Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)

Annotated Bibliography

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Literary Review

The literature surrounding the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest insurgent and terrorist group in the Western Hemisphere, is extensive and varies greatly in its interpretation and understanding of FARC-related events, historical accounts, definitions, and international relations. Throughout the myriad of scholarly articles, journals, books as well as government reports and open source documents surveyed, reoccurring themes and areas of scholarly contention emerge from the literature. Among them, the most noteworthy being interpretations of the FARC’s tactical transformation in the early 1990s, discord regarding the classification and categorization of the FARC, contrasting opinions on the proper counterterrorist and insurgency strategies to implement, discussions surrounding the usefulness of the United States’ involvement, heated disputes with respect to ongoing peace negotiations, divergent insights as to a crime-terror nexus coming to fruition, and contrasting visions for the future trajectory of the FARC. These camps of discussion are based off of different data sets, methodologies, primary sources, and case studies that have allowed each author or agency to compile their respective viewpoints and statistics accordingly.

A review of the literature surrounding the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia must first be preceded with an overview of the historical foundations of the organization. Molano’s “The Evolution of the Farc” grants an understanding under which the FARC was formed. During the 1940’s heavy political turmoil concerning the Liberalist and Conservative parties of Colombia sparked a decade of acute violence known as La Violencia. This period lasting from 1948-1958 lead to the death of over a quarter of a million Colombians and to the birth of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. This leftist guerrilla, insurgent group advocated for the overthrow of the Colombian government, to be replaced with a Marxist-Leninist government. The main divisions of thought rested in the repartitioning of land—where the peasants lived impoverished, oligarchies backed by the Catholic Church owned the majority of Colombia’s available land. The FARC was founded by peasants from the rural countryside and into the present maintains much of its membership from the poorly educated, young, and from agrarian populations.

Therefore an agrarian struggle, backed by notions of change and communist ideology, gave rise to the FARC. However since the 1990s, the FARC has experienced a tactical transformation that has led to this group attacking the very populations it once vowed to serve and protect. An increasing indiscriminate violence against civilians, namely peasants, has left many scholars investigating the reasons for such a tactical involution. The observed camps of discussion regarding the explanations for such a dramatic, and some might argue hypocritical, shift seem to echo the same logic. Both Hough and Metelits in their respective scholarly articles argue that the increased violence against civilians can be accredited to two novelties: an increase of United States aid and a proliferation of paramilitarism in the region. Metelits promulgates that the advent of

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paramilitary forces has pressured the FARC to exert supremacy over its region, and has added to a complex situation were resources are increasingly more difficult to attain. Increased government aid has also forced the FARC to acquire resources elsewhere, the immediate solution being extorting noncombatants. In brief, both authors are in agreement that the FARC changed its behavior toward noncombatants as a result of losing resources necessary for survival, in competition with other armed groups.

Due to what some might describe as an involution of ideology due to the transformation described above, coupled with an intensified involvement in the drug trafficking and production industry, there exists lively debate regarding the identity of the FARC—guerrilleros, terrorists, or organized crime group? The literature examined contains opinions on both sides of the argument nonetheless there is an overwhelming support for the FARC to be labeled as a guerrilla organization rather than a terrorist or organized crime group. Most authors agree that the FARC should be classified as a highly organized insurgency group that has in the past and present adopted terrorist tactics, yet should still remain separate from that category for numerous reasons. Authors such as Cook, McCarthy, and Leech agree that there is an inherent ideological motive that distinguishes the FARC from profit-seeking criminal organizations. Leech, then, differentiates the FARC from a terrorist organization by stating that although the group uses terrorist tactics, it is simply a strategy for ultimately furthering ideological objectives. Hudson almost identically echoes this analyses asserting that the FARC only engages in terrorist activities and utilizes them as tactics so that it can achieve its political objectives. McCarthy expands by assuring that the group is powered by the same ideology with which it once began. Therefore he advocates diplomacy and formal peace negotiations as a way to deal with the FARC. Contrasting these similar opinions, authors such as Crandall believe that the FARC abandoned its ideology long ago and is currently only motivated by the profit it reeks from the drug and smuggling trade. A similar report published by the United States Institute for Peace concluded although the FARC is not a terrorist group in its orientation and mode of fighting, its primary goal is in line with that of a criminal organization—not to spread fear and panic but instead to accumulate wealth and expand their control of Colombian territory. This understanding of the FARC’s primary goal is interesting in that it omits any political motives as an end goal, instead focusing on pure profit-related motives.

