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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 13897

DEPT OF JUSTICE FOR OIA

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PTER, CO
SUBJECT: THE PALACE OF JUSTICE ATTACK-LOSSES AND GAINS

REF: BOGOTA 13815

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: The M-19 TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE COLOMBIAN
PALACE OF JUSTICE, NOVEMBER 6-7, TOOK A HEAVY HUMAN TOLL:
AT LEAST 88 DEAD, INCLUDING 12 OF THE NATION'S 24 SUPREME
COURT JUSTICES, 13 MILITARY AND POLICE PERSONNEL, ALL THE
TERRORISTS (ABOUT 40), AND MANY CIVILIANS. THE DEAD
TERRORISTS INCLUDED THREE "COMANDANTES". THE REMNANTS
OF THE M-19'S FALSE "ROBIN HOOD" IMAGE ALSO DIED IN THE
PALACE. COLOMBIANS SEEM UNITED IN SUPPORT OF THE
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GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS AND OF PRESIDENT BETANCUR'S DECISION
NOT TO NEGOTIATE WHEN THE HIGHLY-RESPECTED INSTITUTION
OF THE SUPREME COURT WAS UNDER ATTACK. THE M-19 MISCALCULATED
AND LOST. PRESIDENT BETANCUR SHOWED THAT HE CAN BE

4. FINAL HOURS: THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION THROUGHOUT WAS NOT TO NEGOTIATE, DESPITE A RADIO APPEAL NOVEMBER 6 FROM THE HOSTAGE PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT. SECURITY FORCES RENEWED THEIR COUNTER-ATTACK IN THE EARLY MORNING DARKNESS NOVEMBER 7. DURING THIS PERIOD, IT IS BELIEVED THE M-19 KILLED THEIR HIGH RANKING HOSTAGES. RESISTANCE CONTINUED UNTIL 2:30 PM ON NOVEMBER 7, WHEN GOC FORCES WERE ABLE TO REMOVE THE SURVIVING HOSTAGES FROM THE BURNED-OUT HULK OF THE PALACE. NONE OF THE GUERRILLAS SURVIVED.

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5. THE COSTS: AT LEAST 88 PERSONS ARE DEAD BY OFFICIAL COUNT. THE BREAKDOWN OF CASUALTIES IS NOT YET OFFICIAL, AS FINAL CLEAN-UP OPERATIONS CONTINUE. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE PRESS ACCOUNTS, THE DEAD INCLUDE ELEVEN SUPREME COURT JUDGES, THIRTEEN GOC SECURITY PERSONNEL, AROUND FORTY GUERRILLAS, AND THE REST CIVILIANS AND NONCOMBATANT. A TWELFTH JUDGE WAS AN INDIRECT CASUALTY, DYING IN A LOCAL HOSPITAL OF HEART FAILURE WHEN TOLD OF THE ATTACK. INCLUDED AMONG THE M-19 LOSSES WERE THREE SENIOR LEADERS, MEMBERS OF ITS "NATIONAL DIRECTORATE."

6. THE SUPREME COURT -- DOWN BUT NOT OUT:

THE COURT IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SECTIONS WITH A TOTAL OF...
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24 MAGISTRATES. THE DEATHS OF ELEVEN MAGISTRATES, including court president Alfonso Reves Echandia, are naturally a major blow. The attack and fire in the Palace of Justice destroyed many of the archives, including files of narcotics traffickers. It will be difficult and time-consuming to reconstruct the records. The court will resume work next week in temporary quarters at the National Library, but is unlikely to accomplish much until new magistrates have been appointed and remaining records salvaged. Some records are duplicated elsewhere, but many may be irretrievable, putting strain on the judicial and administrative systems.

