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COLOMBIA'S FARC:
MORE THAN JUST OPPORTUNISTIC CRIMINALS

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Sean Michael McCarthy is a U.S. Air Force pilot assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography, and Air Command and Staff College in 2007 with a Masters Degree in Military Operational Arts and Science. He earned his pilot wings in 1994 at Laughlin AFB, TX and has nearly 2,800 flying hours in the T-37, T-38A, A-10/OA-10, F-15E, and T-38C. He has Joint Staff experience at a Combatant Command and is a graduated squadron commander.



Abstract

For almost half a century, Colombia has been engaged in a relentless battle against a well-organized leftist guerilla group known as *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC for short). This heavily-armed organization – originally created to defend the rights of the country’s forgotten poor – has several goals. Among them are to overthrow the Colombian government, create a new state founded on Marxist-Leninist principles, liberate the country from the ruling-class elites, and defeat the lawless national military. One of the United States’ staunchest allies, Colombia is a dichotomy of sorts. Not only is it one of our key military and trading partners in Latin America, it is also one of the world’s leading producers of cocaine (third behind Peru and Bolivia). The revenue generated from this illicit drug trade is what sustains the FARC – undoubtedly the primary national security threat to Colombia as well as a key antagonist in America’s ongoing war on drugs. It is therefore in our national interest to help Colombia resolve its internal struggle, and understanding the FARC and the role it plays in the region is an essential part of that effort.

Over the decades, two main bodies of thought have emerged regarding the FARC. The first views the organization as one that began with a revolutionary cause but degraded into a violent criminal network of narco-traffickers and rent-seeking profiteers. This group rejects the notion of a peace settlement and believes the only way to deal with the FARC is with a heavy-handed approach similar to the one implemented by President Álvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010. Meanwhile, the other camp sees the FARC as a well-organized insurgency fueled by an ideology possessing legitimate economic, social, and political elements. As such, they advocate diplomacy and formal peace negotiations like those attempted in the early 2000’s under President Andrés Pastrana and again by Colombia’s current president, Juan Manuel Santos.

There is no debating the fact that the FARC began as a small, politically-motivated insurgency that evolved into a very large and complex guerilla organization. Where the debate comes into play for the two competing interpretations is whether the FARC remains at its core a revolutionary movement. This author contends – based on extensive review of policy and literature on the matter – that the FARC is indeed a legitimate insurgency with deep roots in society. It is therefore argued that the second camp’s viewpoint is a more accurate assessment of the situation.

Defeating the FARC once and for all will not be easy. As this paper reveals, the FARC is much more than a band of narco-terrorists and rent-seeking profiteers. Consequently, treating it as just another criminal organization is a mistake ... this has been done before and has failed to achieve positive results. The Santos administration seems to recognize this fact and its multi-faceted approach to combating the FARC (negotiating peace while keeping its military options open) appears to be working and must be continued. It is therefore in America’s national interest to see that the FARC is treated as a legitimate insurgency and not just a criminal entity.

Colombia's FARC – More Than Just Opportunistic Criminals

For almost half a century, Colombia has been engaged in a relentless battle against a well-organized leftist guerilla group known as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC for short). This heavily-armed organization – originally created to defend the rights of the country's forgotten poor – has several goals. Among them are to overthrow the Colombian government, create a new state founded on Marxist-Leninist principles, liberate the country from the ruling-class elites, and defeat the lawless national military.¹ One of the United States' staunchest allies, Colombia is a dichotomy of sorts. Not only is it one of our key military and trading partners in Latin America, it is also one of the world's leading producers of cocaine.² The revenue generated from this illicit drug trade is what sustains the FARC – undoubtedly the primary national security threat to Colombia as well as a key antagonist in America's ongoing war on drugs. It is therefore in the United States' national interest to help Colombia resolve its internal struggle, and understanding the FARC and the role it plays in the region is an essential part of that effort.

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Background/History of the FARC:

To understand the modern FARC, one must turn to centuries of Colombian history. In the early 1500’s, Colombia was colonized by Spain, a rule that lasted some three hundred years. During that time, the government was run by powerful elites. The majority of society was rural and the economy hinged on coffee and precious mineral exports to the “Old World.”³ Since most of the population had no voice in government, dissatisfaction ran high which spurred widespread civil unrest. After Colombia achieved independence in 1819, power was concentrated in two highly-polarized political parties – the “Liberals” and the “Conservatives.”⁴ The struggle between the two parties was (and still is) rooted in political and social inequality, particularly the lack of representation for those not in the land-owning oligarchy and

commercial-industrial classes.⁵ This inequality among social classes and the inability of the two parties to compromise would later provide the impetus behind the creation of the FARC.⁶

Chaos erupted in 1948 after the assassination of a moderate Liberal presidential candidate.⁷ His death polarized the country, leading to numerous murders, riots, and extensive property damage throughout the nation. Referred to as *La Violencia*, this period represents the bloodiest moment in Columbia's history.⁸ It took over a decade for the violence to subside, after which members from both parties agreed to form a new bi-partisan government known as the *National Front*. This government outlawed all other political parties and stipulated power alternate periodically between the liberals and conservatives regardless of election results. Moreover, policies favoring the ruling class and large landowners forced many peasants from their farms and into the cities where they formed cheap labor pools. This period of oppression fanned the flames of discontent which drove many to the socialist movements taking hold in much of Latin America in the 1950's.⁹

Despite being excluded from the *National Front*, the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) stood up to state-supported oppression by calling for improved working and living conditions for the nation's poor. In 1961 Manuel Marulanda, a guerilla leader and key member of the PCC, declared an independent territory known as "Marquetalia." The idea behind the territory was to provide protection and support for agrarian peasants in rural Colombia. The Conservatives viewed Marquetalia as a threat and for several years launched numerous attacks against its people.¹⁰ Hostilities culminated in 1964 when the government launched a major offensive against Marulanda, forcing him and the PCC into the jungle. Shortly thereafter, Marulanda and several guerilla leaders joined forces and started an armed revolutionary movement against the

“oligarchic usurpers of power.” The movement, which eventually became known as the FARC, appointed Marulanda and a man named Jacobo Arenas as its leaders.¹¹

The Creation of a Revolutionary Movement:

The FARC’s two founding fathers complimented one another. Marulanda was a charismatic leader with instincts for fighting guerilla-style warfare while Arenas was an intellectual Marxist ideologue. Together they built an organization that became the armed forces component of the CCP. Early membership was low and revenue was generated through extortion, kidnapping, and the taxation of goods and services.¹² The “base” for their grassroots movement came from the disenfranchised agrarian poor and socialist-leaning rebels living in rural Colombia.¹³ During its first decade, the FARC could only muster sporadic hit-and-run attacks on government entities because of mounting pressure from the joint U.S.-Colombian counterinsurgency campaign known as *Plan Lazo*.¹⁴ Yet despite early setbacks, the FARC continued to grow into a well-organized Marxist-Leninist insurgency based on *Bolivarian* principles.¹⁵

