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Colombian Rebel Activities & Related Developments: 
Summary, April 1 - May 7

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April 1: According to a Defense Ministry communique, a total of 703 Colombians died as a result of rebel actions in the first quarter of 1991. The death toll includes 312 rebels, 207 government troops and police agents, and 184 civilians. In the January-March period, 307 soldiers and police, and 231 civilians were wounded, and 455 rebels captured by government troops. Next, 74 soldiers and police agents, and 88 civilians were disappeared or abducted by rebels. In Santander department, two police agents were killed and two wounded in a clash with rebels pertaining to the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). The police were attempting to rescue businessperson Rodolfo Tirado, who was kidnapped by rebels while passing through the village of Buenavista, near Velez municipality. April 3: Colombian army sources reported that an estimated 400 FARC rebels were executed and buried in a common grave in La Uribe municipality, Meta department. The burial site was discovered by the 7th army brigade in the mountains of the Gaucha area, near the FARC's long-time headquarters, known as "Casa Verde." [On Dec. 9 last year, army troops occupied and bombed the hideout, resulting in a nationwide retaliation campaign by the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The Simon Bolivar National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNG) is comprised of the FARC and the ELN. The rebel offensive escalated in early February, with the opening of Colombia's Constituent Assembly.] According to Col. Misael Plata, commander of a 7th brigade mobile unit, the nearly 400 men and women were shot to death by rebel counterparts for having violated FARC rules. Officials did not rule out the possibility that some of the bodies were those of rebels lethally wounded in combat, or even those of soldiers. Col. Plata asserted that the FARC high command operated a concentration camp at La Gaucha, where rebels were put on trial for stealing, falling asleep on guard duty and other violations, and later executed. According to Plata, candidates for execution were brought in from throughout the country lured by false promises of possible promotion within FARC ranks. [In 1985, common graves were found in Tacueyo, Cauca department, where Javier Delgado, head of a dissident group within the FARC, ordered the execution of more than 120 rebels suspected of being military informants.] April 4: According to a communique by the 11th army brigade, six FARC rebels were killed in fighting with troops in Chigordo municipality, near Uraba. The government estimates that rebel sabotage has cost the Colombian economy about $500 million since Jan. 1. April 5: For the third time in less than a week, guerrillas bombed the Apiaybogota gas pipeline in Cundinamarca department. Defense Minister Oscar Botero Restrepo said the sabotage was performed by FARC rebels. April 6: Jairo Alfredo Urbina, regional chief of the Patriotic Union (Union Patriotica) political party, was shot to death at his home in Valledupar, Cesar department. Witnesses said a youth burst into the house, shot Urbina, and fled without saying a word. Seventy rebels forced a bus driver to carry them to a mining site in Purace, Cauca department, where they seized 23 cases of dynamite and 66,700 detonator caps. According to Andres Restrepo, president of the state-run oil company ECOPETROL, rebels dynamited five crude oil supply lines linked to the Barrancabermeja refinery complex. The explosions caused an oil spill, estimated at about 6,000 barrels, and a forest fire. In addition, said Restrepo, a gas pipeline was shut down, result of rebel sabotage. The oil company executive said that since Jan. 1, rebel...
sabotage incidents perpetrated against the nation's oil infrastructure number nearly 70. Strikes by oil workers and rebel sabotage have caused $139 million in losses, and forced ECOPETROL to increase gasoline imports from 28,000 to 34,000 barrels per day to meet domestic consumption requirements. At least six municipalities in the Uraba region were affected by a power blackout, attributed to rebel sabotage of electricity towers. April 7: The CNG described the reports by military officers on common grave sites in La Uribe municipality as a "provocation" aimed at delaying peace negotiations. ECOPETROL spokespersons told reporters that rebels dynamited a propane gas pipeline near the Barrancabermeja refining complex. One rebel was killed and a police agent was wounded when rebels attacked a police patrol near Barrancabermeja. April 8: In a statement, the FARC said the attacks on the Barrancabermeja oil complex was aimed at pressuring the government into accepting demands of the ECOPETROL employee union. In a communiqué sent to several local media outlets, the FARC high command denied any involvement in the execution of 400 rebels found during the previous week in 40 common graves in Meta department. The FARC also suggested that reports on the grave sites were fabrications, or that the military intelligence service was attempting to lay the blame on the rebels for an atrocity committed by soldiers or paramilitary thugs. April 10: Top FARC leaders were charged with "collective homicide" by Col. Misael Plata, commander of one of the military units which discovered a common grave containing the remains of 400 persons. Military sources reported plans to launch a campaign against rebels and organized crime with the use of 60 helicopters, 12 planes, 44 new intelligence units and two mobile brigades. The offensive is to be financed via a special "war tax," expected to bring in 58 billion pesos (about $96.6 million) in revenues by year-end. The army and police are to receive about 70% of the extra funding, while the remainder is earmarked for the navy, air force, and security administration department (DAS). April 15: Presidential peace adviser Jesus Antonio Bejarano told reporters that President Cesar Gaviria's administration maintains an "open door" policy regarding negotiations