APPEALS PANEL ACTION: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELEASED 1.4(D)

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1.6(X6)
TAGS: PINS, SNAR, PHUM, PTER, ASEC, MASS, PREL, PGOV, PINR, CO
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE
(PART V OF A MONTERIA TRIP REPORT)

REFS: A) 98 BOGOTA 13823 B) 98 BOGOTA 14108 C) BOGOTA 341
D) BOGOTA 577 E) 98 BOGOTA 7790 F) 97 BOGOTA 11430

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

SUMMARY

1. (S) SUMMARY: TOLD POLOFF DURING A TRIP TO MONTERIA, CORDOBA IN DECEMBER, THAT THE PARAMILITARIES' MOST INFAMOUS 1997 MILITARY ACTION -- THE JULY 1997 MASSACRE IN THE FARC-DOMINATED, COCA-
CULTIVATING TOWN OF MAPIRIPAN, META DEPARTMENT -- HAD BEEN "WELL-COOORDINATED IN ADVANCE" NOT ONLY AMONG FIVE PARAMILITARY GROUPS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF COLOMBIA BUT ALSO WITH (UNSPECIFIED ELEMENTS OF) THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. WHILE THEY ASSERTED THAT THE JOINT PARAMILITARY/ARMY PLANNING INCLUDED "TRAVEL, LOGISTICS, INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY," THEY BALKED AT PROVIDING FURTHER DETAILS. THEY ALSO CLAIMED THE RAID HAD ACHIEVED ITS INTENDED GOAL: TO DELIVER A MAJOR BLOW AGAINST THE FARC'S LIFELINE, ITS ABILITY TO MOVE COCAINE AND NARCO-MONIES IN THE EASTERN PLAINS. (NOTE: SOURCES MAY HAVE PROVIDED THE INFORMATION AS MUCH TO INFLUENCE AS TO INFORM. END NOTE.)


MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE: THE BACKGROUND


MAPIRIPAN: A CASE APART?

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ARMY COORDINATION?

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10. (§) BUT WHAT MADE THE PARAMILITARY THRUST INTO MAPIRIPAN DIFFERENT FROM MOST OTHER OPERATIONS OF THE NEW, "INDEPENDENT" ACCU/AUC, THE FIRST CONTINUED, WAS THAT IT HAD BEEN "WELL-COORDINATED IN ADVANCE WITH THE (COLOMBIAN) ARMY." CHALLENGED BY POLOFF, HE STATED THAT THE COLOMBIAN ARMY HAD NO DIRECT PARTICIPATION ON THE GROUND IN MAPIRIPAN, BUT THAT "FULL COORDINATION" HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN IN ADVANCE WITH "THE ARMY" (NOT FURTHER SPECIFIED). THIS JOINT PLANNING, THE TWO LOCALS AGREED, HAD COVERED THE ISSUES OF "TRAVEL, LOGISTICS, INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY."

11. (§) WHEN Pressed BY POLOFF FOR FURTHER DETAILS, BOTH INTERLOCUTORS DECLINED TO SAY MUCH MORE (PERHAPS REALIZING THEY HAD ALREADY SAID TOO MUCH.) THEY CONCEDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE LEVEL OF COORDINATION WITH ELEMENTS OF THE ARMY WENT "WELL BEYOND" ("MUCHO MAS ALLA") THE TWO ARMY SERGEANTS WHO HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF FACILITATING THE PARAMILITARY ARRIVAL AT SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE. THEY DID NOT CONTRADICT POLOFF'S SUGGESTION THAT, IF THE OPERATION WAS AS "WELL-COORDINATED" AS THEY WERE ASSERTING, THE PARAMILITARIES DEPARTURE FROM URABA WAS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN AS COORDINATED WITH SOME ELEMENTS OF THE ARMY AS ALLEGEDLY WAS THEIR LANDING IN SAN JOSE. THE TWO SMILED, BUT REMAINED MUM ON THE EXACT EXTENT OR THE COMMAND-LEVEL OF ARMY INVOLVEMENT. (NOTE: THEY ALSO PUT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF DEAD DURING THE MAPIRIPAN TAKEOVER AT "TWENTY TO TWENTY-FIVE," THE SAME APPROXIMATION USED BY MAPIRIPAN EXILES WITH POLOFF SHORTLY AFTER THE TAKEOVER.)
A NOTE ON SOURCES

12. (S) POST HAS DELIBERATELY REFRAINED FROM DIRECTLY IDENTIFYING HERE EITHER OF THE TWO INTERLOCUTORS -- BOTH PUBLIC MEN, WELL-KNOWN [WHOM THERE ARE NO KNOWN CRIMINAL WARRANTS. IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT, WE HAVE NO DESIRE FOR OUR REPORTING, NOW OR IN THE FUTURE, TO BE USED AS A DEATH SENTENCE AGAINST PERSONS WHO WERE WILLING TO SPEAK TO US.