Akin to the widespread and flung opinion regarding the FARC’s identity, a similar crisis exists in identifying the most efficient strategies to counter the FARC’s military and political ambitions. There is a wide range of policy recommendations that advise attacking leadership, technology, financial institutions, and support bases as viable.

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and wise counterinsurgency strategies. The Department of State’s 2014 Country Terrorism Report recommends improving Colombia’s border security as a way to combat transnational drug trafficking as this region is currently plagued with a myriad of illicit drug groups and cocaine cultivation.\(^{10}\) The Narcotics and Law report differed slightly in its policy prescriptions by stating that the best strategy would be to expand Colombia’s governmental reach into the rural regions, where without institutional presence is susceptible to civil unrest, insurgent uprisings, and a myriad of illicit activities.\(^ {11}\) A different approach is offered by Cook who suggests that the group’s financial arm would be the best target in order to cripple its resources and ultimately undermine the group’s capabilities.\(^ {12}\)

The topic of United States involvement in Colombia’s internal struggle is controversial. All the authors agreed that it is in the best interest of the United States to lend support and aid in order to stop the drug trade—more than 90% of the cocaine seized by authorities in the United States in 2013 was of Colombian origin\(^ {13}\) and the majority from FARC related production and transportation. Nonetheless, Hough accredits the escalation of violence against civilians as a direct result of U.S. involvement. Likewise, Peceny reports that FARC’s strengthening in the 1990s and successful drug trafficking expansion was an unintended repercussion of a series of tactical successes in U.S. antidrug policies.\(^ {14}\) The Congressional Research Service’s 2012 report similarly advises for continued U.S. involvement in the Andean region to assist Colombia with the numerous drug cartels and insurgency groups that destabilize regional security. However, the strategy known as Plan Colombia, in which the U.S. has given billions of dollars in an effort to combat these drug cartels and reduce poverty, is reported to only partially have completed its drug reduction goals.\(^ {15}\) All the reports indicate that continued U.S. involvement is crucial to ending this internal battle; nonetheless none reported precisely what strategically changes are necessary to better assist the Colombian ally.

The literature examined contained discussions regarding a possible convergence and alliance between criminal organizations and terrorist groups. Hesterman identifies what she sees as a strong possibility of terrorists using existing criminal alliances and methodologies to circumvent national defenses and the military as a credible threat to national and regional security.\(^ {16}\) Caruso echoes this sentiment by pinpointing the FARC as not only engaging in short and long term alliances with criminal organizations, but stating that the FARC has converged into a single entity of crime and terror—completely


switching onto the opposite side of the spectrum from whence it first began. Furthermore, a report from the Drug Enforcement Agency reveals a close relationship between the FARC and Mexican transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) such as Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel having an agreement to transport cocaine through Mexico and into the United States. This report included the FARC as part of the transnational crime organizations segment, contrasting to Dishman’s article that states that partnerships between criminal organizations and terrorist groups are tentative and rarely function. Dishman hypothesizes that although dangerous potentials can exist when guerrillas generate money through drug trafficking—as evidenced with the FARC—prognostics about a grand collaborative shift where terrorists and criminals operate together will prove groundless.

With peace talks currently on the table and their discussions entering the third year as of 2016, many articles explored the possibilities and struggles such negotiations could have on the future of the FARC and its relationship with the Colombian government. A hearing from the Congressional record demonstrated the manuscript of a Congresswoman from Florida who was vehemently against these negotiations, stating they are dangerous for the world’s national security and whitewash human rights. Many echo her sentiment as the negotiations will likely contain concessions that grant FARC leaders immunity from incarceration and extradition, and its members may have the ability to run for elected office and play a role in Colombia’s legitimate government.

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18 Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Intelligence Report, “Insurgent Involvement in the Colombian Drug Trade,” June 1994 obtained by National Security Archive.
Annotated Bibliography

Scholarly Articles


The authors, graduate students matriculated in the Naval Postgraduate School and two Colombian and United States Army Majors, discussed an overview of the organizational structure and a brief historical account of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) with the purpose of uncovering current and prospective leaders of the FARC, through this forecasting a trajectory of the insurgency’s future. The methodology and data retrieval of the study relies on tools of social network analysis (SNA) derived from official documents from the Colombian government, academic and scholarly works, and open source media reports. Their findings demonstrate that the FARC has transformed from a local to transnational insurgency and suggest that some of the FARC’s key leaders, through living and seeking sanctuary outside of Colombia, have attracted broad international support and have created internationalized networks. Furthermore, the organization has a skill in keeping the identities of its leadership secret.

