

Testimony of Douglas Farah

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Subcommittee on Monetary Policy and Trade

A Legislative Proposal Entitled the 'Bank Account Seizure of
Terrorist Assets (BASTA) Act

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Chairman Campbell, Ranking Member Clay and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on the nature of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* – FARC), the world’s premiere hybrid terrorist/drug trafficking organization. I have been asked to discuss the FARC’s relationship to terrorism and drug trafficking.

I have had the privilege of being involved in Colombia since 1989. I was first sent by the *Washington Post* to cover an airliner blown up by the Medellín cartel. Over the past quarter of a century I have lived in Colombia a number of years and visited there regularly, first as a journalist and in recent years as a researcher and a consultant. I have seen the nation teeter on the edge of the abyss in the 1990s, when U.S. officials spoke of the possibility of a FARC victory and Colombia becoming a “narco state” to the present time, when Colombia is a regional model of democracy and economic development.

Yet the FARC, despite engaging in ongoing peace talks with the government of President Juan Manuel Santos, remains at the center of a multitude of criminal enterprises and terrorist activities that stretch from Colombia south to Argentina, and northward to Central America and into direct ties to the Mexican drug cartels, primarily the Sinaloa organization. It is involved in the massive laundering of drug money, and recent cases by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have shown the direct and growing criminal drug ties of the FARC and Hezbollah.

The FARC is the only organization in the world that is designated by the U.S. government as both a major drug trafficking organization and an international terrorist entity. The United States is not alone in its assessment.

The European Union, Canada and other countries have also designated the FARC a terrorist entity, particularly for the kidnappings and execution of foreign nationals. In addition the FARC has wreaked havoc on Colombia and Colombians.

In its most recent global human rights report covering 2012 the State Department listed the FARC as a “terrorist organization” that has

Committed numerous abuses, including the following: political killings; killings of members of the public security forces and local officials; widespread use of land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs); kidnappings and forced disappearances; subornation and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens’ privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; widespread recruitment and use of child soldiers; attacks against human rights activists; violence against women, including rape and forced abortions.¹

¹ Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2013, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, “Colombia,” accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>

The United States government first named the FARC a “Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization” on October 8, 1997², due in large part to the decision by the organization’s general secretariat a few years earlier to target U.S. citizens for kidnapping, particularly evangelical Christian groups that lived and worked in isolated areas. In 1993 the FARC kidnapped three members of the New Tribes Mission, and in 1994 kidnapped two more, as well as a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators. All six were executed while in captivity.

After President Clinton made the designation, the FARC continued to target American citizens where possible. In March 1999 the FARC abducted and kidnapped three Native American activists on an indigenous land and executed them. In February 2003 the FARC shot down an aircraft carrying 4 U.S. citizens, all contractors supporting U.S. and Colombian counter-narcotics efforts. The FARC executed one U.S. citizen and one Colombian and held the other three hostages for more than 5 years, until they were freed in a dramatic Colombian military raid.

In 2001, shortly after the 9-11 attacks the FARC was re-designated a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Organization, greatly increasing the range of actions the Treasury Department and others could take against the organization.³ The European Union, which has a notoriously difficult time in designating groups as terrorists, would eventually follow suit, listing the FARC as a terrorist entity in 2005.⁴

While certain fronts of the FARC was widely known to be increasing their involvement in the cocaine trade since the early 1990s, the organization was not formally named a significant foreign narcotics trafficking organization until May 2003, under the Kingpin Act.⁵ The Act was passed in 1999, and was designed to “deny significant foreign narcotics traffickers, their related businesses, and their operatives access to the U.S. financial system and to prohibit all trade and transactions between the traffickers and U.S. companies and individuals. The Kingpin Act authorizes the President to take these actions when he determines that a foreign person plays a significant role in international narcotics trafficking.”⁶

Under the protection of the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia – as well as powerful friends in El Salvador and Panama -- the FARC maintains a robust international infrastructure that is producing and moving thousands of kilos of cocaine and laundering hundreds of millions of dollars. It has emerged as a pioneer hybrid criminal-

