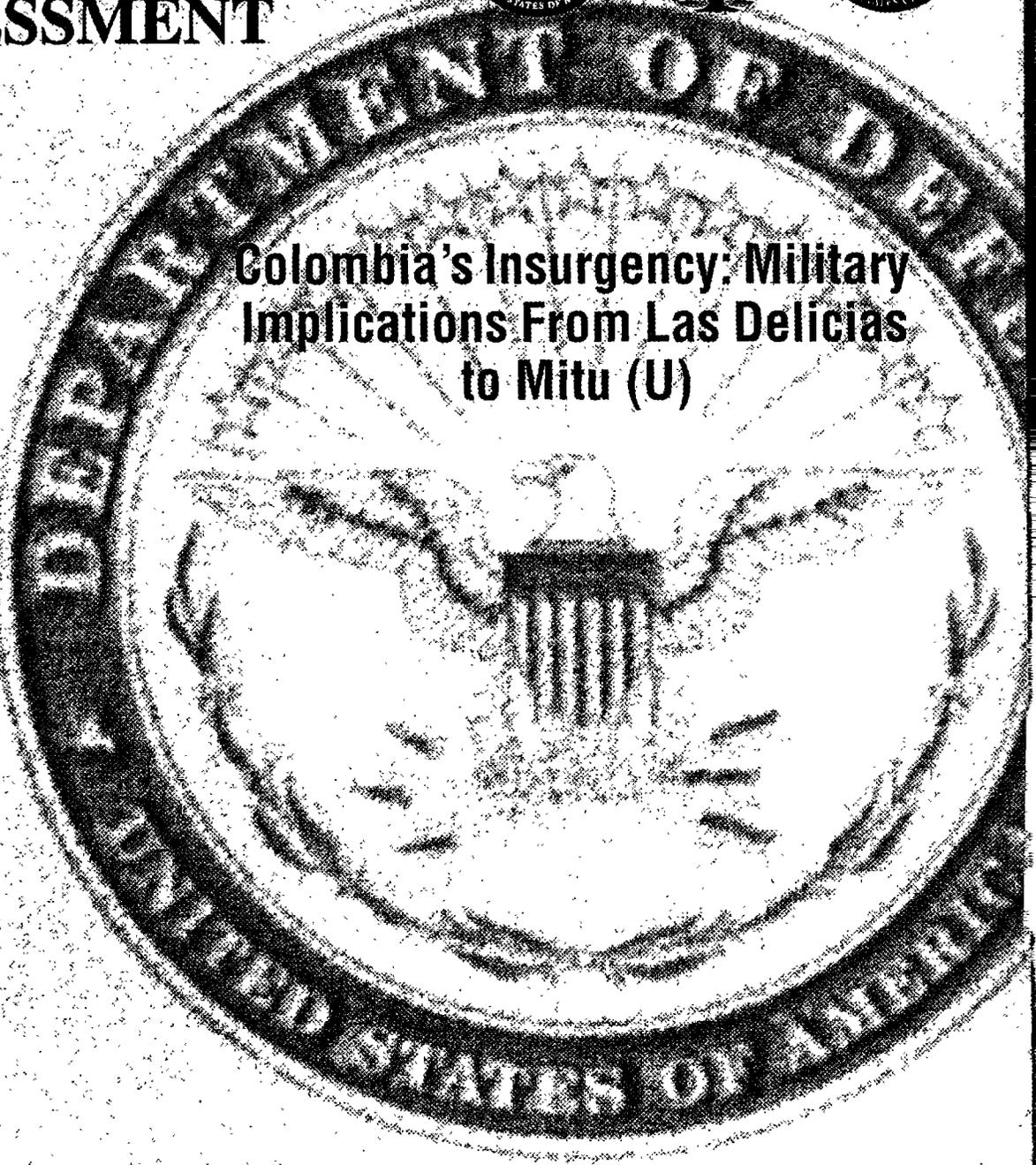


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February 1999
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DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT



Colombia's Insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu (U)

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Defense Intelligence Assessment

Colombia's Insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu (U)

Information Cutoff Date: 21 January 1999

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Prepared by:

(b)(3):10 USC 424

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DI-1584-10-99

Colombia's Insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu (U)

Key Judgments

~~(S)~~ The Las Delicias engagement in 1996 presaged the growing power of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Its leaders now can command and control up to 1,200-man formations for limited operations and can clandestinely maneuver, mass, logistically sustain forces, and attack with massed indirect fires.

