1. (C) SUMMARY: AS COLOMBIA'S GUERRILLA WAR HEATS UP, ATTENTION HAS INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON THE COUNTRY'S HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION AND ALLEGED ABUSES BY THE GOC SECURITY FORCES. GOC HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS REMAIN MODEST BY COMPARISON WITH THE ENDEMICH LEVEL OF CRIMINAL AND TERRORIST VIOLENCE. THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY ARE A CONSTITUTIONAL FORCE UNDER CIVILIAN CONTROL, AND A NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS DEFEND COLOMBIA FROM "CENTRAL-AMERICANIZATION." END SUMMARY

2. (C) CENTRAL-AMERICANIZATION OF COLOMBIA? THE SIEGE OF THE PALACE OF JUSTICE LAST NOVEMBER AND THE CONTINUING UNRAVELLING OF PRESIDENT BETANCUR'S PEACE PROCESS HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE SECRET

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN COLOMBIA AND ALLEGED ABUSES
BY THE GOC SECURITY FORCES. RECENTLY THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO COLOMBIA BY "AMERICAS WATCH" IS ESPECIALLY STRIKING. THE "NEW YORK TIMES" PRECIS OF THE RECENT "AMERICAS WATCH" REPORT ON COLOMBIA WARNED THAT THE SITUATION HERE VERGES ON "CENTRAL-AMERICANIZATION." SIMILARLY, THE LAWYER'S COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (WHICH EMBRACES AMERICAS WATCH) DECLARED IN "THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN 1985" THAT THE MILITARY IS "RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAJORITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND FOR UNDERMINING CIVILIAN AUTHORITY TO SECURE A NEGOTIATED PEACE." NO EVIDENCE IS OFFERED IN SUPPORT FOR THESE CHARGES. WITHOUT MINIMIZING THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN COLOMBIA, FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES EXIST BETWEEN THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY'S ROLE IN SOCIETY AND THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE MILITARY IN CENTRAL AMERICAN SOCIETIES.

3. (C) THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY: THE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE:


4. (C) THE MILITARY'S SUBORDINATION TO CIVILIAN AUTHORITY:

SEVERAL FACTORS ACCOUNT FOR THE POSITION OF THE MILITARY IN COLOMBIAN SOCIETY. HISTORICALLY, THE COLOMBIAN PROFESSIONAL MILITARY FORCES HAVE BEEN SMALL. CIVIL STRIFE -- FREQUENT IN THE 19TH CENTURY -- DID NOT CONSOLIDATE MILITARY POWER. RIVAL ARMIES WERE FORMED FROM VOLUNTEERS, LED BY AMATEUR POLITICIAN GENERALS. TODAY THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY REMAINS A SMALL INSTITUTION FOR A NATION OF 27 MILLION. ACTIVE DUTY PERSONNEL NUMBER 70,000, WITH THE ARMY ACCOUNTING

5. (C) MILITARY INFLUENCE ON CIVILIAN RULE:
THE MILITARY'S RECORD OF SUPPORT FOR CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT HAS MADE IT AN INSTITUTION WHICH MOST COLOMBIANS RESPECT RATHER THAN FEAR. THOUGH REMAINING CONSTITUTIONALLY AND ACTUALLY SUBORDINATE TO CIVILIAN AUTHORITY, THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY DOES LEGITIMATELY
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SECTION 02 OF 04 BOGOTA 02829

STATE PLEASE PASS TO FRANK FULGHAM - OS/CTP

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADP
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, PINS, CO
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA: THE MILITARY
INFLUENCE COLOMBIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS. THAT
INFLUENCE, NO DOUBT EXERCISED AT TIMES OF CRISIS SUCH
AS THE PALACE OF JUSTICE TAKEOVER, IS ALSO SOMETIMES
OVERDRAWN (AS NOTED IN BOGOTA'S 15258/85 "AFTER BLACK
NOVEMBER.") IN PARTICULAR, THE LAWYER'S COMMITTEE
CHARGE THAT THE MILITARY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR UNDER-
MINING CIVILIAN EFFORTS TO SECURE A NEGOTIATED PEACE
WITH THE GUERRILLAS IGNORES BOTH THE BAD FAITH OF THE
INSURGENTS AND THE LIMITS WITHIN WHICH THE MILITARY
OPERATES. WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, THE MILITARY'S VIEWS
ARE REPRESENTED BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, WHO BY
TRADITION IS A SERVING GENERAL. ALSO INFLUENTIAL ARE THE
ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS AND A NUMBER
OF RESERVE OFFICER ASSOCIATIONS, THE LATTER ORGANIZED
BY SPECIALTY (ENGINEERS, ETC.). THESE GROUPS FORM
AN INTERCONNECTED NETWORK WITHIN THE GOVERNMENTAL

