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O 101420Z MAR 98
 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1878
 INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
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 DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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 NSC WASHDC
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 DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD

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STATE FOR ARA, DRL, EB, INL, PRM, DS
NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS
ONDCP FOR JANET CRIST
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEA FOR OF, OFL, OC, AX
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: 03/06/08
TAGS: PHUM, SNAR, ASEC, PTER, ECON, PREF, PINS, CO
SUBJECT: LAW, ORDER & MONEY IN THE GATEWAY TO COLOMBIA'S "LLANOS"
(VILLAVICENCIO TRIP REPORT, PART I)
REF: BOGOTA 2036

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE O.P. GARZA. REASONS: 1.5(B&D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: DURING A TWO-DAY TRIP TO VILLAVICENCIO, META DEPARTMENT, POL/ECONOFFS SAW EVIDENCE OF EXTENSIVE NARCO, GUERRILLA AND PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING INFILTRATION OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS. COCA CULTIVATION, PROCESSING AND TRANSPORTATION IS A MAINSTAY OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMY, WITH MULTIPLE ARMED ACTORS ALL FIGHTING FOR A PIECE OF THE ACTION. EVEN AS THE GOVERNMENT IGNORES THE PROBLEMS OF THOSE INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY THE VIOLENCE, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ANTI-NARCOTICS PROSECUTORS CONTINUE TO DO THE NECESSARY (THOUGH HARDLY SUFFICIENT) SPADE-WORK TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, REDUCE THE VIOLENCE AND PROMOTE LAW AND ORDER. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PRESSURES, [REDACTED] HAVE PERVERSELY FORCED THE ARMY TO RETREAT FROM THE FIELD OF BATTLE, RESULTING IN A WAR BETWEEN THE

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GUERRILLAS AND PARAMILITARIES. THE REAL SOLUTION [REDACTED]
IS A PEACE ACCORD (NATIONAL OR LOCAL) WITH THE GUERRILLAS AND THE
PARAMILITARIES. [REDACTED] FEARED, HOWEVER, THAT SUCH AN
AGREEMENT WILL NOT COME SOON ENOUGH TO PROTECT [REDACTED] FROM A

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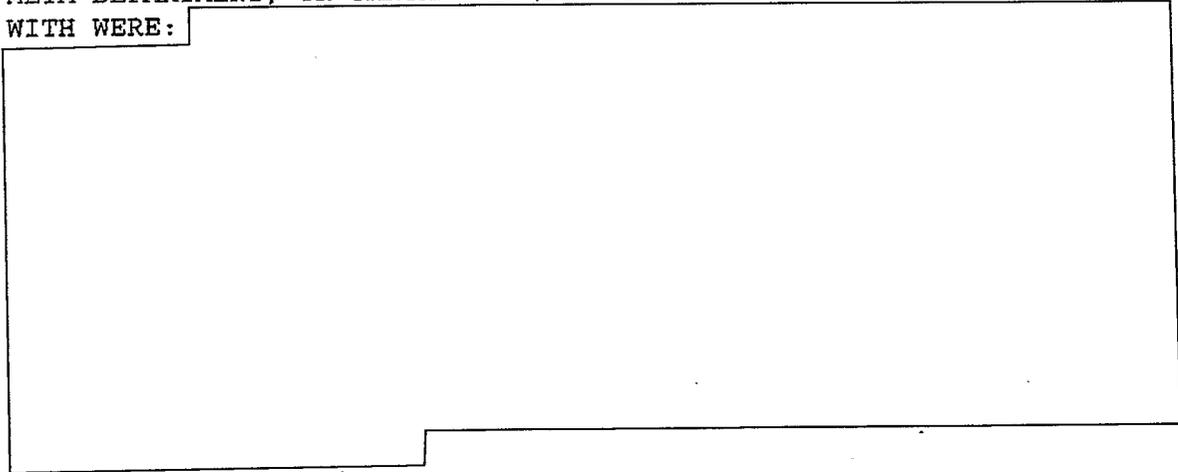
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COMING "PARA" COUNTER-ASSAULT ON THE GUERRILLAS AND THEIR PRESUMED CIVILIAN SUPPORTERS. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) POL/ECONOFFS TRAVELED TO VILLAVICENCIO, THE CAPITAL OF META DEPARTMENT, ON JANUARY 25-26. AMONG THOSE EMBOFFS SPOKE WITH WERE:



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"VILLAVO": GATEWAY TO THE COLOMBIAN "LLANOS"
=====

3. THE LLANOS (OR "PLAINS") REGION OF COLOMBIA -- META, GUAVIARE, GUAINIA, VICHADA, CASANARE, AND ARAUCA DEPARTMENTS -- IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS COLOMBIA'S ANSWER TO THE WILD WEST OF NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY. IN MANY RESPECTS, IT IS NOT AN UNFAIR