~~(S)~~ The guerrillas have the capability to attack and overrun a major installation, [redacted]

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

~~(S)~~ The FARC is broadening its combat ranks and is operating in larger combat formations, massing multiple *fronts*, columns, and mobile columns on the battle field for conventional positional operations.

~~(S)~~ [redacted]

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

~~(S)~~ [redacted]

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

~~(S)~~ [redacted]

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

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Colombia's Insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu (U)

Foreword

(U) [Redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c)

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Colombia's Insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu (U)

An Operational Point of Departure

(S) The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) attack against the Colombian military garrison at Las Delicias in August 1996 was the opening engagement of an improving insurgent campaign that is challenging state security forces for control of large portions of Colombia. The Las Delicias engagement presaged the growing power of the FARC, which now can command and control up to 1,200-man formations

for limited operations.

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) The November 1998 attack against Mitu, in Vaupes Department, was the first successful seizure of a departmental capital. This almost-uninterrupted string of victories has strategic consequences: exhausting

A Maoist Insurgency of Prolonged Struggle

(S) The FARC generally is pursuing a Maoist-style insurgency. The FARC's agrarian, peasant-based revolutionary movement, if oriented on a multiphase prolonged guerrilla war, would progress from evasive guerrilla war to a more conventional "war of movement." A war of movement phase describes a level of guerrilla military capability, where they have perfected their organizations, forces, tactics, staffs, fire support, logistics, and intelligence to a level that allows them to conduct successful conventional operations against state forces. A Maoist insurgency ultimately moves from its rural base to eventually isolate state-controlled urban centers.

(b)(1), 1.4 (a), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) Colombian military and political analysts are saying openly, and perhaps prematurely, that the FARC already has entered a "war of movement" phase. Currently, the FARC is consolidating, tactical victory by tactical victory, its military and political position in the Southeast of Colombia. Whether the FARC ever initiates urban insurrection will determine if it has national ambitions to reorder society or has more limited regional political goals. With regional power and autonomy, it still will be in a position to leverage national political influence.

remaining Colombian national will, bringing the government to the peace table, and shaping the contours of future peace negotiations.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

It not only would be the first loss and defeat of a major military garrison, but each of these garrisons is key to the downrange sustainment and reinforcement of other smaller detachments and outposts, like Puerto Inirido or Leticia, both on the border. These garrisons also are key to counterdrug efforts in Southern Colombia.

Guerrilla Organization

(S) The FARC guerrilla *front* structure remains basically unchanged since it was first established in 1978 at the FARC's 6th Guerrilla Conference. A *front* is geographically oriented and responsible for its own sustainment and funding. With about 150 members, a *front* is organized into two or more columns. Each column has two or more companies; companies are subdivided into sections and sections into squads. *Front* survival is dependent on a locally exploitable economy, such as oil, minerals, agriculture, cocaine, or opium. Bank robbing and kidnaping also supplement its financing. *Fronts* function as cadre structures that develop and raise combat formations, organize financial sustainment, and maintain population control in respective areas.

(S) Population-control activities consist of keeping accurate census data, conducting propaganda displays — such as holding “peoples’ court” and functioning as a shadow judicial body — supporting and organizing protest marches, maintaining military and economic cache sites, and recruiting. FARC expansion is dependent on economic sustainment. For example, the FARC's exploitation of the drug economy and security network creates a synergy that helps promote colonization of uninhabited areas for cocaine farming. This, in turn, expands the exploitable market and political base. As cadre structures, *fronts* are designed to expand, and once the population base, recruitment density, and economic base reach a self-sustaining point, new *fronts* are spun off and organized.

Strategic Vision

(S) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S/NF) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S/NF) Increased joint operations also were envisioned between all guerrilla groups and large-scale economic sabotage against communication and power grids, as well as the transportation networks.

Operational Shift

(S) (b)(1),(b)(3):10 USC 424,1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S/NF) Military actions under the Bolivarian Campaign strategy were designed to place the military on the defensive and lure Army units from their major operating bases so that they cannot be reinforced easily or conduct simultaneous multiple actions that fix Army forces.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) In June 1998, FARC commander Manuel Marulanda, aka "Tirofijo," publicly announced the "Bolivarian Movement for New Colombia." According to Tirofijo, "to move further...we need more convergence, rebellion, and people's insubordination." This "movement" reportedly is a clandestine political one, designed to infiltrate institutions, community associations, and labor and nongovernmental organizations.

