

## CONFIDENTIAL

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TITLE: SUBJECT: THE NARCO-GUERRILLA CONNECTION IN META

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SUBJECT: THE NARCO-GUERRILLA CONNECTION IN META

1. CONFIDENTIAL--ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: EMBOFFS SPENT JAN 13-15 IN META DEPARTMENT INTERVIEWING GOC OFFICIALS AND MISSIONARIES ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC). WHILE THE POLICE AND MILITARY AGREE THE FARC HAS LARGELY ABANDONED IDEOLOGY AND IS NOW MAINLY A CRIMINAL GROUP THAT HAS GROWN DRAMATICALLY OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THEY DISAGREE AS TO THE EXTENT OF FARC INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. THE MILITARY BRASS IN META ARE CAREFUL TO REPRESENT A STRONG LINK BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE NARCOS. THE POLICE IN META BELIEVE THE GUERRILLAS ARE ONLY INVOLVED IN THE PERIPHERY OF DRUG TRAFFICKING. DUE TO REPORTED GOVERNMENT ABUSE AND CORRUPTION, AND A SAGGING ECONOMY IN THE DEPARTMENT, THE GUERRILLAS, PARTLY THROUGH INTIMIDATION, HAVE A FREE HAND WITH MANY OF THE PEOPLE OF META. END SUMMARY.

3. META DEPARTMENT (AREA 85,630 SQ. KM; POP 361,000) IS IN THE LLANOS, AN AREA OF SCRUB BRUSH-COVERED HILLS CRISS-CROSSED BY DENSELY FORESTED STREAM BEDS IN WHICH LARGE GROUPS OF MEN AND NARCOTICS LABS CAN BE HIDDEN. ROADS ARE FEW AND USUALLY UNPAVED; HORSES AND PLANES ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION. IN THE MOUNTAINS IN WEST META, OPIUM POPPY (AMAPOLA) HAS BEEN GROWN FOR SEVERAL YEARS. IN THE REST OF THE DEPARTMENT, COCAINE LABS ARE BECOMING MORE COMMON. FARC GUERRILLAS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN META FOR OVER 20

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Classification Extended on : 07/02/2014 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~ Reason:  
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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Adolph Eisner, Senior Reviewer

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YEARS. AS RECENTLY AS FIVE YEARS AGO, THEY HAD ABOUT 350 COMBATANTS DIVIDED INTO THREE FRONTS IN THE DEPARTMENT. ACCORDING TO MILITARY SOURCES, THE FARC NOW HAS 11 FRONTS IN THE DEPARTMENT.

4. POLOFFS MET WITH GOC, DEPARTMENTAL, MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICIALS AS WELL AS [REDACTED] TO LEARN HOW THE FARC OPERATES IN THE REGION AND TO ASCERTAIN FARC INVOLVEMENT IN THE NARCOTICS TRADE.

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THE ARMY AND THE "NARCO-GUERRILLAS"

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5. HISTORICALLY, THE COLOMBIAN ARMY HAS FOCUSED ON THE GUERRILLAS, WHILE THE POLICE HAVE FOCUSED ON THE NARCOS. COLONEL RAFAEL RUIZ NAVARRO OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY'S IVTH DIVISION WAS CAREFUL TO USE THE WORD "NARCO-GUERRILLAS" WHEN DESCRIBING THE FARC IN META. THE IVTH DIVISION, BASED IN VILLAVICENCIO, IS COMPOSED OF THREE BRIGADES AND OPERATES OVER 250,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS, FROM VILLAVICENCIO TO THE PUTUMAYO RIVER AND FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF VICHADA TO VAUPES.

6. RUIZ SPOKE OF HUGE COCA PLANTATIONS AND LABS AND SAYS SOME FRONTS OF THE FARC NOW SPECIALIZE IN THE NARCOTICS TRADE. THE FARC FRONTS IN THE REGIONS OF COLOMBIA NEAREST THE BORDERS WITH ECUADOR AND BRAZIL TEND TO BE THOSE MOST INVOLVED WITH NARCOTICS (COMMENT: U.S. ARMY INTEL DOES NOT SHOW FARC FRONTS ACTIVE ON THE BRAZIL BORDER). RUIZ TOLD OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN PROCESSING COCAINE AND HEROIN, GUARDING FIELDS AND AIRSTRIPS AND TRANSPORTING CHEMICALS. HE FORESEES THE FARC BECOMING A THIRD CARTEL IN COLOMBIA