² The FARC was among the first organizations designated a foreign terrorist entity, which meant, in the eyes of the U.S. government it had met the criteria of being a threat to U.S. nationals or the national security of the United States. See: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

³ U.S. Treasury Department, Office of Foreign Assets Control, “Treasury Targets Venezuelan Officials Supporting the FARC,” September 12, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp1132.aspx>

⁴ Official Journal of the European Union, Council Decision of Dec. 21, 2005, accessed at: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_340/l_34020051223en00640066.pdf

⁵ <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp1132.aspx>

⁶ “Fact Sheet: Overview of the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act,” The White House Office of the Press Secretary, accessed at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Fact-Sheet-Overview-of-the-Foreign-Narcotics-Kingpin-Designation-Act

terrorist insurgency, using drug money to sustain an ideological movement and help like-minded groups.

Over time the ideology has faded and the FARC has become much more of a business enterprise than Marxist insurgency.

U.S Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) publicly designated three of the late Hugo Chávez's closest advisers and intelligence officials as drug trafficking figures and supporting the FARC, a "narco-terrorist organization." The three main influential in the Maduro government.

OFAC said the three--Hugo Armando Carvajál, director of Venezuelan Military Intelligence; Henry de Jesus Rangél, director of the Venezuelan Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services; and Ramón Emilio Rodríguez Chacín, former minister of justice and former minister of interior -- were responsible for "materially supporting the FARC, a narco-terrorist organization."

It specifically accused Carvajál and Rangel of protecting FARC cocaine shipments moving through Venezuela, and said Rodríguez Chacín, who resigned his government position just a few days before the designations, was the "Venezuelan government's main weapons contact for the FARC."⁷

It is worth noting that the designations rather than provoking sanction in the Chávez government, led to rewards. For example in November 2010, Rangel was promoted to the overall commander of the Venezuelan armed forces⁸ and in January 2012 was named defense minister as part of Chávez's promotion of close associates tied to drug trafficking and the FARC.⁹

The current peace talks between the Santos government and the FARC, underway for 18 months Havana, Cuba, have yielded more results than past dialogues, in large part because the FARC is in a significantly weakened state.

Perhaps because of its weakened state, in recent years the FARC has been consistently underestimated as a transnational organization that has significant and long-standing ties to multiple international terrorist and criminal groups.

The FARC is a regional and trans-regional organization. The significant support – logistical, financial and ideological – the group receives from nations and non-state allies in the hemisphere that aid and abet its criminal and terrorist alliances is significant and dangerous. The FARC is a central part of the revolutionary project of bringing together armed groups and terrorist organizations under the umbrella of the Bolivarian Revolution, with the aid

⁷ "Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Support of the FARC," U.S. Treasury Department Office of Public Affairs, Sept. 12, 2008 accessed at: <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp1132.aspx> .

⁸ "Chávez Shores up Military Support," Stratfor, November 12, 2010.

⁹ "Venezuela: Asume Nuevo Ministro De Defensa Acusado de Narco por EEUU," Agence France Presse, January 17, 2012.

and support of Iran. This is now a deeply criminalized political project with the express and overt intention of hurting the United States.¹⁰

What should worry us, as I have documented and written about extensively, is that the glue that binds these groups is a shared vision of creating a new world order, in which the United States, Europe and Israel are the enemies to be destroyed.

Their common doctrine is one of asymmetrical warfare that explicitly endorses the use of weapons of mass destruction against the perceived enemies.¹¹ This doctrine remains a statement of intention, not a statement of capabilities. Yet a review of Iran's growing presence in the region, the FARC's growing relationship with Hezbollah and other terrorist groups and the ability of these groups to deal extensively with Mexican drug cartels, make that statement of intention a dangerous possibility.