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Improved Guerrilla Military Capabilities

Maneuver Forces — Mobile Columns

(S) The FARC — as well as the National Liberation Army (ELN) — is broadening its combat ranks and operating in larger combat formations, massing multiple *fronts*, columns, and mobile columns on the battlefield for conventional positional operations. Its activities have progressed from merely small hit-and-run guerrilla-style attacks to sophisticated operations using intelligence, maneuver, indirect fire, and command and control of multiple units that mass on the target.

(S) *Fronts* are grouped under a command-and-control structure known as a bloc, which has the important role of raising and sustaining purely offensive combat formations known as mobile columns: This organization, which consists of 100-200 veteran guerrillas, is not geographically oriented; it is enemy oriented. Since their primary mission is to attack, these formations consume resources; they do not produce assets as typical *fronts* are required to do. They also do not have the political or self-sustainment missions that other *fronts* require. Incorrectly assumed to be merely new *front* structures or special escorts when first identified in the early 1990s, the mobile columns are the nucleus around which major guerrilla combat formations have been task organized for operations.

(S) A mobile column with other *front* detachments formed the base of the forces that overran Las Delicias in November 1996. The "Teofilo Forero" mobile column was linked to the defeat of the 52d Counter guerrilla Battalion at El Billar in March 1998.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

... With Fire Support, Good Logistics, and Intelligence

(S) This latest attack at Mitu and the battle of El Billar in March 1998 show that the guerrillas have at least the minimum capability needed to defeat isolated fixed installations or battalion-size units in open field. The Teofilo Forero mobile column demonstrated a combat capability at El Billar that the FARC did not have 2 years ago. That column tracked and maneuvered to attack the 52d Counter guerrilla Battalion in open combat. This illustrates a major deterioration in the tactical situation for the Colombian Army — one that cannot be measured simply by comparing the estimated numbers of guerrilla fighters to a COLAR organization chart.

(b)(1), 1.4 (a), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) A new ability to use massed indirect fires, first demonstrated at Miraflores in August, also enhances the guerrilla's military capabilities.

(b)(1), 1.4 (a), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(b)(1), 1.4 (a), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

Table 1
The Blood Trail

Battle	Date	Number Lost
Narino Engagement	April 1996	31 Killed in Action (KIA)
Las Delicias	August 1996	27 KIA, 60 Prisoners of War (POW)/Missing in Action (MIA)
La Carpa Ambush	October 1996	26 KIA
Choco Engagement	January 1997	3 KIA, 10 POW/MIAs
San Juanito Engagement	February 1997	18 KIA
Mi-17/HIP Shootdown	July 1997 ¹	22 KIA
Mt Patascoy Attack	December 1997	10 KIA, 18 POW/MIAs
El Billar Battle	March 1998	62 KIA, 22 MIA, 27 POW/MIAs
La Uribe	August 1998 ²	30 KIA, 31 Wounded in Action (WIA), 7 POW/MIAs
Miraflores Attack	August 1998	14 KIA, 26 WIA, 132 POW/MIAs
Pavarando Engagement	August 1998	9 KIA, 9 WIA, 20 POW/MIAs
Rio Sucio	August 1998	41 KIA
Mitu	November 1998	32 KIA, 30 WIA, 68 POW/MIAs

¹ The guerrillas bombed the Cano-Limon pipeline to lure and attack the reacting force.

² The August offensive included nationwide attacks in more than half of Colombia's 32 departments with ELN units participating as well. Thirteen assaults occurred in the offensive against small military or police outposts, guerrillas destroyed six military and seven police outposts

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(S) The guerrillas' demonstrated ability to mass forces and logistically distribute fabricated mortar and rifle grenade munitions for operations throughout the country indicates a sound and well-developed network. With their growing economic capabilities, they seemingly have a munitions factory with a national distribution network for their fabricated mortars and rifle grenades, or a regional production capability.

(S) Guerrilla tactical intelligence appears to be excellent as well, deftly identifying vulnerable units for attack. They conduct thorough prestrike reconnaissance and know the numbers and positions of government troops in their target, as well as the reinforcements available and time required to respond.

