Illicit Drug Funding: The Surprising Systemic Similarities Between the FARC and the Taliban

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The preponderance of literature and scholarly debate on counterinsurgency (COIN) focuses on the strategic or operational approach: leader-focused; large group-focused; special operations; conventional operations; enemy centric; and the latest, population-centric. While the criticism on the latter approach accuses it of plagiarizing work on the subject written in the 1960s, the current debate may result in distraction from how to effectively do long-term damage to insurgent groups. There is a relatively small conglomerate of scholarly work that focuses on the illicit sources of funding for insurgencies. More to the point, this work addresses the commonalities of this type of funding among seemingly disparate insurgent groups.

This monograph will present case studies on the two groups that details their origins, ostensible reasons for existing, and how both groups came to subsume the cultivation, production, and trafficking of illicit drugs into their organizations. A comparison of the two groups as complex systems as well as the correlations drawn between illicit crop cultivation and the size and strength of both groups will underscore this. Illicit drug funding is not simply a functional effort that is subordinate to the COIN approach "du jour." Any serious study of how to defeat these two groups absolutely must consider leveraging what has become both groups' primary source of financing against them.

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Abstract

ILLICIT DRUG FUNDING: THE SURPRISING SYSTEMIC SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE FARC AND THE TALIBAN, by MAJ David L. DeAtley, U.S. Army, 45 pages.

The preponderance of literature and scholarly debate on counterinsurgency (COIN) focuses on the strategic or operational approach: leader-focused; large group-focused; special operations; conventional operations; enemy centric; and the latest, population-centric. While the criticism on the latter approach accuses it of plagiarizing work on the subject written in the 1960s, the current debate may result in distraction from how to effectively do long-term damage to insurgent groups. There is a relatively small conglomerate of scholarly work that focuses on the illicit sources of funding for insurgencies. More to the point, this work addresses the commonalities of this type of funding among seemingly disparate insurgent groups.

In a November 2009 interview with the author, Professor Diana Marcela Rojas, an international relations expert and professor at the National University of Colombia states, "There's an availability of this illegal resource that these illegal armed groups take advantage of that explains their military strength and as such their strategy of territorial control [Translated from Spanish by the author]." Dr. Camilo Echandía, a professor of economics and expert in conflict studies at the Externado University of Colombia comments to the author, also in November of 2009, "I believe the guerrillas (FARC) are very tied to cocaine despite their military withdrawals of the last 5, 6, 7 years." Gretchen Peters describes in the introduction of her recent book *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling The Taliban And Al Qaeda,* "an explosion of poppy farming across southern Afghanistan." Noteworthy is that Ms. Peters writes "The definition of a Taliban member and drug smuggler is blurring" and goes on to coin the phrase "'FARCification'" of the Taliban."

Ms. Peters and other notable authors such as Georgetown University's Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown in are on to something. Most of the recent scholarship may have moved away from, or never focused on, how the arguably two most noteworthy insurgent groups operating today, FARC and the Taliban, finance themselves. This is a crucial knowledge gap because the similarities in how two seemingly completely different insurgent groups came to rely on illicit crop cultivation are startling.

This monograph will present case studies on the two groups that details their origins, ostensible reasons for existing, and how both groups came to subsume the cultivation, production, and trafficking of illicit drugs into their organizations. A comparison of the two groups as complex systems as well as the correlations drawn between illicit crop cultivation and the size and strength of both groups will underscore this. Illicit drug funding is not simply a functional effort that is subordinate to the COIN approach "du jour." Any serious study of how to defeat these two groups absolutely must consider leveraging what has become both groups' primary source of financing against them.

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Introduction

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Ms. Peters and other notable authors are on to something. While recent scholarship may have moved away from, or never focused on how the FARC and the Taliban finance themselves, the similarities in how two seemingly completely different insurgent groups came to rely on illicit crop cultivation is startling. Moreover any serious study of how to defeat these two groups absolutely must consider leveraging what has become both groups' primary source of financing against them.

[1]Professor Diana Marcela Rojas, interviewed by author.

Methodology and Case Study Introduction

Methodology

This monograph will use the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) Methodology. There are several factors that lead to this choice of methodology. The similarities of the FARC and the Taliban will be framed in the context of Most Different Systems Design. This methodology from political science provides a viable model for this undertaking. MDSD reveals "Similar outcomes across different countries," or in this case, different groups. [2] The following serves to exemplify why MDSD is appropriate for comparing and compelling these two cases. The FARC has operated as an organized group for over forty-five years now while the Taliban formed only about sixteen years ago. The FARC, by doctrine, is absolutely secular and traces its roots to class conflict. The Taliban, at least ostensibly, is the model of extremist Islam and has its roots in religious fundamentalism. The FARC speaks one language. The Taliban speaks several languages, primarily one that couldn't be more different than the FARC's language. They operate on the other side of the world from each other, on different north/south hemispheres, and in climates that are diametrically opposed.

The usefulness of examining these two groups as systems is derived from the fact that a systems approach allows the researcher to deconstruct the groups into their component parts, examine the structure and behavior of these component parts, determine which of these parts are key nodes and links, and derive comparisons from similar key nodes or links. The goal of this process is ultimately to achieve a greater understanding of key nodes and critical vulnerabilities in the system, and then leveraging against or stressing these key areas, i.e. the aforementioned key nodes and links. They, as organizations, both fit the requirements of most of the generally

[2]Todd Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction* (New York, Routledge, 2007).

accepted definitions of systems. Specifically, these two groups fit the commonly accepted definitions of a System:

A group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole.[3]

The International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) defines a system as: "A system can be broadly defined as an integrated set of elements that accomplish a defined objective."[4]

The defined objective of these two groups, and the argument as to whether or not it remains the same vis-à-vis their ostensible ideology as compared to their current raison d'être will be covered later in this monograph.

Having established the FARC and the Taliban as systems, we move on to an assertion that the two systems are also highly complex. This is because these two groups appear to fit what a consensus of authors agree that a complex system is. A complex system is one:

1. Whose structure and behavior as not deductible, nor may be inferred, from the behavior of the component parts;
2. Whose elements change in response to imposed "pressures" from neighboring elements;
3. Which has a large number of useful potential arrangements of its elements;
4. That continually increases its own complexity given a steady influx of energy (raw materials);
5. Characterized by the presence of independent change agents.[5]

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[3]American Heritage Dictionary's First Definition, as quoted by Norman and Kuras in their "Engineering Complex Systems" *Mitre Corporation Paper*.

[4]Ibid.

[5]D. Norman and M. Kuras, "Engineering Complex Systems," *MITRE Technical Report*, reference Bar-Yam, Heylighen, and Kauffman.

This adaptive aspect drives their operational characteristics today and leads to the emergence of their operational similarities. These operational similarities derive primarily from a shared need to survive monetarily. Both groups, notwithstanding their religious or ideological beliefs, have turned to illicit drug production and trafficking. Moreover, the FARC and the Taliban have made this activity part of their day-to-day operations and even centered their efforts geographically around the most advantageous areas to carry out the cultivation of Coca and poppy, respectively. The resulting production of cocaine paste and opium base has kept both groups alive and well.

Case Study Introduction

The birth of the FARC traces its roots to class and socio-economic conflict found in the Spanish discovery and conquest of northern South America in the 16th century. This monograph will focus on the social turmoil that began about halfway through the 20th century that led to the birth of the FARC in the mid-sixties. This monograph will also examine their need for support in the context of an emerging illicit drug industry in the 1970s and 1980s, and how the FARC used this industry to its advantage.

The interviews conducted in Colombia in November of 2009 serve two critical purposes: to support the literature and provide a unique perspective of the FARC. The Colombian Military (COLMIL) focus is strictly on the Division and below, as the Division represents the absolute highest operational level.[6] The interviews in Colombia provide a crucial and unique insight into, among other things, how the FARC has developed, changed, and adapted over the years. These interviews also support the postulation there has been a shift away from their ostensible ideology to abject narco-terrorism. This underscores the FARCs similarity to the Taliban in this regard.

[6]The Colombian Army is roughly the size of a Corps plus, and the argument can be made that the Colombian Army Divisions execute strategy. Additionally, COLMIL includes the National Police.

Although the Taliban took advantage of the opportunity provided by an illicit crop cultivation and production network that was already in place when they came to power in the mid-1990s, their roots are found in an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam. Although the Taliban is much more short-lived than the FARC, Afghanistan's history goes back over two thousand years. That said, their history shows the same correlation with illicit crop production, and after their ouster in 2001, their rebirth in centered around it.

History of the FARC

Examining the history of the FARC provides a narrative that above all gives context to the operational similarities between the FARC and the Taliban. The often undiscussed prehistory of the FARC and their development (adaptive tendencies) since the mid-1960s provides context for their ostensible ideology versus their current operational makeup. The factors that constitute their current operational makeup provide the context for their recent centering around illicit crop cultivation and production.

FARC "Pre-History"

"The FARC traces its roots to 'La Violencia' (The Violence) in Colombia at the end of the 1940s and during the1950s," is the predominant framework for subject matter on the FARC. Other literature about the FARC discusses the main historical precursor to La Violencia, the 1948 assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Gaitán. There is virtually no literature that takes the minimum perfunctory extra step to cover the "Thousand Day War" that took place between 1899 and 1902.

The "Pre-History" of the FARC is somewhat more complex, and inexorably tied to Colombian history. This historical bond ties the FARC to Colombia's external influences, as well. Examples include the Elitism rooted in Spanish colonization, the Russian Revolution, the spread of Communism throughout Latin America in the early 20th century, the Cuban Revolution, and even United States influence that goes back to the 18th century.

Colombia was discovered and settled by Spain in the early 16th century. The ensuing colonization and governance saw the emergence of class distinction and divisions that would last into the 19th century, which would produce a civil war and internal bickering. However, it would also mark the genesis of the two political parties that mostly endure to this day. The PL, "Partido Liberal," or Liberal Party, was anti-colonial and supported free trade and separation of church and state.[7] The PL "primarily came from the more recently created and ascending classes advocating free trade."[8] The PC, "Partido Conservador," or Conservative Party "wanted to preserve the Spanish colonial legacy of Roman Catholicism and authoritarianism."[9]

However, the very end of the 19th century would usher in the Thousand Day War, another antecedent of class conflict that is the historical forerunner to the framework that leads to the formation of the FARC. The Thousand Day War was an attempt at revolution in 1899 by what had become a divided PL. However, the PC managed to unite their Nationalist and Traditionalist factions against the PL. As the PL was weakened, they were unable to maintain conventional warfare tactics, and resorted to guerrilla warfare.[10] [11]

This is an important forbearer to the creation of the FARC because as Ruiz writes, "they switched the code of combat from one of conventional military tactics to one of guerrilla warfare. In doing so, they transformed the war into a bitter struggle that lasted for two more years and gave birth to a form of violence that fighters would employ with frightening results for the next 100 years." [12] Palacios expresses this a little differently, "In the guerrilla phase of the War the

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[7]The PL also supported liberalization of state monopolies on crops and freedom for slaves. They also supported freedom of the press, education, and elimination of the death penalty.

[8]Hanratty and Menritz, *Colombia, A Country Study*, 22.

[9]Ibid, 23.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Bert Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., 2001), 42.

[12]The change to guerrilla tactics occurred in 1900, the literary and historical consensus being that this prolonged the Thousand Day War until 1902.