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13. (G) Based on discussions with multiple sources (Colombian and non-Colombian; government and non-government) quietly sounded out in Bogota since Poloff's

We have reason to believe that one of the two, in fact, goes beyond that, and has participated directly in the planning of AUC military operations -- to include, based on his discussion with Poloff, Mapiripan.

A post-script

14. (G) In a February 17 meeting on other issues, [T]old Emboffs that the criminal investigation into the Mapiripan case continues, and that the "Fiscalia" was now ready to issue formal indictments against several members of the Army, including officers, for having facilitated the entry of paramilitaries not only into Mapiripan but Miraflores (October 1997) and Puerto Alvira (May 1998), as well. He stated that prosecutors already had enough to order the arrest of several of those implicated, but that, as a courtesy typically extended to employees of the state (especially military officers), they will not be ordered into pre-trial detention at this time.

Comments

15. (G) Given: A) [T]he probable involvement of one of the two men in planning AUC operations, and, C) the Fiscalia's progress in investigating the Mapiripan takeover, post finds version (limited though it was) of the Mapiripan takeover to be most credible. We know of no reason for them to deviate from their boasting of the AUC's full-fledged independence in order to correct Poloff's statement other than their desire for the USG to understand correctly what had transpired eighteen months ago. (Indeed, what Castano and company most want now is political legitimacy, in their view a key to achieving some degree of recognition from the USG -- which they have consistently failed to get. Poloff's raising the question on Mapiripan thus put the two in a position of either having to lie to us, or to come clean. As the USG's position on army/paramilitary complicity is known to all, dropping such a bombshell on us was not the best way to curry favor with the USG -- but they evidently felt they had to do it in order to protect something even more important in their eyes, their own credibility with us.)
16. *SOME MIGHT ARGUE THAT THEIR MOTIVATION WAS NOT HISTORICAL ACCURACY OR TO PROTECT THEIR OWN CREDIBILITY, BUT SIMPLY TO BESMIRCH THE HONOR OF THE ARMY -- AN INSTITUTION THEY OTHERWISE HOLD IN LOW ESTEEM. WE WOULD ONLY NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT THEY FREELY ADMITTED THE AUC'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTION, TERMED THE COORDINATED OPERATION A "SUCCESS," AND SPOKE MATTER-OF-FACTLY ABOUT ARMY FACILITATION IN MAPIRIPAN, AS IF IT WAS REALLY NO SURPRISE TO ANYONE (EXCEPT MAYBE TO THE GRINGOS).

17. *IT APPEARS THAT GENERAL BONETT, THEN-COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE ARMY, GOT IT CLOSE TO RIGHT IN HIS VERY FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE MAPIRIPAN ATTACK (UTTERED EVEN BEFORE GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATORS HAD MANAGED TO GET INTO THE DISTANT JUNGLE HAMLET): THAT THE MASSACRE HAD BEEN PERPETRATED AS PART OF A FEUD BETWEEN "ILLEGAL DELINQUENT ORGANIZATIONS" (I.E., GUERRILLAS AND PARAMILITARIES) FIGHTING OVER CONTROL OF NARCO-TRAFFICKING FINANCES. (WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE, HOWEVER, TO INDICATE BONETT KNEW THEN, OR EVER, OF ANY MILITARY FACILITATING ROLE.)

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INFO LOG-00 ACDA-08 ACDE-00 INLB-01 AID-00 A-00 ACQ-01
CA-02 CCO-00 CTME-00 INL-01 DEAE-00 WHA-01 SRPP-00
DS-00 EB-00 OIGO-01 FAAE-00 FBBE-00 FBO-01 H-01
IMMC-01 IM-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 IO-00 JUSE-00 LAB-01
L-01 ADS-00 MMP-00 M-00 NSA-00 OCS-03 OIC-02
OMB-01 OPR-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 SP-00
SSO-00 STR-00 TSEE-00 T-00 USIE-00 USSS-00 ASDS-01
DTC-01 IMCC-01 SGHD-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-01 DRL-02
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DAO COMMENT

1.4(D)
END DAO COMMENT.

KAMMAN

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