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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00	VC-00
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	AC-01	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	PA-00	PM-00	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	SAS-00	/008W

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R 192119Z JUL 00  
 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6144  
 AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
 AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
 AMEMBASSY QUITO  
 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
 AMEMBASSY LIMA  
 INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
 JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
 SECDEF WASHDC  
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
 DIA WASHINGTON DC  
 CIA WASHDC  
 NSC WASHDC

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.5(B), 1.5(D), 1.5(C)

SECRET SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 006305

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/10  
 TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, PINR, PTER, CO  
 SUBJECT: EL SALADO MASSACRE REVISITED IN LIGHT OF NEW  
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YORK TIMES ARTICLE

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

B1, 1.5(C)

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

1: (C) SUMMARY: ON JULY 14, A NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE REVIEWED THE FEBRUARY 19-20 MASSACRE OF 37 PEOPLE AT THE HANDS OF PARAMILITARIES IN EL SALADO, BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT, ASSERTING THAT COLOMBIAN MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES STOOD BY WHILE THE MASSACRE TOOK PLACE. THE GOVERNMENT OF

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DEPT OF STATE APPEALS REVIEW DANIEL (ARP)

<input type="checkbox"/> Reference	<input type="checkbox"/> Excise	<input type="checkbox"/> Deny
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Exemptions B1  
 ARP Action Cert. Law Date 07/17/00

COLOMBIA'S PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE (FISCALIA) REACTED TO THE ARTICLE, PROVIDING THE EMBASSY WITH SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE CASE, WHICH DETAILED THE SUBSEQUENT CAPTURE OF SOME PARAMILITARIES INVOLVED IN EL SALADO BY MILITARY FORCES. THE FISCALIA MAINTAINS AN OPEN INVESTIGATION OF THE CASE !

), 1.5(D)

THE  
MINISTER OF DEFENSE HAS WRITTEN TO THE NEW YORK TIMES STRONGLY DENYING ANY MISCONDUCT BY MILITARY FORCES. END SUMMARY.

NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE DESCRIBES EL SALADO  
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2. (U) THE FEBRUARY 19-20 MASSACRE AT EL SALADO IS ONE OF  
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THE LARGEST IN RECENT MEMORY. PARAMILITARY FORCES ENTERED THE TOWN OF EL SALADO AND MASSACRED 37 PEOPLE THEY SUSPECTED OF BEING GUERRILLAS OR GUERRILLA SYMPATHIZERS. (SEE REF A, EMBASSY REPORTING CABLE FOLLOWING THE ATTACK.) THE JULY 14 NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE DESCRIBES THE MASSACRE IN DETAIL, INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH A DOZEN SURVIVORS. THE ARTICLE ALSO FOCUSES ON POSSIBLE COLOMBIAN MILITARY COMPLICITY DURING THE MASSACRE, NOTING THAT, ACCORDING TO WITNESSES, MILITARY (MARINE) AND POLICE FORCES HAD BEEN ON PATROL IN THE AREA BUT LEFT DAYS BEFORE THE MASSACRE. AS REPORTED, ONCE THE MASSACRE BEGAN, MILITARY AND POLICE UNITS DID NOTHING TO STOP IT, AND SET UP A ROADBLOCK ESSENTIALLY PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIEF GROUPS FROM ENTERING THE TOWN. THE ARTICLE STATES THAT RESIDENTS BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE MILITARY WOULD NOT READILY INTERVENE WHEN AT ONE POINT, PARAMILITARIES FLEW IN A HELICOPTER TO RESCUE A MEMBER WHO HAD BEEN INJURED PULLING PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR HOMES.

3. (U) ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, TOP MILITARY OFFICIALS DECLARED THAT FIGHTING WAS UNDERWAY BETWEEN PARAMILITARIES AND GUERRILLAS. FURTHERMORE, IN INTERVIEWS WITH COLOMBIAN NAVY ADMIRALS, THE ARTICLE STATES THAT THE ROADBLOCKS WERE ERECTED BY THE ARMED FORCES TO PREVENT MORE DEATHS OR INJURIES TO THE CIVILIANS AT THE HANDS OF PARAMILITARIES.

COLONEL RODRIGO QUINONES

4. (S) THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONS COLONEL RODRIGO QUINONES'S NAME. IT NOTES THAT DESPITE  
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PENDING INVESTIGATIONS OF THE EL SALADO MASSACRE AND OTHER PAST HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, HE, THE MARINE COLONEL IN CHARGE OF THE REGION AROUND EL SALADO, WAS RECENTLY PROMOTED TO GENERAL. ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, A FEBRUARY HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT, THE EMBASSY'S 1998 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT AND REF C, COLONEL QUINONES, WHILE COMMANDER OF THE NAVAL INTELLIGENCE NETWORK, WAS "SEVERELY REPRIMANDED" (ALONG WITH THREE OTHER OFFICERS AND ONE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER) BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE (THE PROCURADURIA, IN EFFECT, A GOC-WIDE INSPECTOR GENERAL) IN OCTOBER 1998 FOR THEIR ROLES IN ESTABLISHING, PROMOTING, FINANCING, AND FOMENTING PARAMILITARY GROUPS, AND FOR ASSISTING THESE GROUPS IN THE MURDER OF MORE THAN 50 PEOPLE IN AND AROUND THE CITY OF BARRANCABERMEJA, SANTANDER DEPARTMENT FROM 1993 TO 1994. (NOTE: THE SUPERIOR MILITARY TRIBUNAL EARLIER HAD EXONERATED QUINONES IN 1994. END NOTE.) THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OCTOBER 1998 FIRST-INSTANCE RULING WAS VALID AND EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, BUT SUBJECT TO A SECOND-INSTANCE REVIEW BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, JAIME BERNAL CUELLAR, RECUSED HIMSELF FROM THE QUINONES CASE DUE TO PRIOR INVOLVEMENT. CONGRESS MUST APPOINT AN ACTING ATTORNEY

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00	VC-00
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	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00
	USIE-00	PMB-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00	/008W

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R 192119Z JUL 00  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6145  
AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
AMEMBASSY CARACAS

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AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
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GENERAL TO REVIEW THE FIRST-INSTANCE FINDING.

