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PRS-00 ACE-00 P-00 SCT-00 SP-00 SS-00 STR-00
TRSE-00 T-00 USIE-00 PMB-00 PRM-01 DRL-02 G-00
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R 251701Z AUG 00
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SESTATE WASHDC 6714
INFO NSC WASHDC
CJCS WASHDC
USCINCOS MIAMI FL
DIA WASHINGTON DC
CIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

SECTION 01 OF 04 BOGOTA 007462

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/10
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, PINR, PTER, CO

SUBJECT: MILITARY GIVES THEIR VIEWS ON EL SALADO MASSACRE

REF: A) BOGOTA 06305 B) BOGOTA 1594 C) IIR 6 819 0185 00
D) IIR 6 819 0255 00

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CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ANNE PATTERSON. REASONS:
1.5(B&D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 8, POLOFFS WERE BRIEFED BY

ON THE BRIGADE'S DAY-BY-DAY ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO AND THROUGH THE FEBRUARY 19-
20, 2000 EL SALADO MASSACRE. DENIED

CHARGES OF MILITARY-PARAMILITARY COMPLICITY ASSERTED IN A
JULY 14 NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE (SEE REF A). HE STRESSED
THAT THE BRIGADE RESPONDED TO ALL REPORTS OF GUERRILLA

Current Class: CONFIDENT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SAM A. MOSKOWITZ
DATE/CASE ID: 27 JUN 2001 200100677

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AND PARAMILITARY MOVEMENTS WITHIN THEIR JURISDICTION, BUT NEVER RECEIVED ADVANCE REPORTS OF A POSSIBLE PARAMILITARY ATTACK AGAINST EL SALADO. WROTE TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STRONGLY DENYING ALLEGATIONS MADE BY A COLOMBIAN NGO THAT THE BRIGADE WAS INDIFFERENT TO PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REGION. ALSO REITERATED THAT THE BRIGADE HAD NOT RECEIVED REPORTS OF A POSSIBLE ATTACK AT EL SALADO. END SUMMARY.

1ST MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE

2. (U) DESCRIBED THE BRIGADE'S JURISDICTION (WHICH INCLUDES EL SALADO) AS A JUNGLE ZONE, RUGGED, MOUNTAINOUS, AND HARD TO TRAVERSE. THE REGION IS STRATEGIC FOR ALL ARMED GROUPS INCLUDING ...


1ST BRIGADE SPREAD THIN PRIOR TO MASSACRE

3. (U) A WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF THE EVENTS FROM FEBRUARY 15 ONWARD, INCLUDING THE BRIGADE’S MOVEMENTS, REPORTS OF POSSIBLE ATTACKS, AND DOCUMENTATION FROM VARIOUS SOURCES, INCLUDING LOCAL PROSECUTOR GENERAL OFFICES, REGIONAL POLICE COMMANDS AND ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT SECURITY OFFICES. ALSO VERBALLY DESCRIBED TO POLOFFS THE 1ST BRIGADE’S DAY-BY-DAY ACTIVITIES, EMPHASIZING THAT THE BRIGADE RESPONDED TO ALL REPORTED PARAMILITARY AND GUERRILLA ACTIVITY. STATED THAT NUMEROUS INTELLIGENCE REPORTS OF GUERRILLA AND PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY SPREAD THE BRIGADE AND ITS LIMITED RESOURCES THINLY THROUGHOUT ITS JURISDICTION DURING THE WEEK.
LEADING UP TO THE EL SALADO MASSACRE.

