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2 of 11

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02396 01 OF 04 052209Z
ACTION SCT-00

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	INLB-01	AID-00	A-00	ACQ-01
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P 052128Z MAR 99
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 75
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIRONDCP WASHDC
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DIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY PANAMA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: DAVID W COX
CLASSIFICATION: SECRET REASON: 1.4(B), 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 4 MAR 2024
DATE/CASE ID: 21 APR 2009 200604183

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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
PANAMA FOR ALEX LEE

APPEALS PANEL ACTION: ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION RELEASED 1.4(D)

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02396 01 OF 04 052209Z

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1.6(X6)
TAGS: PINS, SNAR, PHUM, PTER, ASEC, MASS, PREL, PGOV, PINR, CO
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE
(PART V OF A MONTERIA TRIP REPORT)

REFS: A) 98 BOGOTA 13823 B) 98 BOGOTA 14108 C) BOGOTA 341
D) BOGOTA 577 E) 98 BOGOTA 7790 F) 97 BOGOTA 11430

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CURTIS W. KAMMAN. REASONS 1.5(B&D).

SUMMARY

1. (S) SUMMARY: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF DURING A TRIP TO MONTERIA, CORDOBA IN
DECEMBER, THAT THE PARAMILITARIES' MOST INFAMOUS 1997 MILITARY
ACTION -- THE JULY 1997 MASSACRE IN THE FARC-DOMINATED, COCA-

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2 of 11

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3 of 11

CULTIVATING TOWN OF MAPIRIPAN, META DEPARTMENT -- HAD BEEN "WELL-COORDINATED IN ADVANCE" NOT ONLY AMONG FIVE PARAMILITARY GROUPS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF COLOMBIA BUT ALSO WITH (UNSPECIFIED ELEMENTS OF) THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. WHILE THEY ASSERTED THAT THE JOINT PARAMILITARY/ARMY PLANNING INCLUDED "TRAVEL, LOGISTICS, INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY," THEY BALKED AT PROVIDING FURTHER DETAILS. THEY ALSO CLAIMED THE RAID HAD ACHIEVED ITS INTENDED GOAL: TO DELIVER A MAJOR BLOW AGAINST THE FARC'S LIFELINE, ITS ABILITY TO MOVE COCAINE AND NARCO-MONIES IN THE EASTERN PLAINS. (NOTE: SOURCES MAY HAVE PROVIDED THE INFORMATION AS MUCH TO INFLUENCE AS TO INFORM. END NOTE.)

2. (S)



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IF ONE IS TO BELIEVE THEIR BLUNT ADMISSION OF AUC/ARMY COORDINATION RE MAPIRIPAN, AS WELL AS THE SEPARATE PRIVATE STATEMENTS BY A SENIOR AUC PARAMILITARY LEADER INVOLVED IN AUC'S OCTOBER 1997 INCURSION INTO MIRAFLORES (REF F), THEN BOTH OF THE KEY PARAMILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED U.S.-ASSISTED COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS IN THE GUAVIARE REGION IN 1997 HAD BEEN CONDUCTED WITH THE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FACILITATION BY MEMBERS OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. INDEED, [REDACTED]

TOLD EMBOFFS FEBRUARY 17 THAT THE "FISCALIA" IS SOON TO ISSUE INDICTMENTS AGAINST SEVERAL ARMY PERSONNEL (IN ADDITION TO THE TWO SERGEANTS ALREADY DETAINED) FOR HAVING HELPED COORDINATE THE PARAMILITARY INCURSIONS INTO BOTH MAPIRIPAN AND MIRAFLORES, AS WELL AS THE MAY 1998 INCURSION INTO PUERTO ALVIRA. END SUMMARY.

