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TAGS: PTER, KCRM, PGOV, PHUM, CO  
SUBJECT: NEW CRIMINAL GROUPS REMAIN DECENTRALIZED, BUT GOC  
OFFICIALS CONCERNED VICENTE CASTANO TRYING TO RECREATE AUC  
NETWORK

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer  
Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) The size and scope of the new criminal groups remained relatively constant in recent months, with some 22 groups comprising about 3,000 people. The groups remain largely decentralized, and former AUC leaders in Itagui maximum security prison--with the exception of Macaco and Don Berna--are increasingly losing influence over the bands. Still, Colombian National Police, Church and OAS officials fear renegade paramilitary leader Vicente Castano is seeking to ally with Macaco and Don Berna to fashion the disparate criminal groups into a national network along the lines of the old AUC. National Police Intelligence chief General Oscar Naranjo told us Castano enjoys \"significant collaboration\" from elements of the police and military, but said the GOC is slowly closing in. End summary.

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New Criminal Groups Still Relatively Small, Decentralized  
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2. (C) Rural Security Police (Carabineros) chief, General Jesus Antonio Gomez Mendez, told us on March 7 the number of new criminal groups remains constant at about 22 groups comprising some 3,000 people, a small percentage of whom are former paramilitaries. Gomez Mendez\' estimate tracks that made by OAS/MAPP experts and GOC security analysts. He reported the groups are still largely decentralized, lacking the national scope, ambition, or capacity to cause harm of the former AUC. They are involved in narcotics trafficking and other illegal enterprises. With the exception of the New

Generation Group in Narino, almost none engage in the counterinsurgency activities undertaken by the AUC.

3. (C) National Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (CNRR) analyst Mauricio Romero said he expects to publish his first quarterly CNRR report on new criminal groups and the demobilization process by early April. He will draw favorable comparisons with other peace processes worldwide, where the average rearmament and recidivism rate was between 5 and 15 percent. In Colombia, over 90 percent of the demobilized are attempting to reintegrate. Romero said criticism of the paramilitary demobilization process as a failure is inaccurate; Colombia is doing better than most such processes in preventing recidivism.

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Concern Over Castano's National Ambitions  
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4. (C) National Conciliation Commission member Father Dario Echeverri said paramilitary fugitive Vicente Castano is trying to recreate a national paramilitary-style movement, apparently seeking the cooperation of Don Berna and former Bolivar Central Block (BCB) leader Macaco. There appears to be limited, but uneasy, collaboration between them. Castano's current area of operations centers on Uraba, Cordoba and Antioquia. He is also trying to extend his influence to Vichada and Casanare, where he works with fellow former paramilitary leader "HH" (Ever Veloza Garcia). Naranjo told us Castano recently traveled by helicopter to Yopal, Casanare where he encouraged local ranchers and criminal groups to support a new paramilitary structure. Gomez Mendez showed us a transcript of a telephone intercept in which Castano told "HH" he envisaged the operation working like the former AUC, with a clear security, economic, and political strategy, including co-opting politicians running for office in the October local elections. Naranjo said Castano also reportedly reached out to the FARC in Casanare to explore cooperation on narcotrafficking.

5. (C) Romero said the former paramilitary leaders in Itagui regard the demobilization effort as a missed opportunity, largely because it has been "legalized" or "judicialized." They see no flexibility on President Uribe's part to allow some former AUC to play a political role, like the former leftist terrorists who are active in Congress. They also complained about the GOC's acceptance of the Constitutional Court's May 19 ruling hardening the Justice and Peace Law.

The Leaders said the GOC's "tough approach" gives the approximately 1500 AUC commanders who remain at large little incentive to return to legality, and had prompted Vicente Castano and other former paramilitary commanders to abandon the process. They insisted they have no control over their former foot soldiers, but told Romero they expect more former paramilitaries to return to crime. MAPP/OAS head Sergio Caramgana said many para leaders expected to retain their wealth and power through the peace process. Their realization that this will not be possible has led many to accuse the GOC of betrayal.

Some Itagui Prisoners Appear Defeated

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6 (C) Romero said Itagui prisoners Jorge 40 and Mancuso, in particular, seem weak, disorganized, and marginalized, giving the impression of having been defeated. Despite access to cell phones, Internet, and regular visitors, they appear increasingly marginalized from other former paramilitary leaders. Mancuso is especially frustrated following GOC efforts to seize properties held by his family members. In contrast, Macaco and other BCB members remain belligerent and committed to anti-subversive rhetoric. Naranjo told us Macaco manages much of major narcotrafficker Wilber Varela's criminal activities from Itagui. Romero said Don Berna retains links with illegal actors, but is also working on a humanitarian exchange, as well as with a non-governmental organization in Medellin, to reintroduce a political component to the paramilitary peace process.

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Police Intelligence Chief Says Getting Closer to Castano  
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7. (C) National Police Intelligence Chief (DIJIN), General Oscar Naranjo, told us on March 14 the GOC is slowly closing in on Castano, in part with the help of detained narcotrafficker "Rasguro," recently extradited from Cuba. President Uribe calls Naranjo every day to demand progress in the search. Naranjo said the main obstacle thus far is that Castano still enjoys "significant collaboration" from elements in the police and military. He predicted the GOC would capture Castano, most likely in Antioquia Department.

Drucker