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Dept of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.  
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Dept of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.  
( ) Classify as (X) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to  
Date 5/15/08 Declassify on 7/1/09 Reason X6

CONTROLS  
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TEXT  
TAGS: PTER, PHUM, PREF, EPET, SNAR, ASEC, PGOV, MOPS, VE, CO  
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES MASSACRE AS MANY AS 50 IN NORTE DE SANTANDER

REFS: A) BOGOTA 5721 B) BOGOTA 6585 C) BOGOTA 0261

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

SUMMARY

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.

[REDACTED]

NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL SERRANO SACKED AN AREA POLICE DETACHMENT COMMANDER FOR APPARENT COMPLICITY IN THE MAY 29-30 MASSACRE (REF A), AND THE VICE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE PRIVATELY REPORTED THAT ARMY SOLDIERS HAD DONNED AUC ARMBANDS AND PARTICIPATED DIRECTLY IN THE SAME MASSACRE. END SUMMARY.

PARAMILITARY MASSACRE CLAIMS 11-50

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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 [ HOWEVER, [ TOLD POLOFF 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 (UNHRC-BOGOTA), THE PARAMILITARIES ALSO ABDUCTED 30-36 LOCAL RESIDENTS. SURVIVORS TOLD UNHRC-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.

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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 MAY HAVE BEEN 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. [

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HE DID NOT BELIEVE ANY OF THOSE HE BURIED WERE GUERRILLAS, BUT RATHER LAW-ABIDING LOCAL FARMERS.

4. (C) [

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HE THOUGHT THE ESTIMATE OF 30-36 DISAPPEARED PERSONS TO BE HIGH, SAYING HE HAD CONFIRMED ONLY 15 SUCH CASES. SEVEN OF THE 15 HAD ALREADY TURNED UP DEAD. HE DENOUNCED THE POLICE AND ARMY FOR FAILING TO ACT.

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PRESS: SECURITY FORCES DIDN'T SUFFER

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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.) "PERSONERO" VILLAMIZAR

[REDACTED]

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

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6. (C) |

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PARAMILITARIES: "WE'RE HERE TO STAY"

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11. (C) POLOFF MET JULY 22 WITH [

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. [

] COUNTED APPROXIMATELY 70 PARAMILITARIES AT VETAS.

SECURITY FORCES: NEGLIGENT, OUTGUNNED, FRIGHTENED, OR COMPLICIT?

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12. (C) ACCORDING TO A JULY 20 "EL ESPECTADOR" REPORT, LOCAL RESIDENTS HAD COMPLAINED OF SECURITY FORCE COMPLICITY IN THE JULY 17 MASSACRE. HOWEVER, [ 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. [ 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 [ 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

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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

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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  
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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) [

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KAMMAN

ADMIN  
END OF MESSAGE

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