Operational Reserve

(S)

(b)(1), 1.4 (a), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

¹ (S) Analysis of 1996 documents for a single *front*, the 15th, which operates in the Caguan region of Caqueta Department, indicated upwards of 350 militia members supporting that *front* in this sparsely populated region of Colombia. This equated to roughly three militia members per full-time guerrilla combatant. The implication, difficult to verify, is that in more densely populated regions with high FARC influence, militia ratios may be higher. Therefore, COLAR estimates of FARC militia strength may be underestimated in some regions of the country.

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) (b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) (b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Relative Strengths of Colombia's Military and the Guerrilla Threat

(S) A simple analysis of an organizational chart comparing Colombian military strength to guerrilla strength

FARC Communications

(S/NF) The amounts of captured COLAR equipment means Colombia's guerrillas have much of the same communications inventory as the military. Historical reporting indicates they have the following capabilities:

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

can lead to faulty conclusions. Although Colombia's combined military and police security forces equal about 240,000 compared with 11,000 to 17,000 full-time guerrillas, about a 15:1 ratio, that is neither how Colombia's security forces nor the guerrillas fight.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(S) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia on the Offensive

(C) The FARC's improved military capabilities and offensive posture have given it the strategic initiative. The Colombian military increasingly will be forced to withdraw from vulnerable areas or suffer defeats — trading terrain for security. Since August 1996, the guerrillas have conducted 13 major tactical engagements and 2 nationwide offensives complemented by countless smaller clashes and a continuing terror campaign of assassinations, kidnappings, bombings, and attacks against economic and political targets. Left unchecked, the guerrillas will grow more powerful. They have demonstrated in several engagements, particularly at El Billar and Mitu, a more conventional warfighting capability — the ability to fire and maneuver in open combat, attack and hold terrain, and withdraw in an orderly fashion under pressure.