4. (U) ACCORDING TO THE BRIGADE RECEIVED MULTIPLE REPORTS OF GUERRILLAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE BRIGADE’S JURISDICTION FROM FEBRUARY 15 CONFIDENTIAL

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ONWARD. REPORTS WERE RECEIVED OF POSSIBLE PARC ATTACKS AGAINST THE TOWNS OF ZAMBRANO AND CORDOBA, IN THE AREAS BETWEEN THE VILLAGES OF LAS PIEDRAS (ARENAL) AND SAN PABLO (MARIA LA BAJA), AND IN AND AROUND THE MUNICIPALITY OF CARMEN DE BOLIVAR, ALL IN NORTHEAST BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT. THE BRIGADE ALSO RECEIVED REPORTS OF A GUERRILLA ROADBLOCK ON THE HIGHWAY NEAR OVEJAS MUNICIPALITY IN SUCRE DEPARTMENT. STATED THAT THE BRIGADE DISPATCHED TROOPS TO COVER THESE AREAS AND DISMANTLE THE BLOCKADE. ACCORDING TO INTELLIGENCE WAS RECEIVED NOTING THAT THE PARAMILITARIES HAD ENGAGED IN COMBAT WITH THE GUERRILLAS THROUGHOUT THE AREA, RESULTING IN THE DEATH OF 45 GUERRILLAS.

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5. (U) ACCORDING TO THE BRIGADE ALSO RECEIVED REPORTS ON FEBRUARY 15 OF A BLUE AND WHITE BELL RANGER HELICOPTER, BELIEVED TO BELONG TO THE AUC PARAMILITARIES, FLYING IN THE AREA OF CORDOBA IN NORTHEASTERN BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT. THE BRIGADE REQUESTED FLIGHT PLANS IN THE AREA AND ORDERED TROOPS TO BE ON MAXIMUM ALERT IN ORDER TO NEUTRALIZE A POSSIBLE ATTACK. SAID THAT MARINE INFANTRY TROOPS, WITH THE HELP OF THE COLOMBIAN AIR FORCE (FAC) BASED OUT OF BARRANQUILLA, DOWNED THE HELICOPTER THAT AFTERNOON.

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Current Class: UNCLASSIFIED
6. (U) ACCORDING TO [____] ON FEBRUARY 17, THE 
BRIGADE RELAYED, VIA RADIO TO THE NAVAL COMMAND, THAT 13
PEOPLE HAD BEEN FOUND DEAD IN AND AROUND EL SALADO IN
CARMEN DE BOLIVAR MUNICIPALITY (BOLIVAR) AND IN THE
VILLAGES OF FLOR DEL MONTE, SAN RAFAEL AND CANUTAL IN
OVEJAS MUNICIPALITY (SUCRE). THE 31ST MARINE BATTALION
WAS ORDERED TO THESE AREAS AND THE BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS
REQUESTED THAT THE NATIONAL POLICE IN SUCRE ALSO SEND
UNITS. THE NATIONAL POLICE WERE UNAVAILABLE, HOWEVER, AS
THEY WERE PROVIDING SECURITY FOR A SENATORIAL COMMISSION
IN SINCELEJO, SUCRE DEPARTMENT, THE FOLLOWING DAY.

7. (U) [____] STATED THAT ON THE MORNING OF
FEBRUARY 18, A MARINE COMPANY WAS ORDERED TO CONTROL THE
ROAD FROM CARMEN DE BOLIVAR TO THE VILLAGE OF EL SALADO,
AND UNIT COMMANDERS WERE ASKED TO TRY TO GAIN MORE
INFORMATION ON THE REPORTED DEATHS IN THE AREA. THE
BRIGADE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL’S
OFFICE IN CARTAGENA THAT APPROXIMATELY 80-100 AUC
PARAMILITARIES HAD INITIATED ACTIONS IN THE AREA BETWEEN
THE MUNICIPALITIES OF SAN JACINTO AND CARMEN DE BOLIVAR.
ADDITIONALLY, THE BRIGADE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM THE
SUCRE POLICE COMMAND STATING THAT 7 PEOPLE HAD BEEN
KILLED ON FEBRUARY 16 IN THE AREAS OF FLOR DEL MONTE,
CANUTAL, CANUTALITO, EL CIELITO AND LA PENA IN THE