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COMPARISON. A VAST EXPANSE OF LAND WITH FEW LARGE CITIES, THE LLANOS IS SPARSELY POPULATED, ATTRACTS PEOPLE LOOKING FOR GREATER TRACTS OF LAND TO FARM, AND PROMISES THEM LITTLE MORE THAN A HARD LIFE IN RETURN. HISTORICALLY A QUIET AGRICULTURAL REGION DEDICATED PRINCIPALLY TO CATTLE AND RICE PRODUCTION, THE LLANOS IS NOW THE HOME OF AN INCREASINGLY VOLATILE MIX OF NARCO-TRAFFICKERS, GUERRILLAS AND PARAMILITARIES. BARELY A TWENTY-MINUTE FLIGHT -- OR A THREE-HOUR DRIVE -- DOWN THE MOUNTAINS FROM BOGOTA, "VILLAVO" (AS IT IS KNOWN) IS THE GATEWAY TO THE LLANOS. WITH SOME 300,000 URBAN RESIDENTS, VILLAVO IS ALSO THE LARGEST CITY IN ALL OF THE LLANOS:

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AN ECONOMY BUILT ON FOODSTUFFS -- AND COCA

4. (C)

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[REDACTED] EXPLAINED THAT
"NARCOTRAFFICKING DRIVES THE ECONOMY." HE PROUDLY ADDED,
HOWEVER, THAT "IT DOES NOT DOMINATE THE ECONOMY. THIS IS NOT
CALI OR MEDELLIN." INDEED, AFTER THE BOGOTA VALLEY ITSELF,
VILLAVO HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT SUPPLIER OF MEAT, GRAINS AND
VEGETABLES FOR THE CAPITAL CITY. INCREASED COSTS DUE TO THE

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INR-00 ADS-00 MMP-00 SCT-00 ASDS-01 DSCC-00 PRM-10
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O 101420Z MAR 98
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CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
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AREA'S UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER AND UNDERDEVELOPED INFRASTRUCTURE,
HOWEVER, HAVE CUT DEEPLY INTO PROFIT MARGINS FOR MOST SMALLER

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FARMERS. MANY HAVE GIVEN UP FARMING ENTIRELY TO RAISE CATTLE, GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE LESS PROFITABLE BUT MORE STABLE. AS CONDITIONS HAVE DETERIORATED IN THE REGION, THE CITY HAS FALLEN ON HARD ECONOMIC TIMES. THE COST OF LIVING IN VILLAVICENCIO IS THE THIRD HIGHEST IN COLOMBIA. INFLATION HAS RECENTLY RUN TWO OR THREE PERCENTAGE POINTS HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE, LARGELY DUE TO THE INFLUX OF NARCO-MONEY.

5. (C) [REDACTED] PREDICTED THAT THE LONG-AWAITED COMPLETION OF THE UPGRADE TO THE VILLAVICENCIO-BOGOTA HIGHWAY WILL BE THE KEY TO ECONOMIC HEALTH FOR THE CITY. GRANDIOSE PLANS HINGING ON THIS UPGRADE INCLUDE MAKING VILLAVICENCIO THE CENTERPIECE OF A HIGHWAY LINKING VENEZUELA TO THE PACIFIC AND A SCHEME TO MAKE
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VILLAVICENCIO'S AIRPORT AN ALTERNATIVE TO BOGOTA'S. GIVEN THAT THIS UPGRADE HAS SUFFERED A NUMBER OF DELAYS DUE TO COST OVERRUNS AND SECURITY ISSUES, [REDACTED] AS TO THE PROBABLE TIME FRAME FOR COMPLETION OF THESE PLANS. (IN NOVEMBER, FOR EXAMPLE, THE BRAZILIAN CONSTRUCTION CONGLOMERATE SPEARHEADING THE ROAD REPAIRS ABANDONED THE CONTRACT -- AND COLOMBIA ENTIRELY -- AFTER REPEATED GUERRILLA KIDNAPPINGS OF ITS ENGINEERS AND TECHNICIANS.) "WELL, THEY'RE LONG-TERM PLANS, [REDACTED] MAYBE WITHIN THE NEXT 20 TO 25 YEARS."

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6. (C) AGRICULTURAL INSTABILITY AND LOWER PROFITABILITY IN THE LLANOS HAVE BROUGHT A NEW INDUSTRY INTO ASCENDANCY IN RECENT YEARS -- COCA CULTIVATION AND NARCOTRAFFICKING. DISCOURAGED BY HIGH COSTS, SOME CAMPESINOS HAVE TURNED TO GROWING COCA FOR ITS HIGHER PROFIT MARGINS AND RELATIVELY LOW ECONOMIC RISKS.

