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July 30: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-FARC) rebels released seven police officers in Norte de Santander department. July 31: The National Liberation Army (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional-ELN) announced the release of three political leaders and 10 police officers abducted by the ELN in May. Former congressperson Alfonso Campo Soto was released in Curumani, Cesar department. Also released were Jose Calixto Mejia and Alvaro Jose Soto, who said that in return for their release they would promote a process of regional peace dialogues. President Cesar Gaviria has expressed opposition to the rebels' proposal for a regional peace process, insisting that negotiations be maintained only at the national level. Aug. 2: Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez told reporters four Venezuelan police were killed Aug. 1 by a land mine in Apure state, near the Colombian border. Perez attributed the attack to rebels from the ELN. He said Venezuelan security forces were cooperating with Colombian officials, and that "there is magnificent cooperation between the Venezuelan and Colombian government" on the issue. According to Caracas daily newspaper El Mundo, at least 20 rebels were captured by the Venezuelan army shortly after the blast. Aug. 3: Military sources reported that army troops discovered and destroyed six guerrilla encampments in three regions of the country. Two of the camps, belonging to the ELN, were located near the municipality of Remedios. The remaining four pertained to the FARC, two of which were found near Uribe, Meta department, and Montanota, Caqueta department. Location of the remaining two FARC camps was not revealed. Aug. 8: Presidential peace advisor Horacio Serpa Uribe told reporters there is no significant chance of reactivating the peace process in the near future because rebel groups continue to resort to armed struggle. Serpa Uribe said the government would agree to resume the stalemated negotiations only if the rebels stopped all "sabotage" against civilian targets and demonstrated a commitment to participating in the democratic process. According to Serpa Uribe, there were over 30,000 political deaths during 1991. Serpa Uribe said that two years ago, about 90% of the population supported the peace process, while now less than 50% believe negotiations are worthwhile. In a recorded message broadcast on Radio Caracol, ELN commanders Manuel Perez ("Poliarco") and Nicolas Rodriguez ("Gabino") said the ELN is interested in conducting separate peace negotiations with the government. The statement said that following a year of ineffective joint talks with other members of the Simon Bolivar National Guerrilla Coordinator (Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera Simon Bolivar-CNGSB), the ELN wants to hold direct negotiations on demilitarization and reintegration into civilian life. Perez and Rodriguez insisted that regional dialogues be an integral part of the negotiation process. Gaviria has repeatedly rejected this proposal. Next, they denied the existence of divisions among CNGSB forces. The CNGSB is comprised of the ELN, FARC and a dissident faction of the demobilized Popular Liberation Army (Ejercito Popular de Liberacion-EPL). Finally, the rebel leaders called for a national debate on the escape of Medellin cartel leader Pablo Escobar. The statement called for punishment against those responsible for the escape. They also called on the government to explain why it doesn't pursue the Cali cartel with the same rigor as the Medellin cartel. They added that the ELN is not in any way linked with drug trafficking, and said the group's income comes from "war taxes on large national and international companies." Aug. 13: The Administrative Security Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad-DAS,
secret police) denounced the appearance of rebel-sponsored militias in the poor neighborhoods of southern Bogota. According to DAS director Fernando Britto, the militias have been responsible for waging "social clean-up" violence, including the murder of drug addicts and thieves. He said similar militias have operated in the poor neighborhoods of Medellin for about five years. Serpa Uribe called on the rebels to present their proposals for a resumption of the peace process. He said that since suspension of the negotiations May 4, rebels have participated in 41 ambushes against government troops, 125 acts of sabotage, 146 armed clashes, 45 abductions and the murder of 77 civilians. He said 155 soldiers and 221 rebels have died in the fighting since May 4. Aug. 18: Presidential human rights advisor Jorge Orlando Melo denounced the "systematic abuse of human rights" by the country's three active rebel groups and the paramilitary organizations that have been organized to confront them. Aug. 19: Serpa Uribe told reporters he is "skeptical" about the resumption of peace talks October 31 as scheduled. Serpa Uribe again rejected the possibility of a regional dialogue process involving the government, civil society and rebel organizations. However, he expressed support for the option of separate government negotiations with the different rebel groups. (Sources: Chinese news service Xinhua, 08/03/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 08/08/92; Spanish news service EFE, 08/01/92, 08/03/92, 08/13/92; Agence France-Presse, 07/31/92, 08/02/92, 08/08/92, 08/13/92, 08/18-19/92)