A Brief History of the FARC: The Early Days

The FARC is currently a shell of what it was in late 1990s, when it controlled more than 40 percent of the national territory and had some 20,000 combatants. It is worth briefly reviewing the history of the hemisphere's oldest armed insurgency and its metamorphosis from a motely band of Marxist guerrillas wandering the jungles of Colombia into a prototype hybrid terrorist-criminal organization that was once on the verge of taking power. Current estimates place FARC combat strength at about 7,200, seldom operating units of more than 10 people and largely unable to hold territory.

The FARC grew out of the Liberal Party militias that fought against the Conservative Party in Colombia in the bloody period of the late 1940s and 1950s known as "La Violencia." The negotiated end to the fighting between the two main political parties brought an unprecedented period of political stability to the capital, but several of the militia groups in more remote regions remained active and in control of autonomous regions. In 1964 the FARC formed in one of those regions, was officially formed with an ideology that was a combination of Soviet Marxism and nationalism.¹²

Over time, the FARC and various other insurgent groups grew in different parts of Colombia. These included the Chinese-backed Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación-EPL*), the Cuban-back National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional-ELN*) and the M-19 nationalist movement. The EPL and M-19 movements negotiated peace settlements with the government in the early 1990s, while the ELN remains a fighting force but has lost most of its military strength and political following.

¹⁰ For a more complete view of the aims, goals and strategy of the Bolivarian Revolution and its project to create 21st Century Socialism, see: Douglas Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, August 2012), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1117>.

¹¹ Ibid. The doctrine of asymmetrical warfare and the use of WMD is outlined in many writing used by the Bolivarian Revolution, and has been adopted as official military doctrine in Venezuela.

¹² For a brief history of the FARC's development, see: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/players_farc.html

The FARC continued to grow throughout most of its life, reaching a peak of about 18,000 combatants in the 2002 period. Unlike most insurgencies, the original founders of the group until recently lived long lives and retained significant influence. The leaders were more likely to die of old age in the hills than in combat. Jacobo Arenas, the founder of the FARC, died of old age in hills at the age of Colombia in August 1990. His successor and long-time second-in-command, Manuel Marulanda (AKA "Sure-shot") died of a heart attack on March 26, 2008.¹³ Alfonso Cano, who succeeded Marulanda, was killed by the Colombian military on November 4, 2011.¹⁴

The survival of the FARC has been possible in part because the FARC is not as dependent as many other non-state armed groups on external sources of financing, most of which evaporated with the end of the Cold War. Instead, the group established a strong nexus with criminal activity, including drug trafficking, kidnapping and extortion, allowing it to finance itself following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Marxist bloc.

It was also possible in part because the Colombian government exerted relatively little effort to fight the FARC for more than three decades. And finally, the state support of Colombia's neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador over much of the past decade has given the FARC significant rearward areas for safe haven, rest, relaxation, resupply and financial activities.

Beginning in the late 1970s and growing in the 1980s, the FARC began to implement what it considered to be legitimate "taxes" on landowners and illicit activities in areas where the group exercised considerable political power. One favorite way of collecting taxes was to kidnap the landowners and hold them for ransom.

This, in turn, led to the formation of paramilitary groups paid for by the large landholders to protect their property and themselves from the FARC and other guerrilla organizations. Over time the paramilitary units, often under the protection of the military, grew into formidable fighting forces and cocaine trafficking structure, and has been deemed by human rights groups to be responsible for the majority of the human rights abuses committed against civilians in Colombia.

The upsurge in the paramilitary violence coincided with a prolonged negotiation period in the 1980s between the government and the FARC, which led to significant hopes that the FARC could be brought into the political process as a legal party. As a result of the negotiations the FARC formed a political party called the Patriotic Union (*Union Patriótica-UP*) and joined the political process while maintaining its armed wing.¹⁵

Despite the UP's legal status the paramilitary forces viewed the organization as a front for the FARC and the drug traffickers viewed the UP as a threat to its activities. As a result, the narco-paramilitary forces carried out a series of massacres against thousands of UP candidates and leaders, including the assassination of its two most promising presidential candidates.