Liberals gained strength….But their principal importance was more long term, by sowing the seeds of the popular radicalism that would germinate during the first decades of the twentieth century."[13]

The Liberals eventually succumbed in November of 1902, and signed a peace agreement with the conservatives. However, this still left Colombia divided, ravaged by a war that cost 100,000 Colombian lives and resulted in the secession of what is modern-day Panama. [14] The United States seized the opportunity presented by Panamanian distrust of both political parties in the wake of the Thousand Day War, supporting Panamanian secession and the building of the Panama Canal. Palacios captures the mood at the time nicely,[15] "The War of the Thousand Days[16] discredited the two parties in the eyes of all classes of Panamanian society…the Conservatives were evil and the liberals, who had cultivated their support for decades, were duplicitous."[17]

The ensuing political turmoil in the first half of the 20th century would set the stage for the first emergence of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the Liberal congressman whose assassination as a presidential candidate in 1948 would set off the largest riot in the history of the western hemisphere. His assassination is also recognized as the beginning of "La Violencia." Gaitán's denunciation of the 1928 Banana Massacre on Santa Marta Island in the Colombian Congress is

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[13]Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence, A History of Colombia, 1875 – 2002* (Durham, NC., Duke University Press, 2006), 38.

[14]This is the consensus estimate throughout the historical literature on the War.

[15]Palacios, 82.

[16]The difference in the translation is likely a difference between Ruiz's translator (he wrote the original version in Spanish), Richard Stoller's and my interpretation of the derived syntax of "Guerra de los Mil Días." I refer to keep it simple and take the extra step toward American English syntax that is not awkward-sounding.

[17]In the interest of objectivity, it is important to note the nuances that appear in the extensive literature on this subject. One side will blame U.S. regional meddling, while the other side will point to the possibility that Colombia brought on the secession of Panama by its failure to manage itself internally. The truth in the Panama (Canal) narrative may be somewhere in the middle.

the first record of his political notoriety that would grow up until his assassination on April 9, 1948 and continues to this day.[18]

La Violencia, which occurred from approximately 1948 to 1958,[19] refers to a period of internal civil conflict between Liberals and Conservatives.[20] The consensus is that it began with the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who was considered a shoe-in for the presidential election in 1949 and would have taken office in 1950. Whether or not La Violencia sparked or caused the resurgence of guerrilla bands in the Colombian countryside, it clearly leads to the birth of the FARC.

After Gaitán's assassination, which initially sparked the "Bogotazo,"[21] a ten-hour long riot that left 2,000 dead and many thousands injured, the current government suspended many liberties and fired all Liberal representatives and functionaries as a result.[22] For this reason, and as Gaitán was widely considered to be a lock to be the next President, the Liberals boycotted the 1949 elections, and Laureano Gómez, a staunch Conservative, ran unopposed and took office in 1950.

Gómez, a fascist and public supporter of Spain's dictator, Francisco Franco, violently suppressed dissent in the Colombian countryside.[23] In fact, Gómez's authoritarian rule was so brutal, the Conservatives themselves supported a coup d'état, placing Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, the

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[18]Although he obviously was not elected president in 1949, it is fair to compare his notoriety to John F. Kennedy's in the United States.

[19]The ends of the historical literary spectrum are from 1945 until 1965. Most agree that the "official" ending of La Violencia was 1958. The argument can be made that it has not ended.

[20]Much of the literature has it as conflict between supporters of the PL and the PC. This is an oversimplification.

[21]Adding "-azo" to the end of a word in Spanish gives it very strong emphasis. For example, "Golazo" is frequently used in Soccer (Fútbol) to denote a really amazing goal scored, combining "Gol" (Goal) and "azo." In this case "Bogotazo" stands on its own to indicate this particular event.

[22]Again, historical literature varies.

[23]He would, in fact, flee to Spain after being deposed.

head of the Colombian Armed Forces, in the Presidency.[24] This, however, would not last, as Gómez would secretly meet with the new Liberal leader, Alberto Lleras Camargo, in 1956 and form was essentially a bi-partisan government under what was called the "Frente Nacional," (FN) or National Front. The FN negotiated Rojas' peaceful ouster with the stipulation that a military junta of five generals remains in power until the FN could hold elections. Rojas left office in 1957, the military junta turned over power to the FN in 1958, "officially" ending la Violencia.

Palacios includes personal accounts about this period:

> Many towns with Liberal majorities, especially in Tolima, Valle de Cauca, and Caldas, were in effect invaded by police detachments whose members were recruited in solidly Conservative towns in Boyacá, Nariño, and Santander.[25] [26] They brought crime instead of security, and the armed liberal response-against them and against neighboring Conservative districts-was not long in coming.[27]

The armed liberal response was, simply put, the immediate historical antecedents of the FARC. In fact, a comprehensive FARC history published by the Istituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (IEPRI), or Institute of Political Studies and International Relations[28] at Colombia's National University writes, "The first large anti-guerrilla operation launched by the State between 1950 and 1951 served, despite its errors and failure, to return force and dynamics to the Plains Guerrilla Movement."[29] [30]

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[24]It was indeed so bad that Liberals rejoiced at the coup!

[25]West Central, Southwestern Coast (Where Calí is), and West Central Colombia, respectively.

[26]North Central, Extreme Southwestern Coast (bordering Ecuador), and North Central Colombia, respectively. This is a strange way to order these.

[27]Palacios, 159.

[28]IEPRI at the National University is precisely where I interviewed Professor Diana Rojas, who is a tenured professor there.

[29]Leongómez, Eduardo Pizarro, *Historia De La Guerrilla, Las FARC, De La Autodefensa A La Combinación De Todas Las Formas De Lucha, 1949-1966. History of the Guerrilla Fighter, The FARC, From Self-Defense To The Combination Of All Forms Of Struggle, 1949-1966.* (Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1991), 84.

[30]"La primera gran operación lanzada por el Estado entre 1950 y 1951 sirvió, a pesar de sus errores y fracaso, para restar fuerzas y dinámica al movimiento guerrillero de Los Llanos."

It is here where some of the first history of one of the eventual founders and long-standing leader of the FARC can be found. Pedro Antonio Marín, who went by the nom-de-guerre Manuel Marulanda Velez, who also had the nickname "Tirofijo," or "Sureshot," was present at the very beginning of the aforementioned armed liberal response.[31] This underscores the importance of this series of events and the events that lead up to them. Tirofijo lived in western Colombia in 1948 and was subsequently forced to flee government forces to the northeast to west central Colombia during the next two years take up arms against the State. Writings that are attributed to him detail a battle that took place in Quindío department in what would have been as early as 1950. He writes, "When Laureano Gómez took power, the Liberals had an agreement with the Army to impede him because that election was unconstitutional.[32] In the early morning of that August 7 we deployed to capture Génova, but we had such bad luck that the Police were waiting and we were the ones surprised."[33] [34]

Tirofijo would continue fighting against the State for the rest of the 1950s, mostly around the central plains where he grew up. Continuing army and police operations throughout the decade as well as the Cuban Revolution would spur him on. During the decade he would also attend the "Plains Guerrilla" meeting that would lead up to the formation of the FARC. Despite the "official" ending of La Violencia is 1958, the then President of the coalition government, Guillermo León Valencia, under pressure from Conservatives, launched a large-scale operation against Tirofijo's home base in west central Colombia. "Operación Marquetalia" took place in

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[31]Henceforth "Tirofijo."

[32]This makes sense in light of the coup d'état that would install an Army General as president in about three years.

[33]Leongómez, Eduardo Pizarro, *Historia De La Guerrilla, Las FARC, De La Autodefensa A La Combinación De Todas Las Formas De Lucha, 1949-1966*, 60.

[34]"Cuando tomara posesión Laureano Gómez, el Partido liberal tenía un acuerdo con el Ejército para impedirlo porque esa elección era inconsitucional. En la madrugada de ese 7 de Agosto nos dispusimos a la captura de Génova, pero con tan mala suerte que no encontramos a la Policía esperandonos y los sorpredidos fuimos nosotros."

May of 1964, and only served to disperse the guerrillas. Four months later, the guerrillas would hold their first organized "Primera Conferencia Guerrillera," or First Guerrilla Conference. Most of this group would meet again beginning April 25, 1966 to write various articles and decide on a name for themselves. They would call themselves to this day the "Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia," the FARC.[35]

The FARC 1966 to the 1980s

The FARC in the 1960s and 1970s saw gradual expansion and then stagnation militarily and politically. The FARC initially strengthened its ties with the Communist Party, both inside and outside of Colombia. Their strengthening military meant they became more organized and they had begun to expand geographically. In 1964 and 1966 the FARC established a "Staff" and organized into roughly six "Detachments" organized under a "Southern Bloc," with about 300 members. (See Figures 1-4).[36]

Figure 1. Colombian Army Intelligence School First FARC Conference Slide.

[35]There was a meeting in 1965, as well, but is largely not attributed to what would become the FARC.

[36]The slides from the Colombian Army's Intelligence School come from different presentations that are part of Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer training. Figures 1 and 3 come from different presentation than figure 2. Teaching Combined Armed Center Standards for slide presentations in terms of organization and presentation of material remains an ongoing challenge for U.S. Army advisors.

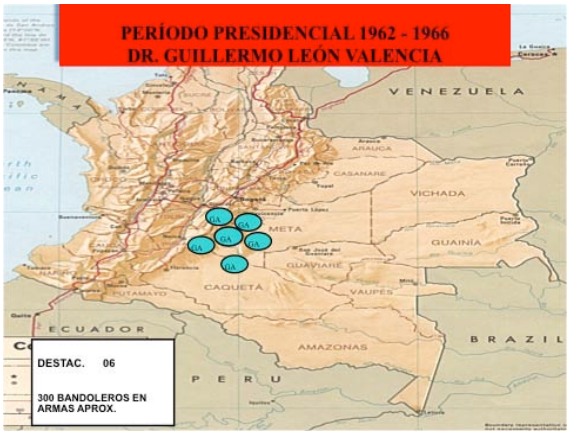

Figure 2. Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide Representing FARC Numbers.

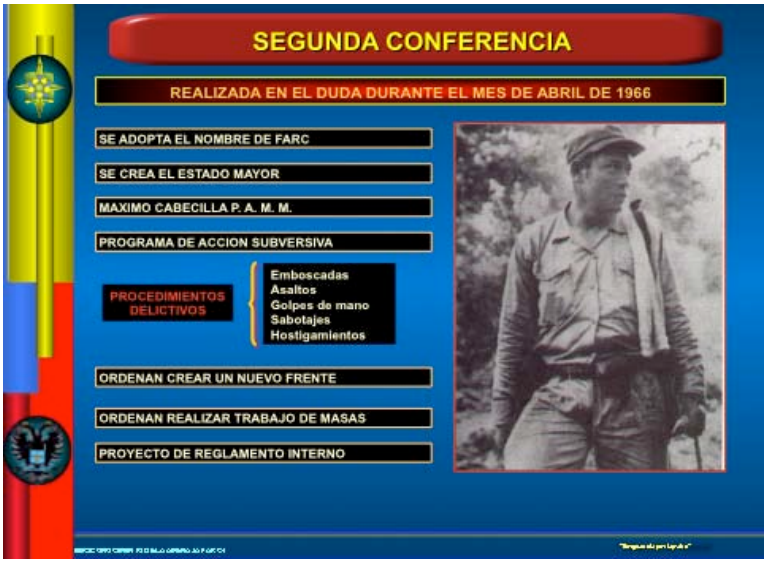

Figure 3. Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide Second FARC Conference.

Figure 4. Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide Depicting FARC Membership Growth 1966-1970.

They were geographically centered around southwest-central Colombia, in Western Meta Department. In 1969 they held their third conference during which they expanded from the six original detachments to four "Fronts," expanding slightly to the north and east, toward Cundinamarca Department and Guaviare Departments, respectively. During this period they grew from about 300 to about 450 members. During the third conference they also formally created intelligence and counterintelligence bodies. During the fourth and fifth conferences, held in 1971 and 1974 respectively, the FARC would grow to about 600 members, add a fifth front, and further expand their structure. (See Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide.

