E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: Pins, Dgov, Co
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT REACTS TO CONTINUED GUERRILLA VIOLENCE

REF: BOGOTA 2324

SUMMARY

1. (C) MILITARY OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED AS MAYORS FOR TWO MUNICIPALITIES IN CORDOBA DEPARTMENT FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY 17 AMBUSH OF A MILITARY PATROL. THE ATTACK, STAGED BY GUERRILLAS OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION ARMY (ELP), LEFT THREE DEAD AND FIVE WOUNDED IN THE MILITARY UNIT, INCLUDING THE HIGHEST RANKING OFFICER TO HAVE FALLEN IN COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE DEATH OF COLONEL JAIME GERARDO DIAZ LOPEZ HAS EVOKED GOVERNMENT CONDEMNAION OF THE ATTACKS, MILITARY REACTION CONTINUES TO BE PARTIAL AND REACTIVE, REFLECTING THE ABSENCE OF A LARGER STRATEGY TO COMBAT CONTINUED INSURGENT-INSTIGATED VIOLENCE. END SUMMARY

2. (U) FOLLOWING WEDNESDAY'S AMBUSH OF A MILITARY PATROL IN THE ALTO SINU AREA OF CORDOBA DEPARTMENT, TWO
LIEUTENANTS WERE NAMED TO HEAD THE MUNICIPAL
GOVERNMENT'S OF VALENCIA AND TIERRALTA. IN ADDITION,
THE MILITARY CONTINUED SWEEPS THROUGH THE REGION AGAINST
EPL GUERRILLAS. MEANWHILE, GOC SECURITY OFFICIALS
CALLED AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY
COUNCIL TO DISCUSS GUERRILLA VIOLENCE.

3. (U) FOUR MAYORS KIDNAPPED BY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION
ARMY (ELN), PER REFTEL, HAVE BEEN RELEASED CARRYING
COPIES OF A GUERRILLA COMMUNIQUE. THE COMMUNIQUE
CONTAINED, IN ADDITION TO THE USUAL POLITICAL DIATRIBE,
A CALL FOR AN INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TO
REGULATE THE NATIONAL OIL SECTOR AND TO LIMIT FOREIGN
INFLUENCE IN THE INDUSTRY. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS,
ONE OF THE MAYORS CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED AT
ALL, BUT VOLUNTARILY WENT TO MEET WITH THE ELN. IN A
BITING EDITORIAL ATTACK ON THE ELN FOR ITS KIDNappings
AND DAMAGE TO THE OIL PIPELINE, DAILY "EL ESPECTADOR"
ALSO CRITICIZED THE MAYOR IN QUESTION FOR TREATING THE
ELN AS A LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ENTITY. ENTITLED "A SUS
ORDENES, SEÑORES BANDOLEROS" THE EDITORIAL BRANDED THE
ELN NOT A "NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY" BUT A GROUP OF
BANDITS HEADED BY FOREIGN (SPANISH) PRIESTS WITH NO
CONCERN FOR THE PHYSICAL DAMAGE THEIR OIL PIPELINE
ATTACKS ARE CAUSING.

4. (C) OVER THE FEBRUARY 20-21 WEEKEND, THE GUERRILLAS
WERE ONCE AGAIN ON THE MOVE. FARC UNITS ATTACKED A
POLICE STATION IN META DEPARTMENT LEAVING THREE ENLISTED
MEN AND A SERGEANT DEAD. MEANWHILE, IN WHAT EVIDENTLY
IS AN EFFORT TO EXPAND ITS EFFECTIVE ZONE OF OPERATIONS,
5. (C) SO FAR THE GOVERNMENT HAS ONLY SUSPENDED MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN A FEW ISOLATED MUNICIPALITIES, BUT NOT FOR SECURITY REASONS. HOWEVER, OFFICIAL SOURCES PRIVATELY HAVE ADMITTED THAT SECURITY IN OUTLYING AREAS CANNOT BE GUARANTEED FOR THE ELECTIONS. A GOVERNMENT SOURCE CONCEDED THAT OFFICIAL MEASURES ARE HAVING LITTLE SUCCESS IN ARRESTING GUERRILLA VIOLENCE. HE THEN CITED CAQUETÁ DEPARTMENT, WITH ITS NEWLY APPOINTED MILITARY GOVERNOR AND MAYORS, AS AN EXAMPLE, SAYING THAT THE MOVE HAD ONLY MARGINALLY IMPROVED SECURITY IN SOME OF THE TOWNS, BUT HAD NO IMPACT WHATSOEVER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

COMMENT

6. (C) MISSION SOURCES REPORT THAT GUERRILLA VIOLENCE IS SUCCESSFULLY COWING OPPONENTS IN CERTAIN AREAS, ESPECIALLY IN THE EASTERN LLANOS, WHERE THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (PARC) CONTROLS LARGE CHUNKS OF TERRITORY. KNOWLEDGEABLE POLITICAL CONTACTS CONCEDE THAT THE GUERRILLAS AND THEIR PATRIOTIC UNION (UP) ALLIES WILL MAKE IMPRESSIVE GAINS IN THE MARCH 13 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN THOSE AREAS. MOST FEEL

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n/a
VIOLANCE

THAT THESE ELECTORAL VICTORIES WILL LEGITIMIZE DE FACTO GUERRILLA CONTROL OF LARGE TRACTS OF BORDER TERRITORY AND, THAT ONCE STARTED, THE PROCESS WILL BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO REVERSE.

7. (C) MEANWHILE, THE ARMED FORCES CONTINUE STUCK IN A REACTIVE MODE IN THEIR COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS, PLAYING CATCH-UP WITH THE GUERRILLAS. THEIR RESPONSE HAS BEEN PIECemeAL, REFLECTING THE ABSENCE OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY OR FRAMEWORK. ALTHOUGH SOME GUERRILLA ATTACKS CAN SPARK AN IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT REACTION, A SUSTAINED MILITARY RESPONSE HAS PROVEN ELUSIVE. PRESIDENTIAL PEACE ADVISOR RAFAEL PARDO HAS PUBLICLY CALLED FOR THE PARC TO LIVE UP TO ITS PROMISES OF A CEASE-FIRE DURING THE ELECTIONS AND REMINDED THEM THAT THE END RESULT OF THAT PROCESS IS THE REINTEGRATION OF THE GUERRILLAS INTO CIVILIAN LIFE. PARDO WILL NOT PRONOUNCE THE END OF THE PEACE PROCESS, BUT CONTINUED PARC ATTACKS WOULD INDICATE CONTINUING CRISIS.

Page 02   BOGOTA 02556 02 OF 02 222143Z

THAT THE RUMORS OF ITS DEATH MAY NOT BE GREATLY EXAGGERATED.
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