¹³ Hugh O'Shaughnessy, "Manuel Marulanda: Commander of the FARC guerrilla army during four decades of insurgency against the Colombian state," *The Independent* (London), May 26, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/manuel-marulanda-commander-of-the-farc-guerrilla-army-during-four-decades-of-insurgency-against-the-colombian-state-834337.html>

¹⁴ BBC News, "Top FARC rebel leader Alfonso Cano killed in Colombia," November 5, 2011, accessed at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-15604456>

¹⁵ http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/players_farc.html

As the peace process unraveled, the FARC entered a new phase of working with drug traffickers, protecting coca fields and laboratories and collecting “*gramaje*” or taxes on the products moving through their territory. With the influx of cash, the FARC was able to expand its recruiting, buy new weapons become a much more structured, effective military force. This coincided with the killing or extradition of the leaders of the major drug trafficking organizations in Colombia, leaving the once-mighty cartels fractured, less unified and less able to control who entered the trade.

From Insurgency to Narco-Terrorism and the Edge of Victory

Gradually the FARC moved from an ideological force that protected drug trafficking operations to a more structured criminal enterprise that relied more and more on its own drug trafficking structures, kidnappings and extortion to finance its existence.

As the FARC began to take control of cocaine laboratories, landing strips and international trade in a more active, direct manner, its financial situation improved markedly, and the insurgency used the money to purchase new weapons, recruit more combatants (whom they were able to pay more than a Colombian army soldier), and rapidly consolidate control over many swaths of rural Colombia. Eventually they were able to cut off the main highways among the nation’s major cities.

When President Andrés Pastrana agreed in 1999 to peace talks with the FARC and granted them a territory the size of Switzerland as a demilitarized zone, the Colombian government was at its weakest point. In addition to the military defeats, the economy was sinking. Poverty rates had risen dramatically, unemployment was growing, and the economy sank by more than 4 percent in 1999.

The FARC, with some 18,000 combatants and flush with sophisticated new weapons and equipment purchased with money from its burgeoning drug trade, was at its strongest point militarily since it was founded in 1964.

During the three-year negotiations, which ended in February 2002, the FARC significantly strengthened itself and its ties to cocaine trafficking while dragging the talks on with endless and constantly shifting demands.

It also moved to aggressively expand its outreach to other terrorist groups and insurgencies to increase its technical capabilities and establish relationships that endure to this day. In many cases the representatives were invited to spend significant amounts of time in the FARC-controlled peace zone.

Among the more unusual visitors to the FARC territory were a group of Iranian government officials, ostensibly sent to finance a \$12 million *halal* beef slaughterhouse and refrigerated meat storage facility. The project was unusual, to say the least, given the remoteness of the region, the lack of transportation for the meat and general lack of economic rationale for the investment.¹⁶ The plant was never built but it provided the FARC leadership with several months of unmonitored time with the Iranian officials, a relationship that endures to the present time.

¹⁶ Karl Penhaul, “Iranians in Sideshow t Colombia Peace Process,” Reuters News Service, December 28, 1999.

Two other terrorist groups that spent a significant amount of time training FARC cadres in a variety of explosives techniques, intelligence methods and kidnapping skills: Basque ETA terrorist and a splinter group of the Irish Republican Army. Their involvement came to light with the arrest of three members of the organizations in 2001. By 2003 the FARC was using techniques from both organizations to set off car bombs and other explosives that took hundreds of lives.¹⁷

Other experts from closer to home also joined the FARC in the jungle safe zone. Among the visitors were Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader and current president of Nicaragua; Salvador Sánchez Cerén, the recently elected president of El Salvador and leader of the most hardline Marxist faction of the FMLN in El Salvador; and José Luis Merino, AKA Ramiro Vásquez, a Communist Party leader in El Salvador who later supplied large shipments of sophisticated weapons to the FARC and reportedly taught them urban kidnapping techniques.