The findings furthermore relate the ease to which the FARC incorporates regional ideological themes such as those supported by deceased Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, perhaps imitating Hezbollah’s strategy of imparting regional influence while seeking legitimacy alongside Chavez’s Bolivarian government. The concluding arguments suggest that although losing support domestically, if the transnational aspirations of FARC’s key and emergent leaders are not halted the organization can potentially grow into a destabilizing international threat.


This paper published in Henley Putnam University’s Journal of Strategic Security suggests that the FARC transformed from a traditional guerilla movement to a powerful insurgency due to its ability to convert proceeds derived from the drug trade into operational funds. The paper exposes the lack of law enforcement and intelligence agencies’ utilization of Threat Finance to track and disrupt criminal and terrorist networks such as the FARC. Nonetheless, the paper is clear in drawing a distinct line between ideological differences in Narco-trafficking groups and FARC. Where the Narco-trafficking organizations focus on maximizing profit at the expense of peasants, the FARC’s founding Marxist ideology sees peasants as the most valued assets. Another important distinction according to the analysis is that Narco-trafficking groups operate on an international level, while the FARC primarily took advantage of the lax Colombian financial system.
The central recommendation of this paper advises policymakers to not underestimate the importance of policy reform, particularly in the areas of Threat Finance and Anti-Money Laundering to fight against the FARC. While the FARC is generally a decentralized organization with fractured independent spheres, the Financial Commission leg of the FARC offers intelligence officers a high-value target. This paper offers a differing opinion on how to best debilitate the FARC as compared to Cunningham’s article that suggests targeting the leadership as a combat strategy.


The author, an associate professor at Davidson College, is optimistic in the successes of the Colombian government’s military campaign against the FARC. Although he does agree that the organization’s involvement in the drug trade and its intact leadership will remain a force to be reckoned with in the near future, the author assures that Bogotá has crippled FARC’s ability to wage war against the establishment. The article suggests conclusively that the Colombian government has enforced its authority into the jungles that the FARC used to once control.

As echoed in Cunningham’s article, the author acknowledges that a long-standing dilemma in the fight against FARC was the inability to locate the guerrilla’s senior leadership. Nonetheless, in contrast to Cunningham this author notes the successes that Colombia’s military has achieved such as successfully killing FARC leader Victor Julio Suárez among many others which were once elusive. However, this article is in striking contrast to Cook’s analysis of the FARC’s ideology as this author asserts that the group discarded its Marxist ideological purity long ago and instead adopted a purely capitalist and profit centered creed—a far cry from their initial call for social change.


The author of this article seeks to explain the escalation of violence committed by FARC guerrillas against noncombatant civilians—who were theorized to be their natural political allies—by analyzing data sets documenting war making, extraction, and protection activities of the FARC between 1975 and 2007. The author finds that whilst previous explanations account for this theoretical shift by emphasizing sociopolitical and economic self-gain motivations they do not explain the newfound violence against the peasant and working class. Instead through utilizing theories of state formation, the author finds that escalations in FARC violence towards private citizens results from government militarization of the region caused by an influx of U.S. military aid, accompanied with proliferation of paramilitarism in the region, which in turn forced the FARC to resort to extracting resources from the local population. As a result, the once fervent support from the very social classes the FARC’s ideology protected has been eviscerated and a trend of delegitimization has commenced.

This article focuses on the perceptions of the FARC and the importance of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Colombia in order to deescalate violence and stop the drug trade in the region. Colombia is not only one of the United States’ key trading partners in Latin America, but is also one of the world’s leading producers of cocaine. The author explains that it is in the best interest of the U.S. government to help Colombia resolve its internal struggle as the revenue made from U.S. consumption of cocaine primarily sustains the FARC. The author delves into the FARC’s goals when it was initially created: overthrow the Colombian government, create a new country founded on Marxist-Leninist ideologies, liberate the country from the ruling-class elites, and defeat the national military. With these initial goals in mind, the author discusses two main bodies of thought that describe the contemporary FARC to have been degraded into a violent network of only narco-traffickers purely seeking profits or as a highly-organized insurgency powered by the same ideology with which it once began. The author agrees with the second camp and therefore advocates diplomacy and formal peace negotiations as a way to deal with the FARC. He supports this argument through highlighting desire to legitimize the organization as a belligerent and gain recognition as an independent government under the Geneva Conventions. The paper concludes that the FARC should be treated as a legitimate insurgency rather than opportunistic criminals, conflicting heavily with Crandall’s perception of the group as rent-seeking profiteers.