Current Class: [____]
MUNICIPALITIES OF OVEJAS AND SAN PEDRO (SUCRE). (NOTE: IT IS UNCLEAR IF THESE 7 ARE PART OF OR IN ADDITION TO THE 13 FOUND ON FEBRUARY 17. HOWEVER, RESIDENTS OF CANUTALITO, EL CIELOITO AND LA PENA WERE NOT MENTIONED IN

THE FEBRUARY 17 DEATHS. END NOTE.) TWO NATIONAL POLICE REPORTS STATED THAT THE DEATHS WERE COMMITTED BY APPROXIMATELY 100-120 ARMED INDIVIDUALS WEARING THE CAMOUFLAGED UNIFORMS OF THE MILITARY FORCES AND THE NATIONAL POLICE. (NOTE: THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS OFTEN WEARING MILITARY/POLICE UNIFORMS FOR COVER. END NOTE.)

8. (U) IMMEDIATELY ORDERED TROOPS TO EL SALADO AND FLOR DEL MONTE AND EVENTUALLY TO BONGA, SAN PEDRO AND CANUTALITO.

THE FARC FOUGHT THE PARAMILITARIES FOR 72 HOURS IN THE GENERAL AREA OF EL SALADO, FLOR DEL MONTE, CANUTALITO, AND BAJOGRADES, AND KILLED 27 PARAMILITARY MEMBERS. AT 6:00 P.M. THAT EVENING, THE ORCA COMPANY OF THE BRIGADE'S 31ST BATTALION FOUND 16 BODIES IN AND AROUND EL SALADO. THE COMPANY ESTABLISHED A COMMAND POST IN THE AREA.

1ST BRIGADE'S RESPONSE

9. (U) IN THE EARLY MORNING ON FEBRUARY 20, THE BRIGADE REPORTEDLY ASKED THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S TECHNICAL INVESTIGATIVE CORPS (CTI) FROM CARMEN DE BOLIVAR TO

REMOVE THE BODIES FOUND IN EL SALADO. THE BRIGADE REQUESTED A HELICOPTER TO ASSIST THE CTI BUT NONE WERE AVAILABLE UNTIL APPROXIMATELY 3:00 P.M. LATER THAT DAY. STATED THAT THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S REPRESENTATIVE DECIDED NOT TO TRAVEL BECAUSE 3:00 P.M. WOULD BE TOO LATE. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO THE CTI EVENTUALLY VISITED EL SALADO ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY
10. (U) ACCORDING TO THE BRIGADE’S TRANSCRIPTS, ON FEBRUARY 21, THE 1ST MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE, THROUGH ITS 31ST BATTALION, PROVIDED APPROXIMATELY 600 KILOS OF SUPPLIES FOR THE COMMUNITY OF EL SALADO. THE BRIGADE ALSO ORDERED THE 31ST AND 33RD BATTALIONS TO PURSUE THE PARAMILITARIES AND PREVENT THEM FROM LEAVING THE AREA.

REPORTEDLY REQUESTED THAT THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL’S OFFICE IN SINCELEJO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MASSACRE. ACCORDING TO AND REF A, DURING THE EARLY MORNING OF FEBRUARY 22, THE MARINES ENGAGED IN COMBAT WITH PARAMILITARY MEMBERS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ZAMBRANO, AND CAPTURED 11 PARAMILITARY MEMBERS WHOM THEY HANDED OVER TO THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL’S OFFICE (FISCALIA) IN CARTAGENA FOR

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TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, PINR, PTER, CO

Current Class: [redacted]
11. (U) EMPHASIZED THAT THE 1ST MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE DID NOT RECEIVE ANY PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF AN ATTACK IN OR AROUND THE AREA OF EL SALADO. HE REITERATED THAT THE BRIGADE RESPONDED TO ALL REPORTED PARAMILITARY AND GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, AND FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE SITUATION IN EL SALADO WHEN IT LEARNED OF THE 13 DEAD BODIES FOUND IN THE AREA. STRESSED THAT THE BODIES WERE NOT ALL FOUND IN EL SALADO, BUT THROUGHOUT THE AREAS OF FLOR DEL MONTE, CANUTAL, CANUTALITO, EL CIELITO AND LA PENA.

