1. (C) PARAMILITARIES MASSACRED 11-14 PERSONS AND REPORTEDLY ABducted 30-36 OTHERS, ON JULY 17 AT TIBU, NORTE DE SANTANDER DEPARTMENT, IN A CONTINUATION OF VIOLENCE BEGUN LAST MAY, DURING WHICH AT LEAST 70 PEOPLE WERE MURDERED IN SEVEN DIFFERENT MASSACRES. MANY AREA RESIDENTS HAVE FLED TO VENEZUELA. SEVERAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE LARGEST MASSACRES -- THOSE OF MAY 29-30 AND JULY 17 -- ARE UNDERWAY, WITH SOMEWHAT VARIABLE INITIAL FINDINGS.
NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL SERRANO SACKED AN AREA POLICE DETACHMENT COMMANDER FOR APPARENT COMPROMISE IN THE MAY 29-30 MASSACRE (REF A), AND THE VICE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE PRIVATELY REPORTED THAT ARMY SOLDIERS HAD DONNED ADF ARMARDS AND PARTICIPATED DIRECTLY IN THE SAME MASSACRE. END SUMMARY.

PARAMILITARY MASSACRE CLAIMS 11-50

2. (C) AUC (UNITED SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS OF COLOMBIA) PARAMILITARIES UNDER THE COMMAND OF "CAMILO" MASSACRED 11-14 RESIDENTS OF TIBU, NORTE DE SANTANDER DEPARTMENT ON JULY 17 (NOTE: NOT/NOT GUILLERMO CRISTANCHO ACOSTA, AKA "CAMILO MORANTES," OF MAY 1998 BARRANCABERMEJA FAME, ACCORDING TO [ ] TOLD POLLOFF JULY 23 THAT THIS WAS INDEED THE SAME "CAMILO." END NOTE). ACCORDING TO BOGOTA DAILY "EL ESPECTADOR" AND SOME EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS PASSED TO THE BOGOTA OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE (UNHCR-BOGOTA), THE PARAMILITARIES ALSO ABducted 30-36 LOCAL RESIDENTS. SURVIVORS TOLD UNHCR-BOGOTA AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS NGO "ANDAS" THAT THE BODIES OF SOME -- BUT NOT ALL -- OF THE 30-36 HAD SINCE APPEARED ON THE TIBU-LA GABARRA HIGHWAY. THUS THERE IS NO CONFIRMED DEATH TOLL.

3. (C) WHILE ACCOUNTS VARY, IT IS CONFIRMED THAT BETWEEN 25 AND 50 PARAMILITARIES BEGAN THE JULY 17 TIBU MASSACRE AT 10 - 10:30 PM IN THE TOWN SQUARE WITH LISTS OF SUSPECTED GUERRILLAS IN HAND. PRESS, MOD, AND NGO ACCOUNTS ALL AGREE THAT PARAMILITARIES PULLED SIX OR SEVEN MEN FROM A BAR, FORCED THEM TO LIE FACE DOWN, AND SHOT THEM EACH IN THE HEAD. ACCOUNTS VARY SUBSEQUENTLY. BETWEEN FOUR AND SEVEN MEN WERE SIMILARLY MURDERED IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER ON THE TIBU-LA GABARRA HIGHWAY (NOTE: ACCORDING TO SOME VERSIONS, THESE WERE ALSO COUNTED AMONG THE DISAPPEARED, AND THUS MAY HAVE BEEN DOUBLE-COUNTED. END NOTE). ONE OTHER MURDERED A FEW BLOCKS FROM THE TOWN SQUARE. SECURITY FORCES CLAIMED SOME PARAMILITARIES LAID DOWN HARASSING FIRE AGAINST THE LOCAL POLICE STATION AND ARMY BATTALION HEADQUARTERS. [ ]

4. (C) [ ]

5. (U) BOGOTA DAILY "EL TIEMPO" REPORTED THAT, IN SPITE OF CLAIMS BY TIBU POLICE AND SOLDIERS THAT THEIR INSTALLATIONS WERE ATTACKED, THE POLICE STATION SHOWED NO BULLET HOLES OR OTHER DAMAGE. (NOTE: THE NEWSPAPER DID NOT COMMENT ON THE 46TH BATTALION'S HEADQUARTERS. END NOTE.) "PERSONAL" VILLAMIZAR
TOLD POLOFF THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY INSPECTED THE TIBU POLICE STATION, AND AGREED THAT IT HAD SUFFERED NO DAMAGE. FURTHERMORE, HE TOOK TESTIMONY FROM TOWNSPEOPLE LIVING NEXT-DOOR TO THE POLICE STATION WHO SAID THAT IT HAD NOT BEEN ATTACKED, CALLING THE SECURITY FORCES' CLAIM A "VILE LIE." ALL PRESS, THE MOD, AND OTHER OBSERVERS AGREE THAT NO MILITARY OR POLICE PERSONNEL WERE INJURED OR KILLED IN THE ATTACKS.