with the CNG. April 20: Police reported that unidentified gunmen shot and killed seven members of the same family on Friday night near the town of Trinidad, Casanare department. Rebels are active in the area. The killings were characteristic of rightist death squads, who target peasants suspected of supporting rebels. Guerrillas dynamited electricity pylons in northern Colombia, causing a 30% reduction in power supplied to towns on the Atlantic coast. According to a statement by ECOPETROL, rebels dynamited an oil pipeline near Barrancabermeja. The attack did not cause an oil spill, since the pipeline had been shut down after rebel sabotage the previous Wednesday. Government officials report total economic damages from rebel sabotage since Jan. 1 at $800 million. The CNG has promised to suspend the sabotage campaign as soon as peace talks are opened with government representatives. As of April 20, the two sides had not yet agreed on a site for the negotiations. April 22: At the Bogota international airport, Argentine Adolfo Perez Esquivel Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1980, told reporters that he would act as a mediator between the Colombian government and the CNG in peace talks if requested to do so by both sides. He said he has not received any such proposals. Army spokespersons said that FARC rebels executed Liberal Party member Afranio Vacca Caravallo, described as a leader of the village of Chigorodo, located 306 km. north of Medellin. April 23: The local media reported that seven rebels were killed in weekend clashes with government troops in Santander and Antioquia departments. April 26: Presidential peace adviser Jesus Antonio Bejarano noted that paramilitary and vigilante groups are multiplying. Armed forces chief Gen. Luis Rocca told reporters that since Jan. 1, 245 soldiers and 133 police agents have been killed in clashes with rebels and other confrontations with criminals. A commission comprised of Colombian and Venezuelan government officials discussed security measures that could be adopted to prevent further kidnappings of livestock growers in the border
region. Thus far in April, 13 ranchers in the area were abducted. Two police agents were wounded during a rebel attack in the town of La Victoria, Santander department. In Tolima department, rebels downed an electricity tower. Government officials in Bogota announced the imminent release of 300 political prisoners, in compliance with a Jan. 22 presidential decree. The decree requests that the courts release all members of rebel organizations which have disarmed, and reached peace agreements with the government. Nine former rebels of the People’s Liberation Army (EPL), who were incarcerated in Bogota, have already been set free. April 28: ELN rebels occupied the town of Surata, Santander department, and killed one police agent, and wounding six others. Two members of the local police force were reported missing, and eight were kidnapped along with the town's mayor. May 1: According to a report by Venpres, the government in Caracas has granted political asylum to three Colombian rebel leaders who sought refuge at the Venezuelan embassy in Bogota on April 30. Venezuelan officials have safe passage for the three from Bogota to Caracas. May 2: After meeting with Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, the three Colombian rebels granted political asylum told reporters that because they were now political refugees, they could not participate in peace negotiations with the Colombian government. The three said preliminary talks, if not subsequent negotiations, between the CNG and the government should take place in Colombia. May 4: According to Gen. Hugo Tovar, commander of the army’s 2nd brigade, 50 rebels plan to surrender to authorities within the next 24 hours, provided they receive guarantees of personal safety, and that journalists are present at the site. During the past week, the CNG announced its refusal to participate in opening direct peace talks with government representatives because the preliminary meetings would not take place in Bogota. At least 12 soldiers and eight rebels were killed in an attack by ELN rebels on a military post in Arauquita, Arauca department, located near the Venezuelan border. May 5: The Colombian government submitted a list of 16 possible sites for peace talks with the CNG to the three rebel leaders who received political asylum in Venezuela. May 6: In a communique, CNG commanders announced a decision to meet with government representatives in Cravo Norte, Arauca department, located near the Venezuelan border. The statement did not specify when the talks would begin. The rebel commanders said the CNG delegation will consist of the three leaders granted political asylum in Venezuela. Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez was scheduled to arrive in Bogota May 7 for a two-day official visit. Both the government and the rebels have requested that Perez serve as mediator in preliminary talks. In a statement delivered to Spanish news agency EFE, the CNG said that principal proposals in talks with government representatives are demilitarization of Colombian society, reorganization of the armed forces to serve democracy and national sovereignty, and prosecution of all military personnel involved in massacres, disappearances and cases of torture. May 7: A Constituent Assembly delegation will attend the preliminary talks in the capacity of observer. Police reported that seven journalists were kidnapped by ELN rebels early Tuesday in Cartagena and Monteria. The reporters were taken a rebel camp, where the guerrillas informed them of numerous human rights violations perpetrated by the armed forces. In a statement, the ELN said the journalists would be released within the next few days. [Basic data from AP, 04/01/91, 04/05/91, 04/08/91, 04/20/91, 05/07/91; Xinhua, 04/03/91, 04/05/91, 04/10/91, 05/01/91; AFP, 04/04/91, 04/06/91, 04/07/91, 04/28/91, 05/03-07/91; EFE, 04/01/91, 04/04/91, 04/06/91, 04/07/91, 04/08/91, 04/10/91, 04/15/91, 04/22/91, 05/04/91, 05/06/91; Inter Press Service, 04/26/91, 05/02/91; Notimex, 04/30/91; Prensa Latina (Cuba), 04/26/91]