Unlike other opportunistic criminal groups, the FARC structured itself like a sophisticated military organization in order to regulate its operations and provide oversight of its finances. The top decision makers formed a seven-member board known as the *Secretariat*. Additionally, a 25-member panel called the *Estado Mayor Central (EMC)* was created to provide command and control over the FARC’s seven regional commands (known as “blocs”). Each bloc commander was responsible for raising money, disseminating information, maintaining public order, and handling logistics within his region.¹⁶

The FARC originally targeted uneducated agrarian peasants to fill its ranks. However it soon realized it needed to broaden its recruitment beyond this demographic in order to gain

greater influence. Thus it looked to the cities – with countless oppressed laborers and impressionable university students – as areas of support.¹⁷ As the FARC attracted new members from all walks of life, it realized it needed a formal training program to standardize its operations. Regional training facilities were constructed to teach recruits how to attack government interests and a stern penal code was established that prescribed punishments ranging from self-criticism to execution.¹⁸ The seriousness of this penal code cannot be understated as the penalty for infractions such as desertion, betrayal, fomenting rebellion and drug abuse is immediate death.¹⁹ This reliance on swift justice minimizes the FARC's discipline problems and allows it to maintain control over lower-echelon units. It also indicates the FARC is more concerned with building an institution rather than conducting criminal activities.

Like any organization of its kind, the FARC would be nothing without money. In 1982, members of the *Secretariat* decided to support coca production to fund its proposed expansion ... a monumental decision that would have lasting implications.²⁰ The FARC elected to charge the coca farmers a *gramaje* (farm tax) even though narcotics trafficking went against its ideological principles.²¹ These drug taxes resulted in a huge influx of money which it used to fund rural social programs that the government was not providing. To limit potential corruption, the FARC relied on a system of strict military discipline rooted in fear. It also assigned *ayudantías* (advisors) to each bloc commander who reported back to the *EMC* whenever funds were used inappropriately (the typical consequence of such violations was death).²² Unfortunately for the rest of Colombia, this drug money drove crime, mistrust and corruption to new heights.²³

By 1990, the FARC had over 10,000 members and was actively supported in 622 of Colombia's 1,098 municipalities.²⁴ Believing it would never be recognized as a legitimate political entity, the FARC decided to increase the level of violence to achieve what it could not

obtain through peaceful participation in the political process.²⁵ Key to its plan was the *Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia*, an aggressive eight-year political-military strategy designed to triple the size of the FARC and rally support for the insurgency.²⁶ The organization's popularity grew well under the campaign, helped in part by the government's lack of attention paid to the rural areas and the FARC's focus on security and social programs.²⁷ Although some of its goals were not achieved, by all accounts the strategy was a success. By 1998, the FARC controlled over 40% of Colombia's territory.²⁸ Many consider the late 1990's the height of the FARC's power and the point where Colombia was closest to becoming a failed state.

More than Just Opportunistic Criminals:

Throughout the FARC's history, Marulanda and Arenas sought to legitimize the organization as a belligerent and gain recognition as an independent government under the Geneva Conventions.²⁹ They argued it was their right to create a separate republic because they controlled territory and had an organized armed force. However critics contend once the FARC entered the drug trade, it abandoned its ideological principles and became a criminal enterprise that didn't deserve to participate in the political process. Unfortunately reality is not that simple, and saying the FARC is nothing more than a criminal network overstates the matter. This is because it did not originally start out intending to traffic drugs.³⁰ Rather, its need to expand (through any means necessary) drove it to the country's most lucrative commodity.³¹ The hefty profits from narcotics fuel its revolutionary agenda and allow it to project power into the periphery, both of which are needed to maintain influence over its base. Therefore the FARC's reliance on the drug trade should be seen as a means to an end. The drugs simply provide the institutional wealth needed to further its political objectives.³²

Since the *Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia* ended in 1998, there have been three presidential administrations in Colombia and each, in varying degrees, viewed the FARC as a criminal enterprise. However it is important to guard against this, especially when it comes to lumping the FARC in with Colombia's other drug groups. Traditional narco-traffickers are nothing more than free-market capitalists motivated by financial gain. This is not the case with the FARC which is organized around a central revolutionary cause – to create a government of the people. If the FARC was just another criminal group, it would have adopted a lower profile to avoid contact with the state.³³ Moreover, typical narco-traffickers look to maximize profits by reducing costs. Seeing the peasants not as long-term assets, they rob and mistreat the farmers in order to get the lowest prices for the crops. Again, this is not the case with the FARC whose socialist ideology dictates institutional wealth and equality over maximizing profits.³⁴ From the FARC's perspective, the peasants are its greatest strategic asset.³⁵

More than Just Opportunistic Criminals – the Pastrana Presidency (1998-2002)

In October 1998, Conservative party member Andrés Pastrana was elected president in the closest election in the nation's history. In an effort to shore up declining U.S. support over Colombia's ineffectiveness in combating its drug problem, Pastrana took negotiations with the insurgents to a whole new level. He offered broad concessions to the guerrillas and honored a campaign promise to try and reach a peace settlement. In a public announcement he stated, "For peace, I will risk everything."³⁶

Several events occurred during Pastrana's presidency which appeared to give the FARC official recognition as a political actor rather than a criminal enterprise. One happened prior to the president's inauguration when Pastrana called for a meeting with Marulanda to discuss the

prospects of peace. Another, and perhaps the greatest indicator the president saw the FARC as a legitimate entity, was his decision to grant the organization temporary control of a 16,000 square-mile safe haven in southeastern Colombia (a cease fire was never declared beforehand). Known as the *despeje*, this area was the size of Switzerland and represented 4% of the country's landmass.³⁷ Pastrana promised to keep this area off limits to government forces for 90 days, but the period was extended several times throughout 2000 and 2001.³⁸ This move was very unpopular with the Colombian military since it feared the FARC was better equipped and would use the safe haven to regroup and train more recruits.³⁹

Pastrana believed peace with the FARC was a prerequisite for success in the drug war. He made a concerted effort to end Colombia's coca production by asking drug-consuming countries to contribute to a South American version of the Marshall Plan. One element of his program, known as *Plan Colombia*, involved spending billions of dollars in rural areas to develop roads, schools and businesses.⁴⁰ He hoped the peasants who grew coca out of financial necessity would be willing to switch crops if their economic situation improved. However the key to Pastrana's plan rest with the FARC since it was the only organization that "had the credibility, manpower, and organizational ability among the coca growers to make crop-substitution programs stick."⁴¹