The article seeks to catalog the historical events in Colombia’s civil war history that led to the evolution of the present day Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). An understanding of FARC’s development and foundation is crucial to analyzing present events and finding solutions to the threat FARC poses. The article delves into the political turmoil in which FARC originated—a face off between peasants and reformists versus the land-owning oligarchies supported by the Catholic Church. The aggressions of the liberal and conservative parties of Colombia led to a decade of extreme violence known as La Violencia from 1948 to 1958 where more than 300,000 Colombians died. The FARC grew as a miniscule guerrilla group in the midst of these tensions, growing from a mere 500 people to a 3,000 strong organization with a hierarchical structure, military and training program, staff, and military code. Deprived of all institutional support and living as displaced peasants, they turned to the profitable cultivation of cocoa to support their operations. The author, nonetheless, makes clear that this rapprochement with cocoa does not lump the FARC into the same category as narco-traffickers—they did not cultivate the weed simply because their was no government oversight but instead because it was their method of surviving. The author suggests then that since the 1980s the FARC’s history has been that of peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the insurgents. The position of the author, then, becomes that
of diplomacy and negotiation, refusing to call the organization a criminal or terrorist group.


This study analyzes peace dialogues between the government and the FARC, and how they both conceive what transitional justice would be realized as. The study reveals that the position the FARC argues for collective social and political forgiveness, as well as exemption from extradition to the United States meanwhile the government has extremely opposing views on what justice should be. The study strongly supports the participation of the international community to lend legal support to affirm the legitimacy of the agreements, or have a legal vacuum that could be utilized in a misappropriated way at any given moment. Lastly, the study argues that the insurgency and internal armed conflict has planted the need to endorse these agreements in a new Constitution, with the participation of all the social sectors. The author agrees that the Rome Statute should be upheld, and that those guilty should receive the appropriate legal sanction. Nonetheless, in order to have a successful peace resolution transitional justice must be applied.


The authors of this article analyze the FARC’s strengthening in the 1990s and successful drug trafficking expansion and conclude that this growth was an unintended repercussion of a series of tactical successes in U.S. antidrug policies. The United States experienced considerable success in dismantling the Medellin and Cali cartels yet through doing so eliminated the top competitors of the FARC, allowing the FARC unprecedented opportunities for newfound profit. As the U.S.’s tactical strategies attacked the Medellin and Cali cartel’s transnational supply networks, the cocoa cultivation was pushed into a region where FARC possessed a long held stronghold and taxation of the drug trade. This shift of production into a region where FARC had a significant presence, allowed them to be able to tax the drug trade and deepen its insurgency against the Colombian state. The author argues that this experience demonstrates the importance of understanding the methods in which plunderable wealth can worsen civil wars. This argument loosely parallels the aforementioned Hough article that also alludes to the United States’ impulsive intervention as exacerbating the struggle against FARC, in the case by pressuring FARC to commit acts of violence against civilians.

The author, a researcher in the Unconventional Weapons and Technology Division of START, presents a case study on the FARC’s creation of narco-submarines. The study demonstrates the efficiency and expertise that allowed the organization to substitute small, disposable boats for fully submersible and reusable vessels. The FARC actively seeks out experts, either through bribes or kidnapping, and youth to send to higher education institutions to study science and engineering so that these complex projects may come to fruition.

The FARC was able to combat improved detection capabilities, resulting in a method of transportation that can carry up to ten tons of illicit product. Although military and intelligence personnel have heavily studied the technological and warfare development by state actors, this author notes that this same complex engineering tasks on the part of violent nonstate actors (VNSAs) is a dangerously understudied phenomenon. In 2012, maritime drug smuggling accounted for over 80% of the total illicit drug flow from the Latin America prior to entry into the United States, and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimated that about 30% of this flow used narco-submarines. The author notes that while a vessel is estimated to cost $2 million dollars to construct, it has a net return of $200 million, making the investment worth it.

The author states that the FARC provides a compelling example on how VNSAs use technologies to overcome challenging circumstances. The broader implication in this study being that covert organizations are willing to tackle complex engineering tasks in their efforts to overcome the state actors’ defensive ploys. Furthermore, this technology is a concern for counter terrorism efforts as it has the potential to diffuse to terrorist groups, and perhaps be used for far more hostile purposes than drug trafficking.


The premise of this article lies in the differentiation of sub-state armed groups and criminal groups. The authors contend that group goals, the political environment, and membership heavily influence the kinds of criminal activities groups undertake. Although they admit that exploiting illicit markets, trafficking illegal goods, and the buying and selling of arms blur the line that distinguishes armed insurgents from terrorist groups, through a comparative study of the FARC and the paramilitary group AUC, the authors cement this difference.

