



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE FARC AND HUGO CHAVEZ: IS CONTEMPORARY
VENEZUELA A THREAT TO COLOMBIA?**

by

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December 2010

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 2010	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The FARC and Hugo Chávez: Is Contemporary Venezuela a Threat to Colombia?			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Carlos A. Padilla				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number <u> N/A </u> .				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
<p>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</p> <p>The Colombian government has been fighting the FARC for more than forty years and since 2002 has proven to be more effective in it. However, in the last years a link of support has arisen between the FARC and Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian government of Venezuela. The FARC's Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia has intertwined with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and by doing so, the FARC has guaranteed for itself not only an ideological vessel to export its revolutionary project throughout Latin America, but also a stronghold in the neighboring country.</p> <p>In order to analyze both movements, elements of Social Movement Theory provides a general theoretical framework for understanding why the two organizations are attracted to each other and how the transformation of Venezuela has allowed the presence of terrorist groups in its territory.</p> <p>The results of the analysis here are conclusive. The government of Venezuela's support for the FARC goes well beyond sympathy with its political objectives and even now, more terrorist organizations (such as ETA) are starting to use Venezuela as a safe haven.</p>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS FARC, demobilization, Bolivarian Revolution, Bolivarian Movement, XXI Century Socialism, Colombia, Venezuela, Colombian Armed Forces, Hugo Chávez, narco-trafficking, Raul Reyes, Alfonso Cano, Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), PDVSA, PSUV.			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 129	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

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A THREAT TO COLOMBIA?**

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requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

from the

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ABSTRACT

The Colombian government has been fighting the FARC for more than forty years and since 2002 has proven to be more effective in it. However, in the last years a link of support has arisen between the FARC and Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian government of Venezuela. The FARC's Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia has intertwined with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and by doing so, the FARC has guaranteed for itself not only an ideological vessel to export its revolutionary project throughout Latin America, but also a stronghold in the neighboring country.

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The result of the analysis here are conclusive. The government of Venezuela's support for the FARC goes well beyond sympathy with its political objectives and even now, more terrorist organizations (such as ETA) are starting to use Venezuela as a safe haven.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas
AUC	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
CCB	Bolivarian Continental Coordinator
DGIM	Military Intelligence General Directorate
DISIP	National Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
ELN	Colombian National Liberation Army
EMC	FARC's Central General Staff
ESICI	Colombian Army Military Intelligence School
FARC	Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces
HCL	Cocaine Hydrochloride
IGAC	Agustin Codazzi Geographical Institute
MAS	Movement for Socialism (Venezuelan Left-wing political party)
MBR-200	Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement – 200
MCB	Continental Bolivarian Movement
MVR	Fifth Republic Movement
OAS	Organization of American States
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control (U.S. Treasury Department)
PCC	Colombian Communist Party
PCCC	Colombian Clandestine Communist Party
PC3	Colombian Clandestine Communist Party
PCV	Venezuelan Communist Party
PDVSA	Venezuelan Petroleum Company

PPT	Homeland for All (Venezuelan Left-wing political party)
PPW	Popular Protracted War
PSUV	Venezuelan United Socialist Party
SEBIN	Bolivarian Intelligence Service
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
UP	Patriotic Union

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been completed without the help, support, assistance and guidance of those who shared their time and patience with the author. Above all, I want to thank my wife for her support and patience going through this project, I love you Sandy.

Second, I would like to thank my advisors, Professor Sean Everton and Professor Marcos Berger for their guidance in consolidating this project. Thanks also to Professor Doug Borer for pointing me in the right direction. The staff of the CORE Lab deserve a special mention for providing different tools used in “assignments,” the results of which were most beneficial. However, Ian Davis and Doug Zimmerman were paramount not only in this project but also in going through the whole process, especially Doug with the very good ideas that ended in useful products. To all of you, and also to the other people who deserve my gratitude, thank you very much.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

During his annual state of the nation address to the National Assembly on January 11, 2008, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, asked Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe, to restart the dialogue between the two of them by first recognizing the FARC¹ and the ELN² as belligerents rather than terrorists:

... I say it even though it can upset somebody: the FARC and the ELN are not terrorist groups; they are armies. Truly armies, they are truly armies [sic] that occupy a space in Colombia, that occupy a space [sic]. Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces and the National Liberation Army of Colombia must be given recognition [status of belligerency]. Those are insurgent forces that have a political project, that have a Bolivarian project that is respected here, respected here [sic].

I request to the governments of the continent that the FARC and ELN be removed—those that have label like that those guerrilla insurgent forces—from the list of terrorist groups, that be removed. I request that Europe remove the FARC and the ELN from the world's terrorist groups list, because that only has one cause, the pressure from United States.

...Therefore, Mr. Colombian President, I would like to resume the dialogue with you, but in a new level. I ask you that we start by giving recognition [status of belligerency] to the FARC and the ELN as Colombian insurgent forces and as opposed as terrorist groups. And so I ask the governments of this continent and the world's governments...³

The day before President Chávez's announcement, the FARC released two political hostages in the jungles of Colombia. These hostages were handed over to a Venezuelan commission led by the Minister of Interior, Ramon Rodriguez Chacin. When he received the hostages, he told the on-site FARC

¹ FARC stands for Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces in Spanish.

² ELN stands for National Liberation Army in Spanish.

³ Scribd.com, "Discurso Hugo Chavez AN-11 Enero 2008," <http://www.scribd.com/doc/1036303/Discurso-Hugo-Chavez-AN11enero2008> (Accessed July 13, 2010).

commander, “I have a message from President Chávez for you. We are very aware of your struggle and ask you to maintain this effort. You can count on us.”⁴

The Colombian government’s response to Chávez’s speech was immediate. That same day, in a communiqué read by the press secretary of the president, the government reminded that the use of the appellation, “terrorist,” for FARC is justified, as the group seeks to attack a legitimately constituted democracy with tactics that are, in many cases, unacceptable and condemned by international law. The FARC is considered a terrorist group because it kidnaps, indiscriminately places bombs, attacks villages disregarding their inhabitants, forces the recruitment of children as a practice to maintain their numbers, and places landmines in any rural area. In addition, the group is funded by the narco-trafficking business.⁵ The United States, the European Union, and a few other countries have designated the Colombian guerrilla groups, especially FARC, as terrorist groups since 2001 and 2002.⁶ On the same day as Chávez’s speech, Argentina, Spain, France, and Guatemala rejected the proposal. Even the Spanish judge, Baltazar Garzon considered Chávez’s proposal as cynical.⁷

According to Hugo Chávez, both entities share a common ideological belief in the “Bolivarian project.” In order to understand his request, this thesis addresses four key research questions:

⁴ Gustavo Coronel, “From Petrostate to Narcostate, Political Corruption in Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela,” *Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico CEDICE*, September 2009, <http://www.cedice.org.ve/fotos/file/Documento%20Gustavo%20Coronel%20Ingles.pdf> (Accessed July 15, 2010), 6.

⁵ Presidencia de la Republica, Colombia, *Colombian Government Press Communiqué, January 11, 2008*, January 11, 2008, <http://web.presidencia.gov.co/sp/2008/enero/11/07112008.html> (Accessed July 17, 2010).

⁶ The FARC was not put in the terrorist list until after 9/11. Unfortunately, many of its practices have been used by the FARC’s enemies, especially the conservative paramilitary organizations that rose and fell in ways that were connected to the FARC’s own trajectory.