1.4(D)

MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE: THE BACKGROUND

3. (S) THE JULY 15-20, 1997, TAKEOVER OF (AND MASSACRE IN) THE COCA-GROWING TOWN OF MAPIRIPAN, META DEPARTMENT, HAS SINCE BEEN SEEN AS THE "COMING OUT PARTY" OF THE AUC PARAMILITARIES: THE ACT BY WHICH THE PARAMILITARIES BOTH ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION TO EXPAND BEYOND THEIR HOME BASES IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA INTO A NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND DEMONSTRATED THEIR FORCE PROJECTION CAPABILITY ON A NATIONAL SCALE -- RIGHT INTO THE HEARTLAND OF FARC OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN COLOMBIA. AS THE 1997 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT NOTED, "DURING THE OPERATION, THE PARAMILITARIES SINGLED OUT AT LEAST SEVEN TOWNSPEOPLE AND EXECUTED THEM, REPORTEDLY FOR SUPPORTING THE FARC GUERRILLAS. SOME TWO THOUSAND TOWNSPEOPLE SUBSEQUENTLY FLED, CLAIMING THE PARAMILITARY FORCES HAD KILLED AS

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3 of 11

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4 of 11

PAGE 04 BOGOTA 02396 01 OF 04 052209Z
 MANY AS TWO DOZEN OTHERS AND HAD THROWN THEIR BODIES INTO THE
 GUAVIARE RIVER. IN A SEPTEMBER 1997, INTERVIEW WITH EL TIEMPO
 NEWSPAPER, (AUC/ACCU) PARAMILITARY LEADER CARLOS CASTANO ADMITTED
 RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE." HE ALSO PROMISED,
 "THERE WILL BE MORE MAPIRIPANS."

4. (U) THE EXACT ROLE OF THE COLOMBIAN SECURITY FORCES IN THIS
 INCIDENT HAS LONG BEEN A MATTER OF PUBLIC (AND PRIVATE) DEBATE,
 AS TWO CHARTERED PLANES CARRYING DOZENS OF THE PARAMILITARIES
 INTO THE AREA FLEW OUT OF ANTIOQUIA'S URABA REGION (NEAR THE
 HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY'S 17TH BRIGADE) AND LANDED AT THE SAN
 JOSE DEL GUAVIARE MUNICIPAL AIRFIELD -- A STRIP WHICH THE
 COLOMBIAN ARMY HAD TAKEN CONTROL OF ON THE PRECISE DAY IN
 QUESTION, AND WHICH IS USED BY THE U.S. EMBASSY'S NAS COUNTER-
 NARCOTICS SPRAY OPERATIONS (HEADQUARTERED AT AN ADJACENT DANTI,
 COUNTER-NARCOTICS POLICE, BASE).

5. (U) THE ARMY AND THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OPENED SEPARATE FORMAL
 ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF FOUR ARMY
 OFFICERS, INCLUDING THE COMMANDER OF THE 7TH BRIGADE, BRIGADIER
 GENERAL JAIME HUMBERTO USCATEGUI, AND FIVE CIVILIAN OFFICIALS,
 INCLUDING THE MAYOR OF MAPIRIPAN, IN THE TAKEOVER. THE
 PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE ("FISCALIA") ALSO OPENED A CRIMINAL
 INVESTIGATION INTO THE INCIDENT. THUS FAR, SIX PERSONS HAVE BEEN
 ARRESTED BY THE FISCALIA: TWO ARMY SERGEANTS, A LOCAL
 PARAMILITARY LEADER AND HIS AIDE (ALL IN SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE),
 AND TWO CHARTER PILOTS.

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02396 02 OF 04 052209Z
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4 of 11