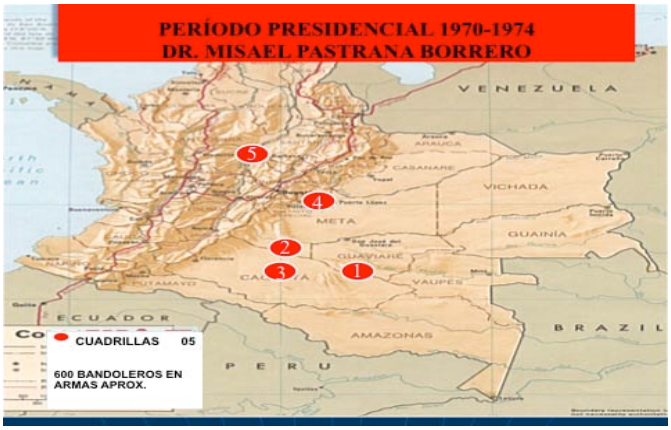

Figure 6. Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide.

However, the FARC would only grow to about 1,200 members until the early 1980s, as expanding their structure ties in with other developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s that would affect the FARC. In 1968, the Colombian Government formalized diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This resulted in waning financial support, which is reflected in their marked lack of growth and expansion. As a result, the FARC's relationship with their primary source of funding, the PCC, began to change and eventually wane.[37] In 1974, the bi-partisan National Front agreement that began in 1956 and officially ended La Violencia in 1958, ended. This was the political context within which the FARC was formed, and in a certain sense left the FARC without an enemy to point at.

These developments overlapped the rise of the illicit drug industry in the early 1970s. Coca cultivation in the 1970s took place primarily in Bolivia and Peru, with production and export taking place in Colombia.[38] The drug industry during this period in Colombia also centered around marijuana and poppy cultivation. The logical locations for this drug cultivation

[37]Roman D. Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, 2001, 127-143.

[38]Jennifer S. Holmes, Sheila Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Kevin M. Curtin, "Drugs, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis," *Latin American Politics & Society* 48, no. 3, 157-184.

and production are the same logical locations for the FARC's expansion after their formation and into the early 1970s: wherever there was lack of government presence. This coincidence of locale is where the FARC would first establish complex relationships with the drug industry.[39]

As drug production and trafficking, especially cocaine, increased exponentially during the 1970s, the relationships between the FARC and the illicit drug industry formed and grew, beginning with protection of drug production sites by the FARC in FARC-held territory in Colombia.[40] The FARC could also conveniently impose a "revolutionary tax" on production, movement by use of airfields or roads, or even the precursor chemicals or supplies required for marijuana, heroin, or cocaine production. During this period the FARC could subsume these "revolutionary taxes" under the same types of tariffs they imposed in territory they controlled on any legal commodity. [41] As long as the FARC was able to lump these taxes in with papaya, mango, coffee, or anything else then they were maintaining the ideological stance and the moral high ground they felt they needed, notwithstanding the fact that the FARC had already enforced these tariffs by extortion, kidnapping, and other forms of violence. [42]

The FARC, the 1980s, and the Macro-Cartels

The FARC in the early 1980s found itself at the crossroads of necessity and the opportunity provided by the tremendous upswing of actual cocaine cultivation and production inside Colombia, as well as the emergence of the Medellín and Calí cocaine cartels. The FARC,

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[39]Norman Offstein, "An Historical Review and Analysis of Colombian Guerrilla Movements: FARC, ELN and EPL," *Desarrollo Y Sociedad* 52 (September, 2003): 99-142.

[40]Ibid.

[41]In Jean Batou's 2008 interview of FARC Political spokesman Rodrigo Granda, Granda disingenuously calls this a "peace tax" and goes on to justify this practice by saying, "Our organization has implemented the collection of a tax on coca paste buyers who have to enter the areas where crops are grown and we operate." What he conveniently leaves out is that coca is grown in these areas at the FARC's armed behest.

[42]The FARC's ostensible ideology is a source of considerable debate among scholars and military officers that runs the gamut between the FARC maintaining their Marxist-Leninist ideals to this day to the FARC having abandoned their ideology as early as the 1970s.

in the decade and a half of its existence, never enjoyed robust logistical support from any of its ideological sponsors or brethren. In the 1970s, they had gotten a taste of the possibilities of the "amazing resource opportunities" that could come from taxation of illegal drug production in territories they controlled. In 1982 the FARC held their seventh conference.[43] At this conference the FARC overtly advertizes their intention to expand territorially and grow in numbers.[44] That is exactly what they did. By 1986 the FARC had gone from less than 20 Fronts to over 30 Fronts and from under 2000 members to around 4000. During this period they territorially expanded to virtually all of Colombia, save only the departments at the farthest reaches of the Brazilian and Peruvian borders. (See Figure 7).[45]

Figure 7. Colombian Army Intelligence School slide.

This expansion coincides with the emergence of cultivation of coca inside the Colombian borders and the birth of the Medellín drug cartel. With the boom in Colombian coca cultivation

[43]Phillippe Serres, "The FARC and Democracy in Colombia in the Colombia," *Democratization* vol. 7 no 4, Winter 2000, 191-218.

[44]They published their "Strategic Plan" of expansion that outlined growing to 48 fronts and 28,000 members, spending 8 billion pesos (about $133 million) over the 8-year period from 1982 to 1990. It seems very optimistic, but it is the author's contention that the FARC knew all along where they would get the finances.

[45]This slide shows Colombian Army Intelligence School estimates of FARC growth between 1982 and 1986 and their increase in territorial presence. This slide correlates with Figure 8 below.

came the development of a complex set of relationships between the FARC and the Medellín cartel. Simply put, the majority of the coca cultivated was in FARC-controlled territory, the hinterlands of Colombia where there was scarce government presence. Initially, the FARC raised the "revolutionary tax" on territory where coca was grown. Nonetheless, Pablo Escobar, the infamous head of the Medellín cartel, bought a great deal of this land when he began to reap these drug profits early on. As the FARC profits grew with the profit upswing, so did their direct involvement in cultivation and processing of coca. In fact, 1983 and 1984 is when known large-scale Medellín cartel drug processing labs began appearing throughout FARC-controlled territory. This means that at this point the FARC had moved from protection and taxation of coca production to the direct oversight and management of the same. Guiliotta and Leen write, "Late in the year (1983), the Colombian Army told the embassy that guerrillas from the Moscow-line Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC had a training camp in the eastern *llanos* near Villavicencio, an area known for years to be crawling with coca growers and mom-and-pop cocaine labs."[46] This occurrence is from early 1983.

Guiliotta and Leen go on to write about March of 1984:

> It was also March 17 when the soldiers found the base camp of what they believed to be a detachment of the…FARC.[47] Like the police a few days earlier, the soldiers concluded that the guerrillas were supposed to be handling base security for the traffickers, a task they had apparently performed without distinction, disappearing into the jungle as soon as the police arrived. It appeared that the army's (and Ambassador Tamb's) long-held suspicions about a "FARC-narc" connection were true. Colombian authorities estimate the jungle labs were likely to have put $12 billion in coffers of the Medellín cartel in two years. What the police destroyed was conservatively estimated to be worth $1.2 billion.[48]

This more direct involvement did result in Escobar forming groups to assassinate FARC members. However, this was not the case everywhere that coca was cultivated and produced. It

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[46]G. Guiliotta, and Jeff Leen. *Kings of Cocaine: Inside The Medellín Cartel – An Astonishing True Story Of Murder, Money, And International Corruption,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

[47]This is in western Caquetá Department, about 180 miles north of the Peruvian border and just over 300 miles south south-east of Bogotá.

[48]Guiliotta and Leen, 133-134.

is no coincidence that the production of cocaine increased by a factor of six between 1981 and 1986, resulting in a crop value that went from about $3 Billion to about $4.5 Billion. (See Figures 8 and 9, Tables 1 and 2).

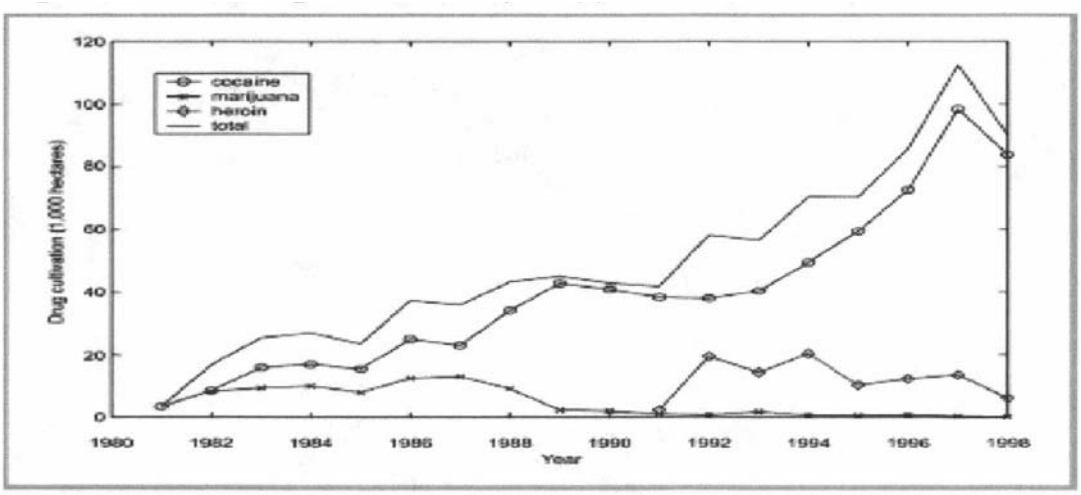

Figure 8. Source: Offstein, Norman. "An Historical Review and Analysis of Colombian Guerrilla Movements: FARC, ELN and EPL."

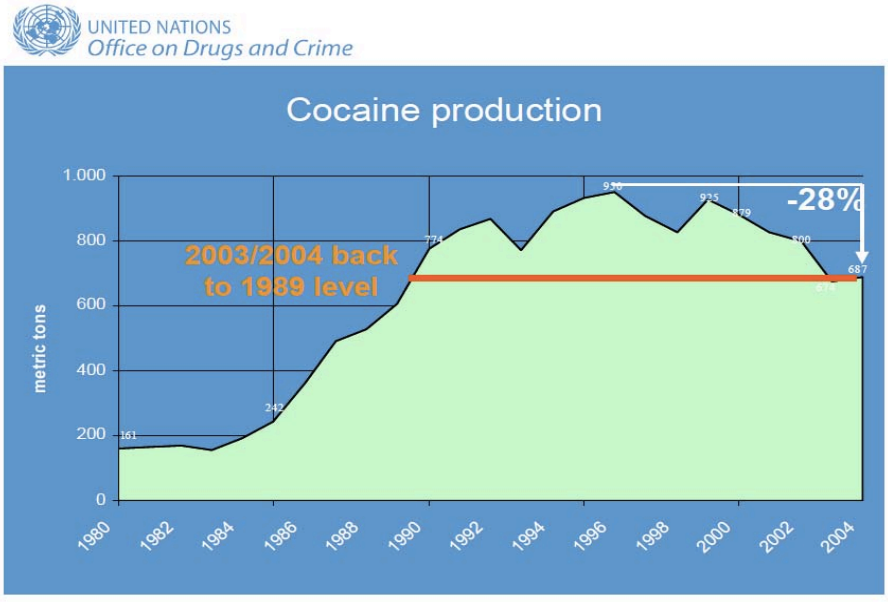

Figure 9. Source: UNODC "Cocaine Production in the Andean Region: 2004."

