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INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS SITUATION REPORT [redacted]

SEPTEMBER 1990

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ITEM 1. PERSPECTIVE--THE ESCOBAR ORGANIZATION: TOUGH CHOICES AHEAD

[redacted]

THE RECENT KILLING OF GUSTAVO DE JESUS GAVIRIA RIVERO, A KEY LIEUTENANT OF PABLO ESCOBAR GAVIRIA, IS THE LATEST MILESTONE IN THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ESCOBAR AND HIS ORGANIZATION. GAVIRIA'S DEATH FOLLOWS THE GOVERNMENT'S KILLING IN MID-JUNE OF JOHN JAIRO ARIAS TASCON, ANOTHER ESCOBAR PRINCIPAL, AND THE CAPTURE A MONTH LATER OF EDGAR ROBERTO ESCOBAR TABORDA, ESCOBAR'S TOP PROPAGANDIST. IN OUR JUDGMENT, THE REMOVAL OF SEVERAL OF ESCOBAR'S TOP LIEUTENANTS HAS CREATED MANAGERIAL AND OPERATIONAL GAPS IN HIS ORGANIZATION THAT LIKELY WILL CONSTRAIN THE ORGANIZATION'S TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES AND INCREASE ITS VULNERABILITY TO COUNTERNARCOTICS PRESSURES. [redacted]

GAVIRIA RIVERO'S DEATH LEAVES A LARGE HOLE IN THE COMMAND AND CONTROL STRUCTURE OF ESCOBAR'S ORGANIZATION. [redacted]

ALTHOUGH THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS HAVE UNDERCUT A NUMBER OF ADVANTAGES ESCOBAR ENJOYED PREVIOUSLY, WE BELIEVE HE STILL HAS A NUMBER OF OPTIONS TO RESPOND TO THE INCREASING PRESSURE ON HIMSELF AND HIS ORGANIZATION. NEVERTHELESS, BOGOTA'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST ESCOBAR HAS REACHED THE POINT AT WHICH MANY OF THE KINGPIN'S OPTIONS COULD SERVE TO UNDERCUT EITHER HIS SECURITY OR HIS ORGANIZATION'S OPERATIONS:

X--SHOULD ESCOBAR ATTEMPT TO FILL THE GAPS IN HIS ORGANIZATION, HE MAY BE FORCED TO RELY ON LESS EXPERIENCED OR LESS CAPABLE TRAFFICKERS, POSSIBLY CREATING FUTURE WEAKNESSES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION AND MAKING IT INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS.

X--IF ESCOBAR CHOOSES TO RESUME ACTIVE CONTROL OF THE ORGANIZATION'S DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES, HIS ORGANIZATION WOULD PROBABLY BE FAR MORE EFFECTIVE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS WOULD LIKELY RESULT IN ESCOBAR'S INCREASED VISIBILITY--HE WOULD LIKELY HAVE TO INCREASE HIS OPERATING AREA, COMMUNICATIONS, AND ACCESSIBILITY TO OTHER TRAFFICKERS--AND HIS RISK TO GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS.

X--HE COULD ATTEMPT TO MATCH THE GOVERNMENT'S CHALLENGE BY

ESCALATING THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE, BUT THIS WOULD PROBABLY COST HIM ADDITIONAL POPULAR SUPPORT AND SERVE TO STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE TO GET HIM AS WELL AS ANY OF HIS LIEUTENANTS WHO MAY BE PERPETRATING VIOLENT ACTS.

X--ESCOBAR COULD ALSO TURN INCREASINGLY TO HIS BUSINESS PARTNERS--FOR EXAMPLE, THE OCHOAS AND LEONARDIS VARGAS VARGAS--TO PICK UP THE SLACK IN HIS COCAINE OPERATIONS SO HE CAN FOCUS ON HIS PERSONAL SECURITY AND WAR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THIS WOULD HELP HIM TRY TO SURVIVE BUT WOULD ALSO REDUCE HIS ORGANIZATION'S STRENGTH AND PROMINENCE IN THE MEDELLIN CARTEL.