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] MOST COCA GROWERS RECEIVE THEIR CHEMICALS, SEED AND FERTILIZER FROM TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS FOR FREE. [REDACTED] IN HIS OPINION, THE USG WOULD END COCA CULTIVATION "INSTANTLY" JUST BY TAKING MONEY EARMARKED FOR ERADICATION AND USING IT TO SUBSIDIZE SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT FOR COLOMBIAN RICE FARMERS. OTHERS ARGUED THAT THE KEY WAS IMPROVING THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE. THE GOVERNMENT'S "PLANTE" CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAM WAS ACTUALLY

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MAKING INROADS IN SOME PLACES, SUCH AS MAPIRIPAN. BUT IT WAS ALL FOR NOUGHT, THEY POINTED OUT, IF SUCH PROJECTS WERE NOT COORDINATED WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT COULD GET LEGITIMATE CROPS TO MARKET.

7. (C) NARCOTRAFFICKERS HAVE ALSO MADE THEIR MARK ON CATTLE
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RANCHING. THE IMAGE OF THE RICH GANADERO (CATTLEMAN) -- A MAN WITH A HUGE TRACT OF LAND, CATTLE AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, BIG CARS, GOLD JEWELRY AND SURROUNDED BY BEAUTIFUL WOMEN -- IS A POWERFUL ONE IN RURAL COLOMBIA. THIS CULTURAL ICON HOLDS GREAT SWAY AMONG SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THEIR MONEY OFF THE DRUG TRADE. IN RECENT YEARS, THE LLANOS HAS BEGUN TO SERVE AS THE SETTING FOR THESE PEOPLE TO LIVE OUT THEIR FANTASY. RETIRED (AND NOT-SO-RETIRED) NARCOTRAFFICKERS HAVE BEEN MOVING INTO THE LLANOS, BUYING THE VERY BEST FARM AND GRAZING LAND, AND PUSHING/PRICING OUT SMALLER FARMERS AND RANCHERS.

THE DELICATE BALANCE

=====

8. (C) IN THIS SETTING, GUERRILLAS, NARCOTRAFFICKERS AND PARAMILITARIES HAVE CO-EXISTED FOR YEARS. THE GUERRILLAS OF THE FARC HAVE OPERATED IN META AND GUAVIARE FOR DECADES, AND OF THE ELN MORE TO THE NORTH IN CASANARE AND ARAUCA (ALTHOUGH THE FARC HAVE ALSO MOVED IN TO THESE DEPARTMENTS, FOLLOWING THE OIL REVENUES). SINCE THE 1970S, LOCAL PARAMILITARY LEADERS, DEFENSIVE IN NATURE, HAD PURSUED A "GO ALONG TO GET ALONG" STRATEGY WITH THE GUERRILLAS, CUTTING DEALS SO THAT EACH COULD GO

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O 101420Z MAR 98
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1880
INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 4022
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIRONDCP WASHDC
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
FBI WASHDC
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THEIR OWN WAY. IN THE LATE 1980S, HOWEVER, GONZALO RODRIGUEZ GACHA, AKA, "THE MEXICAN", MADE A PRINCIPAL OPERATING BASE OF HIS NARCOTICS EMPIRE IN META. WITH THE INFUSION OF NARCO-DOLLARS BACKING HIM, RODRIGUEZ GACHA JOINED FORCES WITH THESE LOCAL "SELF-DEFENSE" GROUPS AND LAUNCHED A DIRTY WAR AGAINST THE FARC AND ITS CIVILIAN "U.P." SUPPORTERS. DESPITE RODRIGUEZ GACHA'S OWN DEMISE IN THE EARLY 1990S, MANY OF THESE PARAMILITARY GROUPS, FINANCED BY NARCO-DOLLARS, STILL OPERATE IN META.

9. (C) THE LONG-TIME LEADER OF THE META PARAMILITARIES IS A SELF-MADE MEGA-MILLIONAIRE, EMERALD MERCHANT AND SUSPECTED NARCO-TRAFFICKER, VICTOR MANUEL CARRANZA NINO. VICTOR CARRANZA HAS LONG BEEN SEEN AS THE MOST POWERFUL -- AND UNTOUCHABLE -- MAN IN META. A ONE-TIME ALLY OF PABLO ESCOBAR, CARRANZA FOUGHT "EL MEXICANO" AND WON. HE ALSO FOUGHT HIS WAY TO THE TOP OF

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COLOMBIA'S SECRETIVE, AND VIOLENT, EMERALD INDUSTRY, AND NOW
DOMINATES THAT NATIONAL MARKET (WHICH, IN TURN, DOMINATES THE
WORLD EMERALD MARKET). "DINERO", COLOMBIA'S ANSWER TO FORBES
MAGAZINE, ANNUALLY NAMES HIM ONE OF COLOMBIA'S MOST POWERFUL MEN.
ON DECEMBER 2, HOWEVER, HE BECAME A WANTED MAN WHEN THE FISCALIA
ISSUED A WARRANT FOR HIS ARREST, CHARGING HIM WITH THE FORMATION
OF ILLEGAL PARAMILITARY GROUPS.