At a meeting in Costa Rica, the FARC's chief negotiator, Raúl Reyes, seemingly acknowledged the merits of *Plan Colombia*. He told a U.S. State Department representative that, given the necessary economic investment, the FARC could help eliminate the drug crops within five years.⁴² This meeting offers important insight into the true nature of the insurgency. The fact that the FARC hinted at giving up its involvement in the drug trade in return for greater government investment in the rural areas demonstrates it is not simply a narco-trafficking

criminal organization. In this case it stayed true to its founding principle of promoting the welfare of the agrarian poor.⁴³

One of the major problems with Pastrana's peace process was it began without first declaring a cease-fire. Consequently, periods of "silence" were routinely interrupted by FARC attacks on government interests. This meant the rebels often arrived at the negotiating table with the upper hand.⁴⁴ Why this schizophrenic behavior of talking peace while making war? Some argue the FARC was never serious about peace and only showed interest in the process to acquire the *despeje*. Others claim it had no incentive to negotiate because it believed it was winning the war.⁴⁵ This author contends both arguments are true and the reason the FARC stretched out the negotiations was to buy time to reconstitute its forces in order to deliver a final blow against a failing state. Moreover, if the FARC was just a criminal organization, one would expect it to drag out the peace process in order to maximize profits from the drug trade. There is no evidence this was ever the case.⁴⁶

Unfortunately by late 2001, hopes for peace finally collapsed. The FARC's continued pursuit of violence and the military's opposition to the peace effort put pressure on Pastrana to end the negotiations. "After three years of unsuccessful peace talks and eleven extensions on the *despeje's* lease, the Pastrana administration had nothing to show for its efforts. However if the government learned anything from its experiences ... it was that the insurgency would not negotiate in good faith unless a 'mutually hurting stalemate' or balance of power which favored the state existed."⁴⁷ In light of this, a majority of Colombians – feeling betrayed by the FARC's disingenuous effort at pursuing peace and the government's mismanagement of the process – decided it was time for a more aggressive approach. In May 2002, the citizens voted in the hardline independent candidate Álvaro Uribe for president.

More than Just Opportunistic Criminals – the Uribe Presidency (2002-2010):

President Uribe ran on a platform to take the fight directly to the insurgents in order to restore citizen confidence in the government and regain control over the entire nation. Uribe viewed the FARC as a criminal organization and was prepared to fight with all the nation's resources at his disposal. His plan called for the government to reassert its sovereignty over guerilla-held territories and provide security to all sectors of society. However to do this, Colombia's military and police forces would need to be significantly strengthened.⁴⁸

To finance the modernization and reformation of the military and national police, Uribe increased government spending on defense and implemented a war tax. The U.S. also played a significant role, having contributed \$4.5 billion to *Plan Colombia* by 2004.⁴⁹ To help boost its popularity, the Colombian government secured several large tracts of FARC-controlled land which it redistributed to poor farmers. This measure, along with the president's focus on counterterrorism and increased investment, quickly paid off. After just two years, the police had a presence in each of Colombia's 1,098 municipalities and homicides fell by 18%. Additionally, over 3,500 paramilitary members were demobilized and the rate of kidnappings drastically declined. Yet despite the government's impressive gains, the FARC remained a considerable threat.⁵⁰ An organization solely devoted to crime would have certainly folded under these conditions.⁵¹

Presidents Bush and Uribe pushed hard in the wake of 9/11 to have the FARC designated a terrorist organization. In 2002, Bush authorized U.S.-pledged funds for *Plan Colombia* to be used directly against the FARC. Prior to this, U.S. money could only be used for counterdrug purposes. With better training and more sophisticated equipment, Colombia's military grew increasingly competent in its counterinsurgency campaign.⁵² Additionally, the military's

increased presence throughout the country yielded actionable intelligence which it used to inflict significant losses on FARC leadership. For example, Simón Trinidad – the third ranking member of the *EMC* – was captured in January 2004 and eventually extradited to the U.S.⁵³ In early March 2008, two members of the *Secretariat* were killed – Raúl Reyes in a cross-border raid in Ecuador and Iván Ríos by the hand of his bodyguard.⁵⁴ Just weeks later, the FARC's leader (Marulanda) died of a heart attack. Although his death was not the result of military action, the loss of a founding father represented another significant blow to the insurgency.⁵⁵

As the Colombian military made advances into guerilla-held territory, it observed signs the FARC was more than just a criminal organization. In many of the isolated villages, it discovered evidence the insurgents were attempting to create shadow governments under a plan called *New Colombia*. John Baylis, a noted expert on revolutionary warfare, contends that most insurgent movements establish parallel governing institutions to act as focal points for gaining public loyalty. These networks provide a degree of legitimacy for the revolutionary forces while eroding the legitimacy held by the government. There are numerous examples of guerrilla organizations predating the FARC (Mao's Red Army, Giap's North Vietnamese People's Army) which created these "states within states" to win over public opinion.⁵⁶

Under *New Colombia*, the FARC successfully established itself as the de facto governing authority in many rural areas. Its efforts to assert control over the local populace and create a political entity in direct competition with the government illustrates the FARC was interested in becoming its own nation state. To help achieve this goal, the FARC implemented several measures such as mandatory identification cards for all residents and social regulations which governed citizen behavior. It even went so far as to create a monetary system based on the coca leaf.⁵⁷ The fact that the FARC attempted to create political structures resembling those of a

traditional government supports the argument that it is a revolutionary organization that desires political power ... not a criminal enterprise.

Not only were government attacks having a tremendous impact on the FARC, but several internal factors helped erode the ideological commitment of its base during the Uribe presidency. First, the FARC lost several key members of its leadership ... positions difficult to fill with equally-qualified replacements. Second, the quality of recruits noticeably dropped as more under-aged children filled the ranks and struggled to cope with the psychological horrors of war.⁵⁸ Third, 90% of its soldiers were illiterate and possessed little primary school education. Although competent warriors skilled in guerilla tactics, many were unable to comprehend the organization's complex ideological beliefs. Finally, the FARC was forced to cut back on most of its regular political meetings due to increased operations tempo. As a result, many new recruits weren't properly indoctrinated into FARC ideology and struggled to grasp the political and social needs of the people they were defending.⁵⁹

A sense of frustration amongst the FARC's base reached new heights during this time. Many complained about the guerrillas' below-average intelligence, extreme shortsightedness, and lack of dedication to the peace process. Anti-FARC rallies (both domestic and international) as well as condemnation over its use of kidnapping became commonplace. Even Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (long considered a FARC ally) called upon the rebels to lay down their weapons and end the practice of kidnapping.⁶⁰ Public opinion towards the FARC reached new lows while polls for the president and his counterinsurgency strategy showed unprecedented support (when Uribe left office he had a 75% approval rating and 82% supported the way he handled the guerillas).⁶¹ By all accounts the tables appeared to have finally turned for Columbia.

