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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Paul Hilburn, Senior Reviewer

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STATE FOR ARA/AND, DRL, EUR/RPM (MFITZPATRICK)  
NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS  
ONDCP FOR JANET CRIST  
JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND NDDS/VAN ULJET  
USIA FOR AR, I/GAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/02

TAGS: PTER, PHUM, PINR, PINS, PGOV, SNAR, CO  
SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES FORM NATIONAL COORDINATING GROUP

1. VIA A COMMUNIQUE SENT TO CARACOL RADIO IN MEDELLIN, COLOMBIAN PARAMILITARY GROUPS ANNOUNCED APRIL 19 THAT THEY WERE FORMING A NATIONAL, UNIFIED COORDINATING GROUP KNOWN AS "AUTODEFENSAS UNIDAS DE COLOMBIA." THE COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN THE PREVIOUS WEEK IN URABA AT A "NATIONAL CONFERENCE" ATTENDED BY 150 PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF CARLOS CASTANO'S "AUTODEFENSAS CAMPESINAS DE CORDOBA Y URABA" AND GROUPS FROM THE EASTERN PLAINS (LLANOS) AND THE MAGDALENA MEDIO REGION. ACCORDING TO THE COMMUNIQUE, PARAMILITARY LEADERS WILL NOT LAY DOWN THEIR WEAPONS UNTIL "BILATERAL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS" TAKE PLACE. IN SPITE OF THE DECISION TO FORM A COORDINATING GROUP, THE STATEMENT SAID THAT PARAMILITARY COMMANDERS WILL RETAIN INDEPENDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE MILITARY ACTIONS. (NOTE: PREVIOUS EFFORTS AT UNITY REPORTEDLY FOUNDERED BECAUSE PARAMILITARIES COULD NOT AGREE TO SUBMIT TO A SINGLE COMMANDER. END NOTE.) THE NEW MOVEMENT DEFINED ITSELF AS AN ORGANIZATION OF ARMED, ANTI-SUBVERSIVE CITIZENS THAT NEITHER THREATENS, NOR DEPENDS ON, THE GOVERNMENT. THE DOCUMENT WAS SIGNED BY CASTANO, CESAR MARIN, SANTANDER LOZADA, JOSE ALFREDO BERRIO AND ANTONIO BOLIVAR OF ACCU; CLODOMIRO AGAMEZ, FOR THE EASTERN PLAINS PARAMILITARIES; AND RAMON ISAZA OF THE MAGDALENA MEDIO.

2. LEADING DAILY "EL TIEMPO" ANALYZED THIS DECISION IN ITS APRIL 22 EDITION, CONCLUDING THAT THE PARAMILITARIES DECIDED TO CREATE A FORMAL JOINT COORDINATING GROUP TO GAIN RECOGNITION AS A POLITICAL FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. THE NEWSPAPER, WHICH INTERVIEWED AN ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT IN THE CONFERENCE, SURMISED THAT PARAMILITARIES HOPE THAT FORMING A UNITED

FRONT MAY INCREASE THEIR CHANCES OF INCLUSION IN ANY EVENTUAL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. BY EMPHASIZING THAT THEY DO NOT "DEPEND ON THE STATE," THE PARAMILITARY GROUP ALSO SENT A CLEAR SIGNAL OF THEIR AUTONOMY FROM THE ARMED FORCES, ACCORDING TO "EL TIEMPO." THE GROUP ALSO DECLARED ITS COMMITMENT TO ADHERING TO INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW, AND "EL TIEMPO" REPORTED THAT SOME PARAMILITARY FACTIONS HAVE EVEN RECEIVED TRAINING FROM THE GOC HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE.

3. PROMINENT COLOMBIAN "VIOLENTOLOGIST" ALFREDO RANGEL EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE "AUTODEFENSAS UNIDAS DE COLOMBIA," TELLING "EL TIEMPO" THIS DEVELOPMENT COULD WORSEN THE ONGOING INTERNAL CONFLICT. IN RANGEL'S OPINION, THE NEW GROUP WAS THE LATEST MANIFESTATION OF THE GROWING, PROBLEMATIC PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFLICT BY CIVILIANS, PROMPTED BY THE GOC'S FAILURE TO GUARANTEE SECURITY IN THE COUNTRY. HE WARNED THAT THIS EXTRA-LEGAL COUNTER-INSURGENCY MOVEMENT VIOLATES HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS AND "CRIMINALIZES THE CIVILIAN POPULATION."

4. (C) COMMENT: THE PARAMILITARIES RESPONDED EAGERLY TO MOD ECHEVERRI'S PEACE PROPOSAL. IN THE WAKE OF THE GUERRILLAS' EMPHATIC PUBLIC REJECTION ANY PEACE TALKS THAT INCLUDED THE PARAMILITARIES, THE LATTER EVIDENTLY DECIDED TO STRENGTHEN THEIR HAND AND JOIN FORCES, AT LEAST ON A NATIONAL, POLITICAL LEVEL. GIVEN THE STRONG, EVEN DICTATORIAL PERSONALITIES INVOLVED, THE NEW PARAMILITARY COORDINATING GROUP MAY NOT REMAIN UNIFIED FOR LONG. THESE LOCAL CAUDILLOS REPRESENT REGIONAL POWER BASES AND SHARE NO COMMON, OVERARCHING IDEOLOGY OTHER THAN A PROFFESSED HATRED OF GUERRILLAS. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THEIR DECISION TO WORK TOGETHER ATTRACTED NATIONAL ATTENTION IS A TESTAMENT TO THE UNDENIABLE STRENGTH OF PARAMILITARISM IN COLOMBIA. FRECHETTE

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