THE PROSECUTORS: IN SEARCH OF AN ELIOTT NESS

10. (C)

EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION WITH HOW THE GOVERNMENT WAS ORGANIZED FOR
THE ANTI-NARCOTICS FIGHT IN HER AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] 12 REGIONAL PROSECUTORS TO COVER ALL
NARCOTICS AND TERRORISM CASES FOR ALL THE "LLANOS" DEPARTMENTS
(TOTAL POPULATION: JUST UNDER ONE MILLION). THEY CURRENTLY HAVE
MORE THAN 1300 ARREST WARRANTS OUTSTANDING. YET THEIR OFFICE HAS
ONLY A FEW CARS AND A TOTAL OF THREE OUTSIDE PHONE LINES (ALL
BELIEVED TO BE TAPPED BY THE NARCOS, IF NOT ALSO BY THE
PARAMILITARIES).

11. (C) MEANWHILE, THE "DANTI" COUNTER-NARCOTICS POLICE BASE AT
SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE -- AS GOOD AS IT IS OPERATIONALLY -- HAS
NOT A SINGLE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER ASSIGNED TO IT TO CAPITALIZE
IMMEDIATELY ON WHATEVER INFO THE COPS DISCOVER DURING RAIDS. IN
FACT, [REDACTED] THERE ARE ONLY FOUR ANTI-NARCOTICS INTEL
INVESTIGATORS IN ALL THE EASTERN REGION -- AND THEY ARE BASED IN
VILLAVO. [REDACTED] THESE MEN ARE [REDACTED]
HEROES. WITH THEM [REDACTED] HAVE BROKEN UP SIX MAJOR COCAINE
DISTRIBUTION RINGS. BUT WE NEED MORE OF THEM [REDACTED] SPOKE

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NOTHING BUT PRAISE FOR DANTI COMMANDER COL. GALLEG0, AS WELL AS
OF THOSE POLICE (SEVERAL OF THEM FRIENDS) KILLED OR INJURED LAST
OCTOBER DURING WHAT [REDACTED] WAS A DANTI EFFORT TO HOLD A
SEIZED LAB IN ORDER TO SHOW IT TO ONDCP DIRECTOR MCCAFFREY WHEN
HE VISITED THE REGION SEVERAL DAYS LATER. (NOTE: THIS CONFIRMS

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WHAT OTHER GOC CONTACTS HAVE INFORMALLY TOLD EMBOFFS. END NOTE.)
 WHAT'S [] SOLUTION? AN INTEGRATED "SEARCH BLOC", INCORPORATING
 FISCALIA PROSECUTORS, CTI INVESTIGATORS AND DANTI TROOPS, BACKED
 UP BY THE NECESSARY AIR TRANSPORT AND SUPPORT. AND THE ARMY?
 "NOT HELPFUL," [] "THEY JUST DON'T KNOW THE TERRAIN OR
 THE PEOPLE."

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12. (C) [] THE PARAMILITARIES HAVE A "NATURAL
 ADVANTAGE" OVER THE FARC IN GETTING INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT AND THE
 LOCAL ELITE POWER STRUCTURE. THE GUERRILLAS GET MOST OF THEIR
 INFO FROM THE LOWER SOCIAL STRATA -- THE GUARDS, THE CLEANING
 STAFF, THE STREET VENDORS. THE PARAS GO INSIDE. VICTOR
 CARRANZA, [] OWNS THE TWO BEST HOTELS AND A FLEET OF 200
 BRAND-NEW TAXIS IN VILLAVO, AND IS THUS ABLE TO KEEP TABS ON OUT-
 OF-TOWN VISITORS. [] NOTED, "IT WOULD TAKE AN
 ARMY" TO DISLodge CARRANZA FROM HIS HEAVILY ARMED AND FORTIFIED

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1881
INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 4023
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIRONDCP WASHDC
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
FBI WASHDC
DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD

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COMPOUND IN PUERTO LOPEZ, EQUIPPED WITH CLOSED CIRCUIT TV,
 ELECTRIC FENCES, SCORES OF GUARDS, ETC. (NOTE: CARRANZA WAS
 SUBSEQUENTLY ARRESTED ON FEBRUARY 24 IN BOGOTA, WHERE HE HAD GONE
 TO HOST THE FIRST WORLD EMERALD EXPO (REF A). [REDACTED])

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[REDACTED] PERSONAL LAWYER WAS ASSASSINATED IN
 BOGOTA ON MARCH 2. END NOTE.)