More than Just Opportunistic Criminals – the Santos Presidency (2010-Present):

There is no disputing the fact that the FARC has been substantially crippled by the government's ongoing military campaigns. Plagued by deaths, captures, desertions and low recruitment numbers, the organization is now estimated to have less than 10,000 members (down from its high of 18,000 in the late 1990's).⁶² Nevertheless, its jungle hideaways continue to provide protection for its ongoing illicit activities, allowing it to ratchet up the violence in areas still under its control. Additionally, the FARC has recently formed alliances with other cartels and paramilitary organizations. Although these alliances are often temporary and fragile, they do add another dimension to the conflict.⁶³

The 2010 election of President Santos marked a defining moment for Colombia's future. During his campaign, he indicated he was willing to implement a "multi-faceted approach" which included resuming peace talks with the FARC.⁶⁴ Santos argued the military-centric policies of President Uribe, although effective, would not be enough to permanently end the insurgency. As such he advocated pursuing a comprehensive strategy of negotiations with an emphasis on nonmilitary solutions.⁶⁵

Undoubtedly Santos wants to go down in history as the president who finally achieved lasting peace with the FARC. However his desire to move away from the hardline policies of his predecessor should not be misinterpreted as an unwillingness to use strong military force against the rebels.⁶⁶ In fact, from the surface there appears to be very little difference between either presidents' approach to military operations. The Santos government continues to bring the fight directly to the rebels, achieving noteworthy results such as the September 2010 airstrike that killed "Mono Jojoy," the FARC's second in command. This high-profile death forced the FARC's new leader – Alfonso Cano – to implement radical change. For example, the FARC

disbanded its large camps and disbursed into groups of less than twelve persons to avoid being targeted.⁶⁷ Additionally, the rebels pushed out into the periphery, seeking the protection provided by the security vacuum existing along Colombia's southern borders.

Unfortunately for the FARC, this change in strategy was not enough to halt the government's advance. In November 2011, Cano was killed in a military raid which Santos says "represents the most devastating blow this group has suffered in its history." Following the raid, the president called upon every member of the FARC to demobilize immediately.⁶⁸ Not surprising, the guerillas refused and vowed to press on with more attacks. Nevertheless, Cano's death made the president feel he could enter peace negotiations from a position of strength. However not wanting to repeat the failures of the Pastrana administration, Santos clearly stipulated there would be no halt to the government's offensive until a formal ceasefire was signed.⁶⁹

With respect to the most recent peace process, it appears the FARC may be willing to make good this time around. In January 2012, the FARC's newest leader "Timochenko" wrote a letter to the president indicating he wished to engage in peace talks.⁷⁰ The letter, which reveals the FARC's revolutionary spirit is still alive, proposed a broad agenda that went far beyond the conflict. Timochenko wished to discuss a wide range of policies including privatizations, deregulation, freedom of trade and investment, and environmental devastation.⁷¹ In a goodwill gesture, the FARC leader also agreed to release all remaining security force hostages.⁷² This was in line with the announcement the rebels made at the beginning of the year of their plan to release all hostages and discontinue the practice of kidnapping.⁷³

By mid-November 2012, enough had been done by both sides to demonstrate each other's commitment to peace. Formal talks were held in Oslo, Norway followed a month later

by the FARC's declaration of a two-month unilateral ceasefire – the first such truce in more than a decade.⁷⁴ The delegation also met in December 2012, this time in Havana, Cuba.⁷⁵ One has to wonder if Timochenko's letter to President Santos represents more insurgent rhetoric or is a genuine call for peace. Considering the government over the last two decades has taken significant steps to address the very issues he mentioned, it is most likely the latter. Given that an insurgency without a cause is not an insurgency, it seems likely the FARC finally recognizes that many of its original grievances are largely resolved. Consequently, the only way it can now become a legitimate member of the political process is if it agrees to peace. And since most Colombians are desperate to see an end to this conflict, odds are they will be very generous towards the FARC if it takes such a step (again, more evidence it is not just a group of narco-criminals).

So Now What?

Colombia represents a strategically important country that is arguably our closest ally in Latin America. Moreover, security in the region depends on a strong Colombia – a resilient and democratic society that has successfully defeated its arch nemesis: cocaine.⁷⁶ It is not surprising the United States' commitment to Colombia has grown significantly, especially considering the close connection between terrorism and the drug trade. In the last twelve years, this commitment has produced tremendous results. Specifically, violence has fallen to its lowest level in a generation, government presence has returned to every municipality, and economic growth has spurred development on all fronts. Yet despite these impressive gains, narcotics trafficking remains a significant threat which has the potential to undermine several years of progress.⁷⁷

Defeating the FARC once and for all will not be easy. As this paper revealed, the FARC is much more than a band of narco-traffickers and rent-seeking profiteers. Consequently,

treating it as just another criminal organization is a mistake ... this has been done before and has failed to achieve positive results. The Santos administration recognizes this fact and its multi-faceted approach to combating the FARC (negotiating peace while keeping its military options open) appears to be working and must be continued. It is therefore in America's national interest that Colombia handles the FARC as a legitimate insurgency rather than a criminal entity.

So what can America do to help Colombia achieve success? Joel Day of the *Korbel School of International Studies* contends the U.S. must support counter-insurgency programs that bring the FARC's true believers into the political process while "flipping" its remaining members. To do this, the Santos administration must capitalize on the major disconnect that currently exists between FARC leadership, its soldiers, and the insurgency's base.⁷⁸ This means the true believers must be separated from those who have little interest in the insurgency and be allowed to peacefully participate in the political process. An open invitation to rejoin civil society would capitalize on the fact that many FARC members still wish to be involved in building schools, paving roads, and increasing the quality of life of its supporters. As such, Colombia must be willing to treat these ideologically-driven FARC members as patriots rather than criminals.⁷⁹

With respect to the non-ideologically-defined rebels, the government must focus less on eliminating them and more on facilitating their defection. Programs of reconciliation and integration will help win their hearts and minds and convince many to flip from the FARC.⁸⁰ Additionally, they must be offered realistic alternatives to the drug trade. If jobs aren't readily available, the government must step in with monetary incentives. However it cannot end there since permanently flipping the insurgents is far more complicated than just paying their bills. If Colombia can get the rebels to defect, then measures must be in place to keep them from going

back. Consequently, the very non-monetary incentives the FARC used to recruit its members (comradeship, security and respect) must be offered by the Colombian government.⁸¹

Thanks to the progress made during the past three administrations, Colombia stands a real chance at finally defeating the insurgency. The above recommendations will only enhance this effort and should be considered by Colombia in its campaign against the FARC. The time has come for Colombia to make the FARC an offer it cannot refuse . . . and the FARC to finally accept.⁸²



Notes

1. Paul E. Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP): Marxist Leninist Insurgency or Criminal Enterprise?" Research Report no. Unknown (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December, 2005), 2.