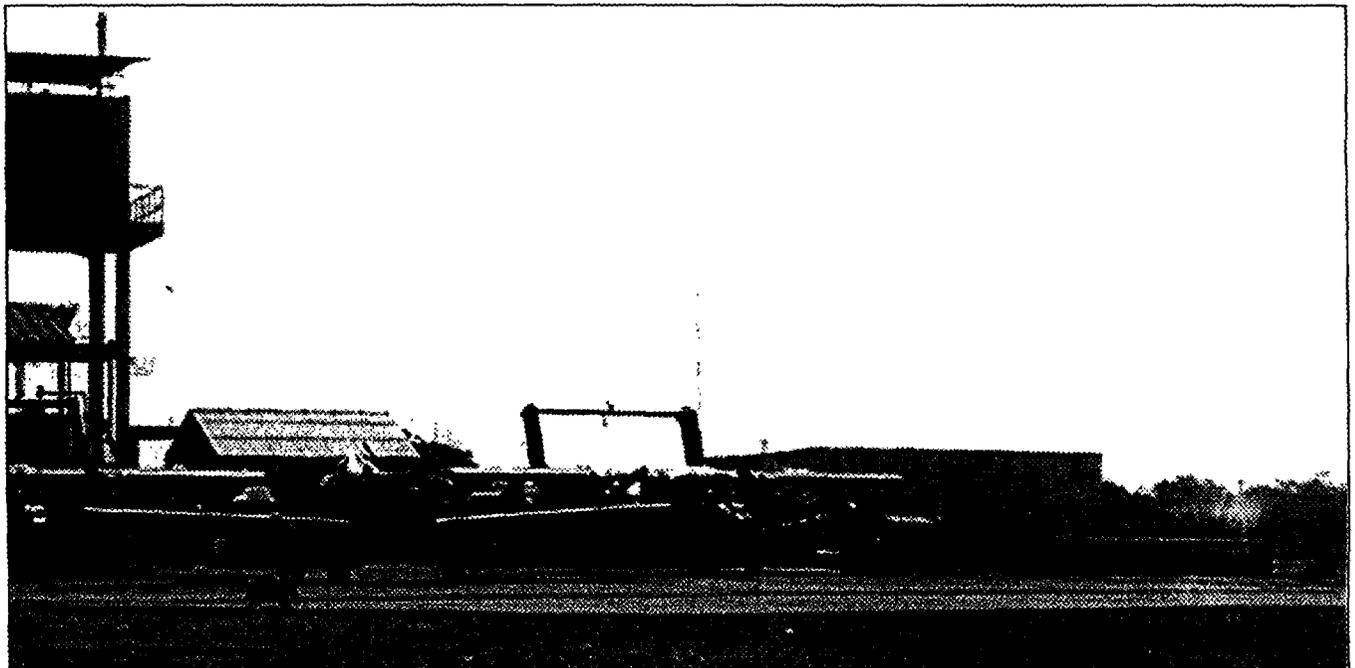
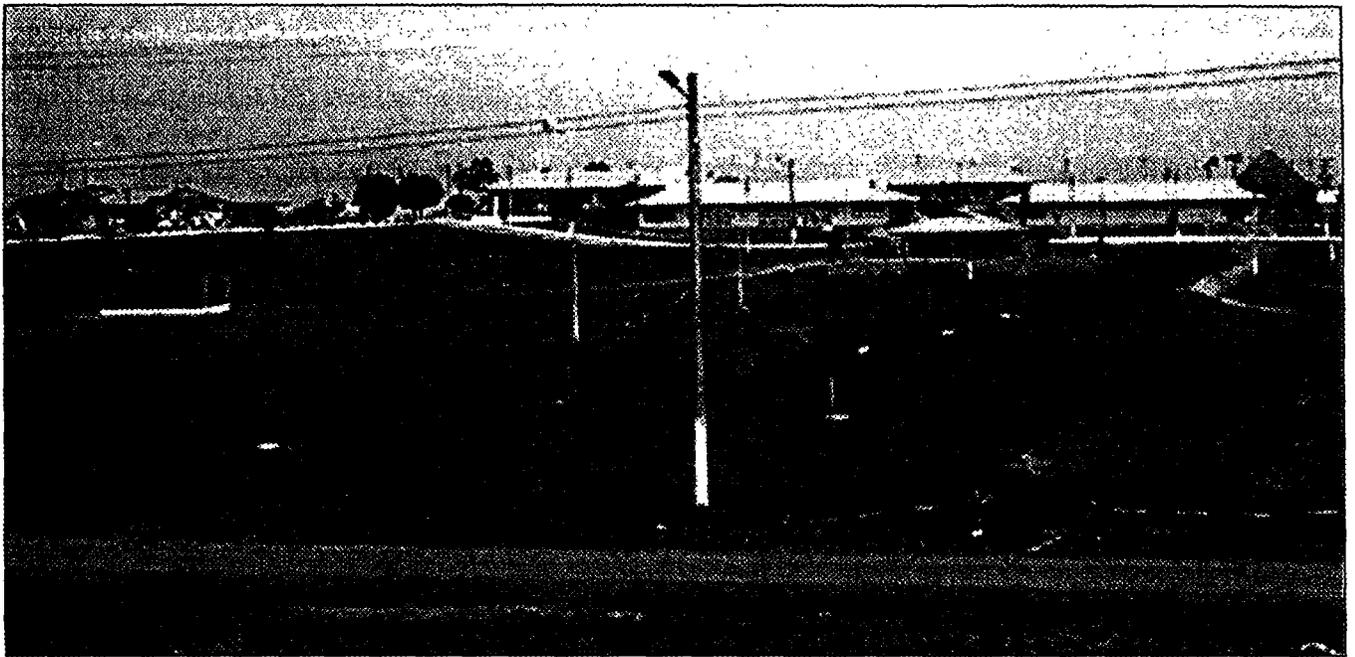
(C) (b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(C) The next significant step for the guerrillas is to attack and destroy a major Colombian installation. Many bases remain at high risk for attack, and their survivability in the face of a concerted guerrilla effort is doubtful. Military observers continue to note the lack of preparation and sound defensive fundamentals at two key Colombian military installations: the airfield at Tres Esquinas and the 19th Infantry Battalion at San Jose-del Guaviare. Lack of overhead cover, positions not dug in, uncoordinated fire plans, limited counterreconnaissance patrolling, and unprepared indirect fire systems spell impending disaster.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

The high guerrilla threat effectively has reduced and sometimes halted aerial drug-eradication operations from this base 2 kilometers from the 19th Infantry Battalion.

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(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

Political and Military Significance of the Demilitarized Zone

(S) The insurgency seeks fixed and guaranteed political representation and power at the national level and in rural areas where it predominates to enact its vision of social justice. It will not follow the demobilization models of previous Colombian insurgent groups, such as the M-19 and the Popular Liberation Army. Recent guerrilla declarations about establishing confederate political structures or autonomous zones vindicate this judgment. The guerrillas already are establishing their authority through taxation, issuing travel passes, indoctrination classes, and even imposing grooming standards on males.

