGENT-INSTIGATED VIOLENCE. END SUMMARY

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2. (U) FOLLOWING WEDNESDAY'S AMBUSH OF A MILITARY PATROL IN THE ALTO SINU AREA OF CORDOBA DEPARTMENT, TWO

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SAM A. MOSKOWITZ
DATE/CASE ID: 9 JUL 2001 200003834

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LIEUTENANTS WERE NAMED TO HEAD THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT'S OF VALENCIA AND TIERRALTA. IN ADDITION, THE MILITARY CONTINUED SWEEPS THROUGH THE REGION AGAINST EPL GUERRILLAS. MEANWHILE, GOC SECURITY OFFICIALS CALLED AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL TO DISCUSS GUERRILLA VIOLENCE.

3. (U) FOUR MAYORS KIDNAPPED BY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN), PER REFTEL, HAVE BEEN RELEASED CARRYING COPIES OF A GUERRILLA COMMUNIQUE. THE COMMUNIQUE CONTAINED, IN ADDITION TO THE USUAL POLITICAL DIATRIBE, A CALL FOR AN INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TO REGULATE THE NATIONAL OIL SECTOR AND TO LIMIT FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN THE INDUSTRY. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, ONE OF THE MAYORS CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED AT ALL, BUT VOLUNTARILY WENT TO MEET WITH THE ELN. IN A BITING EDITORIAL ATTACK ON THE ELN FOR ITS KIDNAPPINGS AND DAMAGE TO THE OIL PIPELINE, DAILY "EL ESPECTADOR" ALSO CRITICIZED THE MAYOR IN QUESTION FOR TREATING THE ELN AS A LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ENTITY. ENTITLED "A SUS ORDENES, SENORES BANDOLEROS" THE EDITORIAL BRANDED THE ELN NOT A "NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY", BUT A GROUP OF BANDITS HEADED BY FOREIGN (SPANISH) PRIESTS WITH NO CONCERN FOR THE PHYSICAL DAMAGE THEIR OIL PIPELINE ATTACKS ARE CAUSING.

4. (C) OVER THE FEBRUARY 20-21 WEEKEND, THE GUERRILLAS WERE ONCE AGAIN ON THE MOVE. FARC UNITS ATTACKED A POLICE STATION IN META DEPARTMENT LEAVING THREE ENLISTED MEN AND A SERGEANT DEAD. MEANWHILE, IN WHAT EVIDENTLY IS AN EFFORT TO EXPAND ITS EFFECTIVE ZONE OF OPERATIONS,

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THE ELN ATTACKED THE TOWN OF TRUJILLO IN VALLE DE CAUCA DEPARTMENT IN A DAWN RAID. THE ASSAULT WAS REPORTEDLY CARRIED OUT BY MASSES GUERRILLA COLUMNS AND LEFT TWO POLICEMEN DEAD AND SEVERAL OTHERS WOUNDED. FINALLY, THE PRESS REPORTS AN ATTACK BY UNIDENTIFIED ASSAILANTS ON A GROUP OF FARMERS ATTENDING A COCK FIGHT, AGAIN IN META DEPARTMENT. THE ATTACK WAS STAGED BY MASKED MEN WHO DISPERSED AUTOMATIC FIRE INTO THE CROWD, LEAVING TEN DEAD IN THE CARNAGE. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES, THIS ATTACK FOLLOWS THE PATTERN OF INTIMIDATION OF RURAL GROUPS BY GUERRILLA UNITS.

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5. (C) SO FAR THE GOVERNMENT HAS ONLY SUSPENDED MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN A FEW ISOLATED MUNICIPALITIES, BUT NOT FOR SECURITY REASONS. HOWEVER, OFFICIAL SOURCES PRIVATELY HAVE ADMITTED THAT SECURITY IN OUTLYING AREAS CANNOT BE GUARANTEED FOR THE ELECTIONS. A GOVERNMENT SOURCE CONCEDED THAT OFFICIAL MEASURES ARE HAVING LITTLE SUCCESS IN ARRESTING GUERRILLA VIOLENCE. HE THEN CITED CAQUETA DEPARTMENT, WITH ITS NEWLY APPOINTED MILITARY GOVERNOR AND MAYORS, AS AN EXAMPLE, SAYING THAT THE MOVE HAD ONLY marginally improved security in some of the towns, but had no impact whatsoever in the countryside.

COMMENT

6. (C) MISSION SOURCES REPORT THAT GUERRILLA VIOLENCE IS SUCCESSFULLY COWING OPPONENTS IN CERTAIN AREAS, ESPECIALLY IN THE EASTERN LLANOS, WHERE THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC) CONTROLS LARGE CHUNKS OF TERRITORY. KNOWLEDGEABLE POLITICAL CONTACTS CONCEDE THAT THE GUERRILLAS AND THEIR PATRIOTIC UNION (UP) ALLIES WILL MAKE IMPRESSIVE GAINS IN THE MARCH 13 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN THOSE AREAS. MOST FEEL

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VIOLENCE

THAT THESE ELECTORAL VICTORIES WILL LEGITIMIZE DE FACTO GUERRILLA CONTROL OF LARGE TRACTS OF BORDER TERRITORY AND, THAT ONCE STARTED, THE PROCESS WILL BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO REVERSE.

7. (C) MEANWHILE, THE ARMED FORCES CONTINUE STUCK IN A REACTIVE MODE IN THEIR COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS, PLAYING CATCH-UP WITH THE GUERRILLAS. THEIR RESPONSE HAS BEEN PIECEMEAL, REFLECTING THE ABSENCE OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY OR FRAMEWORK. ALTHOUGH SOME GUERRILLA ATTACKS CAN SPARK AN IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT REACTION, A SUSTAINED MILITARY RESPONSE HAS PROVEN ELUSIVE. PRESIDENTIAL PEACE ADVISOR RAFAEL PARDO HAS PUBLICLY CALLED FOR THE FARC TO LIVE UP TO ITS PROMISES OF A CEASE-FIRE DURING THE ELECTIONS AND REMINDED THEM THAT THE END RESULT OF THAT PROCESS IS THE REINTEGRATION OF THE GUERRILLAS INTO CIVILIAN LIFE. PARDO WILL NOT PRONOUNCE THE END OF THE PEACE PROCESS, BUT CONTINUED FARC ATTACKS WOULD INDICATE

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THAT THE RUMORS OF ITS DEATH MAY NOT BE GREATLY EXAGGERATED.
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