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ACTION SCT-00

INFO

LOG-00 MFA-01 AID-00 A-00 ACQ-00 CA-02 CCO-00
CG-00 CTAE-00 SMEC-00 COME-00 CTME-00 INL-01 DEAE-00
DINT-00 DOE-00 DOTE-00 WHA-01 SRPP-00 DS-00 EB-00
EUR-01 OIGO-01 FAAE-00 FBIE-00 FBO-01 H-01 TEDE-00
INR-00 INSE-00 IO-00 JUSE-00 LAB-01 L-01 ADS-00
MMP-00 M-00 AC-01 NRCE-00 NSAE-00 OCS-03 OIC-02
OMB-01 OPIC-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 ACE-00 P-00
SP-00 IRM-00 SSO-00 STR-00 TRSE-00 USIE-00 USSS-00
DTC-01 SGHD-00 PMB-00 DSCE-00 PRM-01 DRL-02 G-00
NFAT-00 SAS-00 /023W

182345Z AUG 99
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0278
INFO NSC WASHDC
SECFDEF WASHDC
DIRONDCP WASHDC

AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY MADRID

USINT HAVANA
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL //RUCQSOC//

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USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
CINCSOC ALSO FOR POLAD LITT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/18/09
TAGS: PINS, PTER, ASEC, SNAR, MASS, PHUM, PGOV, CO
SUBJECT: HIGH-PROFILE PEACE ACTIVIST GUNNED DOWN IN BOGOTA

REF: BOGOTA 7339

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

1. (S//TS) SUMMARY: JAIME GARZON, A WELL-KNOWN PEACE ACTIVIST, SATIRIST AND JOURNALIST WAS ASSASSINATED EARLY AUGUST 13 IN UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DECLASSIFY AFTER: 17 AUG 2024
DATE/CASE ID: 24 APR 2007 200602670

THE HIT

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2. (SBU) ONE OF BOGOTA’S MOST POPULAR -- AND SEEMINGLY HARMLESS -- PUBLIC FIGURES WAS ASSASSINATED AT 0555 HOURS ON AUGUST 13

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WHILE ON HIS WAY TO WORK AT A BOGOTA RADIO STATION. JAIME GARZON, 39, WAS KILLED IN THE CLASSICAL COLOMBIAN "SICARIO" STYLE: BY GUNMEN RIDING DOUBLE ON A MOTORCYCLE WHILE HE SAT IN HIS CAR WAITING FOR A TRAFFIC LIGHT TO TURN GREEN. THE GUNMEN HAD BEEN FOLLOWING GARZON FOR AT LEAST SEVERAL BLOCKS. THAT THEIR SUSPICIONS WERE RAISED WHEN THE REAR RIDER TOOK OUT A CLOTH AND COVERED THE MOTORCYCLE’S LICENSE PLATE. TWO BLOCKS LATER, THE MOTORCYCLE PULLED EVEN WITH GARZON’S CAR, WHICH WAS STOPPED AT A LIGHT. THE RIDER THEN PULLED OUT A REVOLVER AND SHOT GARZON AT POINT-BLANK RANGE THROUGH THE CAR WINDOW. GARZON DIED INSTANTLY AS THE RESULT OF AT LEAST THREE SHOTS TO THE HEAD AND CHEST.

