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Intelligence Report

Office of Asian Pacific and Latin American Analysis

2 December 1997

Colombia: Update on Links Between Military, Paramilitary Forces

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Summary

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reports linking members of the Colombian Army to illegal paramilitary groups, including:

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- [Redacted] security forces—possibly including units that receive or may be eligible to receive US aid—did nothing to stop two massacres of civilians perpetrated by paramilitaries and may have facilitated the arrival and escape of those involved in the attacks. [Redacted]

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Despite the recent retirement of at least one Army officer linked to paramilitaries and human rights abuses, prospects for a concerted effort by the military high command to crack down on paramilitaries—and the officers that cooperate with them—appear dim.

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- *The continued presence in the military of an Army general, who is widely regarded within the military as having links to paramilitaries, is likely to be perceived by other officers as tolerance for paramilitary links.* [Redacted]

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Military links with these illegal groups will continue to complicate US efforts to provide aid to military units engaged in counternarcotics efforts. [Redacted]

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Fugitive Warlord Carlos Castano: More Than a Mercenary? [Redacted]

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Paramilitary leader **Carlos Castano Gil** appears to be trying to cloak his notorious outlaw persona with some political legitimacy. Despite the \$1 million government bounty on his head, Castano has recently conducted press interviews to explain the actions of—and possibly to cultivate a legitimate political image for—his Peasant Self-Defense Group of Cordoba and Uraba (ACCU), Colombia's largest and most widely feared paramilitary force. [Redacted] Castano—who has been described by journalists as a "short, surprisingly normal-looking" 32-year-old—has cleverly manipulated his media image to strike a chord with the average citizen's disgruntlement over the decades-long war, claiming that his troops are not ruthless killers but men with principles and fellow victims of the insurgency. According to [Redacted] press reports, Castano has also tried to maneuver for a role in any peace process, maintaining that the paramilitaries have been a strong force throughout the war and should be involved in its resolution. [Redacted] the warlord's strategic paramilitary goal is to control all of northern Colombia. [Redacted]

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Some journalists speculate that Castano's fight against the guerrillas may be motivated, at least in part, by revenge. Nine siblings have been killed in the insurgency, and, according to press reports, he and a now-deceased brother started the ACCU shortly after guerrillas kidnapped and killed their father. Castano—who travels with several well-armed bodyguards—[Redacted] fearing for his wife and young child, he is exploring the possibility of getting his family out of Colombia [Redacted]

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The lure of illicit financial gain also plays a role in Castano's paramilitary objectives, despite the warlord's public denials. He has been involved in various aspects of the narcotics trade since the late 1980s, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] A north coast trafficker claims that Castano's organization currently provides logistic and security support to traffickers in Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, and Atlantico Departments and that no trafficker can operate within Castano's sphere of influence without his approval. [Redacted]

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reports linking members of the Colombian Army operating in various parts of the country to paramilitary groups, particularly those affiliated with Carlos Castano.¹ [Redacted]

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collectors to find out more about the nature and extent of the links. In other instances, however, the reports appear to portend efforts by paramilitaries to establish relationships with local commanders in new areas where the groups seek to expand their operations, such as in the southern departments of Meta and Caqueta. Indeed the expansion of paramilitary groups into areas long considered to be strongholds of Colombia's two largest guerrilla groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—is the most significant change we have seen in recent months and one which has further degraded Colombia's already poor security and human rights situation. [Redacted]

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Setting the Tone

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Like his predecessor Harold Bedoya, Military Forces Commander Maj. Gen. Manuel Bonett, shows little inclination to combat paramilitary groups. [Redacted]

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Direct Links With Individual Officers

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[Redacted] direct contacts between paramilitary leaders or their representatives and three Army officers; [Redacted]

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[Redacted] do not present a comprehensive picture of ties between paramilitaries and the Colombian officer corps, nor should they be regarded as an indication that all high-ranking officers have such relationships. [Redacted]

