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TITLE: SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION -- U.S. ANTI-DRUG STRATEGY

NOTE: THIS CABLE WAS ORIGINALLY SENT 10/28/93. THIS CABLE IS A RETRANSMISSION.

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TEXT:

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COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION -- U.S. ANTI-DRUG STRATEGY

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1. OCTOBER 26 LEADING WEEKLY MAGAZINE "SEMANA" (LIBERAL PARTY ORIENTED, CIRC. 120,000) CARRIED AN ARTICLE THAT PROVIDES A FAIRLY DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ITS VIEW OF THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL IN THE SEARCH FOR DRUG KINGPIN PABLO ESCOBAR SINCE HIS ESCAPE FROM ENVIGADO PRISON LAST YEAR. THE DESCRIPTION INCLUDES THE TYPE OF ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT USED AND DETAILS SUPPOSED INCIDENTS BETWEEN USG AND COLOMBIAN AIRCRAFT.

2. A FULL TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT OF THE ARTICLE FOLLOWS:

HEADLINE -- "LOOKING FOR PABLO."

SUBHEADLINE -- "IN THE HUNT FOR PABLO ESCOBAR, NOT ONLY THE SEARCH TASK FORCE HAS FAILED. THE 'GRINGO' AGENTS HAVE ALSO FAILED."

TEXT -- "A FEW DAYS AFTER PABLO ESCOBAR ESCAPED FROM ENVIGADO PRISON, THE DEA'S HEADQUARTERS IN COLOMBIA DELIVERED A CONFIDENTIAL REPORT TO ITS GOVERNMENT (U.S.) THAT SAID THAT THERE WERE SERIOUS SIGNS OF CORRUPTION IN

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper,
Senior Reviewer

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THE POLICE AND THE ARMY IN REGARDS TO DRUG TRAFFICKING. IT ALSO SAID THAT THE PROBABILITY OF RECAPTURING THE HEAD OF THE MEDELLIN CARTEL WAS MINIMAL. IN SAID REPORT, THE NEED FOR THE UNITED STATES TO PARTICIPATE IN A MORE DIRECT MANNER IN THE SEARCH FOR ESCOBAR -- WHICH WAS BEING PLANNED BACK THEN BY THE COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES -- WAS RECOMMENDED.

THIS IS HOW, TWO WEEKS AFTER THE SEARCH TASK FORCE SET UP ITS HEADQUARTERS AT THE "CARLOS HOLGUIN" MILITARY SCHOOL IN MEDELLIN, A U.S. C-130 FROM HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE IN PANAMA LANDED AT RIONEGRO AIRPORT. A SMALL GROUP OF MEN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHING EMERGED FROM IT, AND THEN WOOD BOXES WERE UNLOADED. THEIR FINAL DESTINY WAS A SPACIOUS OFFICE AT "HOLGUIN."

THE MEN WHO ARRIVED ON THAT FLIGHT CAME FROM FAR AWAY. SOME OF THEM HAD BEEN A PART OF THE ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE GROUP, BETTER KNOWN AS THE DELTA FORCE, THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE RECENT PERSIAN GULF WAR, WHERE THEY GOT THE HIGHEST COMMENDATIONS FOR THEIR WORK. WITH THEIR RECONNAISSANCE EQUIPMENT, OPERATED VIA SATELLITE, THEY LOCATED THE KEY SITES FOR THE CENTRAL CONTROL OF IRAQ'S ARMED FORCES, AND THIS LEAD TO THE LATTER'S IMMOBILIZATION, AND IT FACILITATED THE U.S. VICTORY.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THESE MEN IN MEDELLIN WAS TO LOCATE PABLO ESCOBAR WITHIN 48 HOURS. IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVE, THEY HAD MORE THAN ONE PROVISION. FIRST, ON ONE OF THE WALLS OF THE OFFICE THEY HAD A MAP OF ANTIOQUIA MADE FROM SATELLITE PHOTOS. ON ANOTHER WALL THEY HAD THE AERIAL PHOTOS TAKEN A FEW DAYS BEFORE BY AN AMERICAN FIGHTER PLANE THAT OVERFLEW THE ZONES (COUNTIES) OF ENVIGADO, LA ESTRELLA AND SABANETA. THESE PLACES WERE THE KINGPIN'S SAFE HAVENS. IN ADDITION TO THE PHOTOS, THEY INSTALLED MODERN EQUIPMENT TO TRACE CALLS, HANDLED FROM "KING AIR" AIRCRAFT, WHICH HAVE A RADAR DISC EIGHT METERS IN DIAMETER, MOUNTED ON TOP OF THE FUSELAGE. IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, THROUGH A COMPUTER, THE OPERATORS WERE ABLE TO LOCATE THE EXACT