13. (C) PARAMILITARIES HAVE ALSO INFILTRATED THE FISCALIA
 ITSELF, [REDACTED] JUST THE PREVIOUS FRIDAY, A FISCALIA
 RAID ON A PARAMILITARY GROUP BELIEVED FINANCED BY NARCO-MONEY WAS
 SABOTAGED BY SOMEONE USING THE FISCALIA'S OWN RADIO NET TO
 ANNOUNCE, "THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY; CLEAR OUT." (SEVERAL OF THE
 FISCALIA'S CRIMINAL INVESTIGATORS ("CTI") ARE UNDER SUSPICION AS
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 A RESULT OF THE BROADCAST, WHICH THE FISCALIA CAUGHT ON TAPE.)
 AND WHAT WOULD YOU DO [REDACTED] IF YOU WERE
 INVESTIGATING AN ARMY GENERAL FOR PARAMILITARY TIES, BUT YOUR
 COMPUTER SYSTEMS ENGINEER -- THE ONE PERSON IN TOWN CAPABLE OF
 FIXING OR GOING ANYWHERE IN YOUR (FEW) COMPUTERS -- JUST HAPPENED
 TO BE THE GENERAL'S SON? WITNESSES WERE ALSO BEING KILLED, [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] "SEVERAL" MAPIRIPAN WITNESSES HAVE BEEN KILLED IN VILLAVO
 -- THE LATEST THE PREVIOUS WEEK, AFTER THE WOMAN AGREED TO
 TESTIFY FOR THE FISCALIA ABOUT WHAT SHE HAD SEEN.

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14. (C) BUT IT IS NOT JUST THE PARAS [REDACTED] TO LOOK OUT FOR,
 [REDACTED] THE FARC ALSO CONTROLS A NUMBER OF VILLAVO TAXIS. THE
 FARC'S BOLIVARIAN MILITIAS ARE ALSO VERY ACTIVE IN TOWN,
 PARTICULARLY THE SLUM AREAS WHERE NEW ARRIVALS CONGREGATE. THEIR
 ROLE? PRIMARILY SOCIAL-POLITICAL, AS WELL AS PROVIDING INTEL ON
 POTENTIAL TARGETS FOR FARC KIDNAPPINGS. AND A STREET VENDOR
 LONG-ESTABLISHED IN FRONT OF THE FISCALIA WAS ARRESTED ONLY DAYS
 PREVIOUSLY AND CHARGED WITH SPYING FOR THE FARC ON FISCALIA
 HAPPENINGS.

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15. (C) AS IF ALL THIS WERE NOT ENOUGH, [REDACTED] MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL "GAULA" ANTI-KIDNAPPING TASK FORCE HAD THEMSELVES BEEN INVOLVED IN KIDNAPPINGS-FOR-PROFIT. (AMONGST THESE [REDACTED] WAS THE HEAD OF THE GAULA, WHO DIED IN THE OCTOBER 17 NARCO ATTACK ON A FISCALIA CONVOY WHICH LEFT 18 DEAD AND 4 WOUNDED. THIS CONFORMS WITH [REDACTED] REPORTING THAT SOME OF THOSE KILLED WERE THEMSELVES "DIRTY".) [REDACTED] CONCURRED WITH [REDACTED] ASSESSMENT THAT THE NUMBER OF KIDNAPPINGS IN VILLAVO IS FAR GREATER THAN THE NUMBER FORMALLY REPORTED. FAMILIES ARE OFTEN "RELIEVED," THEY STATED, TO HEAR THAT A FAMILY MEMBER HAS BEEN TAKEN BY THE FARC, RATHER THAN BY

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PARAS OR KIDNAP-FOR-PROFIT GANGS. PEOPLE KNOW THAT IF THEY PAY THE FARC, THEY HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF SEEING THEIR LOVED ONES AGAIN. THE TRACK RECORD OF OTHER GROUPS, HOWEVER, IS SUCH THAT PAYING UP IS NO GUARANTEE OF ANYTHING.

THE (LOSING) STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

=====

16. (C) THE BISHOP OF META, ALFONSO CABEZAS, FATHER GARCIA OF CARITAS, AND WILLIAM ROSSO OF THE CHURCH HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE PROVIDED AN OVERVIEW OF CHURCH AND NGO EFFORTS TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS AND ATTEND TO THE NEEDS OF THE GROWING NUMBER OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS ("IDP'S"). CABEZAS STATED BLUNTLY THAT, DURING THE 1980S, THE ARMY HAD BEEN DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN WIPING OUT THE LOCAL LEGAL (AND ILLEGAL) LEFT. NOW, HE SAID, IT WAS THE PARAMILITARIES.