(COMMENT: THE COLOMBIAN ARMY E-2 IN ITS COMMAND BRIEFING NOW REFERS TO THE FARC AS A THIRD CARTEL. END COMMENT). HE CLAIMS THE FARC LEVIES A TAX ON DRUG LAB OPERATORS OF FROM 30,000-50,000 PESOS (45-70 USD) PER KILO OF COCAINE BASE (COMMENT: THE WHOLESALE PRICE

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OF COCAINE BASE IS 700 USD PER KILO. END COMMENT). HE SAYS THEY ACCEPT A TAX PAID IN COCAINE BASE IN LIEU OF CASH AND THEN SELL THE BASE TO THE CARTELS. IN ORDER TO FIGHT THE GUERRILLAS, RUIZ SAYS THE ARMY HAS TO BECOME MORE MOBILE. HE BELIEVES THE ARMY CAN DEFEAT THE GUERRILLAS IN THE REGION WITH FOUR FORWARD BASES, EACH EQUIPPED WITH FIVE BLACKHAWKS AND TWO ATTACK HELICOPTERS. HIS BELIEF SEEMS TO BE BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE GUERRILLAS ARE LESS MOBILE THAN BEFORE BECAUSE THEY ARE GUARDING FIXED NARCOTICS LABS AND FIELDS.

7. THE COMMANDER OF THE VIITH BRIGADE, BRIGADIER GENERAL CELSO SUAREZ MARTINEZ, WAS ALSO CAREFUL TO USE THE WORD "NARCO-GUERRILLAS" TO DESCRIBE THE FARC. HOWEVER, UNLIKE RUIZ, WHILE RECOGNIZING THE LINK BETWEEN THE NARCOS AND THE GUERRILLAS, HE CLAIMS THE GUERRILLAS ARE NOW A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION MAKING MONEY ANY ILLICIT WAY POSSIBLE. HE BLAMES THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION (1982-86) FOR CREATING A DETENTE THE GUERRILLAS USED TO RECRUIT AND TRAIN. THE FARC HAS NOW EXPANDED TO ABOUT 60 FRONTS NATIONWIDE, SUAREZ SAYS, AND HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SO LONG THAT NOW CHILDREN OF GUERRILLAS ARE JOINING THE FARC (COMMENT: USG INTEL SOURCES BELIEVE THERE ARE 48 ACTIVE FARC FRONTS IN COLOMBIA AT THIS TIME. END COMMENT). HE AGREES THAT MOBILITY IS THE KEY TO FIGHTING THE GUERRILLAS, BUT ADMITS THE GUERRILLAS ARE NOT EXCLUSIVELY INVOLVED IN THE NARCOTICS TRADE AND ARE THUS STILL VERY MOBILE. HE HAS HEARD RUMORS THAT THE FARC NOW HAS SURFACE-TO-AIR WEAPONS TO USE AGAINST ARMY HELICOPTERS (COMMENT: [REDACTED] HAVE HEARD THE SAME REPORTS ABOUT SHOULDER FIRED ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS BUT THE REPORTS HAVE NEVER BEEN PROVEN NOR HAVE COLOMBIAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT BEEN FIRED UPON BY SUCH WEAPONS. END COMMENT).

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8. [REDACTED] BASED NEAR LOMA LINDA AND 40 MINUTES BY AIR SOUTH OF VILLAVICENCIO. HE AND HIS 39 MEN ARE BASED ON A HILL

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OVERLOOKING AN EVANGELICAL MISSION AND HE SENDS A SQUAD OUT NIGHTLY TO LOOK FOR GUERRILLAS. THE WEEK OF 4 JANUARY, HIS MEN WERE INVOLVED IN A FIREFIGHT WITH FARC GUERRILLAS ABOUT ONE MILE FROM THEIR BASE.

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[REDACTED] DOES NOT USE THE WORD "NARCO-GUERRILLAS." HE SAYS THE FARC HAS ELEMENTS OF THE 7TH, 16TH, 39TH, AND 44TH FRONTS COMPOSED OF 900 MEN ACTIVE IN SOUTH META. THIS NUMBER IS UP DRAMATICALLY FROM JUST THREE YEARS AGO. HIS BASE IS NEAR THE SMALL TOWN OF PUERTO LLERAS WHERE EVERYONE, DOWN TO CIGARETTE VENDORS, PAYS PROTECTION MONEY TO THE GUERRILLAS. HE SAYS UNLESS THE PEOPLE ARE CONVINCED THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROTECT THEM, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO HELP THE GUERRILLAS OUT OF FEAR. HE RELATED RUMORS OF THE GUERRILLAS THREATENING TO KILL PARENTS IF CHILDREN DID NOT JOIN THEM AND SAYS HE DOES NOT KNOW WHO TO TRUST IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

(COMMENT: [REDACTED])

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[REDACTED] END COMMENT).