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PLACE WHERE A PHONE CALL WAS COMING FROM. NOT SUFFICIENTLY HAPPY WITH THIS ASSISTANCE, THE MEN OF THE DELTA FORCE AND THEIR COMPANIONS SET UP ANOTHER PIECE OF EQUIPMENT WITH AN INFRA-RED SYSTEM, CAPABLE OF DETECTING A PERSON'S MOVEMENT THROUGH THE JUNGLE AT NIGHT. THE PLANE THAT WAS USED FOR THIS TASK WAS A "P-3C ORION," WITH THE CAPABILITY OF OVERFLYING A TARGET FOR 17 CONTINUOUS HOURS.

THIS IS HOW THE 48 HOUR COUNTDOWN IN ORDER TO FIND PABLO ESCOBAR IN MEDELLIN OUT ON ONE OF HIS FARMS STARTED. BUT THE HOURS WENT BY, AND THE AMERICAN OPERATORS REMAINED GLUED TO THEIR EQUIPMENT WITHOUT GETTING ANY RESULTS. AND IT WASN'T BECAUSE THE LEADER OF THE MEDELLIN CARTEL HAD CUT HIS PHONE COMMUNICATIONS OR BECAUSE HE WAS MOVING FROM ONE HIDE-OUT TO ANOTHER. DURING THE 48 HOURS HIS VOICE WAS HEARD SEVERAL TIMES. IT WAS JUST THAT, ONCE THE PLACE WAS LOCATED, THE ASSAULT GROUPS OF THE SEARCH TASK FORCE, FORMED BY COLOMBIAN POLICEMEN AND SOLDIERS, PUT TOGETHER LIGHTENING-FAST OPERATIONS, BUT WITHOUT ANY SUCCESS.

THE OBSTACLE

AFTER THE PERIOD THEY HAD ESTABLISHED TO FIND PABLO ESCOBAR'S LOCATION WAS OVER, THE U.S. ADVISORS DECIDED TO STOP AND TRY AND DETECT WHERE A POSSIBLE FAILURE IN THEIR FOOLPROOF EQUIPMENT COULD BE. THEY WENT OVER IT PIECE BY PIECE, AND A NEW FLIGHT PLAN FOR THE PLANES WAS DESIGNED, IN ORDER TO GET MORE EXACT INFORMATION. WORK BEGAN AGAIN, AND THE HOURS CONTINUED TO GO BY WITHOUT GETTING ANY POSITIVE RESULTS. A SERIES OF TESTS WERE DONE IN ORDER TO VERIFY THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EQUIPMENT. THE OFFICERS OF THE SEARCH TASK FORCE CHOSE A GROUP OF MEN WHO GOT VERY PRECISE ORDERS: SOME OF THEM HAD TO STAY IN MEDELLIN'S METROPOLITAN AREA, AND OTHERS HAD TO GO TO THE RURAL ZONES.