2. According to an annual White House report for 2011 (written by the Office of National Drug Control Policy), Peru regained its former distinction as the world's top cocaine producer. Colombia's output fell sharply in 2011, putting the former leader in third place behind Bolivia. Gil Kerlikowske, director of the White House drug policy office, described the reduction as "historic" and credits *Plan Colombia* for the decline. *Plan Colombia* is a U.S. taxpayer-funded program to combat drugs and terrorism that has given Colombia over \$8 billion since it started in 2000 – the largest U.S. foreign aid program outside the Middle East and Afghanistan. See Chris Kraul and Jenny Carolina Gonzalez, "White House: Peru Displaces Colombia as Top Cocaine Producer," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 2012,

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/07/reporting-from-bogota-peru-has-regained-its-former-distinction-as-the-worlds-top-cocaine-producer-according-to-the-annua.html.

3. There were several small revolts against Spanish rule throughout this period. A major point of contention was Spain's steady increase in taxes on the Colombians to fund its wars against Britain and France. The first major victory came in 1819 during the Battle of Boyaca when Simon Bolivar's revolutionary forces defeated the Spanish military causing many Spanish loyalists to flee. Although the revolution espoused liberty and republican virtues, the fighting was more about power, money, and independence from Spanish authority. See Maj Jon-Paul N. Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC in Colombia: Breaking the Frame in FM 3-24," Research Report no. Unknown (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, AY 2009), 4-5.

4. *Ibid.*, 5.

5. Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Assistant Professor of International Security Studies, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

6. The constant jockeying for political power and control of the state between the two parties led to a period of fierce fighting from 1899 to 1902 known as the "Thousand Days War." The incumbent conservatives fought liberal-controlled forces which were organized into guerrilla bands in the south and central regions of the country. These regional guerrilla forces – supported by landless indigents and the rural poor – were a precursor to the many insurgent groups that developed in Columbia during the 20th century. The end result of the Thousand Days War was over 100,000 dead and an economy in ruins. See James F. Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 91.

7. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a presidential candidate for the Liberal party, was assassinated in 1948. He ran on a platform that championed middle and urban working-class causes. Members of both parties took advantage of the chaos that followed, some even formed guerilla groups and death squads which sought revenge against "unruly neighbors ... ruthless landlords, and uncompromising bosses." See Steven Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 7.

8. It is estimated that *La Violencia* resulted in anywhere between 80,000 to 400,000 deaths – mostly rural peasants and poor laborers. See Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 345.

9. Several guerrilla groups formed in Colombia during this time (no doubt influenced by the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara starting in 1953). They included the *Ejercito Popular de Liberacion* (EPL), the 19th of April Movement (M-19), the *Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal* (MRL), the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN), as well as the FARC. Additionally, many conservative paramilitary movements were formed which viewed themselves as “guerrillas for peace” and self-defense forces. See Jon-Paul Maddaloni, “An Analysis of the FARC,” 8 and Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

10. Dennis M. Rempe, “Guerillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: US Counter-insurgency Efforts in Columbia 1959-1965,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 6, no.3 (Winter 1995): 304-327, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/smallwars.htm>.

11. Ever since its creation, the FARC championed the cause of the “Have-Nots.” It believes the Colombian government squandered the nation’s resources and failed to address such problems as social inequality, crime, and deficient public services. Additionally, the FARC claims the armed forces have engaged in a campaign of repressive violence against the rural peasants and poor urban laborers. Consequently, it is committed to an armed struggle against the Colombian government and has levied the following demands: 1) provide solutions for rising unemployment, 2) improve health and education among the poor, 3) end impunity for military members who abuse human rights, 4) end discrimination, and 5) dismantle the Colombian paramilitaries. According to the FARC, the Colombian government has yet to meet any of these demands. See William D. Coplin and Michael K. O’Leary, *Political Risk Yearbook 2001*, Colombia Country Report (East Syracuse, NY: The PRS Group, Inc., 2001), 25.

12. Thomas R. Cook, “The Financial Arm of the FARC: A Threat Finance Perspective,” *Journal of Strategic Security* IV, no. 1 (2011): 26.

13. The principles of Marxism and Leninism are an effective tool for organizing armed insurrections and getting citizens (especially the disenfranchised poor) to focus on governance. Leninism preaches building political parties and quickly gaining control of the police and military. Some of the most successful left-wing political movements in Latin America relied on these principles, including the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN: 1980 - present) in El Salvador and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN: 1961 – present) in Nicaragua. Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

14. *Plan Lazo* was part of President Kennedy’s pro-democracy campaign in Latin America known as the *Alliance for Progress*. Under the plan, the United States provided military and financial aid to assist Colombia in its effort to suppress the growing Marxist-based insurgencies and regain control of territories held by guerrillas. See Jon-Paul Maddaloni, “An Analysis of the FARC,” 9-10.

15. *Bolivarianism* is political doctrine identified with anti-imperialism. It is named after Simón Bolívar, a Venezuelan general who led much of South America’s struggle for independence from Spain in the 19th Century. Those who espouse *Bolivarianism* emphasize equality among all social classes, redistribution of government funds to the poor and working

classes, education for all, and the return of native lands to indigenous communities. Social programs and rank-and-file activism are the engines behind *Bolivarianism*, which in recent years has become most closely associated with Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez. Some argue *Bolivarianism* provides a clear framework for Latin American socialism in the 21st Century. See Gabriel Furshong, "What is Bolivarian Socialism? And When?" *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 4 September 2005, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1342>.

16. Despite the FARC's delegation of authority, there was never any doubt that Marulanda and Arenas were ultimately in charge. See Angel Rabassa and Peter Chalk, "Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and all Its Implications for Regional Stability" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 25.

17. The FARC's desire to appeal to the greatest number of people is seen in the hybrid nature of its ideology. By espousing principles such as agrarian land reform, socialism and Bolivarianism, the FARC attracts a widely diverse and eclectic membership. When Marulanda was still alive, he said the organization "is a little bit of everything . . . its doors [are] open to all political, philosophical, religious, and ideological tendencies. The FARC allows for people who share the common ideal of liberating the country to come and work together." See Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," in Carlos Arango Z, *FARC-EP, Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe* (Bogotá: Ediciones Aurora, 1984), 120.

18. It is widely reported the FARC receives training and technical assistance in arms production from international rogue groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The IRA and the FARC have trained together and coordinated attacks, weapons smuggling, and other illegal activities for decades. Many claim the FARC's tactics changed after the Irish connection became established. Evidence of collaboration is seen in the mortars and booby-traps used by the FARC which are similar or identical to those used by IRA Active Service Units in Northern Ireland. Additionally, three IRA operatives – said to be the IRA's two most senior explosives experts and Sinn Fein's political representative in Cuba – were arrested and convicted in a Colombian court for traveling to rebel territory with false passports to train FARC militants. See Rick Stanton, "Still Killing: IRA Linked to FARC, Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Taliban," *Freerepublic.com*, 8 November 2010, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2623650/posts> and Matthew Engel and Rosie Cowan, "IRA 'Sent Men to Colombia'," *The Guardian*, 24 April 2002, <http://www.theguardian.co.uk/uk/2002/apr/25/northernireland.colombia>.

19. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 38.

20. Throughout most of the 1970's, the FARC was not much of a threat to the state. It remained a small-scale jungle-based guerrilla movement that was mostly predatory in nature and relied on financing methods such as "episodic extortion, bank robbing, and random kidnappings." However the opportunity to dramatically expand its financial base occurred in the late 1970's with the rise of coca as a major Colombian export. Coca is hardy, thrives in poor soil, and is easily processed into a nonperishable paste. Moreover, the insatiable demand for cocaine in the United States drove prices to unprecedented heights. For the poor rural peasants who had virtually no access to modern agricultural techniques, coca production became a "no brainer." Aided by the security vacuum created by years of government neglect, the FARC capitalized on this new source of revenue. See Thomas Cook, "The Financial Arm of the FARC," 21.

21. According to Maj Jon-Paul Maddaloni, the *Secretariat* implemented a plan to expand commodity taxes on gold, oil, cattle and coffee in areas controlled by the FARC. However most noteworthy of the taxes were those on the illegal drug industry. At first, the FARC's leadership forbade getting involved with coca saying it was counter-revolutionary and went against its social contract with the people. Furthermore, they viewed illegal drug use as an elitist disease. However the *Secretariat* changed its mind in order to secure a steady source of funding. The fact that the poor farmers – the FARC's main support base – had little choice but to grow the drug put further pressure on the organization to accept it. Consequently, the FARC established a deliberate schedule of fees on coca production known as the *gramaje*. This coca tax was viewed as a way to protect the farmer against the criminal organizations and paramilitary groups that were taking advantage of them by forcing them to grow the illegal drug. See Jon-Paul Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC in Colombia," 13-14.

22. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 37.

23. Lt Col Kristian D. Skinner, "An Historical Analysis of the Colombian Dilema," Research Report no. Unknown, (Washington, D.C.: National War College, April 2001), 3.

24. James F. Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 137.

25. A key factor which strengthened the FARC's increased militarization was the continued assassination of members of its political party (the *Patriotic Union*). Between 1985 and 1988, 550 members of the party including a presidential candidate and four congressmen were murdered. By the late 1990's, the death toll had grown to over 4,000. See Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2004), 96.

26. The *Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia* planned to increase membership to 32,000 so the FARC could take the fight directly to the government. Moreover, the campaign sought to sabotage the national economy with attacks on electricity, transportation, and communication networks. The FARC believed this would diminish the legitimacy of the government and create the necessary conditions for a general insurrection. See Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 28-31.

27. The FARC – and other organizations like it – were the only ones providing any degree of security for the agrarian peasants living in rural Colombia. It also provided many public services, even going so far as to regulate issues such as carrying arms, fishing, hunting, working hours, liquor consumption, prostitution, interfamily violence, drug abuse, and cutting trees. This focus on social programs is critical to understanding how the FARC grew from a tiny band of rebels into the largest and longest-lasting guerrilla movement in Latin America. See Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (State University of New York Press, 2002), 89.

28. The FARC eliminated much of the government influence in the areas it controlled by carrying out targeted assassinations of governors, mayors, and other elected officials. See Ana Carrigan, "Colombia's Best Chance," *The Nation*, 21 January 1999, <http://www.thenation.com/article/colombias-best-chance>.

29. Obtaining belligerent status was important to the FARC. This is a legal concept that, under the international rules of war, would have granted the FARC recognition as a state-building entity. It also would have prevented the Colombian government from judging captured

guerrillas and obligated third-party states to remain neutral until the dispute was resolved. See Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 197-8.

30. It is interesting to speculate why the FARC turned to drugs and not something else as its main source of funding. It certainly makes sense why coca became its crop of choice – Colombia’s natural environment is perfectly suited to growing it. One can surmise if conditions in Colombia were favorable for growing highly-profitable, legal alternatives (truffles and saffron come to mind), perhaps the FARC would have found ways to profit from them. This of course assumes that international demand for such crops is there. Nevertheless, this author contends it is not the illegality of drugs that attracted the FARC to coca production, but rather the lack of any lucrative legal substitute.

However things have recently changed as the rebels appear to have found a more profitable and far safer source of income: gold. Colombia has vast deposits of this precious metal, and with record high prices and *Plan Colombia*’s successful coca eradication efforts, many peasants have left their farms for the gold mining industry. The FARC has imposed a system of taxes and other extortion schemes (both legal and illegal) on the miners, which now makes gold more lucrative for the organization than coca. The advantage of gold is that it is perfectly legal to transport and sell, unlike cocaine. Admittedly, some of the FARC’s tax collection methods are questionable, but the reality is collecting taxes on gold – a commodity valued in most societies – is viewed in a much more favorable light than trafficking narcotics. Additionally, the FARC’s willingness to change its main source of funding indicates drugs are not a fundamental element of its ideology. Rather, they simply serve to finance its revolution. Again, this is evidence the FARC is more than just a criminal organization. See Jeremy McDermott, “Gold Overtakes Drugs as Source of Colombia Rebel Funds,” *BBC News*, 16 June 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18396920>.

31. According to Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, the strengthening of the FARC during the 1990’s was an unintended consequence of the successes made by U.S. anti-drug efforts. These included dismantling the Medellin and Cali drug cartels, interdicting coca coming into Colombian processing facilities, and pressuring the Colombian government to allow aerial fumigation of coca crops. These successes pushed coca cultivation to FARC-controlled areas and weakened many of the FARC’s political and military opponents. As such, the FARC was able to extract unprecedented resources from the cocaine industry and use them to fund its long insurgency against the Colombian government. See Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, “The FARC’s Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia’s Civil War in the 1990s,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (2006): 95.

32. By entering into the drug business, the FARC “transformed from a traditional guerilla group into a full-fledged insurgency because of its ability to effectively convert the proceeds derived from illegal narcotics trafficking into operational funds.” See Thomas Cook, “The Financial Arm of the FARC,” 19.

33. Paul Saskiewicz, “The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia,” 44.

34. Thomas Cook, “The Financial Arm of the FARC,” 23.

35. Three additional factors that lend credence to the notion the FARC is a legitimate insurgency rather than a criminal organization are its highly-sophisticated command structure (*Secretariat, EMC, Regional Blocs, etc.*), its strict adherence to a penal code (*Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario*), and its desire to educate its members. The first two have already been

discussed. The third can be seen in its program called *los cien sabios* (“the one hundred wise men.”) These elite group of rebels were selected by the *Secretariat* and sent abroad to receive advanced university degrees in a variety of academic subjects. The FARC hoped to mold these individuals into competent government bureaucrats who would one day become the nation’s new political leaders. The fact that the FARC is interested in academically developing its members is proof that even during the height of the drug trade and its associated violence, it never abandoned its political aspirations. It understood the importance of maintaining a political platform from which it could disseminate information and attract new membership. One also has to wonder whether a criminal organization motivated by quick profits would be willing to make such a financial investment in the educational development and political advancement of its members.