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5 of 11

INFO SECDEF WASHDC
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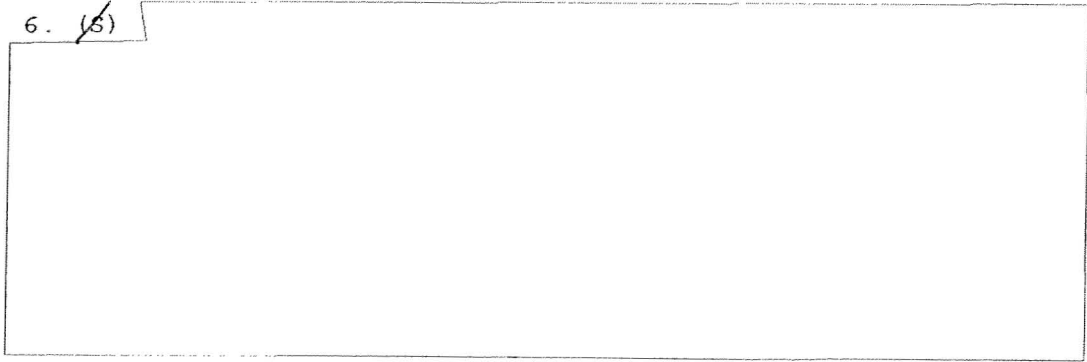
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
PANAMA FOR ALEX LEE

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02396 02 OF 04 052209Z
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THE MONTERIA ANGLE

6. ~~(S)~~ 

1.4(D)

7. ~~(S)~~ DURING A SUBSEQUENT LENGTHY PRIVATE MEETING, THE TWO ENGAGED IN A SURPRISINGLY FRANK, IF SOMEWHAT BOASTFUL, EXPLANATION OF HOW THE LOCAL PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION (I.E., CARLOS CASTANO'S ACCU) HAS TRANSFORMED ITSELF INTO THE SPINAL CORD OF A MATURE PARAMILITARY UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION WITH NATIONAL PRETENSIONS (I.E., THE AUC). NOW AN AUTONOMOUS FORCE, THEY CLAIMED, THE PARAMILITARY MOVEMENT NO LONGER NEEDS TO RELY ON THE COLOMBIAN ARMY "FOR ANYTHING." INDEED, THE PARAMILITARIES CAN NOW STRIKE ANYWHERE AND AT ANYTIME OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING, THEY ASSERTED. "SUCH AS IN MAPIRIPAN?" OFFERED POLOFF.

MAPIRIPAN: A CASE APART?

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 02396 02 OF 04 052209Z
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5 of 11

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6 of 11

8. (S) "WELL, NO. THAT ACTUALLY WAS QUITE DIFFERENT," INTERJECTED ONE OF THE TWO. "OH, HOW SO?" ASKED A CONFUSED POLOFF. SETTling INTO HIS SEAT AND WITH A CLEAR "OK" HEAD NOD FROM THE OTHER, THE FIRST MAN STATED, "LOOK, MAPIRIPAN WAS A SPECIAL CASE. IN REALITY, IT WAS A WELL-COORDINATED COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATION." AT LEAST FIVE DIFFERENT PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS -- FROM ANTIOQUIA'S URABA REGION, FROM CORDOBA, SANTANDER AND MAGDALENA DEPARTMENTS, AND FROM META AND ELSEWHERE IN THE "LLANOS" (EASTERN PLAINS) -- DIRECTLY PARTICIPATED, THE SECOND SAID, BY PROVIDING GROUND TROOPS FOR THE OPERATION.

9. (S) THE GOAL OF THE OPERATION WAS TO STRIKE "A COORDINATED BLOW" AGAINST THE FARC'S FINANCIAL LIFELINE, BY TARGETING THE KEY MONEY-MOVERS WHO BUY AND SELL COCAINE FOR THE FARC. MAPIRIPAN, THE FIRST STATED, WAS A KEY FARC "BUSINESS CENTER." THE SECOND MAN CHIMED IN THAT THE OPERATION HAD BEEN A CLEAR "SUCCESS" IN DAMAGING THE FARC'S ABILITY TO MOVE BOTH MONEY AND COCAINE IN THE REGION.

ARMY COORDINATION?