Table 1. Size Estimates of Selected Guerrilla Groups

Year	ELN		FARC		EPL	
	Armed men	Fronts	Armed men	Fronts	Armed men	Fronts
1964	15; 16[1]	1[1]	200	-	-	-
1965	36	-	400	-	-	-
1966	38	-	580; 500[2,a]	-	-	-
1967	90	-	600; 500[2,a]	-	-	-
1968	95	-	650; 500[2,a]	-	80	-
1969	120	-	700	-	90	-
1970	150	-	740	-	100	-
1971	115	-	780	-	100	-
1972	95	-	790	-	90	-
1973	65	-	790	-	80	-
1974	38	-	800	-	60	-
1975	27	-	820	-	70	-
1976	34	-	820	-	80	-
1977	52	-	830	-	90	-
1978	60; 190[1]	3	850; 1200[1]	7	100; 100[1]	4
1979	65	3	900	7	120	4
1980	70	3	980	11	140	2
1981	80	3	1200; 1800[1]	11; 17[1]	200; 350[1]	2
1982	100; 230[1]	4; 3[1]	1300; 2000[1]	15; 17[1]	220	4
1983	150	5	1570; 2400[1]	25	250	6
1984	350	4	1640; 3000[1]	27	660	7
1985	700	7	2590; 3500[1]	30	670	12
1986	1000; 1800[1]	11; 11[1]	3650; 4000[1]	32	700; 1400[1]	14
1987	1200	14	4280; 6000[2]	39	750; 1400[1]	15
1988	1700	16	4700	40	790; 1400[1]	15
1989	2000	20	4750	45	1400	16
1990	2200; 2600[1]	23	4800; 5800[1]	46	1200; 1250[1]	16
1991	2300; 2750[1] 1800[3]	25; 24[3]	4900; 6200[1]; 5600[3]	49; 60[1]; 49[3]	190; 200[3]	7; 7[3]
1992	2400; 2850[1]; 2080[3]	27; 25[3]	5300; 5805[3]	50; 50[3]	200; 210[3]	7; 7[3]
1993	2500; 3000[1]; 2436[3]	29; 29[3]	5900; 6385[3]	55; 55[3]	250; 550[3]	10; 10[3]
1994	2700; 3100[1]; 2710[3]	30; 32[3]	6200; 6800[1]; 6966[3]	58; 60[3]	300; 550[1]; 715[3]	12; 13[3]
1995	3000; 2500[1]	32	6400; 5700[1]	60	350	13
1996	3300; 3000[3]	32; 35[3]	6500; 7500[3]	62; 66[3]	300; 715[3]	13; 12[3]
1997	4000	33	6600	63	250	6
1998	4500	33	6700	63	200	4

[a]. 500 armed and several thousand peasant members.
[1]. Source: La Rotta Mendoza (1996).
[2]. Source: Hanratty and Meditz, eds (1990).
[3]. Source: Richani (1997).
All others, Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz.

Table 9. Drug production in Colombia.

Year	Cocaine				Marijuana				Heroin				Totals		
	Area	Production	Price	Crop value	Area	Production	Price	Crop value	Area	Production	Price	Crop value	Area	Production	Crop value
1981	3,500	53.4	57,092	3,048.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,500	53.4	3,048.7
1982	8,500	57.7	57,092	3,294.2	8,250	11,090	18,739	207.8	-	-	-	-	16,750	11,147.7	3,502.0
1983	16,000	104.3	29,644	3,091.9	9,400	12,527	22,046	276.2	-	-	-	-	25,400	12,631.3	3,368.0
1984	17,000	97.7	28,546	2,788.9	10,000	9,000	24,251	218.3	-	-	-	-	27,000	9,097.7	3,007.2
1985	15,500	189.5	24,154	4,577.2	8,000	3,000	19,842	59.5	-	-	-	-	23,500	3,189.5	4,636.7
1986	25,000	243.3	16,468	4,006.7	12,500	3,080	23,149	71.3	-	-	-	-	37,500	3,323.3	4,078.0
1987	23,000	315.8	16,468	5,200.6	13,085	5,594	39,683	222.0	-	-	-	-	36,085	5,909.8	5,422.6
1988	34,200	356.9	13,175	4,702.2	9,200	4,607	47,400	218.4	-	-	-	-	43,400	4,963.9	4,920.5
1989	43,000	380.7	12,077	4,597.7	2,350	2,420	51,809	125.4	-	-	-	-	45,350	2,800.7	4,723.1
1990	41,000	444.9	12,998	5,782.8	2,000	2,160	67,285	145.3	-	-	-	-	43,000	2,604.9	5,928.1
1991	38,500	509.1	12,586	6,407.5	1,145	1,252	74,958	93.8	2,316	1,357	40,000	54,280.0	41,961	3,118.1	60,781.4
1992	38,100	495.9	12,876	6,385.2	722	684	72,753	49.8	19,442	7,659	40,000	306,360.0	58,264	8,838.9	312,795.0
1993	40,500	389.4	12,974	5,052.1	1,797	1,825	83,622	152.6	14,408	5,835	40,000	233,400.0	56,705	8,049.4	238,604.7
1994	49,600	411.0	12,808	5,264.1	642	691	94,491	65.3	20,405	4,100	58,743	240,846.3	70,647	5,202.0	246,175.7
1995	59,600	369.5	12,629	4,666.4	659	686	94,799	65.0	10,300	6,106	47,394	289,387.8	70,559	7,161.5	294,119.2
1996	72,800	371.9	13,070	4,860.7	759	794	94,799	75.3	12,328	5,747	55,522	319,084.9	85,887	6,912.9	324,020.9
1997	98,500	385.2	13,415	5,167.5	420	453	79,367	36.0	13,572	7,287	58,603	427,040.1	112,492	8,125.2	432,243.5
1998	83,900	354.5	13,415	4,755.6	166	165	79,367	13.1	6,100	7,126	59,017	420,555.1	90,166	7,645.5	425,323.9

Note: Area in hectars; pricesUS/$kilo, except marijuana US/$ton; production in metric tons; crop value in millions US$.
Source: Rocha García (1999).

This increase was despite the 75 percent drop in the price of cocaine during this same period. Money was being made, and depending on the region, it was fought over or shared. The FARC was able to quadruple in size during this period in terms of manpower simply because they could afford it. They realized the potential of this overwhelming source of income and even justified it by adjusting their rhetoric, calling it a "necessary means to an end."[49] They began to say publicly that it was directed at the American enemy, as United States consumption of cocaine drove the demand.

Later in the decade saw the rise of the Calí cartel in Colombia, as well. While the relationships between both groups and the FARC continued to develop, they were no less complex in the sense that the nature of these relationships varied regionally. Nonetheless, the FARC continued to grow along with the tremendous upswing in coca cultivation and drug revenue that would not slow down at all into the next decade.

The FARC in the 1990s Until Now

The first few years of the 1990s saw the continuing growth and expansion of the FARC that matched the rise of the cocaine industry in Colombia. What is most important is that the 1990s saw the adaptation to this incredible source of income. By the beginning of the decade they had grown to almost 5,000 members and about 55 fronts. By 1993 they had grown to almost 7,000 members and had expanded to about 65 fronts. It is during this period that the FARC overtly published mention of a "financial apparatus."[50] This occurred during their 8th conference, the first such conference in almost eleven years.

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[49]Jason Vauters, and Michael L. R. Smith, "A Question of Escalation – From Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism: Analysing US Strategy in Colombia," *Small Wars and Insurgencies.* vol. 17, no. 2, 163-196, June 2006.

[50]Colombian Army Intelligence School "BG Charry Solano," *40 Años de Historia Narcoterrorista.* Bogotá, 2009.

Figure 10. "Eighth FARC Conference." Colombian Army Intelligence School Slide.

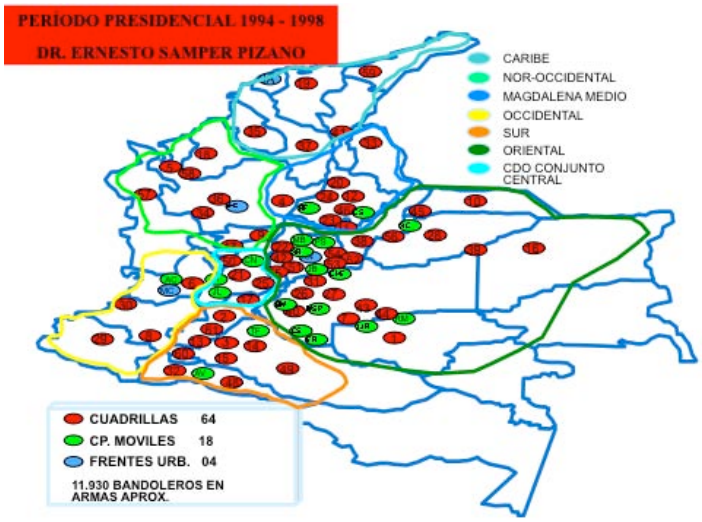

Figure 11. FARC Membership during Ernesto Samper's Presidency. Colombian Army Intelligence School.[51]

Another key event during this period was the vacuum created by the fall of the Medellín and Calí cartels. When these cartels were dismantled in 1993 the resulting vacuum was filled by "micro-cartels" and to a significant extent, the FARC.

[51]Again, these two slides from the COLAR Intelligence School come from two different presentations and should be part of the same presentation, as they are part of required curriculum on the FARC. Captain Fabian Enrique Gonzalez, who is a uniquely talented and highly intelligent officer, manages these presentations. However, when I was the4th Division's advisor, and he was the Chief Analyst for the intelligence apparatus that supports the 4th Division, I could never get him to organize his material then, either.

Ana María Díaz and Fabio Sánchez write:

> As the cartels got weaker, control of the cocaine business began to change hands. One part of the business passed into the hands of the second or third generation of cartels (*Norte del Valle, Costa, Medellín, Eje Cafetero*), and the much of the rest fell under the control of armed groups operating illegally (guerrillas and illegal self-defence groups). The production of coca and the sale of cocaine became one of the groups' principal sources of financing11. Drug trafficking has also become an important part of territorial control; it has the double function of offering the groups a social base (in terms of the labour force involved) and the income they need to escalate and expand their armed struggle.[52]

It is no coincidence that this period saw the steep growth that paralleled the rise of coca cultivation and the arguable height of the FARC's influence in Colombia, so much so that they were able to conduct large-scale offensive operations. (See Figures 10, 11, and 12). By 1998 they had only increased by several fronts. However, their territorial expansion continued to increase and liberal estimates put their numbers at over 10,000.

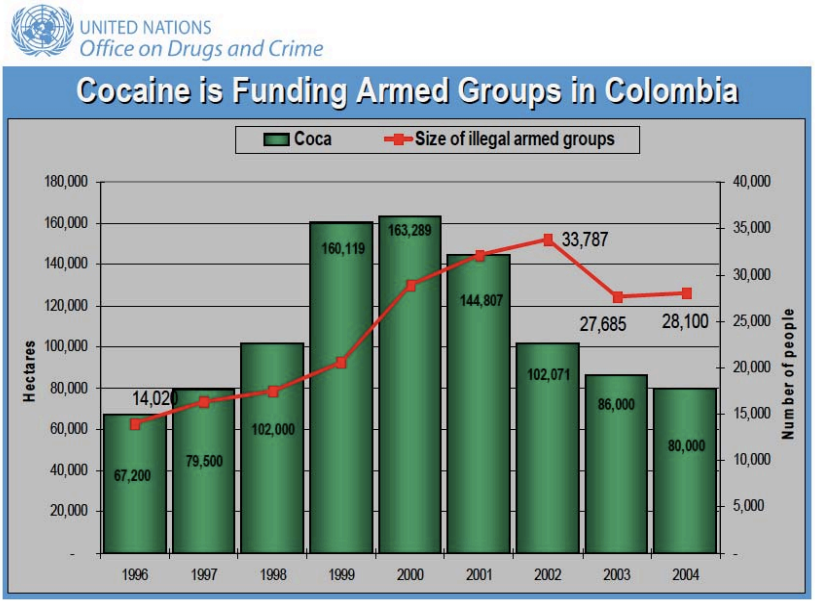

Figure 12. Cocaine is Funding Armed Groups in Colombia

[52]Ana María Díaz and Fabio Sánchez, *Geography of Illicit Crops (Coca Leaf) and Armed Conflict in Colombia.* (Bogotá, D.C., Colombia: Universidad de Los Andes, 2004), 9.

