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Colombia: Highlights Of Political Violence & Government- Rebel Peace Talk Initiative, July 3 - August 17

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July 3: According to a statement released by the state-run oil company Ecopetrol, the 748-km. Cano Limon pipeline was shut down, result of a rebel dynamite attack. The pipeline, which carries about 230,000 barrels of crude per day, runs from oilfields in Santander department near the Venezuelan border to the Caribbean port of Covenas. Since June 28, rebel attacks damaged an electricity generation plant, two petroleum storage facilities, five tanker trucks, and several smaller pipelines. Damage is estimated at \$2 million. Officials said most of the sabotage incidents were likely the work of the National Liberation Army (ELN). The rebel umbrella organization, Simon Bolivar National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNGSB), is comprised of the ELN, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), and a dissident faction of the recently demobilized Popular Liberation Army (EPL). Power black-outs took place in seven departments in northern Colombia, result of rebel attacks on electricity pylons. Fighting over the previous four days left a total of 25 dead, including rebels and soldiers. July 4: Police reported that about 80 rebels shot and killed a municipal judge during an attack on the town of Jerico, located 200 km. northeast of Bogota. For the third time since June 28, rebels dynamited the Cano Limon, resulting in an 7,000 barrel oil spill. Rebels also dynamited three electricity towers and two bridges in northern Colombia. Simultaneous with promulgation of the nation's new political constitution, President Cesar Gaviria lifted the state of emergency which had been in effect for seven years. July 5: Rebels blew up a government radar installation in the Maco mountains near the port of Barranquilla, 1000 km. north of Bogota. Colombian civil aeronautics officials reported that the attack hampered air traffic control operations for commercial flights in northern Colombia and destroyed systems used for tracking private drug planes. In Caracas, Venezuela, CNGSB spokesperson Miguel Suarez applauded the government's decision to lift the state of emergency, adding that the move improves possibilities for reaching a cease-fire agreement during the next round of peace talks, scheduled for July 15 in Caracas. Suarez said the rebels are interested in reaching an agreement as soon as possible in order to facilitate their participation in the Oct. 27 congressional elections. July 6: In Caracas, rebel spokesperson Alfonso Cano declared said the CNGSB may be forced to postpone the upcoming peace talks because army operations have prevented the return from Venezuela of rebel delegates who participated in a previous round of talks which ended June 25. According to Cano, the delegates need to discuss results of the previous round with colleagues in Colombia, but have been unable to return because the army had militarized the airstrip selected for the rebel leaders' use. July 10: Police reported that in the wake of rebel dynamite attacks on 10 electricity towers, half of Colombia suffered power blackouts. Banana exports from Antioquia department have declined by 40%, result of the impact of power outages on packing plant operations. July 11: Rebels bombed a runway at the main airport in Cartagena, halting service to and from Colombia's busiest tourism center. July 13: Rebels destroyed a section of the Transandino petroleum pipeline, which carries crude oil from Orito, Potumayo department (located near the Ecuadoran border), to the Pacific port of Tumaco. Heavy fighting near Chipaque and Caqueza, 60 km. east of Bogota, left some 20 people dead, including rebels, government troops and civilians. Several vehicles were burned and segments of the local highway were mined by the rebels.