WITH THE FIRST PHASE OF THE EXPERIMENT COMPLETE, THE DELTA FORCE TEAM IMMEDIATELY STARTED TO LOCATE THE

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SQUADS. A PERIOD OF 24 HOURS WAS ESTABLISHED. BUT FIVE DAYS WENT BY, AND THEY STILL COULDN'T FIND THE AGENTS (SOLDIERS). WHEN AT LAST THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD FOUND THEIR TARGET, ANOTHER COMMANDO TASK FORCE WENT OUT TO FIND THEM AND TAKE THEM BACK TO HEADQUARTERS. ONCE MORE THEY CAME BACK EMPTY-HANDED. IT WAS DECIDED THEN THAT THE MEN WHO WERE HIDING SHOULD REVEAL THE PLACE WHERE THEY WERE. IT WAS APPROXIMATELY 17 KMS AWAY FROM WHERE THE AMERICAN EQUIPMENT HAD REPORTED THEY WERE.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING? AT FIRST THERE WAS TOTAL CONFUSION. NOBODY COULD UNDERSTAND HOW THIS SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT, WHICH HAD BEEN KEY FOR THE SUCCESS IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR, WAS NO LONGER WORKING. IT TOOK MANY DAYS TO FIND THE ANSWER. AND WHAT THEY PROVED WAS THAT LADY LUCK WAS ONCE MORE ON ESCOBAR'S SIDE. THIS TIME, NATURE WAS GIVING HIM A HAND. ACCORDING TO THE EXPERTS, THE TOPOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTIOQUIA, FULL OF MOUNTAINS AND PEAKS, ORIGINATES A PHENOMENON KNOWN AS MAGNETIC RESONANCE. IT IS LIKE A MAGNET GETTING HOLD OF THE SATELLITE SIGNAL, WHICH MAKES THE EQUIPMENT REGISTER THE WRONG COORDINATES WHILE TRYING TO LOCATE THE TARGETS.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE TECHNOLOGY DIDN'T PROVIDE THE EXPECTED RESULTS IN CAPTURING ESCOBAR, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN EVIDENT, EVEN IN OTHER FRONTS. ALTHOUGH THE U.S. EMBASSY IN COLOMBIA HAS PUBLICLY, OFFICIALLY, AND REPEATEDLY DENIED (U.S.) INTERVENTION IN THE SEARCH FOR THE KINGPIN, IT HAS NEVER BEEN ABLE TO EXPLAIN THE PRESENCE OF U.S. ADVISORS AT THE SEARCH TASK FORCE'S HEADQUARTERS IN MEDELLIN. NEVERTHELESS, TASK FORCE OFFICERS CONSULTED BY "SEMANA" ADMITTED THAT, IN FACT, MANY MEN FROM THE DEA ARE THERE, DOING INTELLIGENCE WORK WITHOUT PARTICIPATING MILITARILY IN THE OPERATIONS.

WHAT KIND OF WORK ARE THEY DOING? TO BEGIN WITH, A

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REDUCED NUMBER OF DEA AGENTS HAS REMAINED AT THE "CARLOS HOLGUIN" SCHOOL FOR THE YEAR AND A HALF THAT SEARCH FOR ESCOBAR HAS LASTED. IN A SMALL OFFICE THEY WAIT IMPATIENTLY FOR THE KINGPIN TO USE THE PHONES AGAIN TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIS MEN. DURING THE LAST EIGHT MONTHS THEY HAVE ONLY HEARD HIM ONCE. THAT HAPPENED TWO WEEKS AGO, AND THIS IN PART IS THE REASON WHY THE SPECTACULAR OPERATION IN AGUASFRIAS TOOK PLACE. BUT AGAIN THEY WERE UNLUCKY. ON THAT DAY, THE SATELLITE BASE, WHICH OPERATES FROM THE "KING AIR" AIRCRAFT, WAS OUT OF SERVICE. THE REASON: THE PLANE HAD GONE TO HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE TO REFUEL.

ANOTHER TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED IN THE SEARCH FOR ESCOBAR HAS BEEN THE USE OF DETECTORS OF EMPTY SPACES IN ORDER TO LOCATE HIDEOUTS. HOWEVER, THEY HAVEN'T BEEN AS EFFECTIVE AS EXPECTED EITHER. THEY WERE USED TO LOOK FOR THE HIDEOUTS BUILT IN ENVIGADO PRISON A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE ESCAPE OF THE LEADER OF THE MEDELLIN CARTEL. FOR THREE MONTHS, U.S. EXPERTS WENT OVER THE PRISON'S INSTALLATIONS FOOT BY FOOT, BUT THEIR DETECTORS COULDN'T FIND A SINGLE ONE. HOWEVER, WHEN THE INSPECTION WAS COMPLETE, IT WAS DECIDED TO ASK FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF FORMER ASSOCIATES OF ESCOBAR WHO HAD TURNED THEMSELVES IN. IN LESS THAN THREE DAYS, ALL THE HIDEOUTS WERE FOUND.

ADDITIONALLY, THE DEA MEN HAVE TAKEN AERIAL PHOTOS OF PREDETERMINED SITES IN ANTIOQUIA. THIS TASK HAS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE OF THE POLEMIC ABOUT THE VIOLATION OF AIR SPACE BY U.S. AIRCRAFT. SINCE THE SURRENDER OF PABLO ESCOBAR ON JUNE 19, 1991, TO THIS DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN 10 AERIAL INCIDENTS THAT HAVE NEARLY CAUSED MORE THAN ONE ACCIDENT OF INCALCULABLE PROPORTIONS.