THE VICTIM

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3. (U) COLOMBIA’S BEST-KNOWN COMIC, JAIME GARZON WAS WELL-LOVED FOR HIS SATIRICAL TELEVISION SKITS IN WHICH HE PLAYED A TOOTHLESS PEASANT SHOEBLACK WHO POKEd FUN AT COLOMBIA’S RICH AND FAMOUS WHILE HE BENT BEFORE THEM SHINING THEIR SHOES. SPORTS STARS, POLITICIANS, JOURNALISTS, BISHOPS AND MILITARY COMMANDERS ALL JOCKEYED FOR THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A SPiT-POLISH AND TO BE ROASTED BY GARZON. HIS KILLING HAS BEEN CONdemned FROM ACROSS THE LEGAL POLITICAL SPECTRUM, WITH FORMER PRESIDENTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF CALLS FOR A MASSIVE PUBLIC PROTEST IN RESPONSE TO THE MURDER. HIS FUNERAL MASS THE NEXT DAY BROUGHT AN ESTIMATED 85,000 CITIZENS OUT IN THE DRIZZLE TO BOGOTA’S PLAZA DE BOLIVAR. THOUSANDS MORE LINED THE ROUTE TO THE CEMETERY. SMALLER RALLIES WERE HELD IN A NUMBER OF OTHER MAJOR COLOMBIAN CITIES.
4. (C) GARZON WAS A MULTI-TALENTED INDIVIDUAL. BEYOND HIS SERIOUS RADIO JOURNALISM AND COMIC TELEVISION SHOW, LAY GARZON'S LESS WELL-KNOWN COMMITMENT TO POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN WORKS. A CAMPUS RADICAL (AND BRIEF MEMBER OF THE ELN) IN HIS STUDENT DAYS, GARZON HAD LONG SINCE REJECTED VIOLENCE AS THE SOLUTION TO THE NATION'S ILLS. INSTEAD, HE SPENT RECENT YEARS AT THE FOREFRONT OF ANTI-KIDNAPPING CAMPAIGNS, NOT ONLY DENOUNCING THE PRACTICE FROM HIS TV AND RADIO PULPITS, BUT PERSONALLY WORKING TO RESOLVE A NUMBER OF CASES. (HE PLAYED A DIRECT MEDIATING ROLE, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE FARC'S "ROMANA" DURING THE MARCH 1998 KIDNAPPING BY THE FARC OF FOUR AMERICAN BIRD-WATCHERS AND DOZENS OF OTHERS ON THE ROAD TO VILLAVICENCIO, AS WELL AS IN THE ELN'S HIJACKING OF THE AVIANCA FLIGHT THIS APRIL.)

CONFIRMED THAT GARZON, LIKE MANY COLOMBIAN "NEGOTIATORS," ALSO SERVED ON OCCASION AS A VEHICLE FOR THE DELIVERY OF RANSOM MONTES IN EXCHANGE FOR THE RELEASE OF HOSTAGES BEING HELD BY VARIOUS ARMED GROUPS.

5. (U) GARZON SERVED IN THE LATE 1980'S AS THE MAYOR OF BOGOTA'S SAN JUAN DE SUMAPAZ DISTRICT (BOGOTA'S MOST-RURAL DISTRICT AND A LONG-TIME FARC GUERRILLA HAVEN), ONLY TO BE BOUNCED FROM OFFICE BY THEN-BOGOTA MAYOR ANDRES PASTRANA. IRONICALLY GARZON HAD WON A LAWSUIT JUST LAST WEEK, CLAIMING HE HAD BEEN UNJUSTLY FIRED. PUBLIC EVENTS HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 17, WHEN HE WAS TO HAVE BEEN CEREMONIALLY REINSTALLED IN OFFICE FOR ONE DAY.

SPECULATION ABOUT THE MOTIVE(S)?

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0279
INFO NSC WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DIRODCP WASHDC
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
USINT HAVANA
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL//RUCQSOC//

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USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
CINCSOC ALSO FOR POLAD LITT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/18/09
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SUBJECT: HIGH-PERFOMACE ACTIVIST GUNNED DOWN IN BOGOTA

6. (C) MOST SPECULATION AS TO THE MOTIVES FOR GARZON'S DEATH CENTER ON HIS MOST RECENT PUBLIC EFFORT: AS A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE AD HOC, YET GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED, "CIVIC-POLITICAL COMMISSION" RECENTLY ESTABLISHED TO ENCOURAGE GOVERNMENT-ELN PEACE EFFORTS (REFTEL). GARZON WAS KILLED HOURS BEFORE HE WAS DUE TO FLY TO MEDELLIN (ANTIOQUIA) FOR A COMMISSION MEETING WITH ARRESTED ELN "SPOKESMEN" AT ITAGUI PRISON. THE GOAL OF THE ITAGUI MEETING: TO CONFIRM THE ELM'S RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS HINTING AT A POSSIBLE BREAKTHROUGH ON RELEASING THEIR AVIANCA, CALI AND BARRANQUILLA HOSTAGES IN EXCHANGE FOR RE-INITIATION OF DIRECT TALKS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

