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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1468  
DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
INFO DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE  
CIA WASHDC  
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
DEA WASHDC  
NDIC JOHNSTOWN PA  
SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//  
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FBI WASHDC  
USIA WASHDC 0133  
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 008737:

STATE FOR H, INL, ARA/AND, L/LEI  
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ONDCP FOR BILL BOZIN  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/10/06  
TAGS: PGOV, SNAR, PREL, PINR, KJUS, KCRM, CO  
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MACKAY MEETS WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND  
VISITS COCA GROWING REGION

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: WILLIAM E. LANDFAIR  
DATE/CASE ID: 5 FEB 2002 200102477

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1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY ACTING POL/ECON COUNSELOR JOHN G. COOK. REASON 1.5(D).
2. (C) SUMMARY: STAFFDEL MACKAY CALLED ON MINISTER OF DEFENSE ESGUERRA AND THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND SEPTEMBER 6 TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED SALE OF BLACKHAWK HELICOPTERS TO THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. ESGUERRA WOULD NOT SPECULATE ON THE AMOUNT OF TIME THAT THE BLACKHAWKS WOULD BE USED FOR COUNTER-NARCOTICS AS OPPOSED TO OTHER OPERATIONS. HE EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT IN OPERATIONS AGAINST COCA FIELDS, PROCESSING LABS, AND TRAFFICKER AIRSTRIPS WHICH THE GUERRILLAS ARE PROTECTING, FIGHTING THE GUERRILLAS IS A COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATION. STAFFDEL ARRIVED SEPTEMBER 7 AT THE POLICE BASE IN SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE IN THE COCA GROWING REGION JUST IN TIME TO WITNESS THE BODIES OF SOLDIERS BEING UNLOADED FROM HELICOPTERS. THESE 22 SOLDIERS WERE KILLED IN A GUERRILLA AMBUSH SEPTEMBER 6. THE POLICE AND ARMY LEADERS IN SAN JOSE BRIEFED THE DELEGATION ON THE SUCCESSES OF "OPERATION CONQUISTA," A COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATION WHICH HAS BEEN UNDERWAY IN THE

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REGIONS SINCE MAY, AND WHICH HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DESTROYING MANY COCA FIELDS AND COCAINE PROCESSING LABS, AND IN CUTTING OFF THE SUPPLY OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS. THE NARCOGUERRILLA RESPONSE HAS BEEN TO EXTRACT A TOLL FROM THE ARMY, SUCH AS THE LIVES OF 22 SOLDIERS ON SEPTEMBER 6. END SUMMARY.

MEETING WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND MILITARY HIGH COMMAND  
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3. (C) ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, STAFFDEL MACKAY, ACCOMPANIED BY THE CHARGE, MET WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE ESGUERRA, COMMANDER OF THE ARMY GENERAL BEDOYA, AND COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE GIL, AT THE CENTRO ADMINISTRATIVA NACIONAL (CAN), THE COLOMBIAN EQUIVALENT OF THE PENTAGON. MINISTER ESGUERRA BEGAN THE DISCUSSIONS FIRST BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE FOCUSED INTEREST OF THE DELEGATION, THAT BEING THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN COUNTER-NARCOTICS AND WHETHER OR NOT THE BLACKHAWKS SHOULD BE SOLD TO COLOMBIA. HE SAID HE INTENDED TO DIRECT HIS REMARKS TO THIS INTEREST, WHILE EMPHASIZING THE ENORMITY OF THE COUNTER-DRUG TASK FACING THE POLICE AND ARMED FORCES.
4. (C) ESGUERRA STATED THAT COLOMBIA IS, WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, ENGAGED IN A WAR AGAINST NARCOGUERRILLAS. THE GUERRILLAS CLEARLY ARE PROVIDING PROTECTION TO COCA FIELDS, PROCESSING LABS, AND

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TRAFFICKERS' AIRSTRIPS, AND, IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR SERVICES, THEY COLLECT TAXES ON TRAFFICKERS IN A HIGHLY ORGANIZED ARRANGEMENT. HE ADDED THAT THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SOME GUERRILLAS ARE INVOLVED THEMSELVES AS COCA GROWERS, LAB OWNERS, AND AS FIRST-LEVEL TRANSPORTERS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT CURRENTLY THERE IS NO HARD EVIDENCE THAT GUERRILLAS ARE ACTING AS NATIONWIDE OR INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTORS. HE POINTED OUT THAT, WHILE COLOMBIA

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HAS HAD TREMENDOUS SUCCESS AT THE TOP OF THE DRUG PYRAMID WITH THE CAPTURE OF THE CALI CAPOS, THE BROAD BASE OF COCA CULTIVATION AND COCAINE PROCESSING REMAINS A HUGE PROBLEM, NOW COMPLICATED BY THE GUERRILLA PRESENCE. BECAUSE OF THE ADDED GUERRILLA ELEMENT, IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT THE MILITARY JOIN THE POLICE ON THE FRONT LINES. HE THEN ASKED THAT THE STAFFERS BE GIVEN A COPY OF A NEW BOOK, "THE FARC CARTEL," WHICH HE SAID OUTLINES THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE CALI CARTEL AND THE GUERRILLAS.