(S) The implications for US counterdrug programs are obvious, particularly if the guerrillas view drug profiteering as political and military power and benefiting Colombia's lower social strata. Although President Pastrana views the guerrillas as key to his new eradication philosophy, analysts remain doubtful of their willingness to abandon this financially and politically lucrative trade.

(S) [Redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) [Redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Nearing the End Game?

(S) [Redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S) [Redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

Insurgent leaders have stated openly that they will not cease firing during the negotiations. Reporting continues to indicate guerrilla preparation for new attacks. The insurgents will maintain military pressure against the government so that peace talks are less a negotiation than an imposition of demands. Since negotiations will not slow the tempo of guerrilla advances, the guerrillas have no need to agree to any deal not in their best interest.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

³ (S) The Colombians refer to this area as the *despeje*, which means cleared area, referring to the clearance or removal of government forces. The area is demilitarized only from the government forces perspective since armed guerrillas occupy it.

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Figure 6. (U) Armed Forces Commander Gen Tapias With Soldiers. Colombia is reaching out to other nations for equipment and training support.

Colombian Army Perceptions of the United States

(S/NF)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S/NF)

(b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) (b)(1), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

(S) (b), 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d)

For Colombia's military, this may be true, but the guerrillas have steadily improved and progressed in their long-term strategy. This is a transitional period. The FARC's activities in 1999 will demonstrate the extents and limits of its capabilities and objectives.

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Appendix A Case Studies of Key Battles

Attack on Las Delicias

(S) At 1930, 31 August 1996, while the company was standing in evening formation, FARC guerrillas attacked with mortars, grenade launchers, and small arms fire against the small garrison. [redacted] (b)(1),1.4 (c) [redacted] Four hundred to five

hundred guerrillas occupied the base, and the officers were tortured before being executed. The company, subordinate to the 49th Jungle Infantry Battalion, was out of communication for more than 8 hours. By the time the nearest military base at Tres Esquinas learned of the attack, it also was under fire and did not assist the company.

(S)

[redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c)

Battle at El Billar

(S)

[redacted]
(b)(1),1.4 (c)

(S) On 28 February, the battalion contacted a small guerrilla force, capturing some equipment. Pushing forward to regain contact with the guerrillas, on 1 March, the unit took fire at a small hamlet and suffered one killed and two wounded. The commander decided to move to a landing zone, establish a perimeter, and evacuate the wounded. The battalion remained overnight through late the next day. At 1615 on the second day, a reconnaissance and security patrol made contact with guerrillas, a firefight ensued, followed shortly by intense combat. [redacted] (b)(1),1.4 (c)

[redacted] The battalion fought until the morning of

3 March. By late morning, the battalion was destroyed; the commander was recovered with other stragglers. The unit suffered 62 killed, 23 missing, 29 wounded — 20 soldiers were recovered unhurt.