THE POLICE: "A CRIME PROBLEM, NOT A MILITARY ONE"

9. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] HIS AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY SPANS META, GUAVIARE, VAUPES AND PUTUMAYO IN DIRECT SUPPORT OF THREE DAN COMPANIES BASED AT VILLAVICENCIO, SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE, AND MIRAFLORES. THE CNP HAS 56 POLICE POSTS IN META. HE CLAIMS THAT FARMERS IN MUCH OF THE AREA NOW GROW MORE COCA THAN FOOD CROPS. THE GUERRILLAS ARE MAINLY A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION INVOLVED IN EXTORTION, HE SAYS, AND THE FEW LABS THEY DO RUN ARE SMALL SCALE. THEY LEVY TAXES OF AROUND 10% IN CASH ON VIRTUALLY ALL TYPES OF BUSINESS AND EVEN SET UP ROADBLOCKS TO

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COLLECT TOLLS.

10. ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] THEIR LARGEST SOURCE OF REVENUE IS DERIVED FROM EXTORTING AND KIDNAPPING CATTLEMEN. HE SAYS THE CARTELS ARE NOT VERY INVOLVED IN THE REGION ANYMORE, PREFERRING TO RELY ON LOCAL MIDDLEMEN WHO ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE GUERRILLAS TO SHIP COCA-PASTE AND COCAINE TO OTHER PARTS OF COLOMBIA. SINCE THE GUERRILLAS ARE NOW A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION, HE BELIEVES THEY WILL BEST BE FOUGHT BY THE POLICE WHO ARE TRAINED IN EVIDENCE GATHERING AND WHO UNDERSTAND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS. HE SAYS HIS ORGANIZATION, WHICH SPECIALIZES IN COUNTER-NARCOTICS, IS RARELY INVOLVED WITH THE GUERRILLAS.

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11. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE ARMY'S USE OF THE WORD "NARCO-GUERRILLAS," [REDACTED] SMILED AND SAID IT WAS A PRETEXT TO GET MORE GOVERNMENT FUNDING. HE SAID PRESIDENT GAVIRIA'S INTERNAL DISTURBANCE DECREE IS PRIMARILY INTENDED TO EMPOWER THE POLICE, BUT THE ARMY IS HOPING TO JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON AND EXPAND THEIR OPERATIONS IN META AND THE REGION. [REDACTED] SAYS ARMY TROOPS ARE NOT TRAINED TO PRESERVE EVIDENCE OR AID IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS AND ARE THEREFORE NOT THE RIGHT GROUP TO FIGHT CRIME IN THE REGION.

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THE MISSIONARIES: SQUEEZED BY THE GUERRILLAS

12. THERE ARE TWO MAIN AMERICAN MISSIONARY GROUPS OPERATING IN META. NEW TRIBES MISSIONS HAS A LARGE OPERATION SEVEN KILOMETERS OUTSIDE OF VILLAVICENCIO AND THE SUMMER LANGUAGE INSTITUTE HAS A LARGER MISSION AT LOMA LINDA. MEMBERS OF BOTH GROUPS, WHO PROSELYTIZE INDIAN TRIBES THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

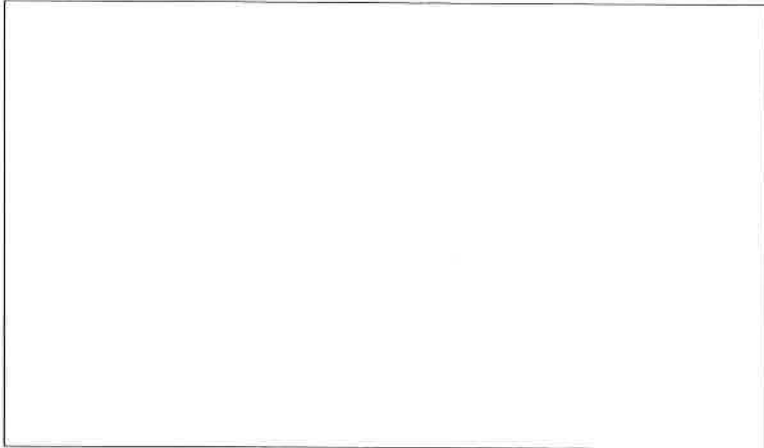
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13. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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14. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] RAISED IN THE AREA, SAYS THERE HAS TO BE A LINK BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND NARCOS. HE SAYS FARC WAS ACTIVE BEFORE DRUG LABS BECAME COMMON IN THE REGION BUT NOW THEY ARE EVERYWHERE. HE SAYS HE LIVED IN SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE IN 1980 AND SAW THE SAME

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THING HAPPENING THERE.