⁷ “Crecen Voces en Contra de la Peticion de Hugo Chavez de darle caracter politico a las FARC y al ELN,” *El Tiempo*, January 12, 2008, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-3918293> (Accessed July 17, 2010).

1. Why is there a link between the FARC and the Venezuelan government?
2. Why does the Venezuelan government want to support the FARC?
3. How does the Venezuelan government support the FARC?
4. Why does the FARC want the Venezuelan government's support?

B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will analyze the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela and how it intertwines with and supports the FARC's new ideological platform, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. The purpose of this research is to examine to what extent Venezuela supports the FARC, and how an increase in that support would affect Colombia's national security and the Colombian effort to counter the FARC's actions.

While there are several organizations that are related to both movements (e.g., the Sao Paulo Forum and the Continental Bolivarian Coordinator), this thesis will limit its scope to only the Venezuelan Bolivarian Movement and the FARC (the Continental Bolivarian Coordinator will be briefly discussed). Another topic that will be addressed but not analyzed in any detail is the ties that both entities allegedly have with foreign terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah and ETA.

C. THESIS METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

The thesis draws on elements of contemporary social movement theory as a theoretical framework. By doing so, an analysis will be presented on the rise and sustenance of both movements. Government reports, news articles, studies made by experts and other material will support the analysis.

Chapter I covers the event in which Hugo Chávez requests that FARC's status as a terrorist organization be reviewed as well as discussing the thesis's purpose, scope and organization. Chapter II discusses social movement theory,

specifically the Political Process model developed by Doug McAdam.⁸ Chapter III presents a history of the FARC, its growth and its current-status in Colombia. Chapter IV analyzes the factors that allowed the FARC to become an insurgency and their relevance now. Chapter V discusses the political transformation of Venezuela, from a liberal democracy to a Socialist democracy. Chapter VI outlines the factors that led to the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution and XXI Century Socialism. Chapter VII examines the links between the Venezuelan Government and the FARC and explores the extent to which this collaboration exists. Chapter VIII summarizes the conclusions of the research.

⁸ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

A. INTRODUCTION

In order to analyze the interface and collaboration between the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution, it is necessary to first understand the history and analyze the components of both movements. To do so this chapter draws on contemporary social movement theory, in particular the political process model developed by Doug McAdam.⁹

B. POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL

The emergence of any social movement or insurgency comes from the desire to change the status quo in a society, when some individuals become angry enough with the system to do something about it. The most prominent theory is the “political process model.” This model takes not only takes into account the grievances of individuals and the willingness of such individuals to mobilize in order bring about change (i.e., *development of an insurgent consciousness*), but also the resources needed in order to mobilize (i.e., *increase in organizational resources*) and a political environment that is “open” to insurgency formation (i.e., *expansion of political opportunities*). Independently, these factors are not enough to generate an insurgency, but when they come together, the possibility that an insurgency will emerge becomes more likely.¹⁰

1. Expansion of Political Opportunities

Oppressed populations often seek to promote change in society, but the opportunities to do so are rare and fluctuate over time. Only when these opportunities become more prevalent can a budding social movement have any

⁹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36.

¹⁰ Sean Everton, “Social Movement Theory” (working paper, Dark Networks, Graduate School of Operational & Information Sciences, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 2010), 1.

hope of successfully mobilizing.¹¹ What leads to the expansion of political opportunities? “Any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured.”¹² According to the model, political opportunities manifest themselves in three primary ways: political instability, enhanced political positions of the aggrieved populations, and ideological openness.¹³

a. Political Instability

Political instability occurs when elite control of the existing power structure weakens. Any short-term event, such as natural disasters, economic crisis, and armed conflict, can shake the foundations of the political establishment. In such situations, the political establishment often has to expend political capital and resources in order to counter any movement that tries to exploit the situation.¹⁴ This raises the probability that it will push through reforms that benefit the aggrieved population in order to maintain its dominance.¹⁵

b. Enhanced Political Positions

“Successful insurgencies typically do not emerge merely because of widespread political instability, but also because of broad social processes that have strengthened the aggrieved population’s political power.”¹⁶ Broad social changes that occur over extended periods can enhance the political standing of an aggrieved population.¹⁷

¹¹ Jeremy A. Bartel and Moises M. Nayve, “The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) and the Rise of Radical Islamic Converts in the Philippines: A Major Security Concern” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), 8.

¹² McAdam, *Political Process*, 41.

¹³ McAdam, *Political Process*, 42.

¹⁴ McAdam, *Political Process*, 42.

¹⁵ Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and the Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 59.

¹⁶ Sean Everton, “Social Movement Theory” (working paper, Dark Networks, Graduate School of Operational & Information Sciences, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 2010), 1.

¹⁷ Bartel and Nayve, *The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement*, 8.

c. Ideological Openness

Moreover, broad social changes can lead the social environment to tolerate alternative, critical, and even subversive ideas and worldviews espoused by the aggrieved population and other associated movements.¹⁸ “Since the exercise of power is often closely linked to the manipulation of ideas, the expansion of freedom of thought and expression combined with an influx of creative, critical ideas may result in a marked increase in political opportunity for potential movement groups.”¹⁹

Any of these three factors can contribute to the expansion of political opportunities for emerging insurgent movements. However, the ability to act upon these opportunities depends on the resources available.

2. Increase in Organizational Resources

Even if an aggrieved population or movement encounters the perfect environment to emerge due to prevalent political opportunities, capitalizing on the opportunity depends on the organizational resources available to mobilize and the subsequently sustain of the movement. “A conducive political environment only affords the aggrieved population the opportunity for successful insurgent action. It is the resources of the minority that enable insurgent groups to exploit these opportunities.”²⁰ These resources can vary, and they include the education of the members of the group, the financial resources of supporters, the organizations from which the aggrieved population can recruit individuals, and free spaces where the group can frame their ideological backgrounds and the

¹⁸ Everton, *Social Movement Theory*, 2.

¹⁹ Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 59.

²⁰ McAdam, *Political Process*, 43.

action plans.²¹ However, probably the most important resources are indigenous ones that contribute several key elements such as “members, leaders, solidarity incentives, communication networks, and enterprise tools.”²²

3. Development of an Insurgent Consciousness

People are unlikely to support a process of social change if they are satisfied with the current political system and environment. Instead, an emerging social movement needs to attract those who are unhappy with the perceived status quo and convince them that collectively they can do something about the situation. “Discontent by itself does not produce social movements; there needs to be a transformation of consciousness. People must recognize that they share these grievances with others and believe that they can do something about them.”²³ In other words, people must come to believe that change is not only necessary but also possible. This transformation is “the development of an insurgent consciousness, which is a collective state of understanding that perceives, interprets and explains a social situation in such a way that it compels people to organize and act in order to change the social situation.”²⁴ Since new movements cannot expect that all potential members will be able to understand fully the group’s ideology, a movement’s leaders must be able to frame the movement’s ideology in ways that attract and retain followers.²⁵

C. CONCLUSION

When the conditions outlined above are present (i.e., expanding political opportunities, increase in organizational resources, development of an insurgent consciousness), insurgent formation becomes more likely. The Political Process

²¹ Everton, *Social Movement Theory*, 3.

²² Bartel and Nayve, *The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement*, 9.

²³ Bartel and Nayve, *The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement*, 12.

²⁴ Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 61.

²⁵ Everton, *Social Movement Theory*, 3.