12. (U) ALSO STATED THAT CONTRARY TO THE JULY 14 NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE, HE ALSO STRESSED THAT THE ROADBLOCK MENTIONED IN THE ARTICLE WAS TO PROTECT CARMEN DE BOLIVAR FROM A REPORTED POSSIBLE GUERRILLA ATTACK ON FEBRUARY 17, NOT TO PREVENT HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIEF GROUPS FROM ENTERING AND AIDING EL SALADO (SEE REF A).

13. (U) IN A LETTER TO THE COMMANDER OF THE NAVAL ATLANTIC FORCES, THE COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISPLACEMENTS (CODHES), A COLOMBIAN NGO, STATED THAT THE PUBLIC FORCES IN THE MONTES DE MARIA REGION (COVERED BY THE 1ST BRIGADE) SHOWED "INDIFFERENCE, SLOWNESS, AND INACTIVITY" TOWARDS PROTECTING THE CIVILIAN POPULATION FROM HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING THE MASSACRE.

Current Class: IDENTIFIED
NOTED TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL THAT HE NEVER
FORMALLY RECEIVED THE CODHES LETTER ADDRESSED TO HIM.
END NOTE.) IN HIS LETTER, ECHOED
MANAGED BY THE BRIGADE AND THE ARMED GROUPS FOUND IN THE
REGION. HE ALSO STRESSED THAT THE BRIGADE DID NOT HAVE
SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO COVER SUCH A LARGE JURISDICTION
24 HOURS A DAY. HOWEVER, NOTED THAT DAY
AFTER DAY, THE "SACRIFICE" OF ALL THE INDIVIDUALS THAT
COMPOSE THE 1ST BRIGADE IS CONSTANT IN ORDER TO COMBAT
ARMED GROUPS AND BRING PEACE TO THE REGION.

14. (U) IN THEIR LETTER, CODHES STATED THAT THE 1ST
MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE HAD A "PARTICULAR DUTY TO PROTECT
EL SALADO," TO WHICH RESPONDED THAT EL
SALADO HAD NOT BEEN AN AREA OF VIOLENT ACTIVITY OR
MURDERS FOR SOME TIME. ALSO STRESSED
THAT THE BRIGADE HAD NOT RECEIVED ANY REPORTS THAT EL
SALADO WAS A POSSIBLE TARGET FOR EITHER A GUERRILLA OR
PARAMILITARY ATTACK. ASSERTED THAT THE
PARAMILITARIES THAT COMMITTED THE MASSACRE AT EL SALADO
WERE NOT BASED IN THE 1ST MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE'S
JURISDICTION, BUT RATHER OPERATE OUT OF MAGDALENA AND
CORDOBA DEPARTMENTS, ENTERING SUCRE AND BOLIVAR

DEPARTMENTS TO COMMIT CRIMES. REMARKED
THAT ALTHOUGH THESE GROUPS ARE NOT BASED IN THE 1ST
BRIGADE'S JURISDICTION, HE HAS THE PARTICULAR AND
CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY TO COMBAT AND NEUTRALIZE ALL GROUPS
ON THE MARGINS OF THE LAW.

15. (U) FINALLY, EMPHASIZED THAT THE
1ST MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE HAS DEMONSTRATED CLEAR
RESULTS IN COMBATING PARAMILITARIES AT THE NATIONAL
LEVEL, IS LEADING A COMMITTEE TO ASSIST WITH THE
DISPLACED IN SUCRE DEPARTMENT, AND IS COLLABORATING WITH
THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL AND ATTORNEY GENERAL TO GATHER
PROOF FOR THEIR PENAL AND DISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATIONS
INTO WHAT HAPPENED AT EL SALADO.
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