9-28-1989

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Colombia: Report On Recent Rebel Activities

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Thursday, September 28, 1989

Sept. 7: Leaders of the M-19 rebel group condemned the murders of three of its members on Sept. 6, apparently by state security agents. After stating that peace talks with the government had been jeopardized by escalating violence against M-19 members, the leaders requested that the government demonstrate it could guarantee the safety of rebels who decide to disarm. Special presidential envoy Rafael Pardo Rueda and Deputy Interior Minister Jose Noe Rios held peace talks with representatives of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the largest of Colombia's six rebel groups, in Meta department. National Liberation Army (ELN) commandos shot and wounded five soldiers and three civilians taking an oil tanker up the Cauca River to the Caribbean port of Cartagena. Sept. 12: The Colombian media reported that the M-19 and the government had concluded a truce, which would be sent to the national congress for approval within two weeks. In northern Cesar department, army troops clashed with FARC guerrillas. According to Col. Tobias Duran Quintanilla, regional military commander, 12 rebels were killed. He provided no details of the battle. Sept. 13: In a guerrilla-stronghold located in Cauca department, police prevented 7,000 Indians from marching to Popayan, the regional capital. According to the RCN radio network, Guanbiano and Paeces Indians announced they were on a hunger strike and took over a highway to Popayan to protest the recent killings of two Indian activists. In the clash with police, two Indians were wounded. Sept. 18: The Defense Ministry reported that two policemen and a guerrilla were killed when rebels ambushed a police patrol Sept. 17 near the town of Bugalagrande, 170 miles west of Bogota. Next, the army reported that three guerrillas were killed in a gun battle with police in Antioquia department. Sept. 26: In an evening broadcast, President Virgilio Barco announced that the government had concluded a peace agreement with the M-19 guerrilla movement after six months of negotiations. The treaty includes pardons for M-19 members, rebel disarmament, and formation of a political party by former guerrillas. The Colombian national congress must approve the accord. M-19 members are estimated at about 2,000. The rebel group was formed in 1970 by dissidents who claimed that year's presidential election was fraudulent. The Colombian and US governments have claimed that the drug rings and an estimated 10,000 guerrillas (the M-19, FARC, ELN, and other rebel groups) work together, with the drug traffickers providing money to the rebels in exchange for armed protection. Reports of such collusion from other sources have been virtually non-existent. Independent investigators from Colombia and other countries have pointed out that rebels, leftists and progressives in general have been assassinated in large numbers in recent years by killers trained and/or hired by the drug mafia, sometimes with cooperation by the military and rightist death squads. Next, independent investigators have reported over the years that guerrillas have provided protection against the traffickers' private armies for poor farmers who grow coca. (Basic data from Xinhua, 09/08/89; AFP, 09/10/89; Notimex, 09/12/89; AP, 09/13/89, 09/18/89, 09/26/89)

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