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TITLE: SUBJECT: MAGDALENA MEDIO PARAMILITARY GROUP SURRENDERS

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SUBJECT: MAGDALENA MEDIO PARAMILITARY GROUP SURRENDERS

REF: A) BOGOTA 12725, B) BOGOTA 11056

1. (C) SUMMARY: COLOMBIA'S MOST INFAMOUS PARAMILITARY GROUP, HENRY DE JESUS PEREZ' "MAGDALENA MEDIO CAMPESINO SELF-DEFENSE MOVEMENT" HAS BEGUN TO SURRENDER TO COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES, BRINGING WITH IT LARGE QUANTITIES OF ARMS, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SAME SURRENDER DECREES AS DID NARCOS PABLO ESCOBAR AND THE OCHOAS. THE SECURITY FORCES WILL BEEF UP THEIR PRESENCE IN THE VACATED AREAS TO PREVENT GUERRILLAS FROM MOVING INTO THE VOID. THE PARAMILITARY GROUP REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING ITS SURRENDER FOR MONTHS WITH PRESIDENT GAVIRIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR, WITH ITS ALLY, THE M-19, ACTING AS GO-BETWEEN. BOTH ESCOBAR AND GAVIRIA CAN TAKE CREDIT FOR BREAKING THE GROUP'S WILL TO CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) AFTER A DECADE OF GUARDING COLOMBIA'S FERTILE MAGDALENA MEDIA AGAINST FARC GUERRILLAS -- WITH THE HELP OF THE MEDELLIN TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION AND THE SECURITY FORCES -- HENRY DE JESUS PEREZ' "CAMPESINO SELF-DEFENSE MOVEMENT" IS CALLING IT QUILTS. FOUR MONTHS AFTER PEREZ' ASSASSINATION (REFTEL B), REPORTEDLY ALMOST 70 MEMBERS OF THE PARAMILITARY GROUP, INCLUDING HIS SUCCESSOR, ARIEL OTERO, HAVE SURRENDERED TO COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES IN THE PAST WEEK (AS OF DECEMBER 3), TURNING IN APPROXIMATELY 230 ARMS. MORE ARE EXPECTED IN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper, Senior  
Reviewer

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3. (U) THE PARAMILITARY FIGHTERS ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SAME SURRENDER DECREES (2047 AND 3030 OF 1990, AND 303 OF 1991) UNDER WHICH THEIR FORMER ALLIES, MEDELLIN DRUG KINGPINS PABLO ESCOBAR AND THE OCHOA BROTHERS, TURNED THEMSELVES IN. ASIDE FROM GUARANTEEING CONFESSING NARCOS IMMUNITY FROM EXTRADITION, PRESIDENT GAVIRIA'S DECREES (CONVERTED INTO LAW BY THE INTERIM CONGRESS OCTOBER 4, 1991) OFFERED CONDITIONAL LIBERTY TO PERSONS LINKED TO PARAMILITARY GROUPS WHOSE ONLY OTHER CRIME WAS ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF ARMS.

4. (U) THE SURRENDERING COMBATANTS ARE BEING TRANSPORTED TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY'S BARBULA BATTALION IN PUERTO BOYACA, BOYACA DEPARTMENT, WHERE THEY ARE TURNING IN THEIR WEAPONS, CONFESSING TO JUDGES BROUGHT IN FROM BOGOTA, THEN BEING RELEASED. INSTRUCCION CRIMINAL DIRECTOR CARLOS EDUARDO MEJIA ESCOBAR IS ON THE SCENE PERSONALLY DIRECTING THE PROCESS.

5. (U) ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, SURRENDERING SO FAR HAVE BEEN MEMBERS OF PARAMILITARY BANDS FROM PUERTO BOYACA, (BOYACA DEPARTMENT), PUERTO BERRIO AND CAUCASIA (ANTIOQUIA), YACOPI (CUNDINAMARCA), AND LOS LLANOS DEL YARI (CAQUETA).

6. (U) TO PREVENT GUERRILLA INCURSIONS INTO THE AREAS BEING VACATED BY THE PARAMILITARY BANDS, THE SECURITY FORCES ARE BEEFING UP THEIR PRESENCE, FILLING THE VACUUM. MEANWHILE, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, UNITS OF THE POLICE'S ELITE CORPS ARE IN PUERTO BOYACA GUARDING OTERO, THE TARGET OF PREVIOUS ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS.

7. (U) ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR RICARDO SANTAMARIA HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING THE SURRENDER WITH THE MAGDALENA MEDIO PARAMILITARY LEADERS FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, WITH AD/M-19 LEADERS OTTY PATINO AND ALVARO JIMENEZ ACTING AS GO-BETWEENS. THE M-19 MADE AN ALLIANCE WITH HENRY PEREZ' GROUP SHORTLY AFTER THE EX-GUERRILLA GROUP TURNED IN ITS ARMS, INCLUDING A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PARAMILITARY GROUP AMONG ITS

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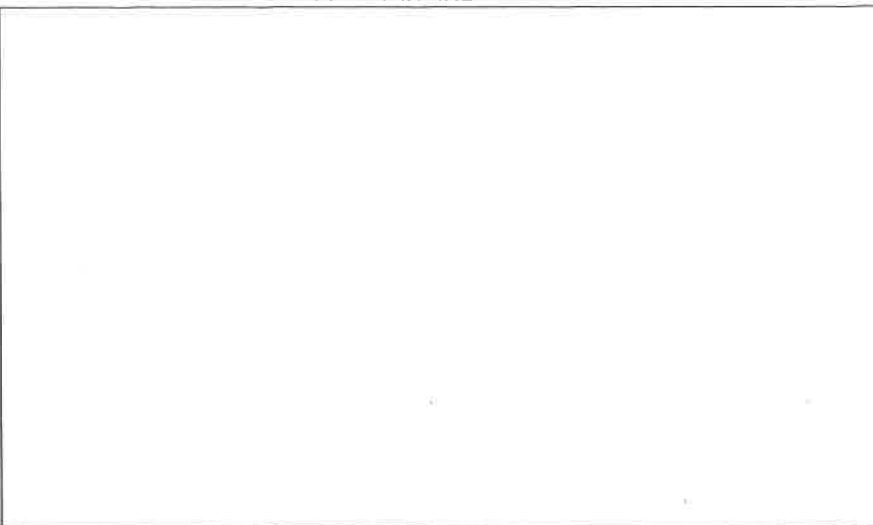
8. (C) COMMENT: PABLO ESCOBER DESERVES SOME OF THE CREDIT FOR THE MAGDALENA MEDIO GROUPS' SURRENDER. HIS UNCEASING WAR AGAINST THEM, WHICH CLAIMED THE LIVES OF HENRY PEREZ AND SEVERAL OTHERS, CONVINCED THE GROUP TO FIRST CALL A UNILATERAL TRUCE (WHICH ESCOBAR DIDN'T RECIPROCATE) THEN HELPED MOTIVATE THEM TO TURN TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR MERCY. HOWEVER, THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION ALSO DESERVES CREDIT FOR BREAKING THE LINK BETWEEN THE GROUP AND AREA SECURITY-FORCE UNITS, WHICH THE RECENT NARCO-VIDEO SCANDAL (REFTEL A) INDICATED CONTINUED. THE GOVERNMENT HAS FURTHER WHITTLED AWAY AT THE GUERRILLAS' EXCUSES FOR NOT NEGOTIATING PEACE. END COMMENT.

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END OF MESSAGE

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INFO RUEBWJA/DEPTJUSTICE WASHDC

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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0626

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