Model will be used in the following chapters as the theoretical framework in order to analyze the emergence of the FARC and the Bolivarian Revolution. Meanwhile, Chapter III will present a history of the FARC.

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III. COLOMBIAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES (FARC) BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the FARC's history. The FARC is the oldest and was at its height the largest "guerrilla" group in the world. Its official formation occurred in 1964, with a Marxist-Leninist orientation. While active in Colombia, it did not earn the designation as a terrorist group until 2001 after 9/11.²⁶ This chapter covers the conditions that led to the FARC's birth, growth, strategic planning, sources of financing, achievements, and an assessment of the current situation.

B. BACKGROUND

Up until 1991, Colombia had only two viable political parties: the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. In 1946, the Conservative Party won the presidential elections with Mariano Ospina Perez as its candidate. Consequently, the Liberal Party joined forces under Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a popular and charismatic leader who promised land reform, and selected him as their candidate for the 1950 presidential elections. On April 9, 1948, however, Gaitan was assassinated in Bogota, an event that triggered tremendous upheaval in the country's capital city.

1. La Violencia

In response to the outbreak of violence, guerrilla groups affiliated with Liberal, Conservative, and Communist parties formed throughout the country. In 1949, the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) tried to take advantage of the chaos and called on these guerrillas to organize the masses and lead them in an armed resistance against the government. The situation created by widespread

²⁶ Unlike Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, the FARC's primary focus has been on Colombia although they have been involved in different activities in many countries around the world.

violence enabled General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to become the President by means of a political coup d'état on June 13, 1953. The National Assembly later recognized him as the legitimate President of Colombia.

During his time as President, Pinilla promoted amnesty for the guerrilla groups throughout the country; however, some groups remained active, especially the communist-oriented ones. These guerrilla groups moved to Tolima²⁷ where they created an armed group aligned with the Communist Party and called itself the “popular masses self-defense group.” Its purpose was to establish some sort of local co-government.



Figure 1. Map of Colombia (From IGAC)

²⁷ Tolima is a State in Colombia, located south of the capital city, Bogota.

2. National Front

Due to pressure from the population, General Pinilla relinquished the Presidency in 1957 to a Military Board comprised of five General officers, who served as a transitional government. In 1958, the two constitutional political parties agreed to share the government every four years and called this the “National Front.” During this time, the remaining guerrilla groups transformed themselves into agrarian self-defense movements with the goal of establishing “Independent Republics.” During 1960, one such guerrilla group named itself the “Marquetalia Self-Defense Movement,” declared that Marquetalia²⁸ was an “Independent Republic,” and elected Pedro Antonio Marin, also known as (aka), “Tirofijo,” as its leader.

In 1964, the Colombian government launched the “Marquetalia Operation,” which tasked the Army and the Air Force to suppress both this guerrilla group and others located to the south. The operation succeeded in recovering the territory, but the nucleus of the guerrilla group escaped.

3. Southern Bloc

After the Marquetalia Operation, the movement joined with other guerrilla groups, and they held the first (FARC) Conference²⁹ at the end of 1964. At this conference, the groups agreed to form a single organization named the “Southern Armed Bloc” and returned to Marquetalia to develop a base area. At the same conference, the group wrote its “Agrarian Reform Plan,” which argued that the land should be given back to the peasants and that the monopoly of the big landowners should end.

²⁸ Marquetalia is a county in Tolima state.

²⁹ FARC’s maximum decision instance. It is comprised by the Secretariat, the Central General Staff and by a representation from all guerrilla structures and its conclusions relate to strategic projections, goals, objectives, procedures and ideology.

C. BIRTH AND GROWTH

1. From Southern Armed Bloc to Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces

At the end of 1966, the Southern Armed Bloc held the Second Guerrilla Conference. It changed its name to the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and set its birth date back to May 27, 1964. The group appointed Pedro Antonio Marin, aka Manuel Marulanda Velez or Tirofijo, as its Commander. During this Conference, the FARC developed its founding charter and stated that its purpose was “to end social, political and economical inequality, the U.S. military and financial intervention in Colombia, through the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist and Bolivarian State.”³⁰ The Central General Staff (EMC) of the FARC recognized that the organization needed to grow. Consequently, it created new guerrilla fronts, adopted guerrilla tactics, and attempted to indoctrinate the masses in order to fulfill its political goals.

During the following years, the FARC grew in terms of both numbers and fronts, and it held four more conferences that outlined the group's objectives for the future:

- **Third Conference (1969):** During this Conference, the group ordered the opening of a fourth front in the region known as Magdalena Medio (Magdalena river valley), located between the states of Boyaca and Santander. The Central General Staff also ordered the creation of urban cells in charge of finances. They numbered around 300 men and 3 fronts.
- **Fourth Conference (1971):** This Conference ended with the creation of a fifth front in Uraba (northwest – borders with Panama) and the first outline of a strategic plan to attack the government in the military, economic and transportation fields. At this time, the FARC had around 450 men and 4 fronts.
- **Fifth Conference (1974):** The Central General Staff increased to 13 members, the Secretariat appeared and the group formed a counter intelligence apparatus. At this time, the FARC had 600 men and 5 fronts.

³⁰ Discovery en Español, “Fuga de las FARC,” <http://www.tudiscovery.com/web/FARC/farc/> (Accessed July 15, 2010).

Colombia. It also embraced the PCC Maxim of “the combination of all forms of struggle.”³² The FARC added the initials EP to its name, which stands for the People’s Army.

1. The Strategic Plan

Initially, the FARC had adopted guerrilla warfare in its most basic form of confrontation. Now, however, the group decided to embrace Mao Tse-tung’s Popular Protracted War (PPW) model, with the modifications of Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap developed during the Vietnam War. According to Mao, a guerrilla group adopting the PPW had to pass through the following three sequential stages to seize power: Strategic Defense, Strategic Equilibrium, and Strategic Offensive.³³ However, the Vietnamese modifications placed more emphasis on conventional military operations and on the concept of “mobile warfare,” as the transition from defensive guerrilla tactics to offensive conventional operations.³⁴ Giap’s modifications hold that a guerrilla force does not need to follow a sequential program when moving from one stage to another. The three stages could be present and forces could switch back and forth among them, employing guerrilla, mobile, and positional warfare.³⁵

The FARC Strategic Plan identified three stages in its struggle:

- A general offensive throughout the country in order to weaken the military forces and the government and to generate chaos.
- The installation of a provisional government composed by revolutionary members.
- The defense of the revolution to exterminate any army remaining forces and consolidate the government.

32 Partido Comunista Colombiano, “Historia del PCC 1930-2008 78 años de lucha,” http://www.pacocol.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=334 (Accessed July 16, 2010).

33 Ian W. F. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 74–75.

34 Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 80.

35 Florian Waitl, “Mao Tse-tung and General Vo Nguyen Giap on Guerrilla Warfare,” *Military History Online*, December 9, 2007, <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/20thcentury/articles/maotsetunggiap.aspx> (accessed July 18, 2010).

For this plan to be feasible, the FARC concluded that it had to grow to 80 fronts (with eight blocs of fronts) and have at least 32,000.³⁶ To accomplish this, each front would have to grow by 200 men and 100 weapons each year. In addition, it designated the Colombian Eastern Mountain Range (Cordillera Oriental) as its Strategic Deployment Center because it believed that surrounding the capital city would paralyze the State. In order to achieve these objectives, the group estimated that it would need approximately \$8,000,000,000 COP (Colombian Pesos), which equals about U.S. \$50,000,000.