~~(S)~~

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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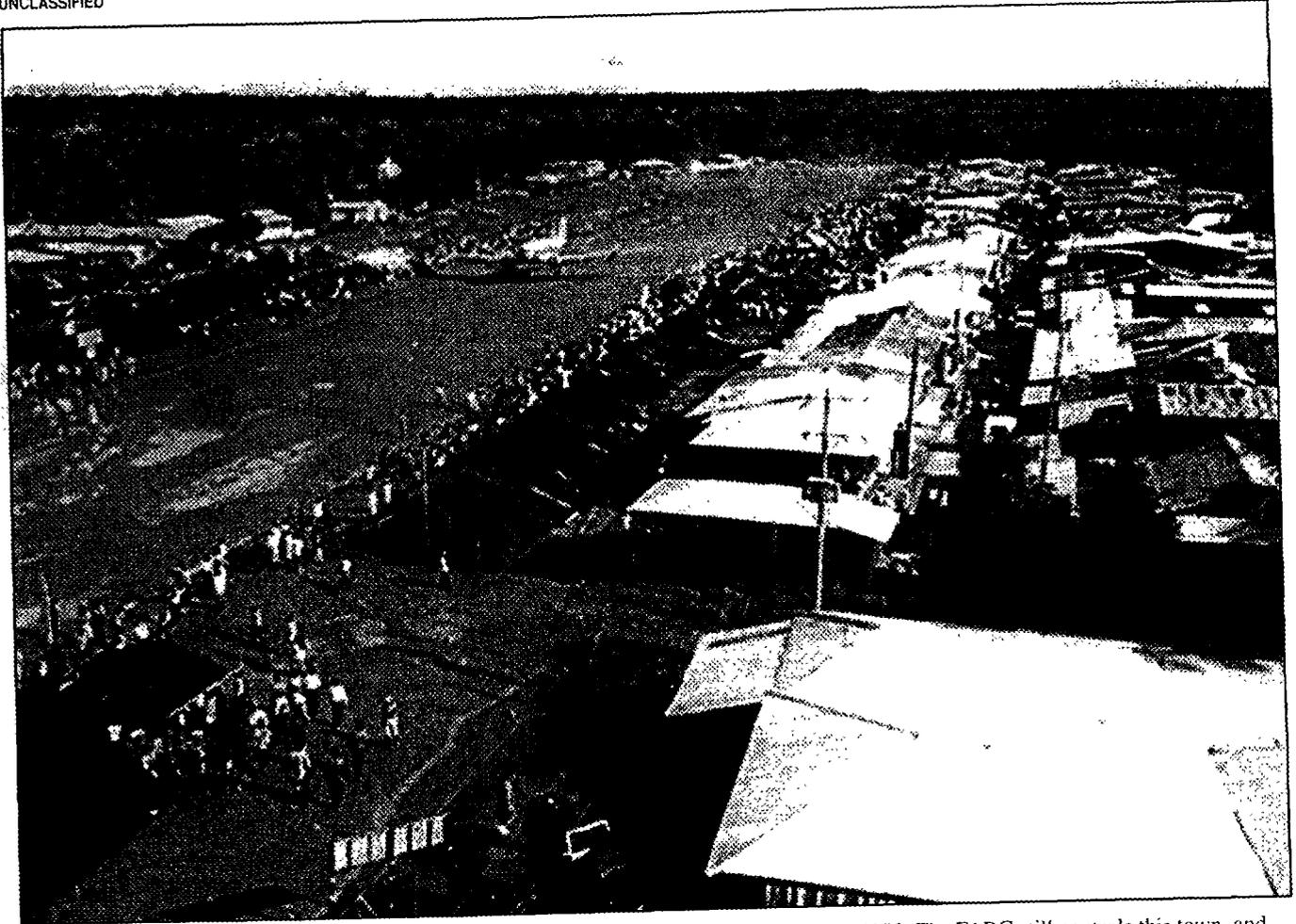


Figure 8. (S) Panoramic Photo of Miraflores. The Miraflores outpost was overrun on 3 August 1998. The FARC still controls this town, and the airfield is active.

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

positions covered by claymore-style mines and were slaughtered. The FARC even had mined nearby landing zones, anticipating a potential COLAR relief force. The FARC's preparation and execution of this attack appear textbook.

Siege of Miraflores

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

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(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)

(S)

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c)

Battle of Mitu

(S) On 1 November 1998, insurgents of the FARC's eastern bloc, Colombia's most powerful, overran the department capital of Mitu (population 10,000), 40 kilometers from the Brazilian border; the attack killed around 15 policemen and 10 civilians. The attack began at approximately 0500 when the guerrillas pounded the base [redacted] (b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d) to assault the 125-man police detachment. The number of FARC attackers is estimated at 700 to 1,000.

(S) Initially the Army and police tried to fly reinforcements into the combat zone before dusk on 1 November, but the Blackhawk helicopters transporting the troops came under heavy ground fire and were forced to turn back from their landing zones. The FARC reportedly

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Figure 10. (U) FARC in the Demilitarized Zone, January 1999.

seized control of the governor's offices, police headquarters, local bank, and the municipal airstrip. President Pastrana monitored the situation and ordered the military to retake the town on 2 November.

(S) A 220-strong military force was sent in and immediately ambushed, leaving an additional 16 dead and 29 injured. The police, Army, and Air Force ultimately reentered Mitu, deploying 1,200 soldiers to the area. The guerrillas apparently conducted an orderly withdrawal from the battle area; the status of the 68 police the FARC took hostage at the garrison is undetermined.

(S) Operationally, this battle highlights the restrictions and deficiencies of the limited Colombian air and air mobility assets sent to this remote region. Only the use of a Brazilian airfield allowed the COLAR to have a staging base back into the Mitu vicinity.

(b)(1),1.4 (a),1.4 (c),1.4 (d)