X--ESCOBAR MIGHT ALSO FIND THAT TURNING HIMSELF IN TO THE GOVERNMENT IS AN INCREASINGLY REALISTIC OPTION IF IT COULD BE DONE IN EXCHANGE FOR AN AGREEMENT WITH BOGOTA THAT HE NOT BE EXTRADITED TO THE UNITED STATES. ALTHOUGH SURRENDER WOULD OBVIOUSLY MEAN A LOSS OF HIS PERSONAL FREEDOM, IT WOULD ALLOW ESCOBAR TO KEEP HIS ORGANIZATION LARGELY INTACT. [redacted]

REGARDLESS OF HOW THE HUNT FOR ESCOBAR PLAYS OUT, WE BELIEVE THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS THUS FAR HAVE REAFFIRMED THE EFFICACY OF A COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGY DESIGNED TO FOCUS ON THE LEAST EXPENDABLE ELEMENTS OF MAJOR TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS--THE KINGPINS AND THEIR KEY LIEUTENANTS. ALTHOUGH THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOST OPTIONS THAT WE BELIEVE ARE AVAILABLE TO ESCOBAR RANGE FROM INCREASED VULNERABILITY TO INCARCERATION, THEY DO UNDERSCORE THE FACT THAT HE STILL RETAINS A CERTAIN DEGREE OF MANEUVERING ROOM EVEN UNDER SIEGE. AS WE SEE IT, BOGOTA'S IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE IS TO CAPITALIZE ON ANY INCREASED VULNERABILITIES THAT RESULT FROM THE GAME PLAN ESCOBAR CHOOSES IN HIS ATTEMPT TO PREVENT THE DISMANTLEMENT OF HIS ORGANIZATION. [redacted]

ITEM 2. COLOMBIA: THE COUNTERNARCOTICS LEGACY [redacted]

THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S RELIANCE ON EMERGENCY POWERS AND STEPPED-UP MILITARY AND POLICE ACTION DURING THE LAST 12 MONTHS HAS PROVIDED THE NEW ADMINISTRATION OF PRESIDENT CESAR GAVIRIA WITH THE TOOLS TO CONTINUE THE ANTIDRUG STRUGGLE OVER THE SHORT TERM. IN OUR JUDGMENT, HOWEVER, FORMER PRESIDENT BARCO'S FAILURE TO STRENGTHEN CIVILIAN INSTITUTIONS CHARGED WITH COUNTERNARCOTICS RESPONSIBILITIES MAY IN TIME COMPLICATE GAVIRIA'S EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN THE MOMENTUM. [redacted]

IN THE YEAR SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE LUIS CARLOS GALAN ON 18 AUGUST 1989 BY DRUG TRAFFICKERS, BOGOTA HAS SCORED SOME SIGNIFICANT SUCCESSES AGAINST THE COLOMBIAN NARCOTICS INDUSTRY. THESE INCLUDE THE DEATHS OF KINGPIN JOSE GONZALO RODRIGUEZ GACHA AND SOME TOP LIEUTENANTS OF KINGPIN PABLO ESCOBAR, AS WELL AS THE EXTRADITION OF 22 TRAFFICKERS TO THE UNITED STATES AND THE APPREHENSION OF SOME 15 OTHERS. IN ADDITION, SECURITY FORCES HAVE CONFISCATED HUNDREDS OF TRAFFICKER PROPERTIES AND ASSETS--INCLUDING CASH, WEAPONS, AND PARTS OF THEIR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE-- [redacted]

[redacted]

BOGOTA'S FOCUS ON APPREHENDING THE KINGPINS AND THEIR LIEUTENANTS AND DISRUPTING THEIR TRAFFICKING NETWORKS IS A MAJOR DEPARTURE FROM PREVIOUS INTERDICTION-BASED STRATEGIES THAT HAS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT. IN THIS REGARD, WE BELIEVE THAT THE RECENT DEATH OF KEY ESCOBAR LIEUTENANT GUSTAVO DE JESUS GAVIRIA DURING A FIREFIGHT WITH SECURITY FORCES IN MEDELLIN IS A SEVERE BLOW TO THE ESCOBAR ORGANIZATION. [redacted]

SUCH ACTIONS, WHICH HIT THE TRADE WHERE IT CAN LEAST EASILY ABSORB LOSSES, HAVE ENABLED BOGOTA TO KEEP NARCOTICS INTERESTS ON THE DEFENSIVE FOR MOST OF THE PAST YEAR. VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE TOP TRAFFICKERS HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LOWER THEIR PROFILES OR GO UNDERGROUND TO AVOID ARREST OR DEATH. REPORTED SECURITY AND COORDINATION PROBLEMS UP AND DOWN THE TRAFFICKING CHAIN MEANWHILE SUGGEST THAT GOVERNMENT PRESSURE IS HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE NARCOTICS OPERATIONS OF AT LEAST SOME OF COLOMBIA'S DRUG GROUPS. [redacted]