2. Finances

Up until this point, the FARC had used the extortion of wealthy companies as its primary means of financing. During the conference, however, the group recognized the need to increase its income and concluded that kidnapping would generate more income. They also became involved in the drug trade, by taxing the transactions made between the buyers and the growers (known as gramage tax), as well as providing protection to coca fields, laboratories, and illegal airstrips. Within twelve years (1994), it controlled all aspects of this illegal business.³⁷

E. INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS AND READJUSTMENTS

In August 1982, Belisario Betancur became the Colombian President and immediately began a peace process with four guerrilla groups. The FARC accepted a truce with the government and even formed a legal political party in association with the Colombian Communist Party.

1. Patriotic Union

In 1985, members of the FARC and the Communist Party established the Patriotic Union (UP). Following its founding, some of FARC's commanders were elected to Congress, and the UP won a total of five seats in the Senate and nine

³⁶ The grouping of Fronts under a unified command.

³⁷ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 90.

in the House of Representatives. Three years later, it won mayoral elections in 23 counties. Because the UP was associated with FARC, it became the target of political violence campaign of drug cartels, paramilitary forces, and rogue military agents. As a consequence, 2,000 of its members disappeared, and the party disbanded.

2. Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia

In 1989, the FARC held a Plenum³⁸ and readjusted its strategic plan, calling it the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, which envisioned a campaign of four stages lasting over a period of six years beginning in 1990:

- First Stage (1990 to 1992): The FARC set a goal of 60 fronts, 18,000 armed men and resources of U.S. \$56 million. Regional peace talks (with regional governments) were encouraged at this time as a way to weaken the central government. In addition, FARC's leaders should be training abroad, and the creation of Bolivarian Militias in the cities was seen as imperative.
- Second Stage (1992 to 1994): A goal of 80 fronts, 32,000 men and resources of U.S. \$200 million was set. The group planned to initiate international relations at this time and procure more weapons, ships, aircrafts and communications equipment.
- Third Stage (1994 to 1996): Deploy 16,000 men around Bogota in FARC's Strategic Deployment Center and add 8,000 men to each side of the Eastern Mountain Ridge in order to exert pressure on Bogota. The group believed that the conditions that resulted from these deployments would cause a general strike in the country, which the FARC planned to take advantage of by instituting a provisional government, holding a plebiscite, and implementing new laws.
- Fourth Stage: If for some reason the third stage were unsuccessful, the units would withdraw to favorable positions, break into more fronts, and launch another offensive, hoping that the use of indiscriminate terrorism would wear the Colombian Army down.

³⁸ Secondary decision instance. Comprised by Central General Staff members and Secretariat. Evaluates and adjusts the strategic plans.

It never launched the plan in the specified timeframe, but the FARC grew and became even stronger.

F. A STRONG GUERRILLA

1. Casa Verde

In August 1990, Cesar Gaviria was elected as the new Colombian President, and in December of that same year, he launched an attack on Casa Verde, the FARC's stronghold in the Uribe County (located in the State of Meta). The place had a historical meaning for the FARC; most of the EMC members had been stationed there for a long time. However, during the operation none of them were captured or killed. During years 1991 and 1992, the government tried to engage in peace talks with the FARC, first in Caracas and later in Tlaxcala, but both attempts failed.

2. Eighth Conference

At the end of March 1993, the FARC held a new conference that proved significant for its future. Not only did the group decide to create an international front in order to gain supporters abroad, but it also decided to consolidate its plans to create blocs of fronts. It also decided to focus on developing quality actions rather than focusing on the number of actions. In addition, the FARC proposed the discussion of an agenda of ten topics concerning the creation of a National Reconstruction and Reconciliation Government.

3. International Front

The FARC concluded that it was time to attract international attention. It set up an International Commission³⁹ to present the FARC as Freedom Fighters. The commission served the following functions, among others:

- Attract financial resources from organizations sympathetic to its cause.

³⁹ Adopted the name of International Front later on.

- Establish contacts in other countries to assure refuge from political persecution by the Colombian government.
- Strengthen its logistical system by establishing contacts with international weapons traffickers.
- Make the Colombian government appear responsible for human rights violations and as the sponsor of self-defense groups within the country.
- Most importantly, seek international recognition (status of belligerency).

One of the members of the Secretariat assumed the role of the international front commander, and in some cases, the front included injured or “retired” guerrillas. At this point, the FARC had a presence (representation) in Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Brazil, Spain, France, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia and Canada amongst other countries.⁴⁰

4. Mobile Warfare

The reorganization of FARC’s structures created six blocs of fronts and one joint command. This facilitated the ease of their actions. The FARC was now able to pull together several fronts in order to conduct quality actions against the Colombian Armed Forces. Beginning in 1994, the FARC showed their capacity to change tactics; it shifted from guerrilla to mobile warfare, especially in the southern and northwestern parts of Colombia. Some of their actions included, but were not limited to, the following:

- August 30, 1996: Six Southern Bloc fronts collectively attacked an Army base located in “Las Delicias” in the State of Putumayo. After 17 hours, the outpost surrendered. Thirty-one soldiers⁴¹ were killed, 17 were injured, and 60 were kidnapped by the FARC.⁴²

⁴⁰ Luis A. Villamarin P., *Complot contra Colombia* (Bogota: Ediciones Luis Alberto Villamarin Pulido, 2009), 48.

⁴¹ The term “soldiers” is used regardless of the rank.

⁴² “Golpes de Pecho,” *Revista Semana*, March 16, 2008, http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=35493 (Accessed July 15, 2010).

- December 21, 1997: Around 300 guerrillas from different Southern Bloc fronts attacked an Army communications relay station located in Patascoy in the State of Nariño (established in an almost inaccessible mountain with extreme temperatures). After a 30-minute engagement, the group killed 22 soldiers and kidnapped 18.⁴³
- March 2, 1998: 400 guerrillas from the Southern Bloc attacked a small, newly formed Army counter-guerrilla battalion comprised of 152 soldiers in El Billar, in the State of Caquetá. After 24 hours, they killed 65 soldiers and kidnapped 43.⁴⁴
- August 3, 1998: More than 500 men of the Eastern Bloc simultaneously attacked an Army Company and a National Police Counter-Narcotics Detachment (totaling 200 men) in Miraflores, in the State of Guaviare. After more than 30 hours of battle, the FARC killed 30 soldiers/policemen and kidnapped around 100.⁴⁵
- November 1, 1998: More than 1,500 men of the FARC's Eastern Bloc seized Mitú, the capital city of the State of Vaupes (in the Amazon jungle). The city only had 120 police officers. Within 48 hours, the FARC had killed 37 and kidnapped 61.⁴⁶

By the end of 1998, the FARC was close to achieving its objectives. It numbered around 12,000 men, the capacity of force concentration was huge, and it was skillful at using gas cylinders (two sizes: one as the grenade, the bigger as the launcher) as artisan mortars. At the same time, the Colombian Armed Forces⁴⁷ were demoralized, and the new government had just approved a Demilitarized Zone in order to start, once again, peace talks with the hope of finally reaching a settlement.

43 "Sangriento ataque de FARC a Patascoy," *El Tiempo*, December 22, 1997, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-717465> (Accessed July 15, 2010).

44 "El Destacamento atacado preparaba golpe a Jojoy," *El Tiempo*, March 6, 1998, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-751456> (Accessed July 15, 2010).