7. (U) GARZON WAS ALSO QUIETLY INVOLVED IN ATTEMPTING TO REESTABLISH DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE ELM AND THE AUC PARAMILITARIES. (INDEED, AFTER ITAGUI, GARZON HAD PLANNED TO HEAD TO THE MOUNTAINS OF CORDOBA AND URABA FOR A MEETING WITH CARLOS CASTANO, CHIEF OF THE AUC PARAMILITARIES. INTERESTINGLY, GARZON HAD SET UP THIS MEETING WITH CASTANO VIA "POPEYE" AND OTHER INFAMOUS PARAMILITARY ENFORCERS FOR PABLO ESCOBAR, NOW SERVING VERY LENGTHY SENTENCES IN BOGOTA'S LA PICOTA PRISON.) WHILE PUBLIC SPECULATION FIRST CENTERED ON PARAMILITARIES AS THE CULPRITS, THE "JOINT STAFF" OF THE AUC PUBLICLY DENIED

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RESPONSIBILITY AND STRENUIOSLY CONDEMNED THE KILLING WITHIN TWO HOURS OF ITS OCCURRENCE. ELN LEADERS HAVE ISSUED A SIMILAR CONDEMNATION OF THE ASSASSINATION.

8. (C) TOLD POLOFF THAT THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT NEITHER THE AUC NOR THE ELN HAD ANY ROLE IN GARZON'S KILLING. THAT LEFT, THEY OPINED, EITHER THE FARC OR INDIVIDUALS ALIGNED WITH THE ELEMENTS OF THE SECURITY FORCES INTENT ON BLOCKING PEACE EFFORTS. SOME SPECULATED THAT THE FARC URBAN MILITIAS MIGHT HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE, AS THE FARC WOULD BE ANXIOUS TO DEREIT ANY DETENT BETWEEN THE ELN AND EITHER THE PARAMILITARIES OR THE GOVERNMENT.

10. (C) SAID GARZON HAD TOLD HIM THAT ARMY COMMANDING GENERAL MORA WAS SAID TO BE SO ANGRY ABOUT GARZON'S EFFORTS TO REOPEN PEACE TALKS WITH THE ELN THAT GARZON RECENTLY SOUGHT OUT A MEETING WITH MORA TO EXPLAIN HIS EFFORTS. AFTER AGREEING TO MEET, GENERAL MORA DID NOT APPEAR FOR THE MEETING — BUT RECENTLY CASHIERED ARMY BRIGADIER GENERAL RITO ALEJO DEL RIO DID. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO SEPARATE EMBASSY SOURCES, MORA AND GARZON DID EVENTUALLY MEET DIRECTLY. END NOTE.) ACCORDING TO DEL RIO HARSHLY UBRAIDED GARZON FOR THE AD HOC GROUP'S EFFORTS TO RESTART PEACE TALKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ELN, SAYING THE MEMBERS WERE, AT BEST, JUST BEING USED BY
THE GUERRILLAS. GARZON REPORTEDLY CAME AWAY FROM THE MEETING VERY TROUBLED BY THE DEPTHS OF THE ANGER THAT DEL RIO VENTED.

11. (C)

TOLD POLOFF AUGUST 17 THAT THE VIEW WAS TAKING SHAPE.

GARZON HAD BEEN KILLED BY PARAMILITARIES IN LEAGUE WITH "LOOSE CANNON" ACTIVE OR RETIRED MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY FORCES. ACTING ON THEIR OWN. THE PARAMILITARIES WERE CONVINCED, THAT GARZON HAD CROSSED THE LINE AND

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ACTION SCT-00

INFO LOG-00 MFA-01 AID-00 A-00 ACQ-00 CA-02 CCO-00

CG-00 CIAE-00 SMEC-00 COME-00 CTME-00 INL-01 DEAE-00

DINT-00 DOE-00 DOTE-00 WHA-01 SRPP-00 DS-00 EB-00

EUR-01 OIGO-01 FAAE-00 FBIE-00 FBO-01 H-01 TEDE-00

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SP-00 IRM-00 SSO-00 STR-00 TRSE-00 USIE-00 USSS-00

DTC-01 SGHD-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-01 DRL-02 G-00

NFAT-00 SAS-00 /023W

P 182345Z AUG 99

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0280

INFO NSC WASHDC

SECD DEF WASHDC

DIRONDCP WASHDC

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

USINT HAVANA

USCINCSO MIAMI FL

USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL//RUCQSOC//

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UNCLASSIFIED
PERSONALLY PROFITED FROM SOME OF HIS NEGOTIATING EFFORTS WITH THE GUERRILLA GROUPS.