The increase in numbers against the relatively small increase in fronts is indicative of the most important adaptation the FARC made that holds true today. They diversified their organization internally and adapted it to the drug trade. They expanded the types of fronts within each block and gave them specific operational missions: public order, direct action, security, and finance. They also created a finance arm of their ruling secretariat. In fact, each block, regardless of type, to this day has a front whose sole purpose is finance. Moreover, each front has a company whose sole purpose is finance.[53] Any finance entity in the FARC, for the most part, has a hand in the security, production, and movement of cocaine products, supplies, or production. The FARC is now an increasingly complex and decentralized system of components that has links to some facet of cocaine production. In fact, the FARC's most recent strategic plan has fronts redeploying over coca-producing areas.[54]

History of The Taliban

The Taliban's history, like the FARC, is tied to the context within which the country that gave it birth was formed. The Taliban's history is arguably not as dense as the FARC's in that its roots aren't part of a complex weave of sociopolitical developments that are tied to race, politics, and social class. This is because the ostensible roots of the Taliban are primarily tied to one thing: religion. This in no way means the Taliban's emergent operational similarities to the FARC are no less important. In fact, this difference underscores the importance of their operational similarities because this is one of the factors that underscores the use of MDSD.

[53]When I was advising the 4th COLAR Division, the 27th Front, which belonged to the Southern Bloc, was the finance front.

[54]This will be covered later in the monograph.

The Taliban "Pre-History"

Afghanistan provides a rich context for the formation of the Taliban as, unlike Colombia, it has never been conquered, at least in modern history.[55] As a land-locked nation in Central Asia, it has long been considered a crossroads of Asia or a gateway into Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. This is why it has long been considered a strategic crossroads, and the prize fought for between empires as far back in history as the sixth century, B.C.[56] This is when the first recorded history of Afghanistan appeared. The remaining ancient history of Afghanistan includes conquest by Alexander the Great in the 3rd century, B.C. The subsequent fall of Alexander's kingdom would give way to Persian, Mauryan, and Greco-Bactrian Kingdoms until its conquest by Arabs in the seventh century A.D. that saw the introduction of Islam to Afghanistan.

Muslim Arabs conquered Afghanistan in 642 A.D. With this conquest and the establishment of Sunni Islam and the rise of the Ghaznavid dynasty, which would be defeated in 1148 by the Ghurids, who ruled most of modern-day Afghanistan until the Ghilzai Hotakis rose to power about 500 years later. This is important because the Ghilzais are a Pashtun tribe that represents a significant portion of the ethnic makeup of Afghanistan to this day. Ghengis Khan's Mongols conquered Afghanistan in the 13th century, and Tamerlane would incorporate Afghanistan into his Timurid empire. The Timurid empire gave way to the Mughal empire in the 16th century.

However, the Mughals did not rule all of Afghanistan, as the Persian Safavids controlled the west. In 1709, Mirwais Khan Hotak, the chief of the Ghilzai Pashtun tribe drove the Persians

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[55]Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia,* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2001.

[56]Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics,* (New York, NY: Perennial,) 2002.

out of the west and establish the Hotaki dynasty, which was defeated by the Abdali Pashtun tribe in 1738. Ahmad Shah Abdali led these tribes, and after consolidating them and being chosen as their leader, he took the name Ahmad Shah Durrani, and established an empire that lasted until 1826, when Durrani's grandson's internal divisions weakened the empire. One of the grandson's half brothers, Dhost Mohammed Khan, gained control in 1826 amid this turmoil and the emergence of "The Great Game," in which the British and Russians began to exert their influence over Afghanistan. This period saw Persian attempts to regain control of Afghanistan. These events spawned two Anglo-Afghan wars and a new leader on the Afghan throne by the turn of the century. This period also saw British and Russian drawing of what are still today the modern borders of Afghanistan. The successor to the Afghan throne's assassination in 1919 spawned a third Anglo-Afghan war, which resulted in the British capitulation by signing the Treaty of Rawalpindi on August 19, which Afghans consider their independence day.[57]

The next four decades during the 20th century would see Afghanistan ruled as a kingdom with attempts at democracy in the mid-1960s. This period also saw overtures toward the Soviet Union and the emergence of the communist political party the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which split into two factions. A subsequent bloodless coup by Mohammad Daoud in 1973 led to the formation of the Republic of Afghanistan. The leader of the PDPA, Nur Mohammad Taraki, assassinated Daoud and his family in 1978, declare himself president, and establish the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Taraki's government would deepen its relationship with the Soviet Union by inviting assistance with physical infrastructure. There was also an establishment of socialist and secular ideals, which alienated traditional, conservative Muslims. On September 16, 1979, Hafizullah

[57]Ewans, 123.

Amin, who had taken over as Afghan Prime Minister, overthrew Taraki, who was subsequently killed.

The Soviet Union, who had in many ways created the tumultuous problem that lead to Taraki's death and Amin's takeover of Afghanistan, decided to invade Afghanistan. In December of 1979 Soviet forces invaded Kabul and killed Amin, placing Babrak Karmal in power. The Soviet invasion led to the rise of the Afghan Mujahideen, which can be transliterated from Arabic as "One Who Struggles." However, this term came to mean specifically the groups of loosely-affiliated armed Muslim fighters who successfully opposed the Soviet Army, causing their withdrawal toward the end of the decade.

With the Soviet Union's withdrawal came, however, a vacuum that led to what some refer to as the actual Afghan Civil War. The government that was left in place by the Soviets was the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and was headed by Mohammed Najibullah, who was placed into power by the Soviets in 1986. The DRA had a somewhat viable army that was trained by the Soviets, but inherited crushing economic challenges as well as threats from Mujahideen leaders, who would eventually drive him out of power in 1992. These Mujahideen leaders would attempt to form governments, but agreements would ever hold. General Abdul Dostum, the pro-Soviet commander who had fought the Mujahideen and headed the northern Afghan Army under Najibullah, left the Afghan Army to join the Mujahideen in 1994. This exacerbated the fighting that had been going on almost continuously since the Soviet withdrawal. This resulted in further damage to the country, especially to Kabul, and thousands of civilian deaths.

Besides civilian deaths, the constant fighting over Kabul and the government of Afghanistan furthered the lack of any governmental control. This resulted in rampant regional fighting between former Mujahideen and warlords throughout Afghanistan. In the Kandahar region, these disputes were as banal as being over the possession of young girls or boys. During one such dispute near Kandahar in the spring of 1994, local peasants asked a respected mullah, or

religious leader, to intervene.[58] He was a former Mujahideen who had lost an eye fighting the Soviets. His name was Mullah Mohammed Omar, and he gathered a group of fighters with some rifles and handle the dispute by force. Mohammed would form a group of what would be called "students" to continue to fight what this group of Sunni Islam students felt was a failure by current leaders to not only uphold conservative Islamic tradition, but also to provide any governance at all. The Pashto transliteration for this group of "students" is now widely known: Taliban.

The Rise of the Taliban 1994 to 2001

The Taliban's rise to power was shockingly swift, as was its growth. Whether or not this is due to Pakistan's support of the Taliban through their Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) or whether there was a true antipathy toward the state of Afghanistan, both narratives confirm that the size of the Taliban grew almost alarmingly between the spring of 1994 and the end of the same year. By October, they had grown to several hundred members when they captured a large arms depot in Spin Boldak, near the southeastern border with Pakistan. In early November, they moved north and captured Kandahar. By the end of the year, 12,000 men and boys, many from Pakistani madrasahs joined the Taliban in Kandahar. Notable in this context is the fact that many of these fighters that flooded across the border to join the Taliban were comprised mainly of the "lost generation" of children who had fled to Pakistan during the Soviet invasion and occupation.

By the end of 1994 the Taliban also turned their attention to the south and the west. After solidifying their control over the key province of Helmand, they moved against the ancient city of Herat, which was controlled by Ismail Khan, the former powerful Mujahideen commander. After months of back-and-forth fighting, the Taliban finally captured Herat in early September. At this

[58]Rashid, 25. However, even he concedes that there is "an entire factory of myths and stories to explain how Omar mobilized a small group of Taliban against the rapacious Kandahar warlords."

point the Taliban controlled roughly 15 of Afghanistan's 31 provinces. They controlled virtually the entire west and south of the country.

With this control came the Taliban's enforcement of their own brand of extremely strict Sharia Law. This included prohibition of education or employment for women, including the enforcement of the wearing of burqas. The Taliban enforced head coverings for men and banned beard trimming. They banned music, pictures, dancing, clapping at gatherings, alcohol, lobster, kite-flying, and nail polish, just to name a few. They held public executions, stonings, and other punishments for adulterers and thieves.

One reason the Taliban took nine months to capture Herat was because they had also attempted to move against Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, at about the same time, in early 1995. With Herat under control, they could move their full attention towards Kabul, which they did in October. By September of the following year, they captured the capital and for all intents and purposes took over as Afghanistan's central government, furthering their enforcement of their version of Sharia law. In 1996 the Taliban accepted into Afghanistan Osama Bin-Laden, whose activities while the Taliban would continue fighting to expand and solidify control over Afghanistan, eventually led to the Taliban's ouster.[59] Bin-Laden ran terrorist training and operations out of Afghanistan as the head of his organization, Al-Qaeda. Bin-Laden, a Saudi national whose previous terrorist activities would result in being thrown out of Sudan, directed numerous terrorist operations from Afghanistan. These terrorist attacks included bombing two embassies in Africa in 1998, resulting in his indictment by the international community. The international community would also demand that the Taliban hand over Bin-Laden. Although by late 1998 Bin-Laden became a liability for the Taliban, they refused to turn him over. However,

[59]Rashid, 75.

Al-Qaeda's attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in a U.S.-led coalition invading Afghanistan, and the transformation of the Taliban from a de-facto government into an insurgency.

The Taliban 2001-Present

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001 drove the Taliban from Kabul by mid-November and their Kandahar stronghold by the end of that same month. They were driven from the west and all of the provinces that bordered Iran. They were also driven across the eastern border into Pakistan. This included what is believed to be the remaining Taliban and Al-Qaeda leadership, Mullah Omar and Osama Bin-Laden.

However, the subsequent establishment of an interim government in 2002, led by Hamid Karzai, would not prevent the Taliban from reorganizing. As early as September of 2002 the Taliban was launching recruiting efforts in Pakistani villages and madrasahs just across the border with Afghanistan.[60] In 2003 the first organized attacks against coalition forces in Spin Boldak and movements of Taliban forces numbering over one hundred in Paktika province in southeast Afghanistan. As they stepped up attacks during 2003, they established their first stronghold in Dai Chopan, in the northern Zabul province just west of Paktika. In 2004, after having established control over virtually all Paktika and Zabul provinces, they moved into Oruzgan province in central Afghanistan and spread south into Kandahar and to the west into northern Helmand province during 2005 and 2006. By 2006, the Taliban had moved farther west into Farah province and established Helmand province as another stronghold. By 2007 they had moved into Ghor province in west-central Afghanistan, as well. Estimates from the same year have the Taliban controlling 54 percent of Afghanistan with a strength of about 17,000. (See Figure 13).[61] Recent estimates further posit that 80 percent of Afghanistan has "Taliban

[60]Giustozzi, 2.