Turning the Tide

But the military, given a reprieve, also used the time to reorganize, train, and dramatically improve its capabilities.¹⁸

It became increasingly evident the FARC was using the ceasefire during the peace talks to expand its cocaine trafficking networks as well as acquire new weapons. But other factors were changing the nature of the political and drug-related violence in Colombia that would ultimately set the FARC back on its heels.

Beginning in 1999, the Clinton administration launched Plan Colombia, a multi-year, multi-billion dollar program to tackle drug-related issues in the region. For the first time, significant amounts of aid could be given directly to the Colombian military, whose human rights record was widely recognized as being abysmal, to fight the FARC. The years of carefully trying to segregate counter-drug aid, largely given to the National Police, from small amounts of counterinsurgency aid, given the military, were over.

This evolution would dramatically alter the intertwined conflicts in Colombia. Plan Colombia has increasingly allowed the military to push the FARC to more remote areas and carry out more sophisticated attacks against the rebel group.¹⁹

With the election of Álvaro Uribe in 2002, Colombia's military turnaround began in earnest. Under Uribe's program of "Democratic Security," raw recruits were replaced over time with a highly trained NCO corps; intelligence operations were revamped and enhanced, and significant new Colombia resources were committed to the conflict.

¹⁷ Tim Padgett, "The Next Terror Nexus? Colombia fears the IRA and ETA may be using the country as a base for weapons testing and training," *Time Magazine International*, February 24, 2003.

¹⁸ For an excellent overview of this process, see previous CSIS reports on Colombia, particularly Peter DeShazo, Tanya Primiani, and Phillip McLean, *Back from the Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999–2007* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2007), <http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071112-backfromthebrink-web.pdf>.

¹⁹ The counter-drug and counter-insurgency aid figures come from the Center for International Policy, and its studies of Plan Colombia, accessed here: <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aidtable.htm>

Uribe also underscored the important link between democracy and security, stating consistently that the overarching goal was to “reinforce and guarantee the rule of law in all our national territory.” As the government raised taxes and showed results, the businesses and citizens in urban areas became more supportive of the government.

Although Uribe would come under significant and justified criticism from human rights groups for illicitly spying on journalists and political enemies and tolerating human rights abuses in the military,²⁰ he is widely credited with developing the first comprehensive plan—including programs encompassing judicial, infrastructure rehabilitation, education, and medical programs to reestablish government authority in areas where non-state actors had held sway for generations.

Focusing on rapidly accelerating military operations against the FARC and the group’s drug-trafficking infrastructure, Uribe and his military leadership designed a strategy that pushed the guerrillas out of the economically vital middle section of the country and away from cities and important transportation routes.

It also aimed to do away with their leadership by focusing significant resources on High Value Targets. From 2008-2012, for the first time in the conflict, senior FARC commanders were located and eliminated. This was particularly effective in targeting those leaders with direct ties to drug trafficking and massive human rights abuses, as was the case of Jorge Briceño, AKA Mono Jojoy, the commander of the FARC’s Eastern Bloc, killed in 2010 in an aerial bombardment.

Part of the urgency of confronting the FARC was the fact that presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Rafael Correa of Ecuador were giving significant logistical, financial, and political support to the FARC, allowing FARC to expand its international networks and increase its resources.

Perhaps no action has played as significant role in changing the tide of the conflict in Colombia as the March 1, 2008 killing of Raúl Reyes, the FARC’s second most important commander and chief international liaison. Reyes, whose real name was Luís Edgar Devia Silva, and 25 others, were killed in an aerial bombardment by the Colombian military on a FARC camp just across the Ecuadoran border.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Colombian commandos entered the camp and retrieved documents and computers, including hundreds of gigabytes of data from the personal computer of Reyes containing communications with other members of the FARC 7-person general secretariat, Venezuelan president Chávez, senior Ecuadorian officials, and an outline of the political and economic strategy of the FARC. It is the most significant seizure of primary source documents from the FARC in recent decades, and the first time a member of the FARC general secretariat had been killed in combat in more than 40 years of war.