After the fall of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, both the FARC and AUC were presented with an opportunity to expand their illegal activities into the drug markets. Nonetheless both the FARC and AUC took different paths mainly due to political considerations that prompted the FARC to use “in house” capabilities and mask and restrain its involvement in illegal activities to avoid being perceived as a criminal organization without political grievances. Nonetheless, the identity of the AUC did not impose such constraints on its activities. Through using the case studies of the FARC and Colombia’s paramilitary group, AUC, the authors suggest that political agenda and identity strongly influence the level of involvement in the drug trade that criminal organizations, created solely for economic gain, do not encounter. This article mirrors
previous articles in that it supports the FARC’s self-identification as that of an insurgency instead of an organized crime group.

Official Sources


The author hypothesizes that although dangerous potentials can exist when guerrillas generate money through drug trafficking—as evidenced with the FARC—prognostics about a grand collaborative shift where terrorists and criminals operate together will prove groundless. The author states that there have been degrees of transformation within transnational crime organizations (TCOs) and guerrilla or terrorist groups that have caused them to stray from their traditional tactics—some terrorists commit criminal acts to fund their political operations, while others have gone extreme and simply use their ideology as a façade to generate profit and some criminal groups might just fund political campaigns while others radically utilize the terrorist tactic of indiscriminate mass killings. Regardless of these transformations, or mutations as the author voices, the different end goals and motivations of a profit-minded Mafia group and a revolutionary-driven terrorist group impede any collaborative attempts.

As the author further mentions, mutations can occur within the TCO and terrorist groups usually caused by changing circumstances in which the leaders of both respective parties sought an operational transition—a political group whose sources of funding vanished and engages in narcotics or a criminal group who employed terrorist tactics to force government leniency. Yet both groups would rather mutate their own organization by turning to nontraditional financial or political roles rather than cooperate with their local or international opposites.

The author argues that FARC leaders are unwilling to cooperate with TCOs for the fear of being branded as criminals. Furthermore, the ideology between both is too distinct to reach consensus or common goals. For instance, the FARC—demanding pervasive land reform—retaliated against the cartels in the form of kidnappings in the because they purchased over one twelfth of Colombia’s land. This opinion parallel’s that of Mccarthy who suggested the FARC’s identity be kept that of an insurgency not of loose criminals.


In this segment of the Congressional Record, a Congresswoman from Florida made a statement regarding the ongoing negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC taking place in Havana, Cuba. The Congresswoman is vehemently against any peace negotiations between the two entities in so long as the agreement remains with its current provisions. The Congresswoman states that the stipulations would undermine America’s national security and the security in the region, allowing the world’s largest
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cocaine cartel to avoid extradition to the United States for crimes committed against U.S. citizens, allow its members to run for elected office, allow the proceeds of illicit activities to fund their campaigns, and avoid incarceration for previous ills committed against the government or civilians. Furthermore, her declaration against the negotiations also attacked the Castro regime’s interest in the matter, stating that the regime only wants a legitimised FARC as leverage in Colombia. This proclamation is significant in that despite previous literature observed that strongly supported negotiations between both entities, it was revealed that there is divided opinions among the Obama administration and its Congressional counterpart regarding the impact these agreements will have.


The Congressional Research Service’s 2012 report on Columbia included a considerably large segment relating to counternarcotic, terrorism, and insurgency strategies. The report revolves around a need for continued U.S. policy focus in the Andean region in helping Colombia resist the numerous drug cartels and insurgency groups that destabilize regional security. Through a strategy known as Plan Colombia, the U.S. has given billions of dollars in an effort to combat these drug cartels and reduce poverty. Nonetheless, the report does state that Plan Colombia had only partially completed its drug reduction goals. In the years 2000-2006 cocaine cultivation actually increased by about 4%. Resulting from this failure in prevention measures, since fiscal year 2008 Congress has reduced assistance for security-related programs and instead increased economic and social aid in its budget for annual foreign assistance appropriations.


The Drug Enforcement Administration report on the national drug threat assessment speculates a close relationship between the FARC and Mexican transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) such as Los Zetas, BLO, CJNG, and the Sinaloa Cartel in an agreement to transport cocaine through Mexico and into the United States. The report states that in 2014 the Colombian drug trade was dominating by several Bandas Criminals (BACRIM) such as various cartels—Cali, Medellin, Norte del Valle—as well as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the United Self-Defense Groups (AUC). This report included the FARC as part of the transnational crime organizations segment, contrasting previous articles that denote a stark difference in their identity. Furthermore, the reports analysis of a working relationship with Mexican TCOs contradicts Dishman’s article stating that partnerships between criminal organizations and terrorist groups are tentative and rarely function.