45 "Miraflores, eje de las FARC," *El Tiempo*, March 6, 1998, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-816762> (Accessed July 15, 2010).

46 "Mitú fue el Infierno," *El Espectador*, October 31, 2008, <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/nacional/articuloimpreso87232-mitu-fue-el-infierno?page=0,0> (Accessed July 15, 2010).

47 Armed Forces refers to Military Forces and the National Police.

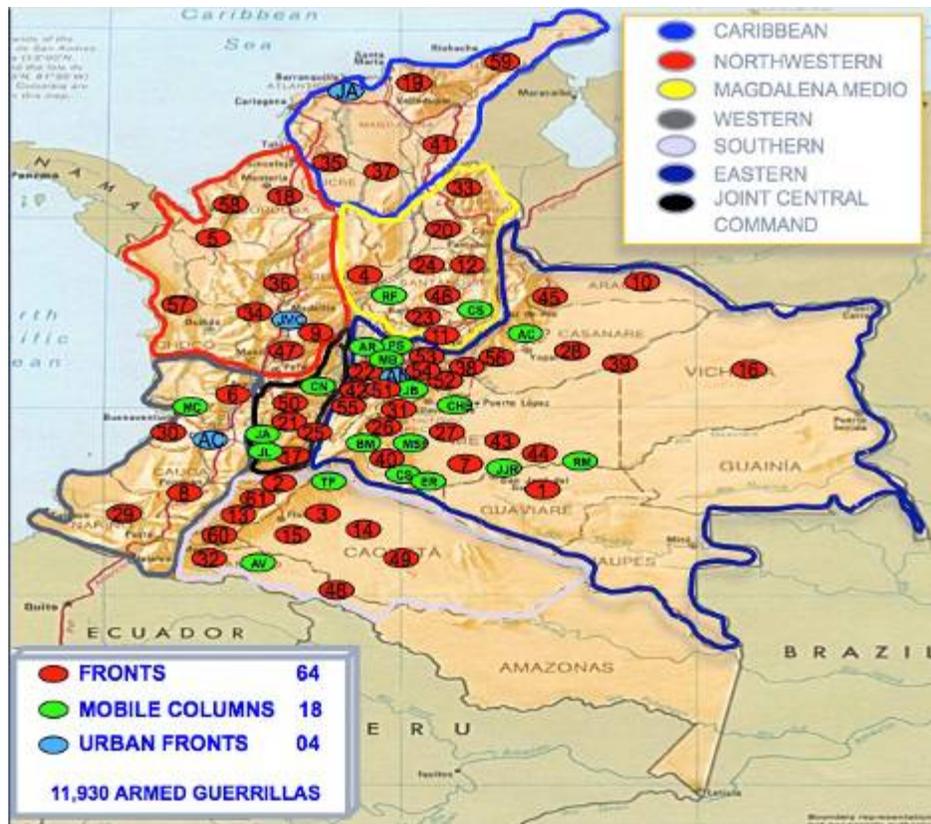


Figure 3. FARC units by the end of 1998 (From ESICI).

G. DEMILITARIZED ZONE

1. Peace Conversations

In 1998, the overall security situation in Colombia was deteriorating very quickly; the FARC was demonstrating a new level of strength, and general chaos was now a real possibility. This was the setting for the next Presidential election. Andres Pastrana, one of the candidates, based his campaign on a proposed dialogue with the FARC. To do so, the FARC demanded the creation of a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in order to create a political and territorial space to hold peace talks.⁴⁸ Pastrana was elected President in August 1998 and in October 1998, the Colombian Congress authorized the establishment of a DMZ

⁴⁸ Even though the government spoke of “peace negotiations,” the FARC never used that term. Instead, the group referred to the process as “peace conversations.”

in the southern part of the country. The DMZ was comprised of five counties⁴⁹ and covered 42,000 square kilometers (i.e., it was larger than Switzerland). The peace conversations began on the wrong foot; the opening ceremony was on January 7, 1999, but even though Pastrana showed up, Marulanda never did.⁵⁰

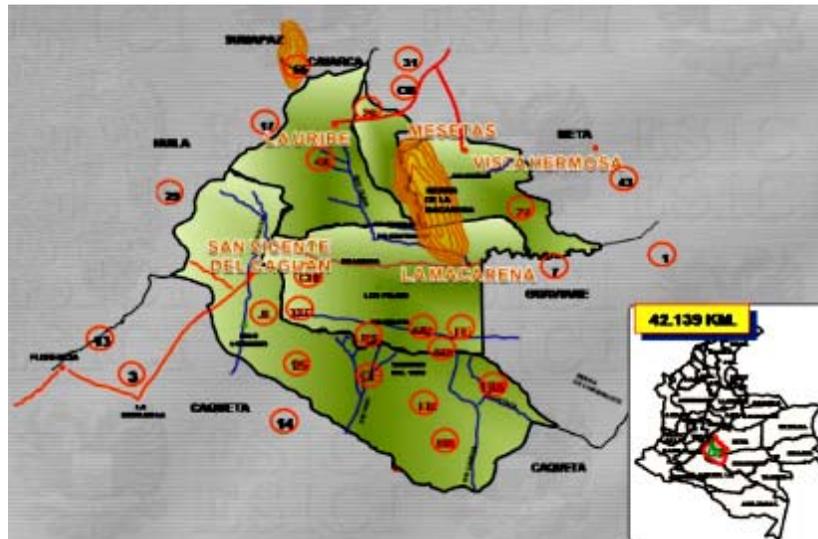


Figure 4. Demilitarized Zone (From ESICI).

The Government desired to include in the conversation's agenda topics such as a ceasefire, investment for social development, and the demobilization and reincorporation of the FARC into society. On the other hand, the FARC wanted to discuss a National Reconstruction Process (based on the 10 topics of the eighth Conference), government investment in the southern regions, and structural changes in the political order, beginning with constitutional reform. The

49 In the State of Meta: La Uribe, Vistahermosa, La Macarena and Mesetas. In the State of Caquetá, San Vicente del Caguán. San Vicente was considered as the "capital city" of the DMZ.

50 "Cronología del Proceso de Paz," BBC Mundo, February 21, 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_1752000/1752115.stm (Accessed July 18, 2010).

FARC never included demobilization and reintegration in its agenda, but it did push hard for an “exchange of prisoners,”⁵¹ something to which the government never agreed.⁵²

Initially, the government established the DMZ for three months, but the FARC managed to have the time extended repeatedly. It used the DMZ as a rearguard area⁵³ where it conducted training, replenished supplies, treated the sick and wounded, and gathered the numbers⁵⁴ it needed to launch attacks on military and police units, villages, and the country’s energy and transportation infrastructure. Coca crops existed in the five counties that composed the DMZ; the FARC took advantage of its control of the area and increased the size and quantity of the fields as well as its involvement in the business. The FARC not only taxed growers, but it also bought the coca paste to resell it. In some cases, it built the basic and HCL labs for producing coca paste and pure cocaine. It also controlled illegal airstrips in the zone, which in turn facilitated the transport of the coca paste outside the DMZ.⁵⁵ As a result, the FARC became the new, and very well armed, drug cartel.

At the same time, the government initiated a modernization and restructuration of its Armed Forces as well as putting into place an ambitious plan, known as Plan Colombia, to counter the narco-trafficking business around the country.