[61]Ibid., 68.

Presence" of around 25,000. (See Figure 14).[62] This is all despite constant and large-scale coalition operations against them. So how was the Taliban has been able to continue spreading and growing? Like the FARC beginning in the early 1980s and 1990s, it is a simple fact that they are able to do so because they can afford to.

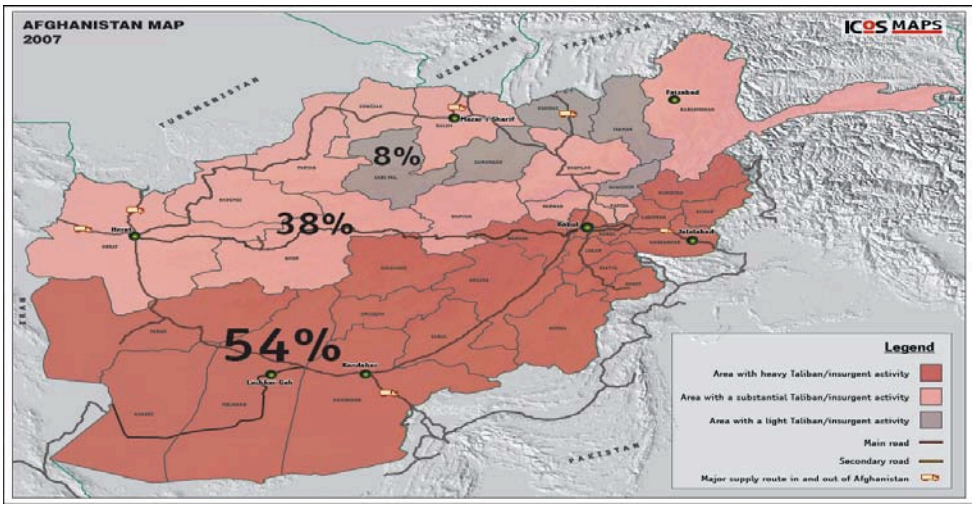

Figure 13. Source: International Council on Security and Development.

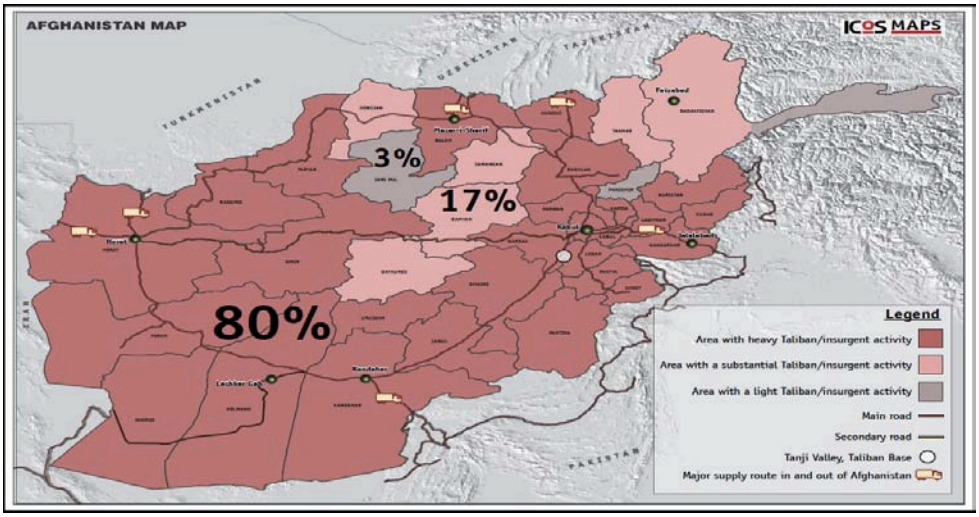

Figure 14. Source: International Council on Security and Development.

[62]Numerous recent news reports at the time of writing.

The Taliban and Illicit Drug Trade

Unlike the FARC and Colombia, the Taliban's ascent occurred in the context of a poppy cultivation system that was already an integral part of illicit funding for forces that were opposing invading armies for over a decade. Moreover, the cultivation of poppy and its production into opium and heroin was well established and actively managed by warlords and drug cartels by 1994. These drug cartels began in the early 1980s during the Soviet occupation. Mujahideen warlords financed themselves independently through taxation of poppy cultivation and opium production in areas under their control. They also took advantage of trade routes in and through Afghanistan that had existed for centuries.

Some of the most extensive trade routes were long-established with Pakistan, who in many ways supported the Mujahideen during the Soviet occupation. Ironically, during this period Pakistan was a sizable poppy cultivator and opium producer. Powerful trucking mafias and drug lords established relationships with Mujahideen warlords that included trading drugs, weapons, vehicles, and any other war supplies that would benefit the warlords' resistance against the Soviets. These relationships became increasingly complicated as the warlords began to enforce increasing poppy cultivation.

The Soviet withdrawal further increased the complexity of these relationships, as the subsequent civil war saw these same warlords fighting amongst themselves, primarily over territory.[63] This increased the warlords' need for financing, which furthered the upswing in poppy cultivation and opium production between 1990 and 1994. During this period opium production increased from 1,570 metric tons to 3,415 metric tons.[64]

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[63]Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling The Taliban And Al Qaeda* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press) 2009.

[64]UNODC *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2001*. Cited in *El Opio De Los Taliban Y La Coca De Las FARC* (The Taliban's Opium And The FARC's Coca) by Angela María Puentes Marín.

This opium production system was already in place when the rise of the Taliban began in 1994. Production would decline in 1995 and 1996 as the Taliban wrested control of Afghanistan from the warlords and the central government. However, as the Taliban established firm control over the majority of the country by 1996,[65] production levels rose again. (See Figure 15). This is due in no small part to the fact that the trucking mafias and drug cartels in Pakistan and the rest of the region only had to deal with one group that was firmly in control of the poppy cultivation and opium production areas.

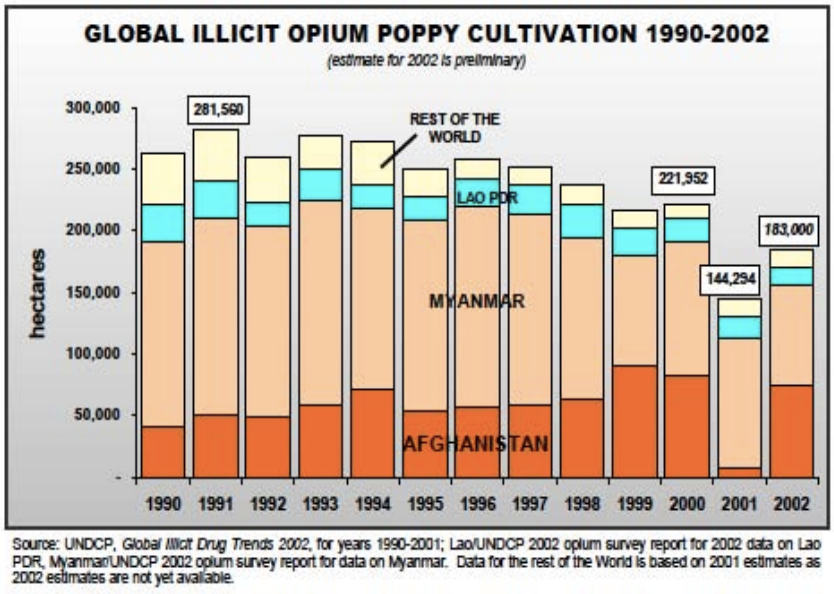

Figure 15. Global Illicit Opium Poppy Cultivation 1990-2002

Taliban control over these areas coupled with expanded regional control is reflected in the large increase in poppy cultivation and opium production from 1996 to 1999. Notwithstanding a slight dip from 1997 to 1998, the continuing increase of cultivation and production resulted in Afghanistan taking over the lead in worldwide percentage of opium

[65]Peters, 76.

production by the end of the decade. (See Figure 16). At this point Afghanistan was supplying about 70-80 percent of the world's illicit opium production.[66]

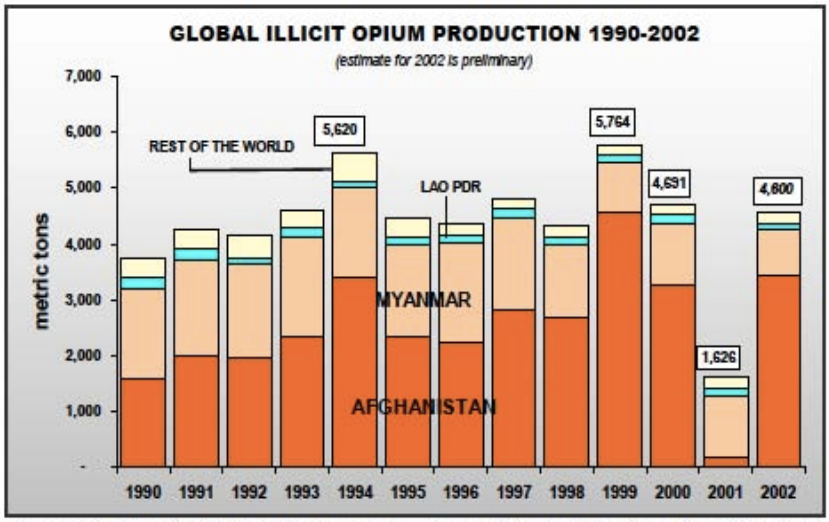

Figure 16. Global Illicit Opium Production 1990-2002

The Taliban had such firm control over poppy cultivation and opium production that they could and did control the price of heroin on the worldwide market. The 2000 ban on opium cultivation by Mullah Omar before the fall planting season and the subsequent decrease in production in 2001 is evidence of this phenomenon.[67] It also gave the Taliban the ability to further a disingenuous discourse of the context of Sharia law and opium production and trafficking. This was also a disingenuous response to United Nations pressure on the Taliban government to reduce poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking.

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[66]Figures vary. Gretchen Peters writes "75 percent of global production in 1999" (UNODC has (79.2 percent) while Ahmed Rashid stays away from these types of figures, only quoting UN officials in 1997 as saying "Afghan heroin supplies 50 percent of the global heroin." Where they do come more closely together and more importantly is Peters, "97 percent of it (poppy crop in 1999) was grown in Taliban-held areas" and Rashid, "By 1997, the UNDCP and the US estimated that 96 per cent of Afghan heroin came from areas under Taliban control."

[67]A closer look at Figure 14 underscores this point. When Afghan production falls from over 3,000 metric tons to no more than 200 metric between 2000 and 2001, the worldwide production level falls by almost two-thirds! This is in spite of the fact that Laos, Myanmar, and the rest of the world stay about the same.