The 2014 Country Terrorist Report released by the State Department signals the FARC to be one of the primary terrorist threats in the Western Hemisphere. Nonetheless important to note is that the report reveals that since 2014, there have been peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the FARC. Perhaps resulting from these negotiations as well as from Colombia’s military campaigns, Colombia experienced an overall decrease in terrorist activities in that same year. Despite these negotiations and partial accords on land reform, political issues, and drug trafficking, no definite peace agreements have been reached. The report focused also on improving Colombia’s border security as a way to combat transnational drug trafficking. The border region is currently plagued with a myriad of illicit drug groups and cocaine cultivation. This report is significant in that it brought to light a recent perspective, in the last two years, of the FARC and uncovered news that peace negotiations were in place with the group. This is interesting as several aforementioned authors suggested entering into negotiations with the organization as the correct path to take.


This report describes the efforts of key countries to combat all aspects of the international drug trade. The narcotics report echoes the findings of the Congressional Research Service report that despite the Colombian government’s efforts, potential pure cocaine production in 2013 has in fact increased. More than 90% of the cocaine seized by authorities in the United States in 2013 was of Colombian origin. The report also praised the Colombian governments for its efforts to expand its support and governmental reach into the country’s rural regions, where without their presence is susceptible to civil unrest, insurgent uprisings, and a myriad of illicit activities. As mentioned in previous reports, a preliminary agreement in 2013 between the Colombian government and the FARC on integrated rural development was announced. This report, although optimistic, criticizes Colombia’s ability to effectively implement its plans.

It is clear in this report that the U.S. government strong encourages and support peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC. In the U.S. government’s opinion, a negotiation will require stronger government presence, security, and economic opportunities to be provided by Colombia’s government.


The 2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report offers new insight as compared to the 2015 report that was previously examined. This report demonstrates that in line with prior efforts by the Colombian government, on September 22, 2015, a new drug control strategy that reduces focus on forced coca eradication, and enhances efforts instead on interdiction; rural policing and oversight; prosecuting and extraditing criminal organizations; anti-money laundering; alternative development, including crop
substitution; market development for legal products; infrastructure and development projects; social investment; and protection of national parks was instituted. The United States strongly support this new strategy and is hopeful that a reoriented focus towards social and economical development will resolve Colombia’s battle with poverty. This new strategy also incorporates the creation of a new crop substitution agency to be placed within the Presidency to guarantee priority commitment and coordination among all agencies. Peace negotiations with the FARC, which began in late 2012 and early 2013, are now in their third year and did not reached a bilateral agreement by the end of the 2015 calendar year.


This publication by the Library of Congress views insurgency, counterinsurgency, and narco-trafficking as Colombia’s most pressing internal threats. It notes that Colombia is a rare anomaly in Latin America as it has yet to overcome the political instability and insurgencies that most of its neighbors have accomplished. The FARC provides a unique case to the world due to its longevity, more than 50 years to date. In the date of this publication, 2010, the government of Colombia had not yet began peace negotiations with the FARC (they began in 2013) therefore this study is critical and pessimistic on the outlook of peace. Despite not foreseeing the future negotiations that would transpire, it is optimistic about the future decay of the FARC due to its military, financial, and membership setbacks throughout the first decade of the 21st century. The FARC’s annual revenues decline to around US$500 million in 2007, and its membership is at an all time low with around 11,000 insurgents. At the conclusion, the study expresses mixed futures for Colombia’s security and stability. After three failed peace processes, the government of Colombia’s main challenge will be to bring about a fourth and final negotiation that can end this 50 year battle. A significant call to action was also made to the FARC, stating that the group should finally come to the table and take this opportunity to end this futile struggle and embrace peace. This study places a heavy importance on peace negotiations as a beacon of hope for ending Colombia’s internal struggle—this proves interesting as currently this process is once again in motion.


This study explores groups that have been officially labeled as terrorist organizations by the U.S. Department of State. Nonetheless, the study believes it is necessary to identity the FARC as a guerrilla organization because doing otherwise would misunderstand sociological and political context, and provide feeble strategies when trying to develop counter attacks. Although the FARC engages in terrorist activities and utilizes them as tactics, they are primarily a guerrilla group that is interested in political solutions. To further support this categorization, the study brings to light that the government of Colombia, after a May 1999 accord with the FARC, designated the FARC
as a political insurgent movement. As to the FARC’s sociology and membership, the study reveals that most members are poorly educated, young, and from rural areas. These people are likely much more attracted to the lure of a decent salary than to the ideology. Therefore, the study suggests the development of rural programs and the construction of civil patrols as proper strategies for reducing the group’s rural camps of support.


