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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1020
BT

EXCISE

[REDACTED] SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 008317

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2012
TAGS: PGOV, PTER, PREL, CO
SUBJECT: A CLOSER LOOK AT URIBE'S AUXILIARY FORCES

REF: REF A: BOGOTA 8182

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafel, J. Dir.
() Release (X) Excise () Deny () Declassify
Date 4/27/05 Exemption B1, 1.4, 2.2

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR ANNE W. PATTERSON; REASONS 1.5
(B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: A KEY ASPECT OF PRESIDENT URIBE'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (NSS) IS TO ENCOURAGE COLOMBIA'S CITIZENS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM AND NARCOTRAFFICKING. HIS INITIATIVES INCLUDE THE WEALTH TAX, UNIVERSAL CONSCRIPTION, AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS AUXILIARY FORCES OR SUPPORT SOLDIERS ('SOLDADOS DE APOYO') AND IN INFORMANT NETWORKS. THIS CABLE FLESHES OUT WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT URIBE'S PLAN TO USE AUXILIARY FORCES TO ACT AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER FOR THE REGULAR COLOMBIAN ARMY AND NATIONAL POLICE BY PROTECTING TOWNS FROM GUERRILLA OR PARAMILITARY ATTACKS AFTER THE MILITARY AND THE GOC HAVE RESTORED THE STATE'S PRESENCE. (SEPTTEL WILL REPORT ON THE 'INFORMANT NETWORKS' AND 'REWARD MONDAYS,' URIBE'S OTHER INITIATIVES TO ACTIVELY INVOLVE COLOMBIAN CITIZENS IN THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM.) URIBE HIMSELF IS LEADING THE PUSH TO CREATE THE AUXILIARY FORCES, AND MOD OFFICIALS TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE FIRST GROUP IS LIKELY TO BE INITIATED IN CAUCA DEPARTMENT. WHILE THIS CONCEPT WOULD ACT AS A LESS-EXPENSIVE SOLUTION TO QUICKLY BOLSTER REGULAR FORCES, [

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IF SUCCESSFUL,
THE AUXILIARY FORCES COULD ASSIST THE GOC IN REGAINING SOVEREIGNTY, WHICH MAY PUSH THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS TO THE PEACE ACCORD TABLE. END SUMMARY.

FUNDAMENTAL PART OF 'CLEAR AND HOLD' STRATEGY

2. (C) PRESIDENT URIBE'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (NSS) CITES AUXILIARY FORCES (AF) AS A KEY COMPONENT TO THE 'CLEAR AND HOLD' STRATEGY DESIGNED TO REGAIN NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY (REFTEL). IN THAT STRATEGY, THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY WOULD RETAKE A TOWN CONTROLLED BY THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS. AFTER ASSURING SECURITY IN A TOWN, THE GOC WOULD RETURN THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL POLICE (CNP), THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE (FISCALIA), AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS, INCLUDING EDUCATION. AFTER THE MILITARY WITHDRAWS, THE CNP AND THE AF WOULD REMAIN TO PROTECT THE TOWN FROM AN ATTACK.

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THE AF WOULD BE ONE OF SEVERAL INITIATIVES THAT WILL ASK COLOMBIAN CIVILIANS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WAR EFFORT.

THE RATIONALE

3. (C) THIS GROUP IS INTENDED TO SERVE AS A DISSUASIVE FORCE AGAINST GUERRILLA AND PARAMILITARY ATTACKS.

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THE LOGISTICS INVOLVED IN COORDINATING A MAJOR FARC OPERATION WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE COULD DETECT THE GROUP AND FOIL THE OPERATION, AND DECREASE THE CHANCES THAT THE TERRORIST GROUP COULD MOUNT SIMULTANEOUS ATTACKS IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS. THE IDEA IS TO CREATE A FORCE OF LOCALS WHO KNOW THE GEOGRAPHY AND KNOW THE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING WHO BELONGS THERE AND WHO DOES NOT. THESE GROUPS WOULD HAVE THEIR COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT AND PROTECTION BECAUSE THEY COME FROM THESE COMMUNITIES.

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AF FORCES ARE A LESS EXPENSIVE AND MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO STAND UP MILITARY FORCES THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA.

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IN NO INSTANCE WOULD AF MEMBERS BE LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS.

HOW IT WOULD WORK

4. (C) THE AF WILL BE SIMILAR TO THE USG'S NATIONAL GUARD. YOUNG MEN WILL BE DRAFTED INTO AF SERVICE VIA A LOCAL LOTTERY SYSTEM, REGARDLESS OF THEIR RACE OR SOCIAL CLASS. THE FORCE WILL ALSO ACCEPT VOLUNTEERS. THE RECRUITS WILL RECEIVE THREE MONTHS OF REGULAR BASIC MILITARY TRAINING -- INCLUDING FIREARMS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND BASIC INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION -- AT THE NEAREST MILITARY TRAINING FACILITY. THE AF MEMBERS

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MUST ABIDE BY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE TO COLOMBIA'S PENAL AND MILITARY COURT AUTHORITY.