17. (C) [REDACTED] TERMED IT IRONIC -- AND A CAUSE FOR CONCERN -- THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT TO REIGN-IN ARMY HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES HAD LED DIRECTLY TO THE ARMY'S "ABANDONING THE FIELD OF BATTLE" AND THE RISE OF UNCONTROLLABLE PARAMILITARIES. HE TERMED THE COLOMBIAN ARMY OF

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	INR-00	ADS-00	MMP-00	SCT-00	ASDS-01	DSCC-00	PRM-10
	DRL-04	SAS-00	/029W				

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1882
INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 4024
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIRONDCP WASHDC
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DIA WASHDC
FBI WASHDC
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DEA FOR OF, OFL, OC, AX
JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND NDDS/VAN VLIET
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TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/08
TAGS: PHUM, SNAR, ASEC, PTER, ECON, PREF, PINS, CO
SUBJECT: LAW, ORDER & MONEY IN THE GATEWAY TO COLOMBIA'S "LLANOS"
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TODAY "INCAPABLE AND INDOLENT", TOTALLY MARGINALIZED FROM META'S
CONFLICTS. HEAVY INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON HUMAN RIGHTS WAS
STILL HELPFUL, HE ARGUED, BUT ONLY IN A FEW SELECT CASES. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] "GOES THROUGH THE MOTIONS" OF DENOUNCING TO THE GOVERNMENT
ANY HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IT BECOMES AWARE OF, HE SAID, NOT
BECAUSE IT HAS ANY FAITH THAT CORRECTIVE MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN
(AGAINST ANYONE), BUT SIMPLY, "SO THAT THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT DENY
WHAT IS HAPPENING." IF NOTHING ELSE; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] MORAL OBLIGATION TO ENSURE THAT EVENTS BE PUT ON THE
OFFICIAL, HISTORICAL RECORD.

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18. (C) THE CATHOLIC CHURCH MAINTAINS THE ONLY HUMAN RIGHTS
ORGANIZATION LEFT IN THE REGION. THE META CIVIC COMMITTEE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS WAS DESTROYED FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 1996,
ASSASSINATION OF ITS LEADER, JOSUE GIRALDO. AFTER MORE THREATS

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(AND A KILLING OR TWO), THE REMAINING COMMITTEE MEMBERS ALL FLED
THE DEPARTMENT.

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] IN ADVANCE THAT JOSUE WAS MARKED FOR DEATH, AND
THAT "ALL THE COPS KNEW IT." GIRALDO WAS ASSASSINATED IN HIS
FRONT YARD ON OCTOBER 14, 1996, AS HE PLAYED WITH HIS CHILDREN IN
THE COMPANY OF A VISITING U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER.

19. (C) [REDACTED] THAT THEY KNEW
OF SEVERAL LOCAL COPS WHO MOONLIGHTED AS SKI-MASKED
PARAMILITARIES, BUT [REDACTED]
THESE COPS-TURNED-PARAS APPEARED TO BE MOSTLY (BUT NOT ONLY)
INVOLVED IN "SOCIAL CLEANSING", TARGETING PETTY THIEVES AND THE
GLUE-SNIFFING BOY-TEENS POLOFFS SAW AMBLING AROUND THE PLAZA IN
FRONT OF THE CATHEDRAL. AT LEAST FOURTEEN SUCH STREET-KIDS WERE
ALLEGEDLY "SNUFFED" DOWNTOWN DURING THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF
1997.

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20. (C) THE PARAMILITARY MAKEUP ELSEWHERE IN THE DEPARTMENT IS
DIFFERENT. THE CONVIVIR IN THE TOWNS OF ACACIAS AND GRANADA, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ARE NOTHING MORE THAN THE LEGALIZATION OF
PRE-EXISTING GANGS OF "SICARIOS" (HIRED KILLERS). [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] WITH A COPY OF A FORMAL PUBLIC COMPLAINT BY A FORMER
MEMBER OF THE ACACIAS CONVIVIR, NOW UNDER [REDACTED] PROTECTION,
DENOUNCING THE SICARIOS' ACTIVITIES -- AND THE POLICE'S ACTIVE
ROLE IN SUPPORTING THEM.

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21. (C) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] WAS SHOT [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] BY "PISTOLEROS" WHO WAITED FOR HIM [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] "WHO KILLED HIM?" [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] SAID, "THE LOCAL PEOPLE ARE CONVINCED THAT IT WAS THE FARC. AND I BELIEVE THEM. BUT FRANKLY, THE NARCOS AND PARAMILITARIES HAD REASON TO KILL HIM, TOO. HE WAS EQUALLY, AND UNSPARINGLY, FRANK AND DIRECT WITH ALL SIDES." ASKED IF THIS WAS THE FIRST SUCH THREAT OR ATTACK ON THE CHURCH, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] "OH, NO." OTHERS HAVE BEEN KILLED IN YEARS PAST. AND "ALL SIDES SPY ON THE CHURCH -- THE GUERRILLAS, THE PARAS, THE ARMY, THE POLICE. ALL SIDES TRY [REDACTED] INTO SHOWING PARTIALITY TOWARDS ONE SIDE OR ANOTHER, EITHER DIRECTLY IN FAVOR OF THEIR OWN SIDE OR BY IMPERSONATING SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER SIDE." AFTER DETAILING A FEW SUCH RECENT ATTEMPTS TO

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[REDACTED]
AND MAINTAIN THE BALANCE -- COME WHAT MAY."