This paper by USAID was extremely helpful in understanding and gaining insight into the current peace negotiations that are occurring between the FARC and the Colombian government. These negotiations, as revealed by the study, include discussed on how FARC members should be held accountable for their atrocities (especially after the Rome Statue was signed in Colombia in 2002) and what role, if any, FARC leaders and members should play in Colombia’s legitimate government. This study analyzed the Colombian public’s support for peace, and whether trust in the negotiators affected this support. These negotiations and peace talk are not only crucial for the region’s security, but also important for the modern state system as this agreements will set international norms for how countries should demand justice after mass atrocities. It was noted in the study that besides the agreement being settled by the elite negotiators, a final agreement must also be legislated by the Colombian Congress, upheld by the Court, and ratified through a public referendum. Therefore this study tested whether trust in the negotiators affected support for the peace process and whether levels of support changed if FARC members’ experiences could be narrated and contextualized. The findings prove that public support for the peace process increased when trust in all negotiating parties was clear and that the public was more lenient to alternative justice outcomes to FARC members when their experiences were narrated.

**Open Source Documents**


This BBC news report discusses the ongoing peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government, three years into the making. The negotiations, which were revealed to be in the works in November of 2012, had a deadline of March 23, 2016 to be agreed and signed upon. Nonetheless the news report shares that the talks have once again been stalled due to numerous differences in provisions that neither party can yet comfortably agree to. The report did disclose, nonetheless, that agreements to critical issues such as land reform, justice for victims of the five-decade long conflict, and involvement with members and drug trafficking have been reached. The FARC has already agreed to demobilize, close their non-conventional arms factories, and destroy their weapons. The President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, remains hopeful that a
‘good’ deal will be reached and the Colombian people will vote in the referendum to bring this insurgent group back into the legal, political process.


This report by the DEA reveals the position that there is not enough credible information or support to believe that numerous guerrilla groups are deeply involved in every stage of the drug cultivation, production, or distribution process. The DEA report, in fact, refutes the notion that these guerrillas, in particular the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, have become the country’s “third drug cartel.” Furthermore, the DEA report finds that the relationship between insurgents and drug traffickers is marked with both conflict and cooperation, nonetheless the ideology and strategies of both groups is so juxtaposing that it is unlikely an arrangement of anything more than temporary convenience will be formed. This report by the Drug Enforcement Administration, although older, is extremely notable in that it contradicts all other reports and articles outlining the major involvement the FARC have with the drug trade. In the year 1994, when this was published, there already existed evidence that the guerilla movements moved into the drug trade.

"The Farc Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of 'Raúl Reyes'"

This report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies is derived from thousands of rebel documents that were seized by the Colombian government in 2008. The report found significant links between the FARC and Colombia’s neighboring countries of Venezuela and Ecuador. The evidence, including computers, hard drives, and other corresponding that belonged to the then top rebel leader Luis Edgar Devia Silva (Raul Reyes) demonstrated definite communications between the FARC and Venezuela’s ex-president Hugo Chavez. Nonetheless, although a definite relationship existed, the documents revealed that Chavez acted in his own self-interest many times, putting the FARC’s interests in the back burner. The IISS report notes that it is still extremely possible Venezuela continues its support for the FARC, behind closed doors. The report also sheds light on possible ties between the FARC and Ecuador—citing evidence that the FARC contributed upwards of US$400,000 for the election of president Rafael Correa.


The Stratfor report is an analysis of the ongoing peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC as of July of 2015. The report hypothesizes that the Colombian government will likely intend to prosecute members of the FARC so as to maintain public support for any deal—stating it is extremely unlikely that the
government will forgive the FARC for all crimes in an attempt to finalize an agreement. The report revealed that a truth commission will be established in order to attribute responsibility for crimes committed during the span of the FARC insurgency. Both parties will also have to come to an agreement on compensation to victims and in respect to amnesty being given, or withheld, to the group’s political and militant leaders. The Stratfor report revealed that the issue causing the most contention in the negotiation rooms is that of amnesty—the FARC negotiators will not sign an agreement for fear of subsequent incarceration and extradition. The FARC leaders also reject any notion to face transitional justice mechanisms. Stratfor forecasts that the Colombian government could conceivably be pressured to sign an agreement with many amnesty concessions, yet an agreement as such runs the risk of not surviving a public referendum.