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10. (S) BUT WHAT MADE THE PARAMILITARY THRUST INTO MAPIRIPAN DIFFERENT FROM MOST OTHER OPERATIONS OF THE NEW, "INDEPENDENT" ACCU/AUC, THE FIRST CONTINUED, WAS THAT IT HAD BEEN "WELL-COORDINATED IN ADVANCE WITH THE (COLOMBIAN) ARMY." CHALLENGED BY POLOFF, HE STATED THAT THE COLOMBIAN ARMY HAD NO DIRECT PARTICIPATION ON THE GROUND IN MAPIRIPAN, BUT THAT "FULL COORDINATION" HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN IN ADVANCE WITH "THE ARMY" (NOT FURTHER SPECIFIED). THIS JOINT PLANNING, THE TWO LOCALS AGREED, HAD COVERED THE ISSUES OF "TRAVEL, LOGISTICS, INTELLIGENCE AND

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 02396 02 OF 04 052209Z
SECURITY."

11. (S) WHEN PRESSED BY POLOFF FOR FURTHER DETAILS, BOTH INTERLOCUTORS DECLINED TO SAY MUCH MORE (PERHAPS REALIZING THEY HAD ALREADY SAID TOO MUCH.) THEY CONCEDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE LEVEL OF COORDINATION WITH ELEMENTS OF THE ARMY WENT "WELL BEYOND" ("MUCHO MAS ALLA") THE TWO ARMY SERGEANTS WHO HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF FACILITATING THE PARAMILITARY ARRIVAL AT SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE. THEY DID NOT CONTRADICT POLOFF'S SUGGESTION THAT, IF THE OPERATION WAS AS "WELL-COORDINATED" AS THEY WERE ASSERTING, THE PARAMILITARIES DEPARTURE FROM URABA WAS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN AS COORDINATED WITH SOME ELEMENTS OF THE ARMY AS ALLEGEDLY WAS THEIR LANDING IN SAN JOSE. THE TWO SMILED, BUT REMAINED MUM ON THE EXACT EXTENT OR THE COMMAND-LEVEL OF ARMY INVOLVEMENT. (NOTE: THEY ALSO PUT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF DEAD DURING THE MAPIRIPAN TAKEOVER AT "TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE," THE SAME APPROXIMATION USED BY MAPIRIPAN EXILES WITH POLOFF SHORTLY

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6 of 11

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7 of 11

AFTER THE KILLINGS. END NOTE.)

A NOTE ON SOURCES

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12. (S) POST HAS DELIBERATELY REFRAINED FROM DIRECTLY IDENTIFYING HERE EITHER OF THE TWO INTERLOCUTORS -- BOTH PUBLIC MEN, WELL-KNOWN [REDACTED] WHOM THERE ARE NO KNOWN CRIMINAL WARRANTS. IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT, WE HAVE NO DESIRE FOR OUR REPORTING, NOW OR IN THE FUTURE, TO BE USED AS A DEATH SENTENCE AGAINST PERSONS WHO WERE WILLING TO SPEAK TO US.

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02396 03 OF 04 052210Z
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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7570
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
PANAMA FOR ALEX LEE

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02396 03 OF 04 052210Z
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~~SECRET~~

7 of 11

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8 of 11

13. (S) BASED ON DISCUSSIONS WITH MULTIPLE SOURCES (COLOMBIAN AND NON-COLOMBIAN; GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT) QUIETLY SOUNDED OUT IN BOGOTA SINCE POLOFF'S

[REDACTED] WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE TWO, IN FACT, GOES BEYOND THAT, AND HAS PARTICIPATED DIRECTLY IN THE PLANNING OF AUC MILITARY OPERATIONS -- TO INCLUDE, BASED ON HIS DISCUSSION WITH POLOFF, MAPIRIPAN.