Peters writes:

> The poppy ban, it turned out, was the ultimate insider trading con. The Taliban gambled they could win millions of dollars in international aid – and perhaps even recognition of their government – while top leaders sold off the opium hoards at far higher prices. Just before the ban, top Taliban leaders purchased huge amounts of opium – especially Haji Bashir Noorzai, according to sources close to the movement. "That was when Haji Bashir really broke into the market on his own," says a relative. "It wasn't religion." a smuggler told me in 2003. "It was good business. They bought low. They sold high."[68]

By July 2000 the Taliban had hoarded a great deal of the opium that was produced during the large upswing in production since 1995. At this time they had also reached a deal with the United Nations for $250 million in aid if they would eliminate poppy cultivation. Almost immediately the price of opium shot up more than ten times. Not only did the Taliban government make no effort to curb opium trafficking, they began selling their opium supply at the much greater market value. By September 2001, the price per kilo of opium was almost $750, skyrocketing from $28 per kilo just over a year earlier.[69]

September 11,' 2001 the subsequent United States invasion of Afghanistan and ouster of the Taliban shows how dependent the Taliban was and is on the illicit drug trade. More to the point, the following years would prove this dependency. These events would also produce an interesting phenomenon vis-à-vis poppy cultivation. Poppy farmers' response to the power vacuum in Kabul after the invasion was to plant poppy again. As such, the invasion had no effect on poppy cultivation. In fact poppy cultivation would increase ten times between 2001 and 2002, and increase three-fold from that amount by 2007.

During this same 2001-2007 period, the Taliban would essentially disperse. They fled east across the Pakistani border and went into hiding in their tradition Pashtun strongholds in the south. While the valid argument is made that they absconded to areas of tribal familiarity and

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[68]Peters, 94.

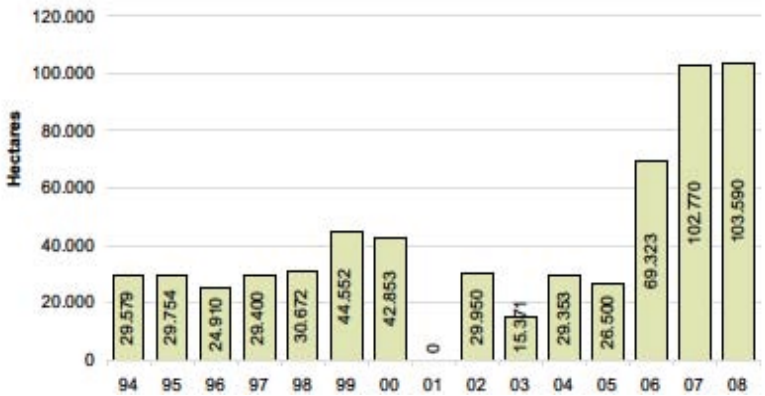
[69]Ibid., 100.

lack of government presence due to proximity and an international border, it is also no coincidence that they returned to traditional poppy-growing areas. These areas were first places where the Taliban attempted to reestablish control was where they could continue to finance themselves.

The "Neo-Taliban" and Illicit Drug Trade

Helmand province is the best example of the Taliban's ability to finance themselves. Poppy cultivation figures beginning in 2004 correlate with the Taliban's return to this area and consolidation of control. In 2004, poppy cultivation was just under 30,000 hectares. In 2005, when the Taliban began to move in to Helmand, the yield dipped about 10 percent to 26,500 hectares. However, as the Taliban firmly established control in Helmand the following year, the yield spiked more than 150 percent to almost 70,000 hectares. [70] In 2007, as the Taliban maintained its control, the yield jumps almost 50 percent to just over 100,000 hectares, where it would largely remain the following year. (See Figure 17). The pattern is the same for earlier years in which the Taliban re-gained control before Helmand. In Kandahar province, which the Taliban moved into just before Helmand,[71] there was an over 150 percent spike in poppy cultivation from between 2004 and 2005, from just under 5,000 hectares to just under 13,000 hectares. (See Figure 18).

Figure 17: Opium cultivation in Hilmand province (ha), 1994-2008



[70] Giusto

[71] Ibid.

Figure 17. Source: UNODC.

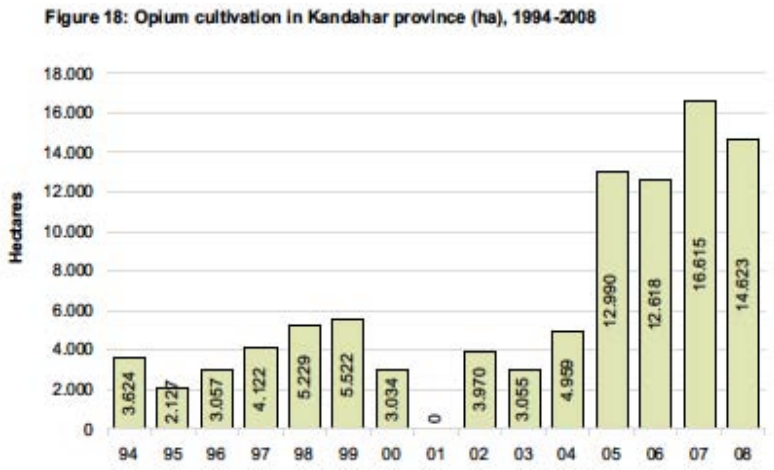


Figure 18. Source: UNODC.

Poppy cultivation is the Taliban's focal point, especially in Helmand. Currently, the Taliban are fighting to maintain control over these poppy-producing areas. The Taliban are not digging in where they could have a tactical advantage. If this were the case, they would be centering their efforts in the Hindu Kush or the rough terrain along the border with Pakistan. Instead, they are digging in on terrain that is very difficult to defend. However, this open farming terrain produces their lifeblood, the poppy.

A Systems-Based Comparison

The similarities between the FARC and the Taliban certainly do not make themselves obvious to the casual observer. However, what emerges from a careful study of what these two groups do to survive financially leads to similarities that above all both groups have subsumed into their day-to-day operations. Moreover both groups, notwithstanding their ostensible

ideology, have become synonymous with how they finance themselves. Establishing that both groups demonstrate the properties of complex adaptive systems lays the foundation for leveraging against the key similar features that emerge.

Examining Both Groups As Systems

The first property of a complex system is that its "structure and behavior as not deductible, nor may be inferred, from the behavior of the component parts."[72] The most important element of this property is emergence, which is to feature a system in which individual parts do not have. For example, killing or capturing and individual leader at virtually any level of the FARC or the Taliban has no effect on the system as a whole or any of its major assemblages. Another example of this is that both groups are comprised as component parts that have specific functions. The FARC has fronts that are purely tactical and others that have primarily a logistical and financial function. Similarly, the Taliban has "five operational zones"[73] (The FARC has Six Blocs) with "two more…logistical commanders…in charge of the logistical areas"[74] that displays a remarkable similarity to the FARC in that the logistical elements maintain different local relationships with licit but corrupt and illicit elements.

The second property is that its "elements change in response to imposed 'pressures' from neighboring elements."[75] In this case "neighboring elements" refers to the pressures on the individual larger or smaller components that make up the FARC or the Taliban. Each Taliban military zone and FARC bloc has a geographical/function aspect related to where they are located and/or what their mission is. For example, the Taliban's military zone that oversees the southeastern Afghanistan border with Pakistan has pressures that have to do with smuggling

[72]Norman and Kuras.

[73]Guistozzi, 90.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Norman and Kuras.

routes across the border, relationships with transport mafias, payoffs to Afghan and Pakistani officials in an around the border area, and pressures from coalition forces. Similarly, the FARC 16th Front has many of these same pressures that come from managing their day-to-day smuggling operations across the Venezuelan, Ecuadoran, and Brazilian borders.[76] Responses to these similar pressures can include direct action operations, changing movement routes, and negotiations with transaction partners and corrupt officials.

The third property is "has a large number of useful potential arrangements of its elements" or shows the ability to self-organize. [77] This also refers to the bottom-up adaptation that occurs in a complex system. For example, smaller elements of the FARC or the Taliban that communicate with one another share information about their operational area or otherwise establish mutually beneficial relationships or arrangements. These relationships will often not look the same as a similar-sized element in another part of the larger organization. In fact, the nature of these relationships may even be prohibited in another part of the organization.

Holmes, et. al cite Rangel:

> Different FARC Commanders interact with the drug trade differently, ranging from pragmatic alliances to ideologically-based rejection. Practical alliances may be encouraged by eradication efforts, which can unify narcotics and FARC interests in the short term. At the same time, it is possible to find cooperation between narco-traffickers and the FARC in the south of the country but conflict in the north.[78]

The fourth property is that the system "continually increases its own complexity given a steady influx of energy (raw materials)."[79] In this case the most prominent raw materials are illicit drugs. The correlation between the FARC's rapid increase in size and expansion in the early 1980s and its involvement in the drug trade is a perfect example of this property. Similarly,

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[76]Personal experience as a US Advisor in Colombia.

[77]Norman and Kuris.

[78]Holmes, Piñeres, and Curtin, 167.

[79]Norman and Kuris.

the correlation between the Taliban's control of poppy cultivation areas from 1994 and 1996 and its sharp growth, along with the continued expansion of poppy cultivation through the end of the decade underscores this property. Reestablishment of control over poppy-growing areas after their ouster between 2004 and 2008 is another example of the steady influx of energy.

The fifth property is that the system is "characterized by the presence of independent change agents."[80] This does not mean in the case of the FARC and the Taliban that there are individuals or small groups within both organizations that are making wholesale changes. Rather, this means that individual autonomy exists within a framework of distributed control. In the case of both groups, this means that while there is an overarching ostensible ideology and mission, regional and local leaders have fairly wide latitude within which they support this ideology and carry out the broader mission. Moreover, they have even broader latitude in how they execute day-to-day operations.

In a November 2009 interview with the author, former United States Military Group, Colombia Commander COL (R) Kevin Saderup comments:

> The struggle is about trafficking and so you will have the FARC and the ELN duking it out over control of the trafficking, but yet in other parts of the country, they are much more cooperative because they have a common ideology. For example, in part like along the Venezuelan frontier…they are actively struggling with the trafficking market. They are acting like drug trafficking organizations but yet in the frontier with Ecuador, surprisingly so, they have a much more cooperative relationship.[81]

Operational Comparison And the Drug Trade

The fact that the FARC and the Taliban conduct day-to-day operations remarkably similarly is what emerges from this look at both groups from a systems perspective. The organizational structure of both groups has some striking similarities. The most striking

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[80]Norman and Kuris.

[81]COL Saderup was my Senior Rater while I was an advisor. He was the MILGRP CDR from 2002-2009.

commonality between the two groups is the fact that logistics is woven into the fabric of both groups, so much so that not only have they centered their operations around and physically moved themselves over illicit cultivation areas, but for both groups "logistics" is virtually synonymous with how the illicit drug business fits into and feeds their day-to-day operations. (See Figures 19-22).[82] The Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) comments in the 2008 Afghanistan Opium Survey, "Afghan opium is grown exclusively (98 percent) in seven south-west provinces, where insurgents control the territory and organized crime groups benefit from their protection." Captain Fabian Enrique Gonzalez of the Colombian Army Intelligence School commented in an interview with the author during which he gives his slide presentation on the FARC's recent strategic plan, "In the following graphic we are going to see how the FARC are beginning to concentrate their military force in the coca production sectors."[83]The facets that are inarguable are both groups involvement in cultivation, production, and local and regional trafficking.

Figure 19. Source: Colombian Army Intelligence School. "FARC Retrograde Areas."

[82]Note the correlation in figures 19 and 20. These come from two completely different sources, analyzed in two different ways. However they show a shocking similarity in FARC location. Figure 19, from 2004, shows that this is not a new trend. Figures 21 and 22 show the correlation between poor security (Taliban presence) and poppy cultivation during 2009.

[83]He's referring to slide that is Figure 21, which he briefed to me in November of 2009.