Reyes’s death was followed by the killing of other high-value FARC targets, as well as a stream of desertions of many mid-level and upper-level commanders, sending the FARC into a downward military and financial spiral from which has never recovered.²¹

²⁰ For a comprehensive look at the positive and negative aspects of the Uribe government, see June S. Beittel, “Colombia: Background, U.S. Relations, and Congressional Interest,” Congressional Research Service, November 28, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32250.pdf>.

²¹ For a more complete look at the role of Ecuador and the FARC, see Douglas Farah and Glenn Simpson, *Ecuador at Risk: Drugs, Thugs, Guerrillas and the Citizens Revolution* (Alexandria, VA: International Assessment and Strategy Center, January 2010),

The documents show several alarming developments that had gone largely undetected by U.S. and Colombian intelligence services prior to the attack.

The first is that the long-cordial relationship between the FARC and Chávez had grown from one of friendship to one of allies and business partners, a relationship that endures in the Maduro government. It is clear that that FARC received a large sum of money from Chávez in 2007, although it is unclear if the money is a loan or a gift. There are several references to “300” as an amount the FARC receives, and Colombian authorities have stated unequivocally that the number refers to \$300 million given by Chávez to the FARC. It is also clear that the FARC has Venezuelan government protection for its massive movement of cocaine to Central America and West Africa.

The second insight gleaned was the FARC’s extraordinary reach into regional politics, particularly in Ecuador, where the President Correa, whose presidential campaign received hundreds of thousands of dollars directly from the FARC, was willing to change senior military commanders along the border (the area where Reyes was killed) in order to curry favor with the insurgents. The role of Bolivia’s President Evo Morales in supporting the FARC also stands out.²²

The third is the FARC’s apparent willingness to engage in trafficking of material (uranium) that could be used for a low-grade nuclear bomb. The type and grade of uranium in question indicate the FARC had been the victim of a scam or was planning on perpetrating a scam on an unsuspecting third party.

A fourth major point is the FARC’s overt discussion of its involvement in drug trafficking and the need to move cocaine and money associated with the trade they have long claimed to not be involved in.

The fifth is that the FARC has engaged in a deliberate campaign to hide its involvement in some of the worst atrocities, including the assassination of members of congress in 2006.²³

In the wake of the death of Reyes and Ríos by violent means and Marulanda to natural causes in a 30-day span left the FARC reeling, and more blows were to come. On July 15, 2008, the army carried out a dramatic rescue operation that freed 15 of the FARC's highest value hostages. These included former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three American contractors.²⁴

http://www.strategycenter.net/docLib/20101214_EcuadorFINAL.pdf. For a study of Venezuela’s role with the FARC, see Douglas Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, August 2012),

<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1117>.

²² The details and documentation of these relationships see: Douglas Farah, “Into the Abyss: Bolivia Under Evo Morales and the MAS,” International Assessment and Strategy Center, 2009; and Farah and Simpson, op cit.

²³ The author worked with U.S. and Colombian officials to analyze the captured Reyes documents, which have now been made public. For more details on the issues raised here see Farah and Farah and Simpson, op cit. The main cache of Reyes documents were compiled into a single document, “The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and Secret Archives of ‘Raúl Reyes,’” A Strategic Dossier, International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 2011.

²⁴ Chris Kraul, “15 Hostages Freed as FARC is Fooled in Cunning Operation,” Los Angeles Times, July 3, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-hostages3-2008jul03.0.3051652.story>

The Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana

While the bilateral and individual relationships are of tremendous importance to the FARC, the group was also anxious to break out of its broader international isolation. The mechanism devised for this was the *Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana* (The Bolivarian Continental Coordinator-CCB). The concept was to build a broad-based Bolivarian movement across the continent that would appear to be a coalition of progressive forces, when in fact, it would be driven and controlled by the FARC.