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STRUCTURE AND THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY, ENSURING THAT THE
INFLUENCE OF FORMER SERVING OFFICERS IS FELT TO SOME

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DEGREE THROUGHOUT COLOMBIAN SOCIETY. MANY OF THE
APPOINTED DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNORS AND MUNICIPAL MAYORS
ARE RETIRED SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS.
6. (C) JUSTICE AND SOCIETY:
THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES PLACE IN SOCIETY IS
DISTINCTIVE. COLOMBIA HAS NEVER BEEN THE PEACEABLE
KINGDOM. THE HIGH LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AS WELL AS THE
TOLERANCE OF COLOMBIANS FOR IT, IS COMBINED WITH A
WELL-DEVELOPED (IF OVERBURDENED) JUDICIAL SYSTEM.
THIS DICHTOMY, WHILE PUZZLING, DOES PROVIDE
GUARANTEES AND INHIBITIONS AGAINST THE SYSTEMATIC
ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
7. (C) THE MILITARY AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS:
AS REPORTED IN THE 1985 COUNTRY HUMAN RIGHTS
REPORT, COLOMBIAN CITIZENS ARE CONSTITUTIONALLY
PROTECTED FROM ABUSE BY GOVERNMENT FORCES. ALSO,
CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES SUCH AS THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
ARE LEGALLY EMPOWERED TO INVESTIGATE INCIDENTS
REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN PERPETRATED BY THE SECURITY
FORCES AND HAVE BEEN DILIGENT IN DOING SO. ALTHOUGH
THERE IS HIGH INCIDENCE OF POLITICAL AND CRIMINAL
VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA, ALLEGATIONS OF OFFICIALLY
INSPIRED DISAPPEARANCES AND TORTURE ARE FEW. THE
STRENGTH OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM IS SUCH THAT THE
COLOMBIAN MILITARY ARE NOT IMMUNE TO PERSECUTION
FOR ABUSES. THE COLOMBIAN ATTORNEY GENERAL'S
1985 ANNUAL REPORT LISTS 344 DISAPPEARANCES AND
242 INCIDENCES OF TORTURE DENOUNCED TO HIS OFFICE
DURING THE YEAR. IN THE CASE OF DISAPPEARANCES,
32 MEMBERS OF THE POLICE AND/OR ARMED FORCES WERE
INVOLVED IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION

IN THESE CASES, AS WERE 10 OTHER INDIVIDUALS. FOR
THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN INCIDENTS OF TORTURE, 12
NATIONAL POLICE MEMBERS WERE FOUND GUILTY AND PUNISHED,
2 WERE ABSOLVED, AND 27 ARE FACING CHARGES.
8. (S) A DISTURBING DEVELOPMENT:
A RECENT REPORT THAT THE ARMY MAY HAVE ADOPTED A
"NO-PRISONERS" POLICY IN ITS
CONFRONTATIONS WITH ARMED GUERRILLAS RUNS AGAINST
THE COLOMBIAN TRADITION OF LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY.
The ostensible reason for this policy is the alleged
FAILURE OF THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM TO CONVICT AND JAIL
CAPTURED GUERRILLAS. EMBASSY WILL ATTEMPT TO VERIFY THESE REPORTS. THE MILITARY REPORTEDLY ADOPTED THIS POLICY ONLY AGAINST ARMED OR UNIFORMED GUERRILLAS. ALTHOUGH THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY PAPER "VOZ" HAVE MADE THE ALLEGATION, WE HAVE SEEN NO COMPELLING EVIDENCE THAT HERE SYMPATHIZERS WITH THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS HAVE BEEN KILLED BY THE MILITARY OR POLICE. EVEN TAKEN IN CONTEXT, HOWEVER, THE PRISONER ISSUE IS ONE WHICH THE COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES WILL HAVE TO CONFRONT.