AN ACCUSATORY FINGER

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12. (C) WHILE MOST PUBLIC FIGURES AND MEDIA OUTLETS HAVE AVOIDED PUBLICLY POINTING FINGERS, ONE HAS NOT. FRANCISCO SANTOS SURPRISED MANY WHEN HE USED HIS BULLY PULPIT AS WRITER OF PERHAPS THE MOST WIDELY-READ SUNDAY OP-ED COLUMN IN THE NATION’S TOP NEWSPAPER. GARZON’S CLOSE FRIEND AND COLLABORATOR MINCED NO WORDS IN DECLARING, "IN THIS CASE THERE IS NO DOUBT. THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING OF THE MILITARY KILLED JAIME GARZON... (THE EVIDENCE) POINTS WITH TOTAL CLARITY TOWARDS THAT RADICAL SECTOR THAT STILL EXISTS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES AND WHICH, DESPITE ALL EFFORTS TO PURGE IT, HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT IT IS STILL ALIVE AND WAGGING ITS TAIL."

13. (U) SANTOS’ COLUMN PROMPTED A SWIFT AND INDIGNANT RESPONSE FROM THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND. MILITARY FORCES COMMANDING GENERAL TAPIAS RELEASED AUGUST 17 A JOINT STATEMENT SIGNED BY DEFENSE MINISTER RAMIREZ, THE SERVICE CHIEFS AND HIMSELF, CONDEMNING GARZON’S MURDER AND CALLING SANTOS’ STATEMENTS "INSULTING AND LIBELOUS." THE COMMUNIQUE ADDED THAT "RECKLESS, SUPERFICIAL, INTOLERANT AND SUBJECTIVE STATEMENTS" DO NOTHING TO HELP BUILD A CLIMATE OF TOLERANCE AND MUTUAL RESPECT. THE SIGNATORIES CALLED ON SANTOS TO EITHER SHARE WHATEVER INFORMATION HE MAY HAVE WITH CRIMINAL INVESTIGATORS OR TO RETRACT HIS STATEMENTS. SEPARATELY, POLICE COMMANDING GENERAL SERRANO APPEALED FOR CALM, ADDING THAT PUBLIC SPECULATION AS TO THE
UNCLASSIFIED

AUTHORSHIP OF GARZON’S KILLING DID NOT HELP THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS.

14. (U) SANTOS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER AUGUST 18. FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER RAFAEL PARDO ANNOUNCED THAT, IN HIS OWN PRESENCE LAST MAY, GARZON HAD COMPLAINED TO THEN-DEFENSE MINISTER RODRIGO LLOREDA (PLUS THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THE NATIONAL COMPTROLLER) THAT GENERAL MORA HAD MOUNTED A DEFAMATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM, PUBLICLY CALLING GARZON "A FRIEND OF THE GUERRILLAS." WHY IS IT, THE CONSERVATIVE FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER CONCLUDED, "THAT ARMY COMMANDERS DID NOT KNOW THAT GARZON WAS BEING HARASSED BY SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS? WHY IS IT THAT CASTANO DENIES INVOLVEMENT (IN THE CRIME) AND ONE BELIEVES HIM?"

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WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

15. (C) WE DO NOT KNOW WHO ORDERED THE KILLING OF GARZON (OR WHY), AND WE PROBABLY NEVER WILL. MANY COLOMBIANS POINT, HOWEVER, TO THE MESSAGE THAT HAS BEEN SENT, REGARDLESS OF WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE: THAT SOMEONE WANTS THE TALKS STOPPED AND THAT "NO ONE SHOULD TALK WITH ANYONE ELSE." THE AD HOC COMMISSION HAS SINCE CONCLUDED THAT THEIR EFFORTS MUST BE BEARING FRUIT FOR SOMEONE TO SEEK TO DERAIL THEM SO DIRECTLY. THEY HAVE THUS RESOLVED NOT TO BE SCARED OFF, BUT TO CONTINUE TO PURSUE EFFORTS TO RESTART PEACE TALKS.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE OUTPOURING OF NATIONAL GRIEF AND CONDEMNATION IS AS SURPRISING AS IT IS REFRESHING. COLOMBIANS, LONG NUMB TO THE QUOTIDIAN VIOLENCE SURROUNDING THEM, HAVE RALLIED AROUND THE SIMPLE SLOGAN OF GARZON’S ANTI-KIDNAPPING CAMPAIGN: "NO MORE."

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