Together these three elements help keep the insurgents committed to their cause and prevent the FARC from degenerating into a criminal entity. Moreover, they provide the revolutionary cohesion needed to keep the organization functioning, especially considering the highly-lucrative and illegal activities it is involved with. As such, the FARC has successfully maintained control over a diverse insurgency that is widely scattered across the country. See Paul Saskiewicz, “The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia,” 50.

36. Gabriel Marcella, “Implementing Plan Colombia,” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, April 2001), 5.

37. The FARC viewed the *despeje* as an independent republic. With no government pressure to challenge them, they increased coca production to all-time heights. See Coplin and O’Leary, *Political Risk Yearbook 2001*, 25.

38. Gabriel Marcella, “Implementing Plan Colombia,” 5.

39. Cynthia A. Watson, “Can the Civilians Hold On? Civil-Military Relations in Colombia,” Research Report no. Unknown, (Washington, DC: National War College, 2000), 23.

40. *Plan Colombia* refers to the financial aid program between Colombia and several international partners aimed at ending the insurgency and eradicating coca production. Proposed by Pastrana in 1999, the program attempted to link economic development and security to the success of the peace process. The plan set out to 1) increase the efficiency of the Colombian security forces and judicial system, 2) reduce drug production, and 3) reintegrate the insurgents into normal society. *Plan Colombia* specifically called for direct U.S. military aid to the Colombian Armed Forces and National Police, support for judicial and police reform, drug interdiction efforts, and alternative crop development for Colombian farmers. See Kristian Skinner, “An Historical Analysis of the Colombian Dilema,” 31.

41. Ana Carrigan, “Colombia’s Best Chance.”

42. *Ibid.*

43. Another event that sheds light on the true nature of the FARC occurred in June 2001 when it announced it would participate in a goodwill gesture to “achieve peace and social justice.” It decided to release 250 of the 450 soldiers and policemen it held captive in return for fourteen ailing guerillas being held in Colombian jails. Pastrana, along with representatives from several Latin American and European countries, were invited to witness the prisoner exchange (the president did not attend). This event was a top priority for the aging Marulanda who insisted the detained individuals were “prisoners of war” who were fairly captured in combat. Despite the large disparity in numbers, the *Secretariat* was well aware that only legitimate states

participate in prisoner exchanges. As such, the FARC saw this as an opportunity to help obtain belligerent status. The decision to free such a large number suggested FARC leaders were conscious of the widespread belief that the peace process lacked credibility. They were also aware that Pastrana, with only one year left in office, would unlikely survive the next election unless tangible progress towards peace was made. Due to all the concessions it was receiving, the FARC had every interest in seeing Pastrana get reelected. See Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 89.

44. "Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace," *International Crisis Group*, Latin America Report No. 1, 26 March 2002, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/001-colombias-elusive-quest-for-peace.aspx>.

45. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 78-9.

46. Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

47. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 86.

48. Jorge Restrepo and Michael Spagat, "The Colombian Conflict: Uribe's First 17 Months," *Center for Economic Policy Research*, August 2004, <http://www.cepr.org/pubs/new-dps/dplist.asp?dpno=4570>.

49. Connie Veillette, "Plan Colombia: A Progress Report," (Washington, D.C.: CRS Report for Congress, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, 2005) 1.

50. In an effort to regain FARC-controlled territory and bring security to the entire nation, the Colombian military launched a full-out assault against the insurgency in 2004. The operation, coined *Plan Patriota*, constituted the largest military force ever assembled in Colombia (some 18,000 soldiers were mobilized). The FARC – on the run but still very much alive – responded with its own counteroffensive. It focused on indirect attacks against military installations and villages located far from the military's area of responsibility. By avoiding direct contact with the armed forces (it relied on landmines, mortars, and improvised explosive devices), the FARC was hoping to conserve its power to fight another day. See Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 88-91.

51. Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

52. To further capitalize on the government's military gains, Uribe implemented the *Política de Seguridad Democrática*. This initiative recruited local men to serve as "home guards" tasked to provide presence in villages where government forces did not exist. See Jon-Paul Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC in Colombia," 22.

53. "Colombia's FARC Calls for US Release of Simón Trinidad," *BBC News*, 23 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-20473922>.

54. Joshua Goodman, "Colombian Rebel Leader Raúl Reyes Killed by Army, Minister Says," *Bloomberg*, 1 March 2008, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a5HnABwKGrZc&refer=latin_america.

55. The Colombian government claimed to have killed more than 100 mid- and high-ranking FARC commanders in 2007. FARC defections and demobilizations also increased (up over 30% from 2006 to 2007). This followed a five-year period in which FARC manpower was estimated to have fallen by more than half. By this time, the government considered the remaining 9,000-10,000 guerrillas in a "self-preservation phase." Additionally, sustained military defeats forced the insurgents to abandon their heavy weaponry and relinquish control over many of their social,

economic and political interests. Another setback for the FARC occurred in July of 2008 during *Operation Jaque*, a Colombian military mission that resulted in the successful rescue of several high-profile hostages held by the insurgents. The hostages included three U.S. military contractors, eleven members of Colombia's military and nation police, and Ingrid Betancourt, a Colombian politician and former presidential candidate. The rescue team, which consisted of members of the Colombian Army disguised as reporters and medical aid workers, tricked the FARC into releasing the captives. The FARC publicly acknowledged the operation was a setback, but vowed it would not change its strategy. See "FARC's future - The Road Ahead for Colombia's Rebels," *Janes Intelligence Review*, 12 February 2008, <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?ShowProductLink=true&DocType=News&ItemId=+++1195472&Pubabbrev=JIR> and Captain Dylan D. Dombret, "Lessons Learned from Operation Check [Mate]," *Air and Space Power Journal*, 1 April 2009, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2009/1tri09/dombreteng.htm>.

56. John Baylis, "Revolutionary Warfare," *Contemporary Strategy II: The Nuclear Powers*, vol. 2 rev. and enl., ed. John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1987), 215.

57. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 93-4.

58. One of the common criticisms of the FARC centers on the fact that 25% of its recruits are under the age of eighteen. Surprisingly, forced recruitment remains rare in the FARC, most likely due to the seemingly inexhaustible supply of soldiers from rural Colombia. In a *Colombia Journal* interview, Raúl Reyes stated most recruits are between the ages of fifteen and thirty years and forced recruitment is prohibited because it goes against the organization's safety rules. UNICEF also backed up his claim saying the youth within the FARC volunteered because they were drawn to the idea of life-long employment and a steady income. However one must consider what "volunteer" really means. According to *Le Temps*, the FARC has a practice of enlisting large numbers of illiterate people under the age of fifteen. These uneducated children – fascinated by guns and hand-held radios – make easy prey for insurgent propaganda. Their overwhelming desire to escape the depravity of rural life masks any real understanding of what they are fighting for. See "Colombia: The Recruitment Methods of the FARC and Government Measures to Help FARC Members Reintegrate into Civilian Society," *Refworld*, 14 April 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4829b55c23.html>.

