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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	INLB-01	AID-00	AMAD-01	ACQ-01
	CIAE-00	INL-01	DEAE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	OIGO-01
	FBIE-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	JUSE-00	L-01
	ADS-00	MMP-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	PM-00
	PRS-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00
	USIE-00	ASDS-01	DTC-01	SGHD-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-01
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R 202313Z MAY 98
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3218
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DIA ALSO FOR GENERAL HUGHES

E.O. 12958: DECL:1.6(D)
TAGS: PHUM, PTER, MASS, MARR, PINR, PINS, PREL, SNAR, PGOV, CO
SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN ARMY TO DISBAND 20TH INTEL BRIGADE

REF: BOGOTA 5511 (AND MANY PREVIOUS)

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CURTIS W. KAMMAN. REASONS: 1.5 (B&D)
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DEPT OF STATE APPEALS REVIEW PANEL (ARP)

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ARP Action Cert. C&I Date 7/16/98

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1. (S) SUMMARY: THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY HAS ANNOUNCED THE DISBANDMENT OF THE ARMY'S 20TH INTELLIGENCE BRIGADE -- A BRIGADE LINKED IN THE PUBLIC'S MIND WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, AND IN THE ARMY'S WITH INTELLIGENCE FAILURES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GUERRILLA SUBVERSION. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE UNITS ARE HERETOFORE TO BE LIMITED TO INTEL COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, AND BARRED FROM CONDUCTING ANY "OPERATIONAL" ACTIVITIES. THE MILITARY COMMANDERS ALSO ANNOUNCED A VARIETY OF TRAINING INITIATIVES AND RESTRUCTURINGS WITHIN THE ARMY WHICH INDICATE THAT THE ARMY LEADERSHIP IS INTENT ON IMPROVING THE ARMY'S OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS (AND THUS MORALE) ACROSS THE BOARD.

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END SUMMARY.

2. (U) "THE 20TH BRIGADE IS NO MORE." WITH THOSE WORDS, GENERAL MANUEL JOSE BONETT, COMMANDING GENERAL OF COLOMBIA'S MILITARY FORCES, AND GENERAL MARIO HUGO GALAN, COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE ARMY, DECLARED MAY 19 THE DISBANDMENT OF THE ARMY'S SOLE, NATIONAL MILITARY INTELLIGENCE BRIGADE. THE ANNOUNCEMENT CAME AT THE CONCLUSION OF A 2-DAY CLOSED-DOOR EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE ARMED SERVICES CHIEFS PLUS ALL THE COLOMBIAN ARMY'S DIVISION AND BRIGADE COMMANDERS.

CRITICIZED FROM WITHOUT AND FROM WITHIN
=====

3. (U) PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE BRIGADE IN RECENT YEARS HAS FOCUSED ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, INCLUDING SELECTIVE POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS, BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN COMMITTED BY PERSONS
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ASSOCIATED WITH THE BRIGADE. TWO FORMER BRIGADE MEMBERS AND TWO BRIGADE INFORMANTS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE CURRENTLY BEING PROSECUTED BY THE FISCALIA FOR THE NOVEMBER 1995 ASSASSINATION OF ALVARO GOMEZ HURTADO, THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICIAN WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN PLANNING A CIVILIAN-MILITARY COUP, TO SERVE AS INTERIM

PRESIDENT OF A JUNTA AND TO EXTRADITE PRESIDENT SAMPER AND CALI CARTEL LEADERS TO THE UNITED STATES.

4. (U) THE BRIGADE HAS BEEN MENTIONED IN AT LEAST THE LAST TWO STATE DEPARTMENT ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS. AMBASSADOR FRECHETTE'S FINAL INTERVIEW IN COLOMBIA IS REMEMBERED FOR "THE GRENADE" HE TOSSED OVER HIS SHOULDER IN THE BRIGADE'S DIRECTION. MORE RECENTLY, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AMERICAS AND THE WASHINGTON POST REPORTED SUSPICIONS OF UNDEFINED LINKS BETWEEN THE BRIGADE AND THE RECENT ASSASSINATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS. AND ONLY LAST WEEK, GENERAL IVAN RAMIREZ, THE "GODFATHER" OF ARMY INTELLIGENCE CONFIRMED THAT THE U.S. HAS REVOKED HIS VISA ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS.

5. (U) BUT THE BRIGADE HAS ALSO BEEN CRITICIZED FROM WITHIN THE ARMY FOR PERCEIVED MILITARY INTELLIGENCE FAILURES, SUCH AS THE MARCH 1998 DEBACLE AT EL BILLAR, CAQUETA. AFTER THE STRING OF MILITARY DEFEATS THE ARMY HAS SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF FARC GUERRILLAS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY, MUCH BLAME WAS WRONGLY PLACED AT THE DOORSTEP OF THE 20TH BRIGADE. IN THE CASE OF THE DECEMBER 1997 OVERRUNNING OF THE ARMY BASE AT PATASCOY, FOR EXAMPLE, THE 20TH GOT THE BLAME -- EVEN THOUGH THE BRIGADE HAD DISCOVERED THE FARC PLAN, AND HAD INFORMED THE PROPER FIELD COMMANDERS IN A TIMELY MANNER.

JUST WHAT IS TO BE DISBANDED?

