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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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Intelligence Memorandum

Subject: Widespread Disorders in Colombia

Lawlessness has become progressively more widespread in Colombia in the past three years. Despite strong government efforts to control the situation, there are no signs that law and order will be restored in the near future. Lawlessness seems to have resulted primarily from the bitterness of the political controversy between the Liberal and Conservative parties; the Colombian Communist Party as such has not been a contributing factor.

Continuance of the present state of affairs will seriously impair the stability of the present government -- which has been more cooperative with the US in matters concerning the UN police action in Korea than any other Latin American country. Furthermore, the recent extension of disorders to the Department of Choco, which borders on the poorly-patrolled frontier of the sparsely-settled eastern section of Panama, jeopardizes the security of the Panama Canal.

Disorders have reached such proportions that the Conservative administration's police and army frequently fight losing battles with outlaw bands having tenuous Liberal Party affiliation. From time to time the police or the outlaws attack small rural settlements either to obtain provisions or to retaliate against some aid given to the other; in addition, the employment of physical violence in Conservative intra-party feuds has become so widespread that one faction is identified with the intention to gain control of the party by this method. Unsettled conditions, which in early 1950 were generally restricted to the thinly populated eastern section of Colombia, now extend to the rest of the country except for the few cities and five scattered departments out of a total of fifteen.

Disrespect for law and order seems to have begun at the time of the Bogota riot in April 1948 when the assassination of the popular leader Gaitan led to widespread rioting and looting. These illegal activities were regarded as primarily political and those involved were in large measure not punished. The attitude that political motivation excuses illegal actions has subsequently

- 2 -

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become widespread among the people. It has been strengthened by (a) the President's disregard for legal impediments to the attainment of his political objectives, and (b) the political bitterness that began with Galtan's assassination and was subsequently aggravated when the Conservative Party, which came to power after almost 20 years in the opposition, dismissed virtually all government employees of Liberal Party affiliation, including the railway workers and, to some extent, the members of the armed forces.

Although some Communists may be adding slightly to the disturbances in the departments of Tolima and Cundinamarca, neither of the two most important Communist leaders, Gilberto Vieira White nor Augusto Duran, has shown any interest in organizing or even encouraging Communist participation. A further indication of limited Communist involvement is the fact that, during 1951, the strongly anti-Communist administration has arrested no Communists for inciting disorders.

- 3 -

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