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THE "DESPLAZADOS"

=====

22. (C) [REDACTED] STATED BALDLY THAT THE GOVERNMENT (AT ALL LEVELS) DOES NOT INVESTIGATE, MUCH LESS RESPOND TO, THE IDP PROBLEM. MORE THAN 1500 IDP'S ARRIVED IN

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INR-00 ADS-00 MMP-00 SCT-00 ASDS-01 DSCC-00 PRM-10
DRL-04 SAS-00 /029W

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O 101420Z MAR 98
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1883
INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 4025
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIRONDCP WASHDC
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
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VILLAVICENCIO PROPER IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1997, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] DISPLACED BY ALL SIDES OF THE CONFLICT. YET BECAUSE OF
PEASANT DISTRUST OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL
TO SEE THE PROBLEM, THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM REMAINS
INVISIBLE. THE MAYOR OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZES ONLY 80 IDP'S, [REDACTED]

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HELPED ORGANIZE 80 MAPIRIPAN IDP'S TO GO THROUGH THE HORRIBLY
COMPLICATED REGISTRATION PROCESS ("WHERE IS YOUR NOTARIZED LETTER
FROM YOUR TOWN'S MAYOR CERTIFYING THAT YOU HAVE FLED IN FEAR OF
YOUR LIFE?") AND FORMALLY REGISTER JUST SO THE GOVERNMENT COULD
NOT DENY THE PROBLEM ENTIRELY.

23. (C) [REDACTED] NOTED BITTERLY THAT,
DESPITE REPEATED REQUESTS, IT TOOK THREE MONTHS FOR THE GOVERNOR
TO ACCEDE [REDACTED] IN THE WAKE OF THE MAPIRIPAN
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MASSACRE AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF HUNDREDS TO VILLAVICENCIO. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] BLUNTLY SAID THE LOCAL POLITICIANS HAVE
"NO DEDICATION, WILL OR SKILL" AND "ARE IN IT ONLY FOR THE PERKS
AND WHATEVER THEY CAN SKIM OFF." [REDACTED] WOULD ONLY SAY THAT
THEY WERE "VERY WEAK AND INEFFICIENT".) [REDACTED] LIKE MOST [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] WE HAVE MET, RESERVED SPECIAL CONTEMPT, HOWEVER, FOR [REDACTED]

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HIM A "GRANDSTANDER" AND "THE SOURCE OF NO END OF EXASPERATION",
[REDACTED] FLEW INTO MAPIRIPAN IN THE
WAKE OF THE PARAMILITARY TAKEOVER, [REDACTED] A KEY
WITNESS WHO WAS UNDER SERIOUS AND CONTINUING THREATS AND NEEDED
IMMEDIATE EVACUATION FROM TOWN. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] EVEN THOUGH HE CLEARLY HAD SPARE SEATS ON HIS PLANE.
[REDACTED] EVAC'ED THE WITNESS ON AN [REDACTED] THE NEXT DAY.

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24. (C) MEANWHILE, THE EMBITTERED, UNEMPLOYED TEENS OF THE IDP'S, NOW LIVING IN THE "BELTS OF MISERY" SURROUNDING VILLAVO, HAVE BECOME EASY RECRUITS FOR THE NARCOS, THE GUERRILLAS AND THE PARAS. THE PARAS IN PARTICULAR, SAID MOST INTERLOCUTORS, NOW FIND THE SLUMS "RIPE PICKINGS" FOR RECRUITING THOSE SEEKING VENGEANCE AGAINST THE FARC. [REDACTED] ALSO EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION WITH EUROPEAN UNION AID POLICIES -- WHICH PROHIBIT REQUIRING AID RECIPIENTS TO WORK IN EXCHANGE FOR ASSISTANCE. REFERRING TO THE FARM FAMILIES WHICH HAVE FLED TO THE CITY, [REDACTED] "THESE PEOPLE DON'T WANT HANDOUTS. THEY WANT TO WORK, TO RECOVER THEIR DIGNITY AND TO GET ON WITH THEIR LIVES." INSTEAD, THEY ARE FORCED TO BE IDLE IF THEY WANT TO FEED THEIR FAMILIES.