According to documents in the Reyes computer, the CCB was born in August 2003, and by December had an anthem, a flag, a newspaper called "Bolivarian Mail," letterhead stationary and a logo. "The CCB is work of the FARC, the Bolivarian Movement composed of the José María Córdoba and Caribbean blocs, a Dec. 7, 2003 the internal document said. The document said "Comrade Alfonso," referring to Alfonso Cano, later the FARC's commander-in-chief, had been informed of each of the steps taken, and that the first executive meeting had been held "in one of our camps" to "lay out the specific tasks and responsibilities for the activities that are currently underway. Among our tasks is the creation of a Bolivarian movement, the establishment of the CCB in each country, etc. This organization has already led protests in Ecuador and Panama."²⁵

The CCB soon established a significant presence across Latin America, attracting the sympathy of numerous leftist political organizations and NGOs, many committed to non-violence. According to a March 11, 2005 report on the CCB's activities in 2004, there were already active groups in Mexico, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Chile. International brigades from the Basque region of Spain, Italians, French and Danish were operational. Work was underway in Argentina, Guatemala and Brazil. The number of organizations that were being actively coordinated by the CCB was listed at 63, and there were "political relations" with 45 groups and 25 institutions. The CCB database contained 500 e-mails.²⁶

The CCB leadership went out of its way to hide its FARC affiliation to all but the more select inner circle. "The CCB runs the whole gamut, from respectable groups to useful idiots to terrorist," said one Colombian official studying the CCB. "There is the public face of the CCB, which seems benign, but the inner workings are all FARC, allied with other terrorist organizations that, frankly, we thought had disappeared."

This is borne out in numerous internal documents. In an April 1, 2006 letter from Reyes to "Aleyda," identified by Colombia authorities as Mariana López de la Vega of the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionaria-MIR) of Chile, the FARC leader states "the CCB is part of movement of masses of the FARC, and as such receives all of our support. However, we are not deluded or confused, and understand that the CCB is

²⁵ Documents provided by Colombian officials, in possession of the Author.

²⁶ March 11, 2005 e-mail from Iván Ríos to Raúl Reyes, provided by Colombia officials, in possession of the Author.

broader than just our cells, as the CCB has a broad roof, which allows us, if we are politically agile, to reach other sectors of society and create more Communist militants."²⁷

A Dec. 31, 2006 letter from Iván Ríos to Raul Reyes, (whom Ríos address as "Dear Foreign Minister") says the FARC support group in Chile "ask for instructions relating to CCB. It seems they are waiting precise orders from you regarding the activity in Santiago."²⁸

Operation Titan, Ayman Joumaa and Ties to Hezbollah

There is now a significant body of evidence showing the FARC's operational alliance with Hezbollah and Hezbollah allies based in Venezuela under the protection of the Maduro government, to which relatively little attention has been paid. A clear example of the breadth of the emerging alliances among criminal and terrorist groups was Operation Titan, executed by Colombian and U.S. officials in 2008. Colombian and U.S. officials, after a 2-year investigation, dismantled a drug trafficking organization that stretched from Colombia to Panama, Mexico, West Africa, the United States, Europe and the Middle East.

Colombian and U.S. officials say that one of the key money launderers in the structure, Chekry Harb, AKA "Taliban" acted as the central go-between among Latin American drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and Middle Eastern radical groups, primarily Hezbollah. Among the groups participating together in Harb's operation in Colombia were members of the Northern Valley Cartel, right-wing paramilitary groups and the FARC.

This mixture of enemies and competitors working through a shared facilitator, or in loose alliance for mutual benefit, is a pattern that is becoming more common, and one that significantly complicates the ability of law enforcement and intelligence operatives to combat these groups.²⁹

While there has been little public acknowledgement of the Hezbollah ties to Latin American transnational organized crime (TOC) groups, recent indictments based on DEA cases point to the growing overlap of the groups. In December 2011, U.S. officials charged Ayman Joumaa, an accused Lebanese drug kingpin and Hezbollah financier, of smuggling tons of U.S.-bound cocaine and laundering hundreds of millions of dollars with the Zetas cartel of Mexico, while operating in Panama, Colombia, the DRC and elsewhere.