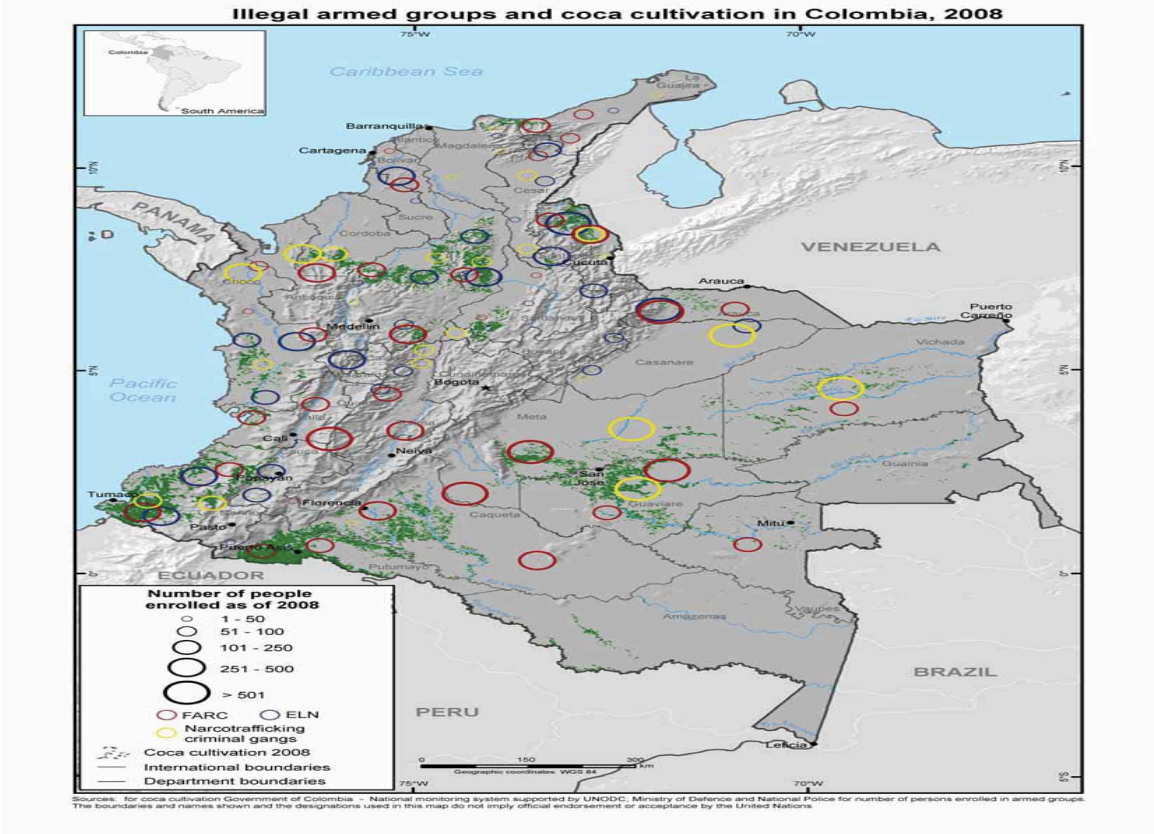


Figure 20. Illegal Armed Groups and Coca Cultivation in Colombia, 2008

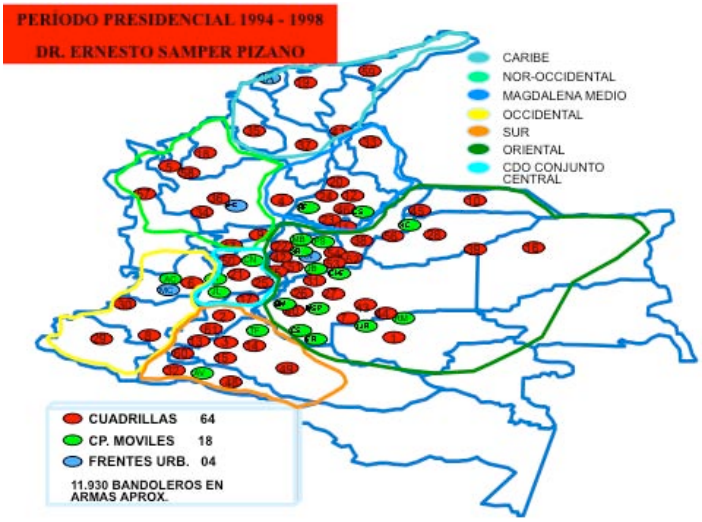
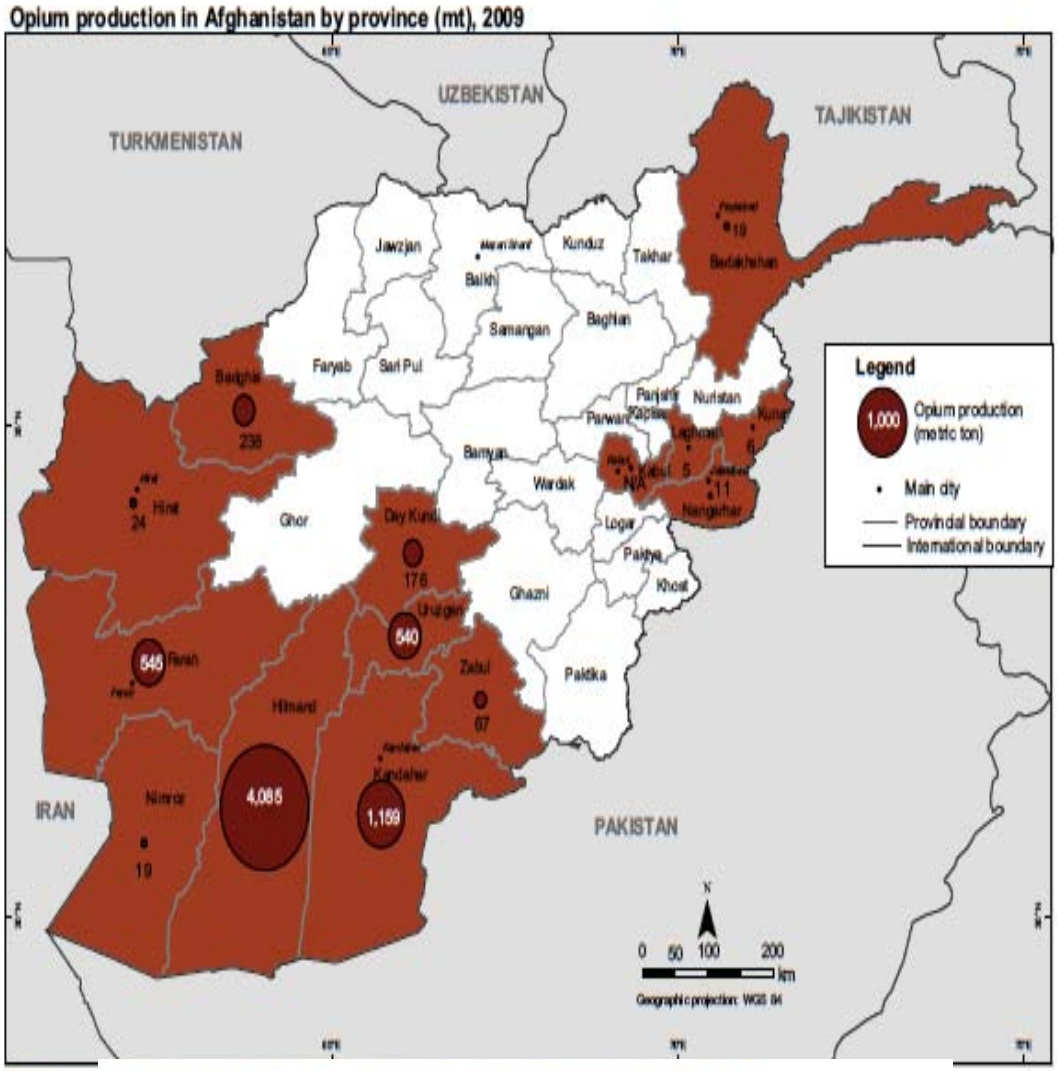


Figure 21. Source: Universidad de los Andes.



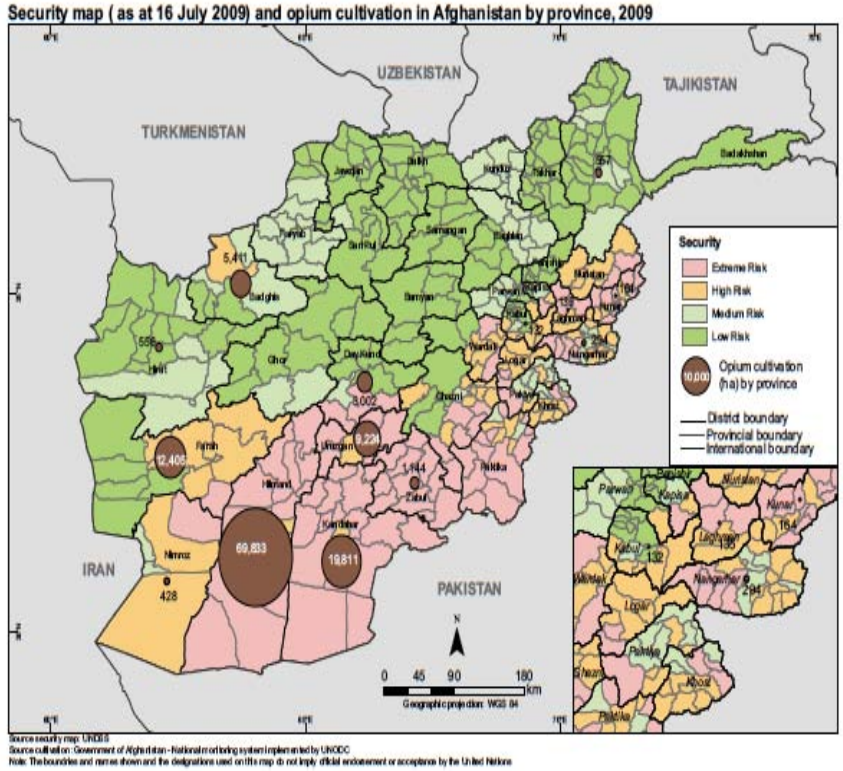


Figure 22. Source: UNODC

Figure 23. Source: UNODC.

Conclusion

It is clear that the FARC and the Taliban are remarkably similar despite the differences in the history, ostensible belief systems, and development of both groups, both groups purport ideology and/or religious beliefs that should preclude the involvement in any facet of the illicit drug trade. However, despite these differences, this monograph has shown how remarkable their similarities are in the sense that they have not only subsumed the cultivation of illicit crops and production of illicit drugs into their day-to-day operations, both groups' strategies and operations have centered around it for a great deal of time.

This centralizing phenomenon and the context of illicit crop cultivation has generated a plethora of written debate and discourse on subjects such as governance, crop substitution, human rights, violence patterns, corruption, regional relationships, religion, globalization, or any combination of these. While all these are important factors in the context of conducting a

counterinsurgency, what is the importance of this phenomenon for the military leader? It is mainly this: the illicit drug/insurgency nexus should never be pejoratively referred to as an unimportant functional effort that takes a back seat to a local, regional, or population-centric focus. Dr. Felbab-Brown underscores this. "When belligerent groups penetrate existing illicit economies[84] (or set up new ones)[85], the resulting interaction profoundly affect their means and strategies and even, under some circumstances, their goals and identities."[86] Not only has the illicit drug phenomenon affected the FARC and the Taliban's goals and identities, it is now how they survive. The way both groups have inarguably made illicit drug production the focus of not only what they do on a day-to-day basis but how the organize themselves and even from where they operate demonstrates the inescapable fact that it is their lifeblood.

[84]More so in the Taliban's case.

[85]The argument can the made the FARC did both penetrate an existing economy during the rise of the macro-cartels but set up their own after the macro-cartels fell.

[86]Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs,* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010.

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