9. (C) BUILDING A CASE/ DEATH SQUADS:
THE NEED TO PORTRAY THE MILITARY AS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS IS ONLY PART OF WHAT THE "CENTRAL-AMERICANIZATION" THEME ENTAILS. ANOTHER KEY ELEMENT WOULD BE THE PRESENCE OF DEATH SQUADS. THOUGH THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE HAS ALLEGED THAT DEATH SQUADS OPERATE IN COLOMBIA, INFORMATION ON THESE SUPPOSED GROUPS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES REMAINS SLIM.
GIVEN THE HISTORIC CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE HERE, AND THE GROWTH OF NARCOTICS AND TERRORIST VIOLENCE, MURDERS
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STATE PLEASE PASS TO FRANK FULGSHRAM - DS/CTP

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, PINS, CO

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA: THE MILITARY HAVING "DEATH SQUAD" ATTRIBUTES ARE NOT UNKNOWN. ONE GROUP KNOWN AS "DEATH TO KIDNAPPERS" (MUERTE A SECUESTRADORES-MAS) CONTINUES TO RECEIVE RECOGNITION IN THE COLOMBIAN PRESS. THE GROUP WAS FORMED IN 1982 BY SEVERAL WELL-KNOWN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS IN THE WAKE OF AN M-19 KIDNAPPING OF THE DAUGHTER OF A MAJOR TRAFFICER. COUNTER-KIDNAPPINGS OF RELATIVES OF M-19 MEMBERS RESULTED IN CESSTATION OF M-19 STEPS AGAINST THE TRAFFICKERS. SINCE THAT TIME THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAFFICKERS AND GUERRILLAS HAS PROSPERED. THOUGH THE LOCAL PRESS CONTINUES TO ASCRIBE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CERTAIN MURDERS TO MAS, CONFIRMATION IS LACKING. ANOTHER GROUP KNOWN AS DEATH TO JUDGES (MUERTE A JUECES-MAJ) IS ENTIRELY CONNECTED WITH THE NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS WHO DOMINATE THE CITY OF MEDELLIN. WHILE MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

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IN ACTIVITIES OF THIS TYPE CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED, STRONG INSTITUTIONAL DEFENSES INHIBIT A MUSHROOMING
OF "DEATH SQUAD" ACTIVITIES. THE CO-OPTATION OF THE
MILITARY INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF COLOMBIAN LIFE ESPECIALLY
ARGUES AGAINST HIGH COMMAND APPROVAL OR CONDONATION OF
SUCH ACTIVITIES.
10. (C) THE OBVIOUS FRUSTRATIONS OF MANY RETIRED AND
ACTIVE MILITARY WITH THE BETANCUR PEACE PROCESS IS
EVIDENT. THEY SEE THE PEACE PROCESS AS AN
OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GUERRILLAS TO REINFORCE
THEMSELVES WHILE RESTRICTED MILITARY BUDGETS KEEP
THEM AT A DISADVANTAGE. THIS EVIDENT FRUSTRATION
COMBINED WITH A SERIES OF ATTEMPTS ON COMMUNIST
PARTY LEADERS AND THE ASSASSINATION OF FORMER
ELN CHIEF RICARDO LARA GAVE RISE TO THE FEAR
OF POSSIBLE MILITARY EXTRA LEGAL RETALIATION.
HOWEVER, ADMISSIONS BY THE RICARDO FRANCO FRONT
OF THE ATTEMPTS ON THE COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS AND
BY THE ELN OF THE MURDER OF RICARDO LARA
HAS EASED THIS CONCERN. GENERAL
VALENZIO TOVAR, RETIRED FORMER COMMANDER OF THE
COLOMBIAN ARMY RECENTLY EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT
THERE MAY HAVE BEEN ISOLATED CASES OF RETRIBUTION BY
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVE OR RETIRED MILITARY, BUT ONGOING
SYSTEMATIC ACTIVITY OF THIS NATURE DOES NOT EXIST
ON THE PART OF THE ARMED FORCES.
11. (C) BUILDING A CASE/FREEDOM-FIGHTING GUERRILLAS:
ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE "CENTRAL-AMERICANIZ-
ATION" THEME IS PORTRAYING GUERRILLA FIGHTERS AS
THE TRUE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE.
THE GUERRILLA GROUPS IN COLOMBIA CLEARLY REPRESENT
AN EXTREMIST ELEMENT WITHOUT WIDESPREAD SUPPORT
AT ANY LEVEL OF SOCIETY. THEY ARE TERRORISTS RATHER
THAN A "REVOLUTIONARY ARMY," AND COUNT AMONG THEIR
RANKS SOME OF THE MOST RUTHLESS KILLERS OPERATING
IN COLOMBIA. STATISTICS CONCERNING DISAPPEARANCES
AND TORTURES CARRIED OUT BY THE GUERRILLA GROUPS
ARE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, SINCE MOST OF THEM OPERATE
IN ISOLATED RURAL AREAS OF COLOMBIA, BUT INCIDENTS
SUCH AS THE M-19 ATTACK ON THE PALACE OF JUSTICE,
AND THE RECENT RICARDO FRANCO FRONT (RFF) MASSACRE
(SEE BOGOTA 0017) DEMONSTRATE WHAT LITTLE REGARD
GUERRILLA GROUPS HAVE FOR HUMAN LIFE. KILLINGS OF
PRESUMED TRAITORS, DEFECTORS, INFILTRATORS, GOVERNMENT
INFORMANTS, AND PERSONS OF DIFFERING POLITICAL VIEWS BY THE GUERRILLA GROUPS ARE COMMON, ALTHOUGH NEVER BEFORE ON THE SCALE OF THE 158 PERSONS SLAUGHTERED BY RFF. RFF LEADER JAVIER DELGADO ADMITTED MURDERING ABOUT HALF OF HIS TOTAL FORCE INCLUDING HIS OWN BODYGUARD, HIS OWN MISTRESS, SEVERAL PREGNANT WOMEN, AND AT LEAST THREE CHILDREN ON THE SUSPICION THAT THEY WERE "INFLTRATORS."