"Ayman Joumaa is one of top guys in the world at what he does: international drug trafficking and money laundering," a U.S. anti-drug official said. "He has interaction with Hezbollah. There's no indication that it's ideological. It's business."³⁰ Joumaa was tied to

²⁷ April 1, 2006 e-mail from Raúl Reyes to Aleyda, provided by Colombia officials, in possession of the Author.

²⁸ Jan. 3, 2007 e-mail to Iván Ríos, provided by Colombia officials, in possession of the Author.

²⁹ While much of Operation remains classified, there has been significant open source reporting, in part because the Colombian government announced the most important arrests. For the most complete look at the case see: Jo Becker, "Investigation into bank reveals links to major South American cartels," International Herald Tribune, December 15, 2011. See also: Chris Kraul and Sebastian Rotella, "Colombian Cocaine Ring Linked to Hezbollah," Los Angeles Times, Oct. 22, 2008; and "Por Lavar Activos de Narcos y Paramilitares, Capturados Integrantes de Organización Internatcional," Fiscalía General de la Republica (Colombia), Oct. 21, 2008.

³⁰ Sebastian Rotella, "Government says Hezbollah Profits From U.S. Cocaine Market via Link to Mexican Cartel," ProPublica, December 11, 2011.

broader case of massive money laundering case that led to the collapse of the Lebanese Canadian Bank, one of the primary financial institutions used by Hezbollah to finance its worldwide activities.

Other cases include the July 6, 2009 indictment of Jamal Yousef in the U.S. Southern District of New York alleges that the defendant, a former Syrian military officer arrested in Honduras, sought to sell weapons to the FARC -- weapons he claimed came from Hezbollah and were to be provided by a relative in Mexico.³¹

Such a relationship between non-state and state actors provides numerous benefits to both. In Latin America, for example, the FARC gains access to Venezuelan territory without fear of reprisals; it gains access to Venezuelan identification documents; and, perhaps most importantly, access to routes for exporting cocaine to Europe and the United States -- while using the same routes to import quantities of sophisticated weapons and communications equipment. In return, the Chávez government offers state protection, and reaps rewards in the form of financial benefits for individuals as well as institutions, derived from the cocaine trade.

Conclusions

The FARC is an unusual hybrid criminal/terrorist organization that is among the largest cocaine producers in the world deriving an increasing amount of revenue from its relationships with multiple other terrorist and criminal organizations. The FARC maintains documented ties to Hezbollah, the ETA Basque separatist movement, the armed faction of the IRA and various armed groups in Latin America. It has also maintained ties to state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran and Libya under the rule of Moamar Gaddafi.

While it is important to note that the United States, EU, Canada and other countries have designated the FARC as a terrorist organization, one must recognize that the vast majority of the organization's victims have been the Colombian people, who have suffered for decades from the FARC's executions, kidnappings, extortions, rape, forced conscription, the illegal use of mines and IEDs and other abuses and crimes against humanity.

Almost all of the FARC's ties to terrorist organizations originated through the Venezuelan government after the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998. Using the architecture of the "Bolivarian Revolution" Chávez turned Venezuela into a safe haven for the FARC, Iran, Hezbollah, ETA and others to meet, exchange lessons learned and develop drug trafficking alliances that fund their multiple activities. These activities continue apace even as the FARC engages in peace talks with the Colombian government.

The ideological underpinnings of the FARC are Marxist and deeply anti-U.S., and it is that veneer of ideology that formed the basis of the relationship with Chávez and other terrorist organizations. In addition to the economic ties that bind these groups together is deeply held belief by all involved that the United States is the primary enemy and needs to be destroyed. While this is largely an aspirational goal, rather than a statement of capabilities, it cannot be discounted in understanding the nature of the FARC.

³¹ United States District Court, Southern District of New York, *The United States of America v Jamal Yousef*, Indictment, July 6, 2009.

Thank you.