5. (C) ESGUERRA ASSERTED THAT CLEAR PROOF OF THE LINK BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE TRAFFICKERS IS THE REACTION THAT THE MILITARY AND POLICE COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS HAVE PROVOKED: FIRST, THE LARGE SCALE CAMPESINO PROTESTS OF LATE, IN WHICH THE PEASANTS ARE FORCED TO PARTICIPATE BY THE FARC; AND SECOND, THE INCREASED ATTACKS ON POLICE AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS. THE MINISTER CONTENDED THAT THESE ATTACKS ARE DESIGNED TO MOVE THE MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES OUT OF SOUTHERN GROWING/PROCESSING AREAS AND INTO THE CENTER AND CITIES. HE INSISTED THAT THIS.

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STRATEGY WOULD NOT PREVAIL, BUT THAT ECONOMIC AND MATERIAL  
 ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED IF COLOMBIA IS MOST EFFECTIVELY TO WAGE A  
 COUNTER-NARCOTICS FIGHT.

6. (C) ESGUERRA THEN ARGUED THAT WHILE THE UH-1H IS A GOOD  
 HELICOPTER, THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE DRUG WAR -- ISOLATED AREAS OF  
 OPERATION WITH LIMITED TO NO COMMUNICATION OR ROAD  
 INFRASTRUCTURE, AND HIGH ALTITUDE LOCATIONS -- REQUIRES SOMETHING  
 MORE, I.E., THE BLACKHAWK. HE ALSO ADDED NIGHT VISION CAPABILITY  
 AND EXPLOSIVES FOR THE AIRSTRIPS TO THE LIST OF EQUIPMENT  
 REQUIREMENTS. HE NOTED HERE HIS CONCERN THAT THE APPROVAL AND  
 THE EVENTUAL SALE OF THE BLACKHAWKS MIGHT BE TOO LATE AS THE  
 MILITARY WOULD SOON LOSE USD 16 MILLION IN BUDGETED FUNDS AND  
 THAT THEY MIGHT BE FORCED TO ACT QUICKLY AND BUY FROM THE FRENCH,  
 ENGLISH, ITALIANS, OR ONE OF THE OTHER POTENTIAL SELLERS.

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7. (C) MR. MACKEY THEN ASKED WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TIME WOULD THE ARMY DEDICATE THE BLACKHAWKS TO COUNTER-NARCOTICS MISSIONS. ESGUERRA RESPONDED BY REITERATING HIS POINT THAT THERE IS NO DISTINGUISHABLE LINE BETWEEN GUERRILLA AND NARCOTRAFFICKER

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 ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD. HE ASKED: IF A NARCO LAB IS STAFFED 100 PERCENT BY TRAFFICKERS, BUT IS PROTECTED BY A CORDON OF GUERRILLAS, IS THE OPERATION TO DESTROY THIS LAB A COUNTER-DRUG OR A COUNTER-SUBVERSIVE OPERATION? TO A QUESTION ON MILITARY-POLICE COOPERATION, HE SAID THAT THE BLACKHAWKS WOULD ONLY INCREASE THE CURRENT HIGH LEVEL OF COOPERATION. WHEN POLICE OUTPOSTS ARE ATTACKED, IT IS THE ARMY THAT RESPONDS; WHEN THE POLICE NEED AIR SUPPORT FOR THEIR SPRAY OPERATIONS, IT IS THE AIR FORCE THAT RESPONDS. HE LIKENED THE RELATIONSHIP TO THAT OF THE THREE MUSKETEERS, ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL.

8. (C) THE MINISTER CONCLUDED BY ASSURING THE STAFFDEL THAT HE AND THE MILITARY AND POLICE LEADERSHIP FOR WHOM HE SPOKE WERE SINCERE IN THEIR COMMITMENT, AND HONEST IN THEIR EVALUATION THAT THEY COULD NOT SAY, WITH ANY MEANINGFUL PRECISION, BECAUSE OF THE CONTEXT OF THE DRUG WAR IN COLOMBIA, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TIME THE BLACKHAWKS WOULD BE USED IN DRUG VERSUS GUERRILLA OPERATIONS. HOWEVER, HE SAID HE HOPED THAT THE SALE OF BLACKHAWKS TO COLOMBIA WOULD GO FORWARD AND SERVE AS A FURTHER DEMONSTRATION THAT OUR TWO COUNTRIES ARE ALLIES IN THIS ALL-IMPORTANT FIGHT.