51 The FARC wanted to include the exchange of soldiers and policemen for convicted guerrilla into the topics of the agenda as a way to achieve the status of belligerency.

52 “El Golazo del Canje,” *Revista Semana*, February 15, 1999, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/golazo-del-canje/22897.aspx> (Accessed July 18, 2010).

53 “Juegos de Guerra,” *Revista Semana*, November 8, 1999, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/viento-coca/40253.aspx> (Accessed July 19, 2010).

54 It was estimated that the FARC had around 7,000 men at the DMZ. People kidnapped by the FARC often ended up in the DMZ.

55 “Viento en Coca,” *Revista Semana*, November 8, 1999, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/viento-coca/40253.aspx> (Accessed July 19, 2010).

By the end of 2000, the FARC put together a column of about 400 men to retake the control of the Middle Magdalena region⁵⁶ from the AUC⁵⁷ in the northeastern part of Colombia. The Army discovered the group and destroyed most of it.⁵⁸ Interestingly, this event marked the FARC's return guerrilla warfare again.

2. Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia

The FARC took this opportunity to (once again) launch its ideological platform for a government of reconciliation and reconstruction. Named the "Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia," its purpose was to gain political support before achieving power through the armed struggle. At this time the FARC distanced itself from the PCC and decided to launch its own party, the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (PCCC or PC3), in order to support its platform. It decided that the PC3 would be clandestine in order to avoid what happened to the UP at the end of the 1980s. Guillermo Leon Saenz Vargas, aka Alfonso Cano,⁵⁹ organized the PC3. The Bolivarian Movement was a vehicle to bring together the armed component of the FARC and the Bolivarian militias. The proposed topics were as follows:

- Finding a political solution to the country's crisis
- Allowing political power to rest in the workers
- Following a scheme of national's sovereignty defense
- Embracing Simon Bolivar's⁶⁰ ideology (unification of Latin America)
- Building a fourth power (moral power against corruption)
- Having the state control the economy (no free markets)
- Struggling against American Empire in defense of biodiversity

⁵⁶ A valley formed by the Magdalena river.

⁵⁷ AUC stands for Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia; also included in the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

⁵⁸ "Gaula entra en Operacion Berlin," El Tiempo, December 26, 2000, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1223868> (Accessed July 19, 2010).

⁵⁹ He is a member of the Secretariat and the Commander of the Caribbean Bloc.

⁶⁰ Simon Bolivar was the Liberator (Libertador) of Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador.

- Supporting agrarian reform against large estate and landowners
- Creating a country without trade agreements imposed by empires
- Developing as an underground movement

This initiative, centered on the Bolivarian doctrine, allowed the FARC to move closer to the new-left tendencies and organizations in Latin America, such as the XXI Century Socialism, the Bolivarian Movement, the Sao Paulo Forum and the Continental Bolivarian Coordinator. By this, it sought to legitimize its armed struggle and achieve international recognition.

3. Terrorist Group

Not only did the FARC continue to stage attacks all over the country, but it also started to care less about the people living in the villages and small cities it attacked. The use of gas cylinders as mortars led to an increase in collateral damage. Another common FARC practice was to stop vehicles (cars, buses and trucks) and kidnap some of their occupants. These kidnappings not only served economic purposes, they also served as a way to exert pressure on the government, especially through the kidnapping of politicians. On July 15, 2001, for example, the FARC kidnapped Alan Jara, a former Governor of the State of Meta. He was acting as a UN consultant and the FARC intercepted him as he was traveling from Lejanias (county of the State of Meta) to Villavicencio even though he was riding in a UN vehicle. The FARC pulled him out of it by force.⁶¹ Later, on September 29, 2001, the FARC kidnapped and assassinated Consuelo Araujo, a former Minister of Culture.⁶² Not too long afterward, on November 2, 2001, the U.S. Department of State added the FARC to the list of Foreign

61 "Alan Jara, un Desafio a la Neutralidad," Revista Semana, January 26, 2009, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-conflicto-armado/alan-jara-desafio-neutralidad/119965.aspx> (Accessed July 19, 2010).

62 "Hallado el cadaver de la Ex Ministra de Cultura secuestrada el Lunes pasado por las FARC," El Mundo, October 01, 2001, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2001/09/30/internacional/1001858025.html> (Accessed July 19, 2010).

Terrorist Organizations,⁶³ in accordance with the definition of terrorist action by INA, Act 212.⁶⁴ The European Union followed suit on June 17, 2002.⁶⁵

4. The End of the Peace Conversations and the DMZ

The government became concerned about the increase in kidnapping by the FARC and allegations that the FARC was exercising total authority in the DMZ. After signing the agreement of San Francisco de la Sombra,⁶⁶ the government extended the FARC's access to the DMZ until February 20, 2002, but it also announced its intentions to exert more control over the area. The FARC did not like this and suspended negotiations until the following year. On January 3rd, the talks resumed. After ten days without an agreement, President Pastrana set a January 14th deadline and threatened to send the Army into the DMZ. Each side blamed the other for the lack of agreement. The President extended the deadline until January 20th, and the conversations continued. On January 20th, both sides agreed to start working on a timetable for a cease-fire starting on April 7th, although the attacks, kidnappings and killings continued. On February 20th, the FARC hijacked a commercial airplane and kidnapped a Senator. President Pastrana declared the end of the DMZ and ordered the Armed Forces to occupy it after midnight the same day. By this time, the FARC had around 17,000 armed men.⁶⁷ On February 23, 2002, Ingrid Betancourt, a presidential candidate, insisted on travelling to San Vicente del Caguan, to

63 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," August 6, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> (Accessed August 11, 2010).

64 U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "INA: Act 212-General Classes of Aliens Ineligible to Receive Visas and Ineligible for Admission; Waivers of Inadmissibility," <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.f6da51a2342135be7e9d7a10e0dc91a0/?vgnextoid=fa7e539dc4bed010VgnVCM1000000ecd190aRCRD&vgnnextchan=fa7e539dc4bed010VgnVCM1000000ecd190aRCRD&CH=act> (Accessed August 11, 2010).

65 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, Documentos, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed August 11, 2010).

66 Among other topics, the main effort was directed towards an immediate commencement of cease-fire dialogs.

67 International Crisis Group, "Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace," March 22, 2002, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/001-colombias-elusive-quest-for-peace.aspx> (Accessed July 20, 2010), 10, 34–40.

address the population. Despite the advice and warnings from the Army and National Police, she went ahead and the FARC kidnapped her before she reached San Vicente.⁶⁸