REGARDING THIS DELICATE SITUATION, ONCE MORE THE U.S. EMBASSY HAS DENIED THAT U.S. AIR FORCE PLANES HAVE VIOLATED COLOMBIA'S AIR SPACE. BUT A CONFIDENTIAL REPORT BY CIVIL AERONAUTICS THAT SEMANA HAS SEEN SHOWS

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THE OPPOSITE. THIS DOCUMENT NOT ONLY REGISTERS THE COMPLAINTS OF THE PILOTS OF THE COLOMBIAN COMMERCIAL AIRLINES, FOR THEY AT ONE POINT PUBLICLY DENOUNCED THE RISK TO WHICH THEY WERE BEING EXPOSED, IT (THE DOCUMENT) ALSO REGISTERS A STRONG COMPLAINT SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, AS WELL AS A SERIES OF SANCTIONS AGAINST AMERICAN PILOTS, THAT START WITH, AS A MINIMUM, A SIX MONTHS DURING WHICH THEY CANNOT FLY IN COLOMBIAN AIR SPACE.

THE REPORT SAYS THAT IN MOST CASES, THE (U.S.) PILOTS OF THOSE PLANES HAVE VIOLATED ALL OF THE SAFETY REGULATIONS AND HAVE IGNORED THE COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES THAT CONTROL THAT (AIR) SPACE. IT ALSO INDICATES THAT, ALTHOUGH IN SOME CASES THOSE FLIGHTS HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED BY THE COLOMBIAN AIR FORCE (FAC), WHICH IN TURN HAS BRIEFED CIVIL AERONAUTICS, IN OTHER CASES NO COLOMBIAN AUTHORITY HAS BEEN INFORMED ABOUT IT. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS WHAT HAPPENED ON AUGUST 13, 1992, WHEN A U.S. C-130 WITH THE REGISTRATION NUMBER M122FF FLEW OVER COLOMBIAN TERRITORY FOR FOUR HOURS WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION AND WITHOUT THE PILOT REPORTING HIS POSITION TO THE CONTROLLERS IN THE DIFFERENT TOWERS. THE CONTROLLERS TRIED CLOSE TO TEN TIMES TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE AIRCRAFT, BUT HE ONLY ANSWERED THE CALL FIVE MINUTES BEFORE GOING OVER LETICIA AND INTO BRAZILIAN TERRITORY.

AT THAT TIME, THE C-130 HAD AS DESTINATIONS HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE AND TRINIDAD (BOLIVIA), BUT IT INEXPLICABLY ENDED (SHOWED) UP OVER ENVIGADO AT 17 THOUSAND FEET, WHERE IT HAD A NEAR MISS WITH AN AVIANCA AIRLINES DOUGLAS MD-83 PLANE, WITH REGISTRATION NUMBER EI-CCC, COVERING THE BOGOTA-MEDELLIN ROUTE. THE REPORT CITES SEVERAL MORE CASES OF INCIDENTS WITH GHOST PLANES. ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT TOOK PLACE ON AUGUST 21, 1991. ON THAT OCCASION, A "MERLIN III" TYPE AIRCRAFT FROM THE U.S. AIR FORCE FLEW OVER COLOMBIAN AIR SPACE FOR FOUR HOURS WITHOUT REPORTING HIS POSITION. IT WENT OVER VALLE (DEPARTMENT), ANTIOQUIA, THE MAGDALENA MEDIO REGION, AND THEN IT SUDDENLY APPEARED AT THE RUNWAY OF

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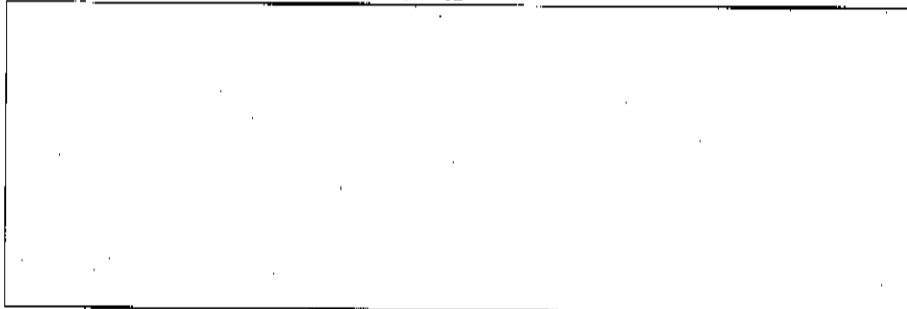
ELDORADO AIRPORT (IN BOGOTA), WHERE IT LANDED WITHOUT REPORTING ONCE AND WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION.