5. (C) EACH MUNICIPALITY WOULD HAVE BETWEEN 100-200 AF DEPENDING ON ITS POPULATION.

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THE AF MEMBERS WOULD BE PAID A SMALL STIPEND, BUT ONLY FOR HOURS WORKED OR TRAINED.

LEGAL AUTHORITY EXISTS

6. (C) URIBE HAS FOUND THE LEGAL BASIS TO STAND UP AUXILIARY FORCES IN THE 'PEASANT SOLDIER' LAW OF 1992, IN THE 1990S THE GOVERNMENT CALLED UP 'PEASANT SOLDIERS' IN HUILA DEPARTMENT. THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM THE DECREE THAT AUTHORIZED 'CONVIVIRS.' IN FEBRUARY 1994, THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION ISSUED A DECREE THAT AUTHORIZED THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE TO LICENSE PRIVATE CITIZENS TO USE SMALL FIREARMS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES IN HIGH-RISK AREAS. IN APRIL 1995, THE SAMPER ADMINISTRATION USED THE GAVIRIA DECREE AS THE LEGAL BASIS TO ISSUE A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CREATION OF PUBLIC SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS CALLED 'CONVIVIRS.' IN OCTOBER 1997, THE SAMPER ADMINISTRATION ABOLISHED THE TERM 'CONVIVIR' AND BEGAN DISMANTLING THE GROUPS IN JULY 1998.

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RISKY BUSINESS

7. (C) [

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8. (U) TO DATE, THE URIBE ADMINISTRATION HAS DONE A POOR JOB OF EXPLAINING THE PROGRAM TO COLOMBIANS. THUS, AS ONE WOULD EXPECT, INITIAL REACTION TO LEAKED OR PARTIAL INFORMATION HAS BEEN CRITICAL. SOME COLOMBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS -- WHO WERE ALREADY SKEPTICAL ABOUT URIBE'S TIES TO THE PARAMILITARIES -- BELIEVE THE AF WILL SERVE TO ASSIST THE PARAMILITARIES. SOME CRITICS FEAR THAT THE TRAINED AF MEMBERS WILL DEFECT TO JOIN THE HIGHER-PAYING PARAMILITARIES, WHILE OTHERS FEAR THE AF WILL ABUSE THEIR AUTHORITY AND TURN TO COMMON CRIME AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. OTHERS FEAR THAT THE GROUP WILL BE 'CANNON FODDER' OR EASY TARGETS FOR THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS.

STILL IN CONCEPT STAGE



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9. (C) [] URIBE WILL START WITH A PILOT PROGRAM IN 5-10 COMMUNITIES WHERE THE GUERRILLAS DO NOT HAVE A VERY STRONG PRESENCE. IF THE PROGRAM IS SUCCESSFUL, IT WILL SPREAD TO AREAS OF GREATEST ECONOMIC INTEREST, AND GROW FROM THERE. URIBE DECIDED THAT THE AUXILIARY FORCE WILL BE INAUGURATED IN AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY -- KNOWN FOR THEIR HOMEGROWN CIVIL RESISTANCE -- IN CAUCA DEPARTMENT. PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT 15,000 AF MEMBERS WILL BE IN PLACE BY MARCH 2003.

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TURIBIO: AN ARGUMENT FOR AUXILIARY FORCES AND RAPID REACTION FORCES

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10. (C) A SEPARATE BUT RELATED ISSUE WILL BE THE NEED TO EXPAND THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY'S RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY TO RESCUE THE AF MEMBERS AND LOCAL POLICE IN CASE OF AN OVERWHELMING ATTACK. []

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ON JULY 11, THREE FARC FRONTS MUSTERED A COMBINED FORCE OF 300 INSURGENTS AND ATTACKED THE TOWN OF TORIBIO, CAUCA DEPARTMENT, AFTER THE INDIGENOUS TOWN DEMONSTRATED AGAINST THE FARC'S ULTIMATUM THAT THEIR MAYOR RESIGN.

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COMMENT

11. (C) ALTHOUGH PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THE MOD PLANS TO HAVE 15,000 AUXILIARY FORCES IN PLACE BY MARCH 2003, THIS SEEMS OVERLY OPTIMISTIC. MANY DETAILS NEED TO BE WORKED OUT BEFORE THE MOD LAUNCHES THE FIRST AF.!

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[] IN ADDITION TO CRITICISM AND SKEPTICISM, SOME INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, WHO

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ESPOUSE NON-VIOLENCE, HAVE FLAT OUT SAID THEY WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM. THE AUXILIARY FORCES ARE DESIGNED TO BE AN INEXPENSIVE, EFFECTIVE FORCE MULTIPLIER, AND COULD BE SUCCESSFUL WITH BUY-IN FROM THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE. IF THESE GROUPS INDEED HELP THE GOC'S PROFESSIONAL MILITARY FORCES SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND STATE CONTROL, THEY COULD MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TOWARD PUSHING THE ILLEGAL GROUPS TO THE PEACE TABLE.

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