15. [REDACTED] REITERATED COMMENTS ABOUT THE NON-IDEOLOGICAL NATURE OF THE FARC. SIX OR SEVEN YEARS AGO THE GUERRILLAS DISTRIBUTED MARXIST-LENINIST TRACTS IN SEVERAL OF THE INDIAN DIALECTS AND HOPED TO CONVERT THE INDIANS. NOW, THEY SIMPLY EXTORT MONEY OR DRAFT RECRUITS. [REDACTED]

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UNEXPECTED SIDE EFFECTS OF CONTACTS BETWEEN THE INDIANS AND THE NARCOS. THEY CLAIM VENEREAL DISEASE IS WAY UP AMONG THE INDIANS AND THAT IN SOME TRIBES, 30% OF THE PEOPLE HAVE DIED AFTER BEING EXPOSED TO NEW DISEASES BROUGHT BY PERSONS WORKING IN LABS DEEP IN THE JUNGLE.

DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS' VIEWS

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16. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] IN HER OPINION, RESTORING PUBLIC ORDER IS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY FOR THE REGION. SHE SAYS THAT SINCE THE CASA VERDE RAID TWO YEARS AGO IN WHICH THE ARMY DESTROYED THE FARC'S HEADQUARTERS IN META, THE GOVERNMENT HAS WORKED HARD TRYING TO EARN THE TRUST OF THE PEOPLE. IN THEIR ZEAL IN ATTACKING THE GUERRILLAS, SHE SAYS, THE ARMED FORCES FREQUENTLY ABUSED MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL POPULATION AND COMMITTED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THIS OFTEN HELPED THE GUERRILLAS IN THEIR RECRUITING DRIVES. NOW THE ARMY IS BETTER TRAINED, AND SHE HEARS FEWER COMPLAINTS OF ABUSE BY THE ARMY. SHE CLAIMS THAT WHILE THE GUERRILLAS ARE EARNING MONEY GUARDING NARCOTICS LABS, THEY STILL EARN THE LION'S SHARE OF THEIR MONIES BY EXTORTING IT FROM LOCAL RANCHERS.

17. GOVERNOR OMAR BAQUERO SOLER SPOKE OF THE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT. HE WAS ELECTED ON A CLEAN GOVERNMENT PLATFORM IN THE FIRST POPULAR GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS. HE SAYS THE COMBINATION OF HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND OFFICIAL CORRUPTION MAKES LIFE WITH THE GUERRILLAS POPULAR. WHILE ADMITTING THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE DEPARTMENT NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED, HE SAYS RESTORING PUBLIC ORDER NEEDS TO BE THE FIRST PRIORITY. THE LONE DISSENTING VOICE IN HIS CABINET AGAINST A HARD LINE IS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] HE CLAIMS THERE IS ONLY A WEAK NARCO-GUERRILLA LINK. [REDACTED] SAYS THE RICH RANCHERS SHOULD GIVE A PORTION OF THEIR RANCHES TO THE POOR IN ORDER TO REMOVE THE POPULAR SUPPORT THE GUERRILLAS ARE RECEIVING. THE OTHER CABINET MEMBERS BELIEVE THIS POLICY WOULD BE A SURRENDER TO THE GUERRILLAS.

A LIBERAL SENATOR SUPPORTS A GET TOUGH POLICY  
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18. SENATOR HERMAN HERNANDEZ LED DEBATE ON THE SENATE FLOOR IN SUPPORT OF GAVIRIA'S TOUGH STANCE AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS--"WE ARE AT WAR WITH THE GUERRILLAS, WE

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NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT." HE SAYS THE HARD LINE POLICY TAKEN BY PRESIDENT JULIO CESAR TURBAY WAS RIGHT. THIS WAS ALL UNDERMINED BY PRESIDENT BETANCUR'S DETENTE WITH THE GUERRILLAS. HE BELIEVES PRESIDENT GAVIRIA TRIED BETANCUR'S APPROACH AND WHEN IT DIDN'T WORK, DECIDED TO GET TOUGH. THIS TIME, UNLIKE UNDER TURBAY, THE PEOPLE SUPPORT A HARD LINE. "TO BREAK A STONE YOU NEED A HARDER STONE," HE SAID IN SUPPORT OF DRASTIC MEASURES. HE WARNED POLOFFS OF THE GOOD TIES THE GUERRILLAS HAVE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, ESPECIALLY [REDACTED] AND EXPECTS MORE COMPLAINTS FROM THOSE GROUPS. HE BELIEVES THE ARMY NEEDS THREE