VISIT TO THE COCA GROWING DEPARTMENT OF GUAVIARE

9. (U) THE LARGEST COCA GROWING REGION OF COLOMBIA IS THE GUAVIARE DEPARTMENT. STAFFDEL MACKEY DEPARTED COLOMBIA BY AIR THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 7 TO VISIT THE GUAVIARE REGION, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBASSY CHARGE AND OTHER EMBASSY STAFF, AND BY COLOMBIAN ARMY COMMANDER BEDOYA AND CHIEF OF THE ANTI-NARCOTICS POLICE (DANTI), COL. GALLEGO. UPON ARRIVAL AT THE POLICE BASE IN SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE, THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL, THE STAFFDEL

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 ENCOUNTERED THE UNLOADING FROM A HELICOPTER OF THE BODIES OF COLOMBIAN ARMY (COLAR) SOLDIERS KILLED IN A GUERRILLA AMBUSH ON SEPTEMBER 6. LATEST REPORTS SET THE COLAR-DEATH TOLL FOR THE AMBUSH AT 22.

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10. (C) THE COMMANDER OF THE POLICE BASE AND DANTI COMMANDER GALLEGO PROVIDED THE STAFFDEL A BRIEFING ON THE OPERATION OF EQUIPMENT USED FOR THE PATHLINK SYSTEM, WHICH IS DESIGNED TO ENSURE THERE IS NO DUPLICATION IN THE SPRAYING OF COCA FIELDS WITH THE HERBICIDE GLIFOSATE. FOLLOWING THIS BRIEFING, THE GROUP TRAVELLED BY HELICOPTER TO THE NEARBY BASE OF THE SECOND MOBILE BRIGADE OF THE COLAR.

11. (C) AT THE COLAR BASE, THE DEPUTY COMMANDER, COLONEL DIAZ, BRIEFED THE STAFFDEL ON "OPERATION CONQUISTA," THE COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATION THAT HAS BEEN UNDERWAY SINCE MID-MAY. THIS IS A JOINT POLICE-MILITARY OPERATION AIMED AT ERADICATION OF COCA FIELDS, THE DESTRUCTION OF COCAINE PROCESSING LABS AND

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 USIA WASHDC 0135  
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TRAFFICKER'S AIRFIELDS, AND THE INTERDICTION OF PRECURSOR  
 CHEMICALS. DIAZ SAID THE OPERATION HAS BEEN EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL  
 IN BLOCKING THE ENTRY INTO THE REGION OF ABOUT 80 PERCENT OF THE  
 PRECURSOR CHEMICALS WHICH HAD BEEN ENTERING PRIOR TO THE ONSET OF  
 THE OPERATION. THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF DRUGS AND DRUG-RELATED  
 EQUIPMENT DESTROYED BY THE OPERATION IS CALCULATED AT ABOUT USD  
 48 MILLION.

12. (C) FOLLOWING THE MILITARY PRESENTATION, DANTI COMMANDER  
 COL. GALLEG0 SPOKE ABOUT DANTI OPERATIONS THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA,  
 BUT PARTICULARLY IN THE EASTERN COMMAND, INCLUDING GUAVIARE. HE  
 SAID POLICE ESTIMATES FOR THE EASTERN COMMAND REGION ARE 28,000  
 HECTARES OF COCA, WHICH CAN PRODUCE 172 ANNUAL TONS OF PURE  
 COCAINE. BECAUSE OF THIS HIGH CONCENTRATION OF COCAINE  
 PRODUCTION, THE FARC GUERRILLA GROUP HAS ESTABLISHED ITS EASTERN  
 COMMAND IN GUAVIARE. IN 1996 IN THE EASTERN COMMAND REGION THE  
 POLICE HAVE ERADICATED 7,000 HECTARES OF COCA AND DESTROYED 230  
 PROCESSING LABS.

VISIT TO LA PICOTA PRISON

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13. (U) UPON THE RETURN TO BOGOTA, STAFFDEL MACKAY SOUGHT TO  
 VISIT THE AREA IN LA PICOTA PRISON WHERE THE CALI CARTEL KINGPINS  
 ARE KEPT. DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF COLONEL GALLEG0 TO ARRANGE THE  
 VISIT, THE PRISON AUTHORITIES WOULD NOT ALLOW IT.

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14. (U) STAFFDEL MACKEY DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS MESSAGE BEFORE DEPARTING BOGOTA. KNEEBONE

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