NUMEROUS STATE-OF-SIEGE DECREES ISSUED BY BOGOTA SERVE AS THE LEGAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR THE GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN. EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES--SUCH AS EXTRADITION OF SUSPECTED TRAFFICKERS TO THE UNITED STATES--LARGELY CIRCUMVENT COLOMBIA'S PARALYZED JUDICIARY AND CLEAR THE WAY FOR AGGRESSIVE ACTIONS BY THE SECURITY FORCES, INCLUDING THE CONFISCATION OF TRAFFICKER ASSETS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS RECEIVED CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR ITS EFFORTS FROM THE COLOMBIAN SUPREME COURT, WHICH SO FAR HAS REFUSED TO YIELD TO TRAFFICKER PRESSURE TO NULLIFY THE DECREES, ESPECIALLY EXTRADITION. [redacted]

FLAWS IN THE ANTIDRUG PROGRAM

SUSTAINING THE COUNTERNARCOTICS PROGRAM AS IS MAY NEVERTHELESS BE DIFFICULT FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. DESPITE GOVERNMENT SUCCESSES DURING THE PAST YEAR, THE PROGRAM'S OVERALL IMPACT HAS BEEN LIMITED BY BARCO'S RELUCTANCE TO BROADEN THE CAMPAIGN TO INCLUDE TRAFFICKING GROUPS OUTSIDE OF MEDELLIN, WHICH CONTINUE TO ACCOUNT FOR MUCH OF COLOMBIA'S COCAINE TRADE. ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR THE GAVIRIA ADMINISTRATION STEM FROM FORMER PRESIDENT BARCO'S INABILITY TO BUILD POPULAR AND POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR A PROTRACTED ANTIDRUG EFFORT AND HIS FAILURE TO ADDRESS ESSENTIAL ADMINISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL REFORMS, [redacted]

EQUALLY IMPORTANT, IN OUR JUDGMENT, HAS BEEN THE LACK OF A CORRESPONDING EDUCATIONAL PROCESS THAT EMPHASIZES THE NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT AN ENTRENCHED NARCOTICS INDUSTRY POSES, SUCH AS THE CORRUPTION OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS BY NARCOTICS INTERESTS. PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE MAJORITY OF COLOMBIANS CONTINUE TO VIEW NARCOTICS-RELATED VIOLENCE AS THE GREATER THREAT AND DRUG TRAFFICKING AS A PROBLEM FOR THE WESTERN-CONSUMING COUNTRIES. SUCH PERCEPTIONS UNDERSCORE THE TOLL THAT NARCOTICS-

RELATED VIOLENCE HAS HAD ON THE POPULACE. ACCORDING TO MONTHLY OPINION POLLS, MANY COLOMBIANS BELIEVE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS OF THE FRONTAL ASSAULT AGAINST THE TRAFFICKERS ARE TOO GREAT, AND A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER ADVOCATE PEACE TALKS WITH THE DRUG KINGPINS. [redacted]

A FRACTIOUS LEGISLATURE BADLY DIVIDED OVER HOW TO PURSUE THE DRUG WAR WILL ALSO COMPLICATE GAVIRIA'S EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN THE OFFENSIVE. NEVERTHELESS, THE NEW PRESIDENT IS MORE POLITICALLY ASTUTE THAN HIS PREDECESSOR AND HAS CONCENSUS-BUILDING SKILLS THAT MAY HELP HIM PROMOTE REFORM INITIATIVES IN THE LEGISLATURE AIMED AT CONTROLLING DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE. GAVIRIA, HOWEVER, ENDORSES THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION'S RELIANCE ON NARCOTERRORISM TO JUSTIFY THE CRACKDOWN--A NARROW FOCUS THAT COULD HAMPER THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO BROADEN ANTIDRUG EFFORTS. [redacted]

IN THIS REGARD, THE CAPTURE OR DEATH OF ESCOBAR WOULD PRODUCE ADDITIONAL PUBLIC PRESSURE IN COLOMBIA TO CURTAIL OR REDUCE COUNTERNARCOTICS OPERATIONS. THOSE TAKING SUCH A POSITION WOULD NOTE THAT ESCOBAR'S REMOVAL, FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF RODRIGUEZ GACHA, RIDS THE COUNTRY OF THE TWO MOST VIOLENT TRAFFICKERS AND FULFILLS BOGOTA'S AVOWED GOAL OF BRINGING THEM TO JUSTICE. [redacted]

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