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, CIVIL AERONAUTICS' CONFIDENTIAL REPORT REGISTERS A SERIES OF MEASURES IN ORDER TO PREVENT MORE COMPLICATIONS WITH FAMOUS GHOST FLIGHTS. FOR THIS, A REQUEST WENT OUT TO THE AUTHORITIES IN CHARGE OF THE ENVIGADO AND ITAGUI PRISONS TO INSTALL A "HOT LINE" WITH THE CONTROL TOWERS OF OLAYA HERRERA AND RIONEGRO AIRPORTS, SO THAT THE AIR CONTROLLERS WOULD PROMPTLY INFORM THEM ABOUT THE FLIGHTS THAT HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED BY THE FAC. THE MEASURE ALLOWED FOR BETTER CONTROL. THAT IS WHY LAST WEEK'S INCIDENT BETWEEN A SAM AIRLINES FLIGHT, REGISTRATION NUMBER HK-3396, AND A U.S. C-130 THAT WAS GOING TO HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE AFTER COMPLETING A TRACING MISSION AUTHORIZED BY THE FAC, WAS CLARIFIED IMMEDIATELY: IT WAS ESTABLISHED THAT THE INCIDENT WAS CAUSED BY A MISTAKE BY THE RIONEGRO AIRPORT'S AIR CONTROLLERS.

IN ANY CASE, THIS CASE LEFT ONCE MORE ON THE TABLE THE PARTICIPATION OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SEARCH OPERATIONS FOR ESCOBAR. IT IS A SEARCH IN WHICH THE AMERICANS HAVE NOT BEEN LUCKY, BECAUSE THE 48 HOUR PERIOD THAT THEY INITIALLY ESTABLISHED TO FIND HIM HAS TURNED INTO AN EXTENUATING AND MARATHON-LIKE JOURNEY THAT HAS ALREADY REACHED THE 450 DAY MARK."

(END TEXT)
KOENGETER

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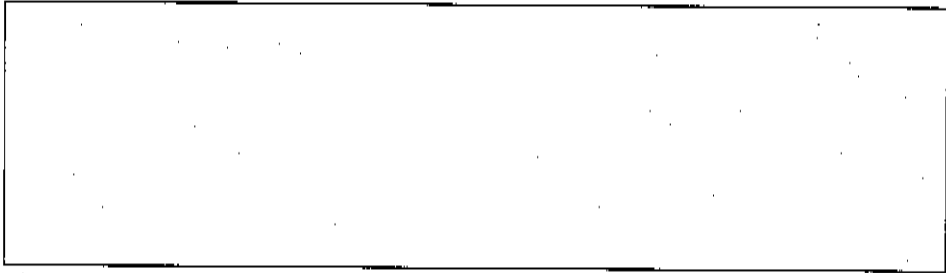


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TOR: 162334Z NOV 93 BOGOTA 17597

CLASS: UNCLASSIFIED
CLREASON: THE PLANE HAD GONE TO HOWARD AIR
CONTROLS: UNCLAS BOGOTA 17597 USIA USIA FOR P/M, P/PFL, P/PG, P/G, P/GN, B/VOA/L, B/TVWP, AR STATE
FOR ARA/P, PA, ARA/AND, INM/P DEA/CPP/BRUZZAMENTI/ AMEMBASSY FOR USIS E.O. 12356: N/A
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DOCST: ACTIVE
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RHLBAAA/USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM//J-2/J-5/SCPA/POLAD//
RUWMEGA/USCINCSO HOWARD AFB PM//SCJ3-DDD//

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RUCBSAA/CINCLANTFLT NORFOLK VA//J-2/J-5//
RUCBAIC/AIC NORFOLK VA//IA/IA6//
RUANJTE/CJTF FOUR//J-2//
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 4513
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 3597
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3540
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 1222
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4022
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TO: TO RUEHLA/USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3288

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