July 22: Military sources reported that eight rebels were killed in clashes with police and army units in northwestern Colombia. July 23: Following a pledge by government officials to suspend military actions for 72 hours, the 11-member CNGSB delegation returned to Colombia after a stay of nearly two months in Caracas. The next round of talks between the government and rebels is scheduled to begin Aug. 26 in Caracas. July 24: The CNGSB announced temporary suspension of its economic sabotage campaign directed at electricity installations on the Atlantic coast. In the first half of the year, damage to the electricity grid in the coastal region is estimated at 18 billion pesos. July 29: Heavily armed gunmen opened fire at the Las Brisas beach, killing 15 civilians and wounding another 13. Las Brisas is located near the highway which links Cali and Jamundi. In separate isolated incidents, another 10 people were killed in Cali and other parts of Valle del Cauca department. Police said preliminary information indicated that the above incidents were related to rivalry between the Cali and Medellin drug mafia organizations. Military officials reported that three rebels from the CNGSB had been killed in clashes with the army, and two important rebel base camps had been discovered and dismantled. The body of a school teacher who had disappeared six days earlier was discovered in San Rafael, northeastern Antioquia department. Police spokespersons said the corpse was discovered less than one kilometer from the school where the teacher worked. Since Jan. 1, 23 teachers employed in Antioquia have been killed. July 30: ELN rebels released three French technicians kidnapped in January. The three were employed by a French- Argentine consortium engaged in construction of an oil pipeline in northwestern Antioquia province. Aug. 6: About 80 rebels occupied a police station in Amalfi (northeastern Antioquia) after two hours of fighting with the 12 police officers on duty. One rebel and one civilian were killed during the fighting. In a separate incident, two rebels were killed and one injured during fighting with soldiers in Yondo, eastern Antioquia department. Aug. 10: Fifteen rebels, six soldiers and two police officers were killed in fighting along the border between Huila and Caqueta departments, 450 km. from Bogota. In a separate incident, violent clashes near Bruselas in Huila department caused five rebel casualties. Aug. 12: The FARC asked the Colombian government to advance the date for the next round of peace talks to Aug. 16. Government spokespersons announced that the nation's 70,000-member police force will be expanded by an additional 5,700 officers in order to counter the rising incidence of rebel operations. Bombs exploded at five bank buildings in Medellin. There were no reports of injuries, but police reported extensive material damage. Unconfirmed reports linked the bombings to the CNGSB. President Cesar Gaviria signed a decree authorizing the government to grant pardons or amnesty to former members of three rebel groups which demobilized earlier this year after signing peace accords with the authorities. The decree covers political crimes including rebellion, sedition and conspiracy committed prior to July 4 by former members of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), and the indigenous group Quintin Lame. Aug. 13: ELN rebels kidnapped three police officers who were guarding an armored vehicle carrying about \$8,000. According to the police, 15 rebels stopped the vehicle on the highway which links Ocana and El Carmen, about 600 km. north of Bogota. The rebels fled with the money and the three officers. The fate of a fourth police officer was unknown. Interior Minister Humberto de la Calle described the CNGSB's recent attacks and "ideological manifestations" as provocative. He was referring to a statement by rebel leader Manuel Marulanda ("Tirofijo") in a letter to the new executive committee of the Colombian Communist Party, in which he said, "Guerrilla warfare is still viable and power through armed struggle is within our grasp." Military officials blamed the CNGSB for weekend attacks in southeastern Huila and Caqueta departments resulting in the deaths of 25 people, including 14 soldiers and 11 rebels. Despite rebel activities, said de la Calle, "the government maintains its promise to attend the third round of negotiations in Caracas." Aug. 14:

Interior Minister de la Calle, Finance Minister Rudolf Hommes, and Defense Minister Gen. Oscar Botero Restrepo announced government approval of new taxes to compensate for damage to oil installations, electricity grid components and transportation infrastructure caused by rebel sabotage since January this year. The new revenue is to be channeled into financing repairs and replacement costs, and an increase in police and military protection of 212 "strategic" sites. Military officers are expected to train 1,762 specialists, and establish 44 intelligence networks. Hommes said a "war tax" introduced last year for oil, coal, gas and nickel companies, will be expanded. In 1992, electricity consumption taxes are to be introduced throughout the country, and highway tolls increased. Next, increased customs fees are earmarked for modernization and repairs of radar and communications equipment. Aug. 16: At dawn, about 200 rebels attacked Santa Rosa district of Simiti municipality, located in Bolivar department (northern Colombia). In 12 hours of fighting with 35 police officers, a minimum of 20 people were killed, and four wounded. According to a report by the Agence France-Presse, the dead included at least 15 rebels, three police officers and two civilians. Several buildings, including police headquarters and the telephone office, were destroyed in the fighting. Aug. 17: Interior Minister de la Calle announced that a five-member independent commission will act in an advisory capacity during the next round of peace talks scheduled for Aug. 26 in Caracas. The participation of non-governmental representatives in the negotiations was requested by the CNGSB, although the minister said creation of the commission was a government initiative and not a response to rebel demands. According to de la Calle, the commission will not have direct contact with the CNGSB. (Basic data from Notimex, 07/10/91; AP, 07/03/91, 07/11/91; Inter Press Service, 08/06/91, 08/13/91; Deutsche Press Agentur, 08/12/91; Xinhua, 07/25/91, 07/29/91, 08/15/91; EFE, 07/03/91, 07/23/91, 07/29/91, 08/12/91, 08/13/91, 08/14/91, 08/16/91; AFP, 07/03-06/91, 07/13/91, 07/23/91, 07/30/91, 08/10/91, 08/14/91, 08/16/91, 08/17/91)

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