5. (U) THE ARTICLE FURTHER LINKS COLONEL QUINONES TO THE MASSACRE THROUGH AN APPARENT CLOSE ASSOCIATE, COLONEL HAROLD MANTILLA, COMMANDER OF THE FIFTH MARINE BATTALION THAT OPERATES IN THE AREA AROUND EL SALADO. ACCORDING TO RESIDENT TESTIMONY AND HUMAN RIGHTS WORKERS RECALLED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE, COLONEL MANTILLA'S UNIT WAS ONE OF THE UNITS THAT FAILED TO RESPOND TO THE MASSACRE. EMBASSY DOES NOT CURRENTLY POSSESS ANY INFORMATION ON COLONEL HAROLD MANTILLA.  
COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES REPORT  
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PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE REPLIES TO ARTICLE

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7. (U) FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE, THE AMBASSADOR RECEIVED A LETTER ON 17 JULY FROM THE CIVILIAN DEPUTY PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE (VICE FISCAL) ON THE STATUS OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE EL SALADO MASSACRE. ACCORDING TO THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE, ON FEBRUARY 28, FOUR MORE ALLEGED PARAMILITARY MEMBERS WERE SUBSEQUENTLY CAPTURED, BRINGING THE TOTAL TO FIFTEEN. THE FISCALIA INITIATED A FORMAL INVESTIGATION AND HAS ISSUED 15 ORDERS FOR PREVENTIVE DETENTION AGAINST THE PARAMILITARY MEMBERS. THE LETTER MAKES NO MENTION OF ANY PRESUMED MISCONDUCT BY THE MILITARY.

PUBLIC RESPONSE PLANNED  
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8. (U) EMBASSY RECEIVED A COPY ON 19 JULY OF A LETTER SIGNED BY LUIS FERNANDO RAMIREZ, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, SENT TO THE NEW YORK TIMES IN RESPONSE TO THE PAPER'S JULY 14 EL SALADO ARTICLE (THE LETTER HAS NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED). RAMIREZ REJECTED CLAIMS THAT COLOMBIAN MILITARY FORCES REMAINED INDIFFERENT DURING THE MASSACRE. IN HIS LETTER, HE STATES THAT MILITARY FORCES CONDUCTED OPERATIONS IN THE AREA WHICH RENDERED USELESS A BELL 206 RANGER HELICOPTER-GUNSHIP USED BY THE PARAMILITARIES, AND THAT THE NAVY HAD INFLICTED SEVEN CASUALTIES ON PARAMILITARY MEMBERS AND ARRESTED 15 (IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE CASUALTIES WERE KILLED OR WOUNDED). RAMIREZ FURTHER CLARIFIES IN HIS LETTER THE MILITARY'S USE OF A ROADBLOCK DURING THE MASSACRE, STATING THAT THREE SOLDIERS HAD SUFFERED SERIOUS INJURIES IN A GUERRILLA AND PARAMILITARY MINEFIELD AND THE ROADBLOCK WAS TO PREVENT FURTHER INJURIES.

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9. (U) REGARDING THE REFERENCE TO COLONEL (NOW GENERAL) QUINONES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE, RAMIREZ STATES IN HIS LETTER THAT COLONEL QUINONES WAS IN BOGOTA WHEN THE MASSACRE OCCURRED. TO CLARIFY THE CASE AGAINST COLONEL QUINONES IN THE BARRANCABERMEJA DEATHS, RAMIREZ WROTE THAT COLONEL QUINONES HAD BEEN "WRONGLY ACCUSED." ACCORDING TO THE LETTER, COLONEL QUINONES HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DISMANTLING OF THE MEDELLIN AND NORTE DEL VALLE DRUG

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CARTELS, AND AS A RESULT A NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER OF THE NAVY AND ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL WERE OFFERED A LOT OF MONEY TO MAKE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST COLONEL QUINONES. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO THE LETTER, THE TWO INDIVIDUALS EVENTUALLY WITHDREW THEIR ACCUSATIONS AND A LETTER FROM A WITNESS TO THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL REVEALED THAT THE TWO HAD BEEN OFFERED MONEY. END NOTE.) RAMIREZ CONFIRMS IN HIS LETTER THAT BOTH THE OFFICE OF MILITARY PENAL JUSTICE AND THE OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL OPENED UP INVESTIGATIONS BASED ON THESE ACCUSATIONS. HE NOTES THAT WHILE THE MILITARY PENAL JUSTICE CLEARED HIM OF BOTH THE FIRST AND SECOND INSTANCES, THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL ISSUED A

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INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00	VC-00
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	USIE-00	PMB-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00	/008W

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AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
INFO DIRONDCP WASHDC  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
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REPRIMAND WHICH COLONEL QUINONES HAS APPEALED. (THIS  
APPEARS TO BE A MISTRANSLATION; THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
APPARENTLY ISSUED THE REPRIMAND.)

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COMMENT

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14. (C) WHILE THE FISCALIA INVESTIGATION IS ONGOING, IT  
WILL BE DIFFICULT TO REACH ANY DEFINITIVE CONCLUSION ABOUT  
THE DEGREE OF MILITARY COMPLICITY AT EL SALADO.

KAMMAN

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