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6. (C) THE 20TH BRIGADE CURRENTLY SERVES AS THE COLOMBIAN ARMY'S SOLE, NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BRIGADE. FIRST ESTABLISHED IN 1990 AT THE RECOMMENDATION OF A SPECIAL SOUTHCOM ADVISORY MISSION, THE 20TH BRIGADE IS RESPONSIBLE NOT ONLY FOR INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS BUT ALSO OPERATIONS. HEADQUARTERED IN BOGOTA, THE 20TH BRIGADE IS COMPOSED OF 7 INTELLIGENCE BATTALIONS, ONE COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE BATTALION, ONE TECHNICAL INTELLIGENCE BATTALION AND A COMBAT SERVICES AND SUPPORT BATTALION. THE SEVEN INTEL BATTALIONS, ALTHOUGH UNDER OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF THE BRIGADE'S COMMANDER IN BOGOTA, ARE UNDER THE TACTICAL CONTROL OF VARIOUS ARMY FIELD COMMANDERS AROUND THE COUNTRY. BUCARAMANGA (2

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BATTALIONS), SANTA MARTA (MAGDALENA), CALI, MEDELLIN,
VILLAVICENCIO, AND BOGOTA.

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AND JUST WHAT IS TO BE DONE?
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7. (U) IN THEIR PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS, GENERALS GALAN AND BONETT ANNOUNCED THAT THREE FUNDAMENTAL REFORMS ARE TO BE UNDERTAKEN: 1) UNITS INVOLVED IN THE COLLECTION OF INTELLIGENCE ARE TO BE ENTIRELY SEPARATED FROM ANY AND ALL OPERATIONAL ROLES; 2) MILITARY INTELLIGENCE UNITS WILL BE UNDER THE COMPLETE COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE DIVISION AND BRIGADE COMMANDERS WHOM THEY SERVE; 3) SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL, SCIENTIFIC AND INVESTIGATIVE TRAINING IS TO BE GIVEN TO THOSE PERSONS WHO WILL WORK FOR A NEW

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE CENTER (APPARENTLY TO BE CREATED).
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8. (U) THE GENERALS ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT THE REFORM OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE WAS BUT ONE STEP IN A LARGER ARMY REFORM EFFORT. A NATIONAL "RE-TRAINING" PROGRAM WAS ANNOUNCED FOR THE ARMY. GENERAL GALAN DECLARED THAT NEW MILITARY INSTRUCTION CENTERS ARE TO BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE DIVISIONS AND BRIGADES SO AS TO DIRECT, ON A PERMANENT BASIS, THE MAINTENANCE OF MILITARY SKILLS. SPECIALIZED TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF COUNTER-GUERRILLA BATTALIONS AND MOBILE BRIGADES IS ALSO TO BE IMPROVED, AND EXTENDED FROM FOUR WEEKS TO SIX WEEKS PRIOR TO FIELD DEPLOYMENT. FINALLY, THE PHYSICAL, TACTICAL AND MORAL TRAINING REGIMES FOR ARMY TROOPS ARE ALSO TO BE REVAMPED. GENERAL GALAN NOTED THAT THIS TRAINING WOULD NOT ONLY INCLUDE HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING BUT WAS ALSO DESIGNED TO INCREASE PROFESSIONALISM AND ESPRIT DE CORPS WITHIN THE ARMY'S RANKS.

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN? AND WHY NOW?
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9. (S) IN HIS PUBLIC REMARKS, GENERAL BONETT STATED THAT

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"IRRESPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES, THE BRIGADE WAS GOING TO BE REFORMED." HE ALSO REMARKED THAT DISBANDMENT OF THE BRIGADE HAD BEEN UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION "SINCE LAST NOVEMBER"

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(WHEN THE BRIGADE RECEIVED ITS FIRST NON-INTELLIGENCE OFFICER AS COMMANDER. INDEED, REFORM OF THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM HAS BEEN ONE OF GENERAL BONETT'S GOALS FOR THE ARMY EVER SINCE HE WAS APPOINTED COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE ARMY, PRIOR TO HIS 1997 ELEVATION TO COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE MILITARY FORCES.

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10. (S) BUT THE CONTINUED PUBLIC POUNDINGS THE BRIGADE HAS TAKEN, PLUS THE USG'S REPEATED AND CLEAR REBUFFS AT OVERTURES TO "PLAY BALL" WITH THE 20TH, PROBABLY PROVIDED BONETT WITH THE LEVERAGE HE HAD SOUGHT TO BEGIN NEEDED INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS.

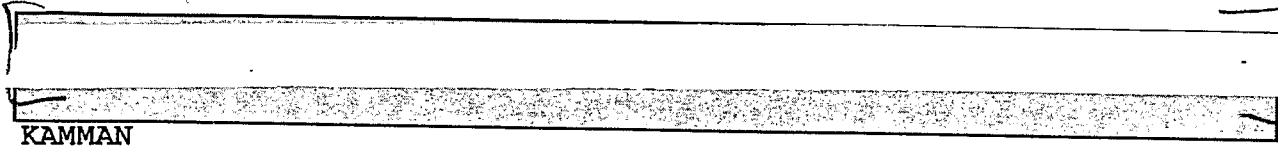
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