THINGS: 1) BETTER INTELLIGENCE, 2) BETTER TRAINING TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, AND 3) BETTER EQUIPMENT. HE ALSO CLAIMS THE GUERRILLAS EARNED MORE THAN 150 BILLION PESOS NATIONWIDE (225 MILLION USD) LAST YEAR IN KIDNAPPING AND BELIEVES THE GOC SHOULD USE SOME OF THE EXPERTISE IT HAS DEVELOPED IN CHASING NARCO DOLLARS TO CHASE THESE FUNDS. AS SUPPORTIVE AS HERNANDEZ IS OF A GET TOUGH POLICY WITH THE GUERRILLAS, HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THE GUERRILLAS HAVE BECOME NARCOS.

COMMENT

19. THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY'S NUMBER ONE PRIORITY REMAINS THE WAR ON THE GUERRILLAS. BUT OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS THE ROLE OF THE GUERRILLAS HAS CHANGED, AND MUCH OF THEIR IDEOLOGICAL AND OPERATIONAL DISCIPLINE HAS EVAPORATED (THE SIMON BOLIVAR COORDINATING GROUP IS MORE AN INSTRUMENT FOR CARRYING OUT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS THAN MILITARY STRATEGY). WE CONCUR WITH WHAT MOST PEOPLE ON THE SCENE IN THE LLANOS CONCLUDE--THE FARC THERE IS MERELY A CRIMINAL GROUP ONLY INDIRECTLY TIED TO THE DRUG TRADE. IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, ELEMENTS OF BOTH THE FARC AND THE ELN ARE WORKING FOR PABLO ESCOBAR NOT ONLY IN THE PRODUCTION OF DRUGS BUT ALSO IN CARRYING OUT TERRORIST

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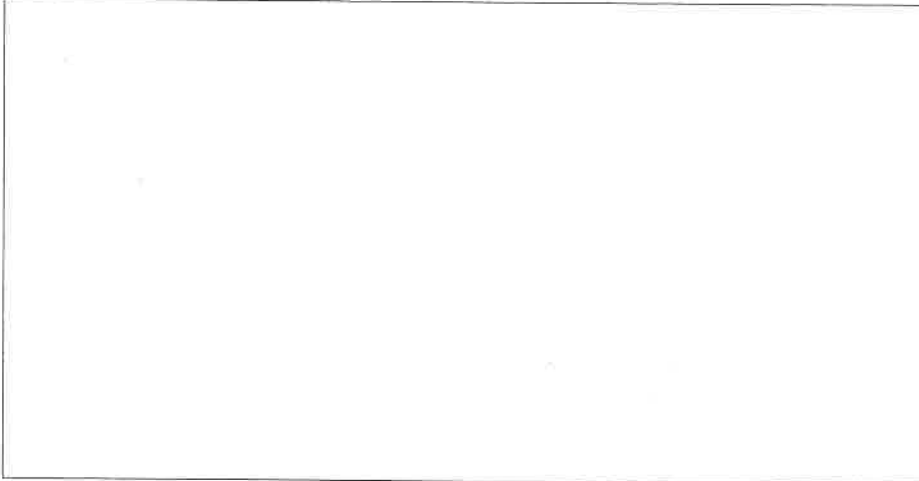
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ACTIONS.

20. THE ARMY IS JUSTIFIABLY CONCERNED THAT WITH THE GOC'S EMPHASIS ON ANTI-NARCOTICS, THE POLICE WILL BECOME THE DOMINANT SECURITY FORCE IN COLOMBIA AND BY EXTENSION GET THE LION'S SHARE OF RESOURCES. THEREFORE, EVEN IN META WHERE GUERRILLAS SEEM TO BE ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS, ARMY OFFICERS MOUTH THE NARCO-GUERRILLA LINE. BUT AT THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP LEVEL, THE ARMY IS COMING TO UNDERSTAND THAT NARCOTICS INCOME SUSTAINS THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT, AND THE COUNTER-NARCOTICS EFFORT IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT IN THE GOC'S GOAL OF DEFEATING THE GUERRILLAS. END COMMENT. BUSBY

END OF MESSAGE

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