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This report was prepared by [Redacted] Office of Asian Pacific and Latin American Analysis with contributions from [Redacted] APLA. It was requested by a senior Department of Defense official. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the author [Redacted] and to the Latin America Regional Issues Manager, APLA, on [Redacted]

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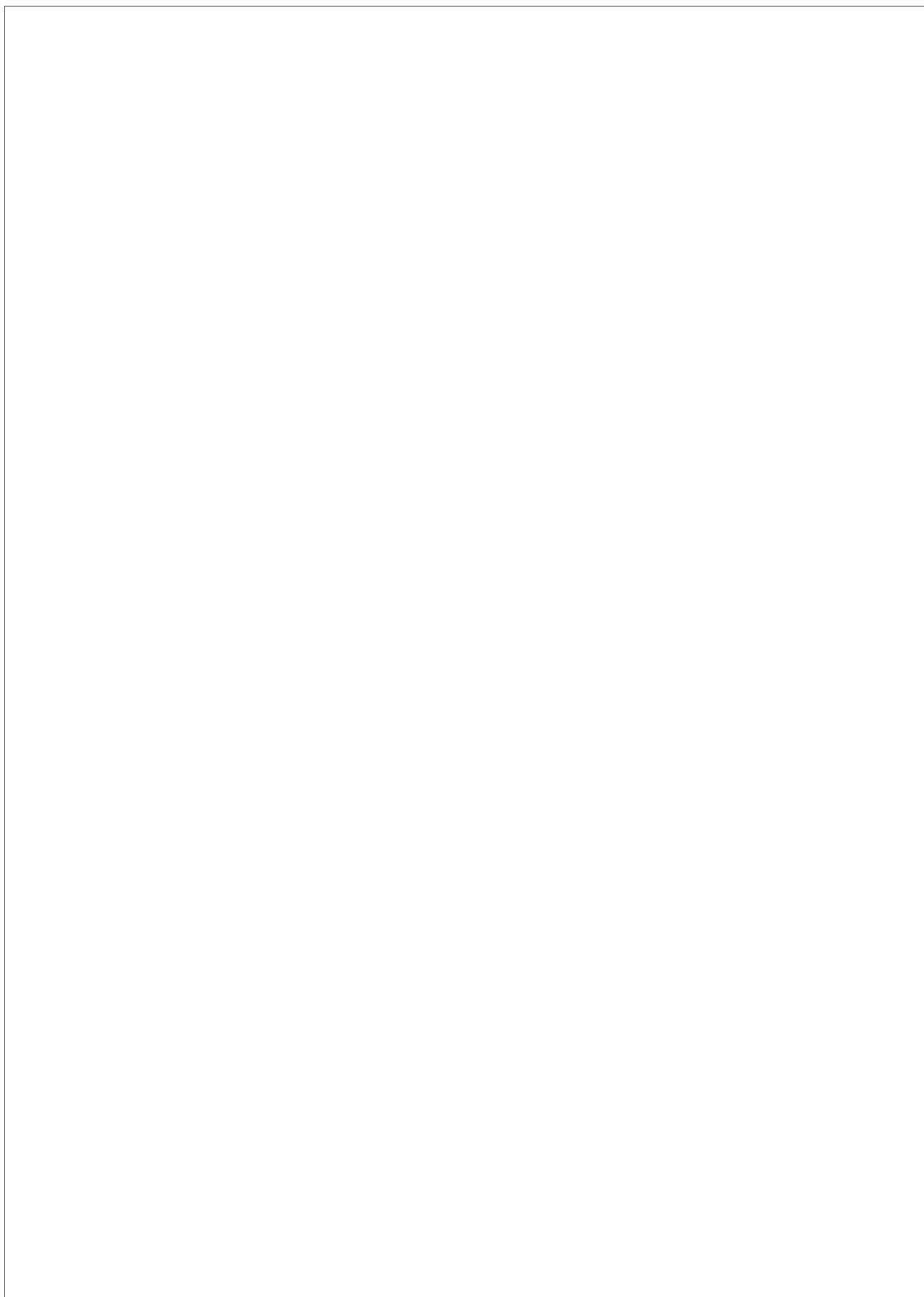
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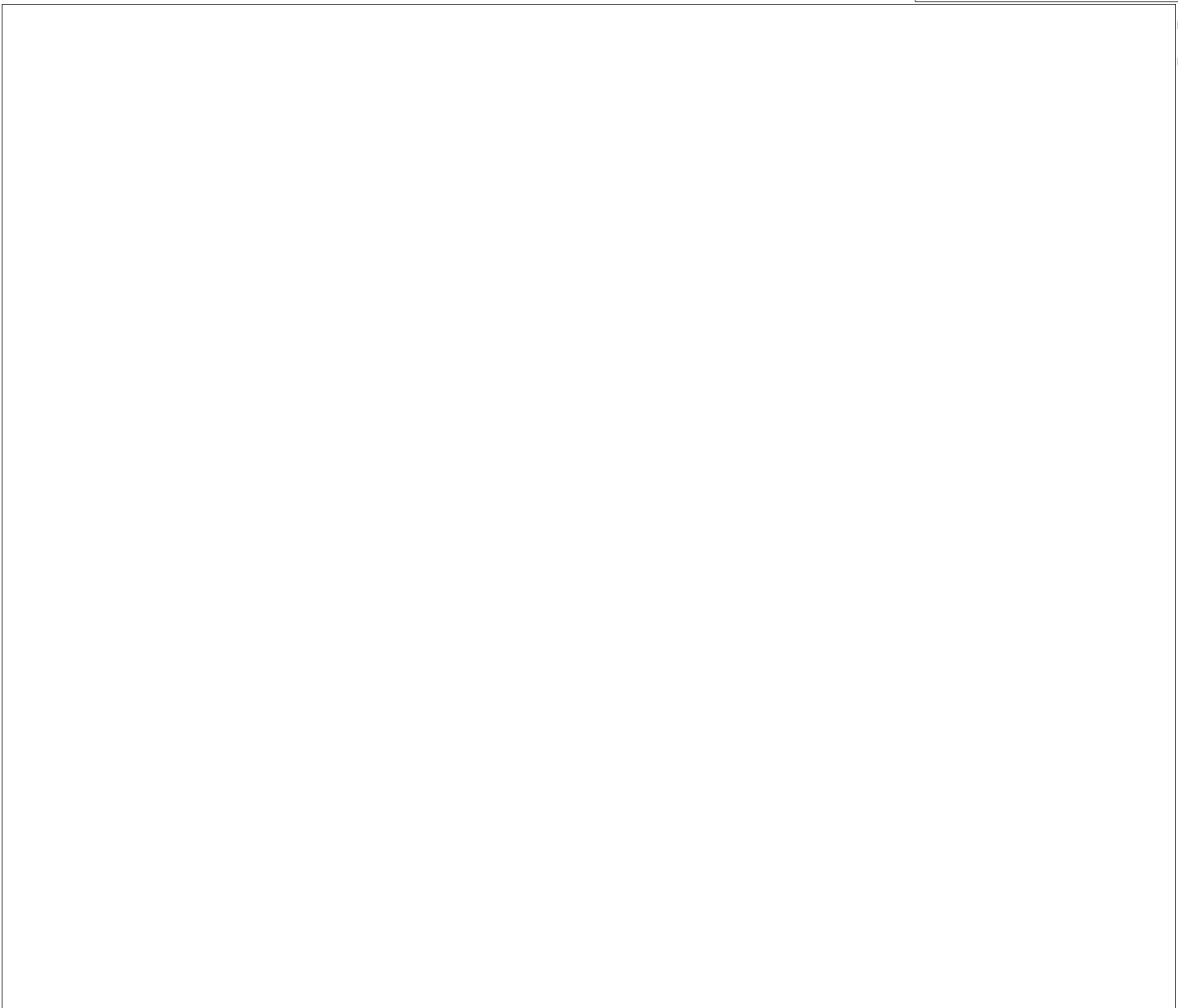
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Reports of Cooperation During Recent Operations