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THE VIEW FROM [REDACTED]

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25. (C) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] HAD MOVED TO THE 4TH DIVISION'S VILLAVICENCIO BASE ONLY A FEW WEEKS BEFORE, WHILE [REDACTED] WERE DOWN IN RECENT MONTHS, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE [REDACTED] LAST SEPTEMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE "DESTRUCTOR II" COUNTER-GUERRILLA OPERATION. IN FACT, [REDACTED] ENCOUNTERED "ONLY ONE HOUSE" DURING ALL THE TIME [REDACTED] HAD TRAMPED THROUGH THE JUNGLE IN SEARCH OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE FARC'S NATIONAL SECRETARIAT. ASKED WHAT [REDACTED] WOULD BE FOR 1998, [REDACTED] WOULD BE DEPLOYED AROUND THE MACARENA MESA (WESTERN META) AGAIN. HE MADE NO MENTION OF COUNTER-NARCOTICS AS [REDACTED] ALTHOUGH HE CLEARLY SAW GOING AFTER THE FARC AS PART OF THE LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO NARCO-TRAFFICKING IN COLOMBIA.

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26. (C) [] THAT IT APPEARED THAT IT WAS THE

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	INR-00	ADS-00	MMP-00	SCT-00	ASDS-01	DSCC-00	PRM-10
	DRL-04	SAS-00	/029W				

-----25355E 101503Z /38

O 101420Z MAR 98
 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1884
 INFO DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
 SECDEF WASHDC
 DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
 USIA WASHDC 4026
 NSC WASHDC
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL
 DIRONDCP WASHDC
 CIA WASHDC
 DIA WASHDC

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PARAMILITARIES, NOT THE ARMY, THAT WAS NOW PUNISHING THE
 GUERRILLAS. THINGS ARE CALM WHEREVER THE BRIM WAS STATIONED.

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THE PARAS AND GUERRILLAS DUKE IT OUT IN OUR WAKE."
 AND DO YOU SEEK OUT OR COMBAT THE PARAS, ASKED POLOFF. "WE
 FOLLOW THE ORDERS WE ARE GIVEN AS DICTATED BY THE 4TH DIVISION,
 TO WHOM WE ARE CURRENTLY 'OPCONNED'", HE STATED CAUTIOUSLY. BUT
 DO YOU HAVE ANY SUCH ORDERS? "NO," WAS THE SHEEPISH, IF HONEST,
 RESPONSE.

IS THERE A WAY OUT?

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28. (C) [REDACTED] ARGUED STRONGLY THAT THE ONLY WAY TO
DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS, A LEGAL ORDER AND JUST PLAIN CIVILITY IN
COLOMBIA TODAY IS TO PUSH FOR A PEACE ACCORD. THAT MEANT

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INCLUDING THE PARAMILITARIES AT THE TABLE, HE ARGUED. THEY HAVE
EARNED THAT RIGHT BY THEIR CLEAR POLITICAL-MILITARY PRESENCE AND
ACTIONS. LOCALIZED NEGOTIATIONS MAY WELL YIELD RESULTS AT THE
LOCAL LEVEL (WHERE IT COUNTS), HE ARGUED, EVEN IF NATIONAL-LEVEL
TALKS REMAIN STYMIED. THE META CHURCH HAD PURSUED LOCAL
NEGOTIATIONS SEVERAL YEARS AGO -- ONLY TO HAVE PRIESTS CHARGED BY
THE GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE GUERRILLAS. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] WILL NOT ENTER INTO ANY MEDIATION EFFORTS
WITHOUT A WRITTEN, FORMAL OFFICIAL GOC POLICY. (NOTE: SUCH A
WRITTEN GOC POLICY, AUTHORIZING LOCAL NEGOTIATIONS UNDER CERTAIN
CIRCUMSTANCES, WAS ISSUED AFTER POLOFF'S TRIP. END NOTE.)

29. ECHOING WHAT [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] WORRIED ALOUD OVER
WHAT HE BELIEVED WILL BEFALL [REDACTED] IN THE MEANTIME, BEFORE
ANY PEACE ACCORD COULD BE REACHED BY THE NEXT PRESIDENT UNDER
EVEN THE MOST FAVORABLE OF TIMELINES. [REDACTED] OPERATIONAL
FOCUS NOW IS ON WHAT HE TERMED "THE COMING BATTLE". THE ARRIVAL
OF THE "ACCU"-STYLE PARAMILITARIES FROM NORTHERN COLOMBIA HAD
BROUGHT TO META NEW WAYS OF FIGHTING THE GUERRILLAS AND THEIR
SUPPORTERS. A "SCORCHED EARTH" WAR WAS COMING TO META, HE
FEARED, "AND RIGHT NOW THERE IS NOTHING TO STOP IT."

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30. (C) SEPTTEL WILL FOCUS ON HOW THE ARRIVAL OF THIS NEW BREED
OF PARAMILITARIES HAS ALREADY UPSET META'S "DELICATE BALANCE" OF
NARCOS, GUERRILLAS AND "OLD-LINE" PARAMILITARIES, AND WHAT IT
PORTENDS FOR META'S NEAR-TERM FUTURE.

GARZA

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