1.4(D)

A POST-SCRIPT

14. (S) IN A FEBRUARY 17 MEETING ON OTHER ISSUES, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE MAPIRIPAN CASE CONTINUES, AND THAT THE "FISCALIA" WAS NOW READY TO ISSUE FORMAL INDICTMENTS AGAINST SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE ARMY, INCLUDING OFFICERS, FOR HAVING FACILITATED THE ENTRY OF PARAMILITARIES NOT ONLY INTO MAPIRIPAN BUT MIRAFLORES (OCTOBER 1997) AND PUERTO ALVIRA (MAY 1998), AS WELL. HE STATED THAT PROSECUTORS ALREADY HAD ENOUGH TO ORDER THE ARREST OF SEVERAL OF THOSE IMPLICATED, BUT THAT, AS A COURTESY TYPICALLY EXTENDED TO EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE (ESPECIALLY MILITARY OFFICERS), THEY WILL NOT BE ORDERED INTO PRE-TRIAL DETENTION AT THIS TIME.

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COMMENTS

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 02396 03 OF 04 052210Z

15. (S) GIVEN: A) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] B) THE PROBABLE INVOLVEMENT OF ONE OF THE TWO MEN IN PLANNING AUC OPERATIONS, AND, C) THE FISCALIA'S PROGRESS IN INVESTIGATING THE MAPIRIPAN TAKEOVER, POST FINDS [REDACTED] VERSION (LIMITED THOUGH IT WAS) OF THE MAPIRIPAN TAKEOVER TO BE MOST CREDIBLE. WE KNOW OF NO REASON FOR THEM TO DEVIATE FROM THEIR BOASTING OF THE AUC'S FULL-FLEDGED INDEPENDENCE IN ORDER TO CORRECT POLOFF'S STATEMENT OTHER THAN THEIR DESIRE FOR THE USG TO UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY WHAT HAD TRANSPIRED EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO. (INDEED, WHAT CASTANO AND COMPANY MOST WANT NOW IS POLITICAL LEGITIMACY, IN THEIR VIEW A KEY TO ACHIEVING SOME DEGREE OF RECOGNITION FROM THE USG -- WHICH THEY HAVE CONSISTENTLY FAILED TO GET. POLOFF'S RAISING THE QUESTION ON MAPIRIPAN THUS PUT THE TWO IN A POSITION OF EITHER HAVING TO LIE TO US, OR TO COME CLEAN. AS THE USG'S POSITION ON ARMY/PARAMILITARY COMPLICITY IS KNOWN TO ALL, DROPPING SUCH A BOMBSHELL ON US WAS NOT THE BEST WAY TO CURRY FAVOR WITH THE USG -- BUT THEY EVIDENTLY FELT THEY HAD TO DO IT IN ORDER TO PROTECT SOMETHING EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN THEIR EYES, THEIR OWN CREDIBILITY WITH US.)

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8 of 11

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9 of 11

16. (S) SOME MIGHT ARGUE THAT THEIR MOTIVATION WAS NOT HISTORICAL ACCURACY OR TO PROTECT THEIR OWN CREDIBILITY, BUT SIMPLY TO BESMIRCH THE HONOR OF THE ARMY -- AN INSTITUTION THEY OTHERWISE HOLD IN LOW ESTEEM. WE WOULD ONLY NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT THEY FREELY ADMITTED THE AUC'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTION, TERMED THE COORDINATED OPERATION A "SUCCESS," AND SPOKE MATTER-OF-FACTLY ABOUT ARMY FACILITATION IN MAPIRIPAN, AS IF IT WAS REALLY NO SURPRISE TO ANYONE (EXCEPT MAYBE TO THE GRINGOS).

17. (S) IT APPEARS THAT GENERAL BONETT, THEN-COMMANDING GENERAL
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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 02396 03 OF 04 052210Z
OF THE ARMY, GOT IT CLOSE TO RIGHT IN HIS VERY FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE MAPIRIPAN ATTACK (UTTERED EVEN BEFORE GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATORS HAD MANAGED TO GET INTO THE DISTANT JUNGLE HAMLET): THAT THE MASSACRE HAD BEEN PERPETRATED AS PART OF A FEUD BETWEEN "ILLEGAL DELINQUENT ORGANIZATIONS" (I.E., GUERRILLAS AND PARAMILITARIES) FIGHTING OVER CONTROL OF NARCO-TRAFFICKING FINANCES. (WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE, HOWEVER, TO INDICATE BONETT KNEW THEN, OR EVER, OF ANY MILITARY FACILITATING ROLE.)