[redacted] paramilitaries provided assistance to the military during two recent large-scale operations against guerrilla strongholds:

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- [redacted] paramilitaries were providing information to the military during an offensive against the FARC in the Yari plains of southern Colombia in September and October.
- [redacted] the 7th Brigade, 12th Brigade, and the 2nd Mobile Brigade—all potential recipients of US aid—were involved in ground operations.
- The operation is scheduled to conclude this month; [redacted]
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[Redacted] paramilitary forces loyal to Carlos Castano moved into Arauca Department as of September to assist the military there, [Redacted]

Possible Complicity of Security Force Members

[Redacted] claim that, at a minimum, Army and antinarcotics police units did nothing to stop the two massacres of civilians that presumably were regarded by paramilitaries as sympathetic to the guerrillas and may have facilitated the arrival and escape of the paramilitaries. [Redacted]

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Mapiripan. In July, members of Carlos Castano's paramilitary group killed between 15 and 30 civilians in Mapiripan, Meta [Redacted] The paramilitaries arrived by chartered planes at the San Jose del Guaviare airport and apparently were not subjected to identification or cargo checks by airport police who control the commercial sector of the airport; the counternarcotics police control the other sector of the airport, [Redacted]

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- [Redacted] that Castano would not have flown forces and weapons into a civilian airport known to have a large police presence if he had not had received prior assurances that they would be allowed to pass through. [Redacted]

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During the paramilitaries' five-day stay in Mapiripan, the commander of a nearby military base—Maj. Hernan Orozco, then acting commander of the Joaquin Paris Battalion—received several reports of a problem in the town, including killings, but offered a variety of excuses, such as not enough troops or transport, to explain why he did not respond. Colombian officials are currently investigating Orozco, Brig. Gen. Jaime Humerto Uscategui—commander of the parent unit, the 7th Brigade—and other officials, including the mayor and other civilians who live in Mapiripan, presumably for complicity in the massacre.³ [Redacted]

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³ Under the recent command changes, Uscategui will soon assume command of the 4th Brigade, which is headquartered in Medellin, Antioquia [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Army helicopters extricated the paramilitaries in the days following the attack, [Redacted]
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Miraflores. Officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [Redacted] paramilitaries killed six civilians in Miraflores, Guaviare, in October and that security forces in the town did nothing to prevent the massacre or to pursue the killers:

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- An ICRC official claims that an unknown number of gunman arrived by air in Miraflores and that the proximity of the airport to the town and military facilities suggests there was "at least cohabitation" between the paramilitaries and the security forces. [Redacted]

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- In addition, a human rights group has alleged that unnamed soldiers facilitated a getaway by air for two of the killers. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] a counternarcotics police company that receives US aid is stationed at Miraflores and that Army units in this area are subordinate to the 7th Brigade. [Redacted]

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Outlook

Prospects for concerted action by the military high command to crack down on paramilitaries—or the officers that cooperate with them—appear dim. Although steps against some egregious human rights abusers such as Lieutenant Colonel Rubio will continue, the presence of others like Major General Ramirez in key positions suggests that achieving results against the guerrillas—rather than rooting out paramilitary links—remains the top priority for the Colombian military. [Redacted]

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Scrutiny by US and other international observers will continue to play a key role in encouraging the military high command to focus on human rights and take steps against violators, but some links—particularly those involving turning a blind eye to paramilitary activities—are longstanding and will not be easily reversed. [Redacted]

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This situation will complicate US efforts to provide aid to military units engaged in critical counternarcotics efforts in southern Colombia. The number of paramilitaries operating in these areas is likely to remain relatively small and their activities sporadic unless and until they are able to gain a foothold there. This limitation, however, suggests that they will continue to seek out links to security forces operating in the areas to facilitate their transit and activities. [Redacted]

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Colombia: Selected Paramilitary-Associated Incidents and Army Disposition

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