59. Paul Saskiewicz, "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 94-6.

60. "Chavez Calls on Colombian Rebels to End Struggle, Free Hostages," *Fox News*, 9 June 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,364368,00.html> Author's personal assessment: Perhaps there was a hidden agenda in Chavez' comments. After all, for the FARC to be considered a legitimate political actor that may someday govern Colombia, it would need to stop participating in activities seen by most as criminal. Moreover, the FARC becoming a genuine political player would go a long way in helping advance Chavez' Latin American socialist agenda.

61. Pandora Pugsley, "Uribe's Approval Rating at 75% in Final Poll," *Colombia Reports*, 20 July 2010, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/11096-uribes-approval-rating-at-75-in-final-poll.html>.

62. Since 2002, the FARC has lost nearly half its territory and it is currently incapable of conducting any degree of seize and hold operations. See Joel Day, “Buy Off and Buy In: Flipping the FARC,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 3 (2011), 50.

63. “Improving Security Policy in Colombia,” *International Crisis Group*, Latin America Briefing No. 23, 29 June 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/B23-improving-security-policy-in-colombia.aspx>.

64. Santos first entered office with a popularity rating of 76% indicating a large majority of Colombians supported his plan. An interesting note here is how public opinion swung back in favor of negotiations (compared to the hard-line approach favored during the Uribe administration). Perhaps this is due, to a certain extent, on the fact that many Colombians sympathize with the guerrillas because they understand the government has failed to provide economic opportunities to the nation’s poor. See Pandora Pugsley, “Uribe’s Approval Rating at 75%,” and Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

65. Joel Day, “Buy Off and Buy In,” 50.

66. “Colombian Military Attacks Rebel Camps, Killing 20,” *CNN*, 3 December 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/03/world/americas/colombia-farc/index.html>.

67. The death of Mono Jojoy was the first big test for Alfonso Cano, the man appointed to lead the FARC following the death of Marulanda. Just like any credible military leader, Cano saw what was happening on the battlefield and decided to implement radical change. See Adriaan Alsema, “Death of Mono Jojoy Forces FARC to Carry Out Different Strategy: NGO,” *Colombia Reports*, 1 December 2010, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/13215-death-of-mono-jojoy-forces-farc-to-carry-out-different-strategy-ngo.html>.

68. Ibid.

69. “Colombia Agrees to Hold Peace Talks with FARC Rebels,” *BBC News*, 28 August 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19393096>.

70. The fact that the FARC is able to replace its lost leaders without any major power struggles is a testament to its strict discipline and well-developed organizational structure. Perhaps if the FARC was just another criminal organization, it would not be so resilient.

71. There is something very interesting about Timochenko’s letter to President Santos. The letter indicated that he may be taking the FARC in a new ideological direction. Whereas the group has always been antagonistic towards organized religion, Timochenko’s letter contains numerous Catholic references including heaven, the book of Genesis, and the word of God. See Simeon Tegel, “What’s the Fate of Colombia’s Negotiations with the FARC?” *Minnpost*, 12 January 2012, <http://www.minnpost.com/global-post/2012/01/whats-fate-colombias-negotiations-farc>.

72. Although the release of the security force hostages is considered a significant step forward, the FARC has yet to release over 400 civilian hostages (perhaps a move to maintain some degree of bargaining power). See Arron Daugherty, “FARC Releases All Political Hostages,” *Colombia Reports*, 2 April 2012, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/23223-farc-releases-all-political-hostages-red-cross.html>.

73. Ironically, one of the biggest critics of the FARC’s use of kidnapping is Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. In 2008 Chavez, who is on good terms with the rebels, successfully brokered a deal with FARC leaders to release two female hostages. Following that event, he said, “I don’t agree with kidnapping and I don’t agree with armed struggle.” He also maintained

that it makes no sense to hold people who have nothing to do with the rebel's fight against the Colombian government. See "Hugo Chavez Tells Colombian Rebels to Stop Kidnapping," *Reuters*, 13 January 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/01/13/us-colombia-hostages-chavez-idUSN1336689820080113> and "Chavez Urges Colombia's FARC Rebels to Free All Civilian Hostages," *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 14 April 2008, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/newsbrief/3352>.

74. Nelson Bocanegra, Monica Garcia and Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombian Rebels Call Truce as Peace Talks Start," *Reuters*, 19 November 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/19/us-colombia-rebels-talks-idUSBRE8AI0O520121119>.

75. While most Colombians approve of the peace talks, polls showed more than half oppose any deal allowing the FARC leaders to participate in politics or which give them amnesty for crimes committed in the conflict. Furthermore, many Colombians doubt the peace talks will succeed because of claims the FARC is highly fractured and that its negotiating team does not represent the interests of the entire organization. Former president Pastrana is one such critic. He explains that when he negotiated with Marulanda back in the early 2000's, there was no question the FARC leader spoke with one voice. Today however, Pastrana believes there are two camps within the FARC – one that claims it wants peace and another that is more interested in drug trafficking. As proof, Pastrana cites the fact the rebels did not include anyone on their negotiating team from the Southern Bloc. This bloc is the most powerful and has the strongest links to drug trafficking. Pastrana also contends the FARC's negotiating team is coming more from the organization's political wing rather than its military wing. See Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombia's Santos Faces Tougher Peace Talks: Pastrana," *The Chicago Tribune*, 19 September 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-09-19/news/sns-rt-us-colombia-rebels-pastranabre88i142-20120919_1_farc-rebels-marulanda-peace-talks.

76. Dan Christman, "Our Strategic Interest in Trade with Colombia," *Free Enterprise*, 14 March 2008, <http://www.freeenterprise.com/2008/03/our-national-in> and Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

77. Dan Christman, "Our Strategic Interest in Trade with Colombia."

78. This divide has several causes: 1) recent defeats on the battlefield have challenged rebels to provide even basic services to the population that supports it; 2) high desertion rates among soldiers citing economic hardships, no doubt the result of receiving payments of "morale" rather than money; and 3) heavy losses in FARC leadership have fostered a lost sense of purpose, especially among members who struggle to understand the organization's complex ideology. See Joel Day, "Buy Off and Buy In," 52-3.

79. *Ibid.*, 53.

80. *Ibid.*, 51.

81. *Ibid.*, 51-4.

82. Dr. Gabriel Aguilera, Air War College, comments made on 19 December 2012.

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