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SECTION 04 OF 04 BOGOTA 02829

STATE PLEASE PASS TO FRANK FULGHRAM - DS/CTP

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, PINS, CO
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA: THE MILITARY
MASS GRAVES OF RFF VICTIMS WERE DISCOVERED.
COMMITTEE PRESIDENT ALFREDO VASQUEZ CARRIZOZA
FINALLY ISSUED A STATEMENT: "IT IS ONE OF THE
MOST HORRIFYING CRIMINAL ACTS TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE
IN MANY YEARS IN COLOMBIA... ABOUT THESE MURDERS
I ADD MY PROTEST AS A COLOMBIAN AND AS PRESIDENT
OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MOST OPEN, ENERGETIC,
AND CLEAR FORM." INTERESTINGLY, VASQUEZ CARRIZOZA
MADE HIS STATEMENT THE SAME DAY THAT THE PATRIOTIC
UNION (UP - A FRONT GROUP FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY
AND THE FARC GUERRILLAS) CONDEMNED THE MASSACRE
AFTER A SENIOR-LEVEL MEETING. SHORTLY AFTER THE
DISCOVERY OF THE MASS GRAVES IN DECEMBER, THE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE,
HERNANDO HURTADO, (A COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER) TOLD
AN EMBOFF THAT THE COMMITTEE ONLY ISSUED STATEMENTS

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WHEN GOVERNMENT FORCES WERE INVOLVED IN AN INCIDENT,
THE COMMITTEE'S INITIAL RESPONSE AND ITS DELAY IN
PUBLICLY CONDEMN THE RFF MASSACRE ERODE ITS CREDIBILITY AS AN IMPARTIAL OVERSEER OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN COLOMBIA.

13. (LOU) CONCLUSIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY ALL SIDES MAY WELL INCREASE IF THE PEACE PROCESS CONTINUES TO DECAY. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT FORESEE COLOMBIA ENTERING INTO A PERIOD COMPARABLE WITH THE EL SALVADOR OR GUATEMALA OF THE EARLY 1980'S, OR EVEN WITH COLOMBIA'S OWN "LA VIOLENCIA" OF THE EARLY 1950'S. THIS NATION OF 27 MILLION HAS A NUMBER OF HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DEFENSES AGAINST "CENTRAL-AMERICANIZATION." THE REPUBLIC APPEARS TO RETAIN FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT TO CIVILIZED NORMS OF BEHAVIOR AS WELL AS THE STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY TO MEET THE HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES OF THE GUERRILLA WARS WITHOUT ABandonING THAT COMMITMENT.

GILLESPIE