7. PUBLIC OPINION: The "blood and fire" brought about by the M-19 have united a majority of Colombians in anger against terrorism and in support of the country's democratic institutions. The supreme court is perhaps the most universally respected of those institutions. Hence, its

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DEA HQS WASHDC
USCINCSC QUARRY HEIGHTS
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DEPT OF JUSTICE FOR OIA

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CHOICE AS A TARGET WAS PARTICULARLY CLUMSY.
PRESIDENT BETANCUR IS ENJOYING A RESURGENCE OF
SUPPORT. (SOME JUDICIAL EMPLOYEES HAVE TAKEN
EXCEPTION TO GOC'S HANDLING OF THE CRISIS.) IT IS
TOO EARLY TO PREDICT IN WHAT DIRECTION PUBLIC OPINION
WILL ULTIMATELY MOVE, AND HENCE WHETHER BETANCUR
WILL RETAIN HIS MASTERY OF THE ISSUE. FOR THE
M-19, ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE SEEMS NO QUESTION
THAT THE ATTACK WAS A DISASTER IN EVERY POSSIBLE
SENSE. WHEN THEY GET OVER THEIR SHOCK, THE
M-19 MAY BE EVEN MORE BIZARRELY DANGEROUS AS THEY
TRY DESPERATELY TO RECoup.

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8. COMMENT: WE WERE REMINDED OF SOME THINGS THIS
WEEK THAT BODE WELL FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF THIS
COUNTRY. BELLISARIO BETANCUR CAN BE REMARKABLY TOUGH
WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES WARRANT. WE EXPECT THAT IN
FUTURE INCIDENTS HE WOULD BE JUST AS DETERMINED.
WE BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE FACTORS PRESSING ON
BETANCUR WAS PRESIDENT DUARTE'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE
TERRORIST KIDNAPPING OF HIS DAUGHTER. AS FOREIGN
MINISTER RAMIREZ MADE CLEAR TO US LAST MONTH,
BETANCUR -- WHO MAINTAINED REGULAR TELEPHONIC CONTACT
WITH DUARTE THROUGHOUT THE LATTER'S ORDEAL -- BELIEVED
THAT THE INTENSE PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT OF A "DESPERATE"
SALVADORAN PRESIDENT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WAS A "TRAGIC
MISTAKE." THE RESULTS, ACCORDING TO BETANCUR,
INCLUDED PREMATURE CONCESSIONS AND INCREASED VUL-
NERABILITY OF SALVADORAN DEMOCRACY. IN THIS REGARD,
IT IS IRONIC THAT ONE OF THE JUDGES RESCUED EARLY
FROM THE JUSTICE PALACE HERE WAS THE PRESIDENT'S
OWN BROTHER, JAIME BETANCUR, WHO WAS HIMSELF A
TERRORIST KIDNAP VICTIM TWO YEARS BEFORE. THE FOREIGN MINISTER TOLD US LAST MONTH THAT THE PRESIDENT FREQUENTLY COMPARED HIS HANDLING OF HIS BROTHER'S KIDNAPPING (FAVORABLY) WITH DUARTE'S DEALINGS ON BEHALF OF HIS DAUGHTER. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE M-19 CALL ON THE 7TH ON BETANCUR TO SEND JAIME BACK TO THE PALACE AS A MEDIATOR ONLY SERVED TO RECONFIRM THE PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL AND POLITICAL DECISION TO ACT WITH FORCE RATHER THAN EVEN APPEAR TO NEGOTIATE WITH TERRORISTS.

--THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE ARE INCREASINGLY ANGRY AND DISILLUSIONED WITH THE VIOLENT GUERRILLAS. THE REMNANTS OF M-19'S "ROBIN HOOD" IMAGE DIED IN THE PALACE. THE PUBLIC WILL SUPPORT STAYING ACTIVE CONFIDENTIAL

AGAINST THE M-19. AS FOR THE OTHER GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THE FARCA, UNLESS THEY ARE VERY CAREFUL THEY MAY BE SWEPT INTO THIS REACTION -- NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING...IN THE VIEW OF MANY.

9. IN SEPTEMBER WE WILL ANALYZE THE IMPACT OF THE PALACE ATTACK ON COLOMBIA'S PEACE PROCESS AND ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOC'S FORCES DURING THIS CRISIS.

GILLESPIE