This document revealing an interview between U.S. Ambassador Myles Frechette and new Minister of Defense Guillermo Alberto Gonzalez Mosquera details strategies and conversations regarding anti-narcotics and counterterrorism efforts made on part by the Colombian government. The U.S. Ambassador Frechette is stern with Minister Mosquera regarding the administration’s previous lack of efficiency and expediency when dealing with human rights issues. The sharpest criticism on part of the Ambassador to the minister comes in the end of the interview when the Ambassador reveals the position of the U.S. government regarding using military assistance against the guerrillas. The Ambassador notes that although some guerrilla fronts are indeed involved in narco-traffic, not all of them are and therefore cannot be constituted as cartels. In specific light he discusses the FARC as one of these guerilla organizations that need more than force and military action to be appeased—this issue requires political action. This deep criticism is significant in that the Ambassador, speaking on behalf of the United States, was convinced that this notion of a FARC cartel was fabricated by the Colombian military in order to obtain assistance with the counterinsurgency.

Scholarly Books


This book offers a comparative study on the policies and strategies that have been employed in numerous countries to combat terrorism. The authors are critical of Colombia and determine the government’s efforts to stop the violence to have failed, identifying the country as a weak state. Interestingly, the authors note that in cases and countries such as Colombia democracy has been an inhibitor to peace and resolution, having fueled terrorism and political violence instead of fighting against it. The authors conclude that the FARC is not a terrorist group in its orientation and mode of fighting. The FARC’s primary goal, as analyzed by the authors, is not to spread fear and panic but
instead to accumulate wealth and expand their control of Colombian territory. This understanding of the FARC’s primary goal is interesting in that it omits any political motives as an end goal, instead focusing on pure profit-related motives.


The author’s objective of this book was to converge the multiple understandings, definitions, and objectives of terrorism and how it is accepted in our society, bringing together the opinions of numerous scholars from a variety of fields. Of particular interest is the segment of the book, which outlines methods of cooperation between criminal organizations and terrorist groups, highlighting the involvement of the FARC in, numerous of these alliances. The crime-terror continuum the author identifies has four types of cooperation: the first can vary in short or long term alliances, it is possible for terrorist organizations to participate in criminal activities (blurring the lines of the two phenomenon), when the aforementioned occurs it is possible for a particular organization to converge into a single entity of crime and terror or to completely switch onto the opposite side of the spectrum from where it first began, the final type or ‘black hole’ occurs when failed states create a safe haven for these transnational crime and terror groups to emerge and even flourish. According to the author, the FARC is a group that transformed itself into the complete opposite side of the continuum from whence it began.


The author strongly identifies the need to see the possibility of terrorists using existing criminal alliances and methodologies to circumvent national defenses and the military as a credible threat to national and regional security. The author identifies the FARC as a transnational criminal organization, not an insurgency. The author notes in the book that the FARC is routinely underestimated in potential and sophistication, and includes a description of their submarines that were used to smuggle drugs into the United States as an example. The author also highlights an interesting contrast between old and new methods of terrorist and criminal financing methods, ones that now focus on criminal exploitation of e-commerce. The author inclusively drew a separation between drug cartels and organized criminals; she characterizes drug trafficking organizations. This work contrasts with previous literature that does not view the nexus of terrorists and criminal organizations to be forthcoming, or a threat to security.


The author provides a historical and socio-political approach to understanding the FARC’s goals, ideology, founding principles, and future direction. The author rejects the notion that the FARC is a terrorist group, and instead adopts the belief that the group uses terrorist tactics as a strategy for ultimately furthering ideological objectives. The tone of the book, slightly sympathetic towards the FARC’s cause (interesting as the author
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himself was taken prisoner by the FARC) demonstrates a different side to the myths that the group is simply motivated by profit. Through an examination of human rights abuses, the author demonstrates that although the group has committed heinous crimes against civilians, the Colombian government and paramilitary right-wing groups have been comparatively far more aggressive towards noncombatants. The author reveals sentiments that many on the non-violent left believe that the FARC’s persistent violent crimes provide the government with a convenient justification for repressing those who are peacefully searching for peace and social justice.


The author analyzes the FARC’s transformation from a peasant-protecting guerrilla organization that fought for the rights of the impoverished into one that became infamous for the atrocious killing of civilians, kidnapping, and extortion and received its funds from extortion and drug trafficking. The author argues that the advent of the paramilitary forces and the added complexity of the conflict and threat to its resources and survival led to the FARC changing its behavior toward noncombatants in the late 1990s. It set up a coercive behavior indiscriminately and disproportionally. The author explains how the FARC, which once used to maintain a considerable amount of legitimacy and support among the peasant and rural populations, began to lose it after it started using its tactics against the populations it was once meant to protect. This situation where the FARC was forced to assert political primacy over the paramilitaries likewise forced the FARC into the drug industry. In brief, the group did not change its behavior towards noncombatants because of its participation in illicit activities (narcotics) but rather the group was pressured to compete with other armed groups in the area for resources that would ensure its survival.