MOD'S VERSION

6. (c) ☐
PARAMILITARIES: "WE'RE HERE TO STAY"

11. (C) POLOFF MET JULY 22 WITH

had met with "Camilo" at the hamlet of Vetas. They said they
had met with "Camilo" at the hamlet of Vetas. He had been frank
about his intentions: He and 300 other AUC paramilitaries had
come to the region to kill guerrillas, and would remain until the
region had been "cleansed." "Camilo" said he received no support
of any kind from local security force officials. He
counted approximately 70 paramilitaries at Vetas.

SECURITY FORCES: NEGLECTFUL, OUTGUNNED, FRIGHTENED, OR COMPPLICIT?

12. (C) According to a July 20 "El Espectador" Report, local
residents had complained of security force complicity in the
July 17 massacre. However, they were unsure
whether security force members had actually been complicit in the
July 17 attack or merely negligent. Were the latter correct,
they opined that it amounted to criminal incompetence, given the
six previous, recent massacres in the area.

The area's 1,000 guerrillas - one commission member reportedly
they unanimously assured Poloff that the security
forces were at best unwilling to take on the paramilitaries.

13. (C) Asserted that police had been complicit in the May 29-30 La
Gabarra massacre. He had seen five trucks
full of paramilitaries pass through the police checkpoint just
north of Tibu on the night of May 29, on their way to La Gabarra.
The then-police commander has since been replaced, detained, and
is under investigation. He

commander Rosso Jose Se;

had determined that

46th Battalion soldiers had donned AUC armbands the night of
May 29 and participated directly in the La Gabarra massacre. He
said this information has been shared with prosecutors.

Flight from the region continues

14. (C) The July 17 Tibu massacre has only exacerbated an
already widespread trend of civilian flight from the area --
several thousand persons have fled the Sierra de Tibu since late
May (Ref B). Some have become internally displaced within
Colombia; others fled to Venezuela; and several hundred remain on
"La Pista" Island, in the Rio del Oro, which forms the border
BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA. HAS CRITICIZED BOTH THE COLOMBIAN AND VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENTS FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO DISPLACED PERSONS, AND FOR ENCOURAGING/PRESSURING THEM TO RETURN TO UNSAFE AREAS. TOLD POLOFF JULY 23 THAT THE GOC HAD TO DATE TAKEN "NO MEANINGFUL ACTION" TO ASSIST THE DISPLACED.

COMMENTS

15. (C) THE STRING OF MASS KILLINGS SINCE MAY WITHOUT SECURITY FORCE RESPONSE IS APPALLING. HOW DID SEVEN MASSACRES OCCUR WITHOUT INTERFERENCE UNDER THE NOSES OF SEVERAL HUNDRED SECURITY FORCE MEMBERS? WHETHER INCOMPETENCE, SIEGE MENTALITY, BEING OUTGUNNED, OR ACTUAL COMPlicity IS TO BLAME IS STILL UNCLEAR.

SEVERAL INVESTIGATIONS BY THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL, ATTORNEY GENERAL, AND HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN ARE UNDERWAY. SIMILAR CONCERNS WERE RAISED IN THE WAKE OF THE JANUARY PARAMILITARY OFFENSIVE (REF C). THE SIERRA DE TIBU WILL REMAIN A PLACE TO WATCH. ALL ACTORS IN COLOMBIA'S ARMED CONFLICT ARE PRESENT AND DISPUTING CONTROL OF THE AREA SO THE KILLINGS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE.

16. (C) POST DOES NOT BELIEVE THE RECENT EVENTS IN NORTE DE SANTANDER RAISE LEAHY AMENDMENT CONCERNS. NEITHER THE UNITS PRESENT IN THE SIERRA DE TIBU AREA NOR THEIR PARENT UNITS HAVE BEEN PROPOSED TO RECEIVE USG MILITARY ASSISTANCE. ANY MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN THE KILLINGS REMAINS UNDER INVESTIGATION. END COMMENT.

17. (C) END

KAMMAN

ADMIN

END OF MESSAGE