18. (S) WE ARE ALSO REMINDED OF PRIVATE STATEMENTS BY [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] SHORTLY AFTER THE EXECUTION OF THE NEXT MAJOR PARAMILITARY INCURSION IN THE GUAVIARE REGION: THAT THE OCTOBER 1997 INCURSION INTO THE SIMILARLY FARC-DOMINATED, COCA-CULTIVATING VILLAGE OF MIRAFLORES BY HIS OWN PARAMILITARIES HAD BEEN CONDUCTED WITH ARMY FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FACILITATION (REF F). THUS, IF PRIVATE STATEMENTS BY PARAMILITARIES INVOLVED IN THE ACTIONS ARE TO BELIEVED, IT APPEARS THAT THE TWO PARAMILITARY INCURSIONS INTO SOUTHERN COLOMBIA DURING 1997 WITH THE MOST DIRECT IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S.-ASSISTED COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN COLOMBIA -- JULY IN MAPIRIPAN AND OCTOBER IN MIRAFLORES -- WERE BOTH FACILITATED BY ELEMENTS OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE NOW GOES EVEN FURTHER, AND INCLUDES PUERTO ALVIRA AS ANOTHER SUCH INCURSION COORDINATED BY SOME OF THE SAME INDIVIDUALS IMPLICATED IN THE OTHER TWO INCIDENTS. ONE THING, AT LEAST, IS CLEAR: IT LIKELY WENT WELL BEYOND THE TWO ARMY SERGEANTS NOW STEWING IN ARMY DETENTION.

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02396 04 OF 04 052210Z
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9 of 11

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10 of 11

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 AMEMBASSY PANAMA

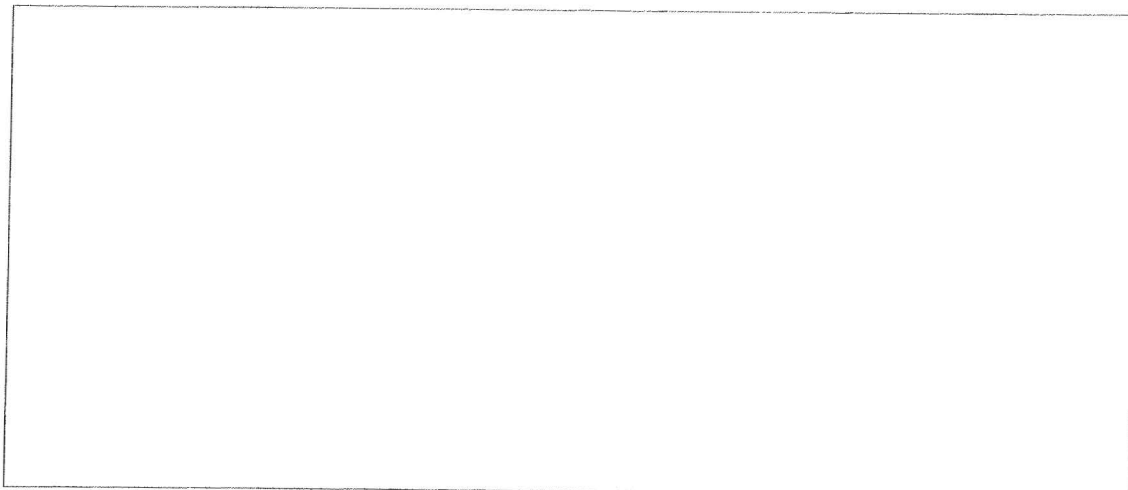
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 PANAMA FOR ALEX LEE

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02396 04 OF 04 052210Z
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DAO COMMENT



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10 of 11

UNCLASSIFIED
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 CASE NO. M-2006-04183
 DOC NO. C17832701
 DATE: 07/10/2012

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11 of 11

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END DAO COMMENT.

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11 of 11

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