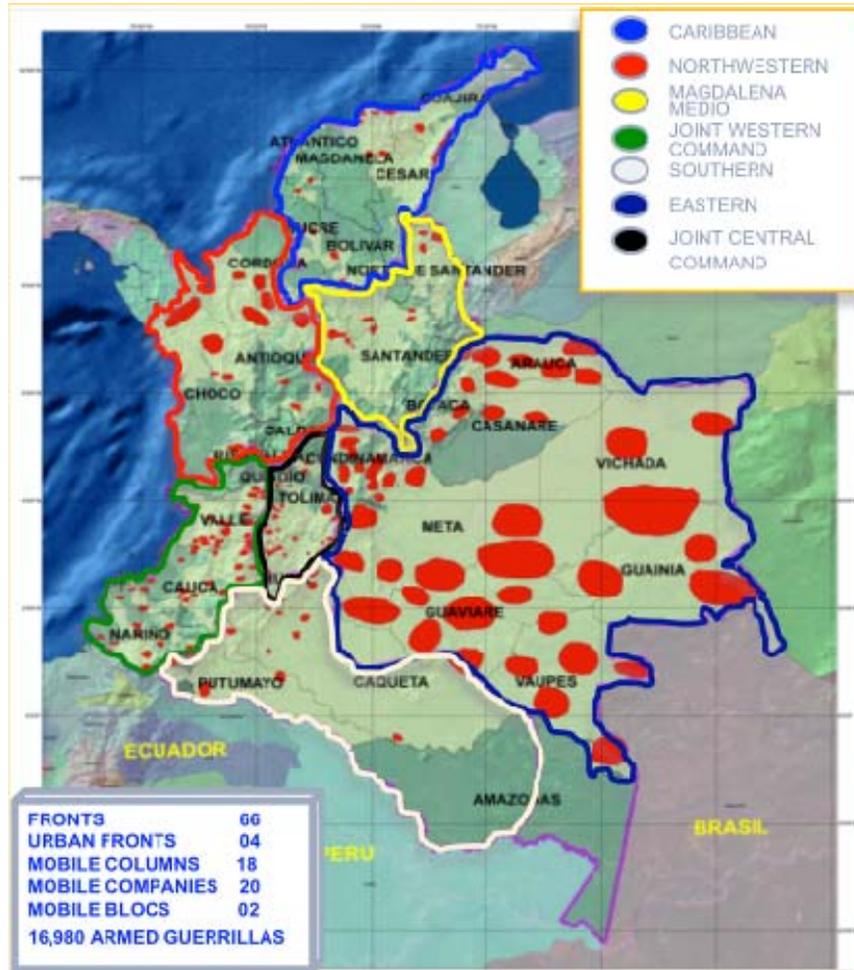


Figure 5. FARC's size by mid 2002⁶⁹ (From ESICI).

⁶⁸ "Asi fue el Secuestro de Ingrid Betancourt," El Espectador, April 3, 2008, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/paz/articulo-asi-fue-el-secuestro-de-ingrid-betancourt> (Accessed July 20, 2010).

⁶⁹ In this map the actual FARC's Fronts are not shown, instead, its base areas are shown.

H. DEMOCRATIC SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY

1. New President – New Policy

After the end of the DMZ peace talks, a general feeling of disappointment pervaded Colombia; most citizens felt betrayed by the FARC. That same year, the country held new presidential elections, and a candidate, Alvaro Uribe, who had been a Senator and the Governor of the State of Antioquia but was not widely known, came into play. He proposed to implement the Democratic Security and Defense Policy, which stated that it was necessary to “establish and reinstate the rule of law in Colombia and protect the population.”⁷⁰ Uribe won the election, and he put his proposed policies into place. The modernization and transformation process of the Armed Forces continued; the Army grew in its number of units and effectiveness in order to regain the territory lost to the FARC. Most of the units secured the roads, protected the energy infrastructure, and closed down the FARC’s mobility corridors between Colombian States. The major military effort began in the State of Cundinamarca (where Bogota is located) and in the southeastern part of Colombia.

2. Major Setback – Operation Liberty I

The FARC managed to surround the capital city with numerous fronts, and the destruction of these fronts became a priority for the Colombian government. The operation began in June 2003, and by November, the Colombian government had dismantled the fronts and killed the main fronts’ commanders. FARC casualties included “Marco Aurelio Buendia,” a legendary FARC leader who led the attempt to siege Bogota.⁷¹ With this operation, the FARC suffered a major setback in its quest to take over the reins of the country by the force.

70 Embassy of Colombia, Washington, The Uribe Administration’s Democratic Security and Defense Policy, Presidencia de la Republica, http://www.presidencia.gov.co/sne/visita_bush/documentos/security.pdf (Accessed July 20, 2010).

71 “La Primera Batalla Final,” Revista Semana, November 10, 2003, http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=74497 (Accessed July 21, 2010).

3. Patriot Plan

This military plan aimed to recover the territory gained by FARC during the establishment of the DMZ. A Joint Task Force (division strength) was formed to accomplish this goal. As the government recovered the DMZ territory, the FARC retreated to areas deep inside the Colombian jungles. The population increased its support of and collaboration with the military, especially in terms of information. On December 2004, Ricardo Gonzalez, aka Rodrigo Granda, was captured in Venezuela and turned over to Colombian authorities at the international border. The FARC considered Granda its “Foreign Minister,” and he represented the group at a Bolivarian Congress held in Caracas.⁷² By 2004, Army Intelligence estimated the FARC’s numbers around 12,000 men.

4. Policy for the Consolidation of the Democratic Security

President Uribe was elected for a second term, and a revision of the policy was necessary. Although the government had managed to reduce the size of the FARC, the group adjusted its tactics, so Uribe recognized that more action from the state was required. The Army gained territorial control throughout the country, and the government reintroduced every type of government service into these areas.⁷³ In addition, the FARC began to lose more members to demobilization than to armed engagements with the Army and National Police.

The FARC had a strong presence in the northwestern part of Colombia, in particular in the area known as Montes de Maria. The Front Commander of that area, Martin Caballero, was something of a legend within the FARC, but pressure from the Armed Forces diminished his front. During a military operation on December 31, 2006, the former Ministry of Development, Fernando Araujo, who the FARC had kidnapped six years before, escaped. In the Pacific region,

⁷² Global Security, “Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/farc.htm> (Accessed July 25, 2010).

⁷³ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security, Bogota, 2007, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed July 25, 2010).

because of the paranoia caused by the pressure of military operations, two FARC fronts engaged in “friendly fire,” killing eleven deputies of the State of Valle del Cauca’s Assembly, who had been kidnapped in 2002.

For years, the Colombian Armed Forces had been never able to kill or capture relevant FARC front commanders, much less members of the Secretariat, but with the change of policy, that became possible. For example, Front 16 of the FARC was tasked with the narcotrafficking business in the south of Colombia. It also provided money, weapons and explosives for the group.⁷⁴ Its commander, Tomas Medina Caracas, aka Negro Acacio, had contacts with all kinds of international drug traffickers and weapons suppliers. However, a September 2007 Air Force bombing run, which was based on good intelligence, killed him. With his death, Front 16 began to collapse. It went from 50 HCL⁷⁵ labs to only two, losing more than U.S. \$300 million.⁷⁶

In October 2007, the Armed Forces killed another iconic front commander, Gustavo Rueda Diaz, aka Martin Caballero, Commander of Front 35. This Front controlled the Montes de Maria area. After his death, this Front practically disappeared, and the FARC lost all control over the territory.

The FARC, in another strange episode, summoned an international committee to release Emmanuel, the son of hostage Clara Rojas, who was born in captivity. On December 31, the FARC and President Chávez accused President Uribe of failing to provide guarantees for the boy’s liberation. However, Uribe, in a later press conference, announced that the FARC had lost track the boy years ago, and he was now safely in Bogota in the government’s custody.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Juan Manuel Santos, *Jaque al Terror, Los años horribles de las FARC* (Bogota: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2009), 140.

⁷⁵ The coca base is produced in artisan labs. The Cocaine Hydrochloride (HCL) requires a more sophisticated laboratory and is where the coca base is transformed into pure cocaine.

⁷⁶ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 149.

⁷⁷ “Fate Uncertain of Mission to Free Hostages,” CNN, January 1, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/01/01/colombia.hostages/index.html> (Accessed July 24, 2010).

I. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

1. Unilateral Liberations and Lack of Support in Colombia

In an effort to get back on track, the FARC released two political hostages on January 10, 2008. It handed them to a Venezuelan committee in the Colombian jungles. The hostages flew to Venezuela, where President Chávez received them. The next day, during his annual state of the nation address to the National Assembly, President Chávez, asked the Colombian President, the governments of the Continent and Europe, to remove the FARC from world's terrorist list and give the group recognition (status of belligerency).⁷⁸

At the beginning of February, over 13 million people in more than 185 cities around the world participated in rallies against the FARC.⁷⁹ On February 25, the Colombian National Police captured Heli Mejia Mendoza, aka Martin Sombra, who was one of the FARC's founding members. They found a permit in his possession issued by the Venezuelan Office of Migration that enabled him to travel and move freely around the city of Machiques in the State of Zulia. As a gesture of thanks for President Chávez support and understanding, the FARC released four more hostages to a Venezuelan committee.

2. The Fall of the Myth

March 2008 was a bad month for the FARC. On March 1, a joint operation involving the Colombian Air Force, Army, and National Police killed Luis Edgar Devia Silva, aka Raul Reyes,⁸⁰ in his camp located 1,800 meters inside Ecuador. It was the first death of a member of the Secretariat, and it destroyed the myth that members of the Secretariat were untouchable. During the raid, three computers and some USB memory cards were recovered, which contained more

⁷⁸ Scribd.com, "Discurso Hugo Chavez AN-11 Enero 2008," <http://www.scribd.com/doc/1036303/Discurso-Hugo-Chavez-AN11enero2008> (Accessed July 13, 2010).

⁷⁹ Colombia soy Yo, "El 4F, Nuestra Historia," <http://www.colombiasoyyo.org/el4f> (Accessed July 27, 2010).

⁸⁰ Raul Reyes was a member of FARC's Secretariat, the FARC's Second in Command, the Commander of the Southern Bloc and the International Front.

than 600 GB of documents, including the exchange of e-mails and documents among members of the Central General Staff about FARC's national and international situation. It proved to be a gold mine for the Colombian Government.⁸¹

Demoralization among the FARC became so deep after the death of Reyes that on March 3rd it lost another member of its Secretariat, killed by his own bodyguard. Manuel Muñoz Ortiz, aka Ivan Rios, was the Commander of the Northwestern Bloc and the youngest member of the Secretariat. His bodyguard, aka Rojas, killed him during a simulated engagement with the army. Rojas cut off his hand as evidence and turned himself into the Army.

Finally, on March 26 Pedro Antonio Marin, aka Manuel Marulanda or Tirofijo, died in the middle of the jungle. Some information states that he died from injuries suffered after a bombing run from the Air Force; others claim that he died of a heart attack. Regardless, his death threatened the cohesiveness of the group. The Colombian Ministry of Defense made the announcement in May, which forced the FARC to issue a communiqué confirming his death, and designating Alfonso Cano as the new FARC Commander. Timochenko delivered this communiqué⁸² from his camp, well inside Venezuela.⁸³

3. Reyes's Computers

Almost as important as the death of Reyes was the seizure of his computers, which not only provided knowledge of the FARC's internal situation but also of its most relevant international contacts. To certify the validity of the computers, an Interpol forensic team examined them and determined that the Colombian authorities had not tampered with them. When information contained on the computers became public, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua attempted to discredit the information by claiming it was a masquerade on the part of the

⁸¹ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 199.

⁸² Rodrigo Londoño aka. Timochenko is a member of the FARC's Secretariat.

⁸³ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 175.

Colombian government. This reaction was undoubtedly prompted by the revelation that strong ties existed between these three governments and the FARC, ties that they denied.⁸⁴

4. Big Blows

The main purpose of the FARC's political hostages was to exert pressure on the government in order to get the approval of a permanent law to exchange military personnel and politicians for imprisoned guerrillas.⁸⁵ The most important hostages for the FARC were the former presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt⁸⁶ and three American citizens, whom they kidnapped in 2003.

In July, after tapping FARC's communications for months, the Army instigated a deceptive operation (Operation Jaque), which resulted in the rescue of 15 hostages, including Betancourt and the three Americans. The FARC not only lost its most valuable assets, but also its capacity to maintain command and control without discovery by the Armed Forces.⁸⁷

In October, a guerrilla (who had been with the FARC for 12 years), tasked with the security of a politician kidnapped eight years earlier, decided to run away and turn himself in, taking the hostage with him. After a couple of days, he located the Army and eventually received a monetary reward. He is now living in France with his partner. He escaped from the FARC because it seemed the only feasible option to avoid death and because he was tired of the armed struggle.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 201.

⁸⁵ This proposal is also known as "Humanitarian Accord" and at the end is a mean for being recognized as a belligerent force.

⁸⁶ Ingrid Betancourt not only was a presidential candidate but also a Colombian-French citizen. President Sarkozy was pushing Uribe in order to reach an agreement with the FARC that eventually would lead to the liberation of Betancourt.

⁸⁷ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 261.

⁸⁸ Santos, *Jaque al Terror*, 298.

Another important hostage held by the FARC was Luis Mendieta, a police officer kidnapped during the assault on Mitú in 1998. During his captivity, he was promoted to Brigadier General, becoming the highest-ranking officer held captive by the FARC. An operation executed in July 2010 rescued the General, two more police officers and an Army NCO from the camp where the FARC had them. An unconfirmed report stated that the Secretariat ordered the execution of the guerrillas responsible for holding them. This demoralized the group even more.⁸⁹

5. Mono Jojoy is Dead

In September 23, 2010, the Colombian Armed Forces launched a joint operation called “Sodoma” in the jungles of the State of Meta. This operation led to the death of the FARC’s second in command, Victor Julio Suarez Rojas, aka Mono Jojoy or Jorge Briceño. The FARC’s military commander, he was one of its most ruthless. At the time of his death, he was hiding in a concrete reinforced bunker⁹⁰ where 18 laptops and 67 USB drives containing information on the terrorist group were also found. In the same camp, the army found 30 tons of groceries, 120 mortar rounds, and more than 13,000 rifle cartridges.⁹¹ Unquestionably, this was the most successful operation against the FARC to date. Not only did it eliminate a member of the Secretariat, but it also meant the loss of an iconic FARC figure, which should lead to additional demoralization within the FARC’s ranks.

J. CURRENT SITUATION

The FARC is still far from being defeated, but its current situation is anything but favorable. The numbers of guerrillas killed in operations have

⁸⁹ “Las claves de la Operacion Camaleon,” Revista Semana, June 16, 2010, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-opinion-on-line/claves-operacion-camaleon/140398.aspx> (Accessed July 28, 2010).

⁹⁰ “Asi se planeo y ejecuto la operacion Sodoma,” El Tiempo, September 23, 2010, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7960880> (Accessed September 24, 2010).

⁹¹ “Encontraron tres computadores y cinco USB mas en el campamento de Jojoy,” Revista Semana, October 1, 2010, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/encontraron-tres-computadores-cinco-usb-campamento-jojoy/145365.aspx> (Accessed October 3, 2010).

diminished, but the number of guerrillas who have been demobilized has grown exponentially, especially among those who have been in the FARC between five to ten years. Recent estimates set the FARC's numbers at around 7,000, with the corresponding loss of territorial control.⁹² The number of active fronts has fallen by more than 50% as well.

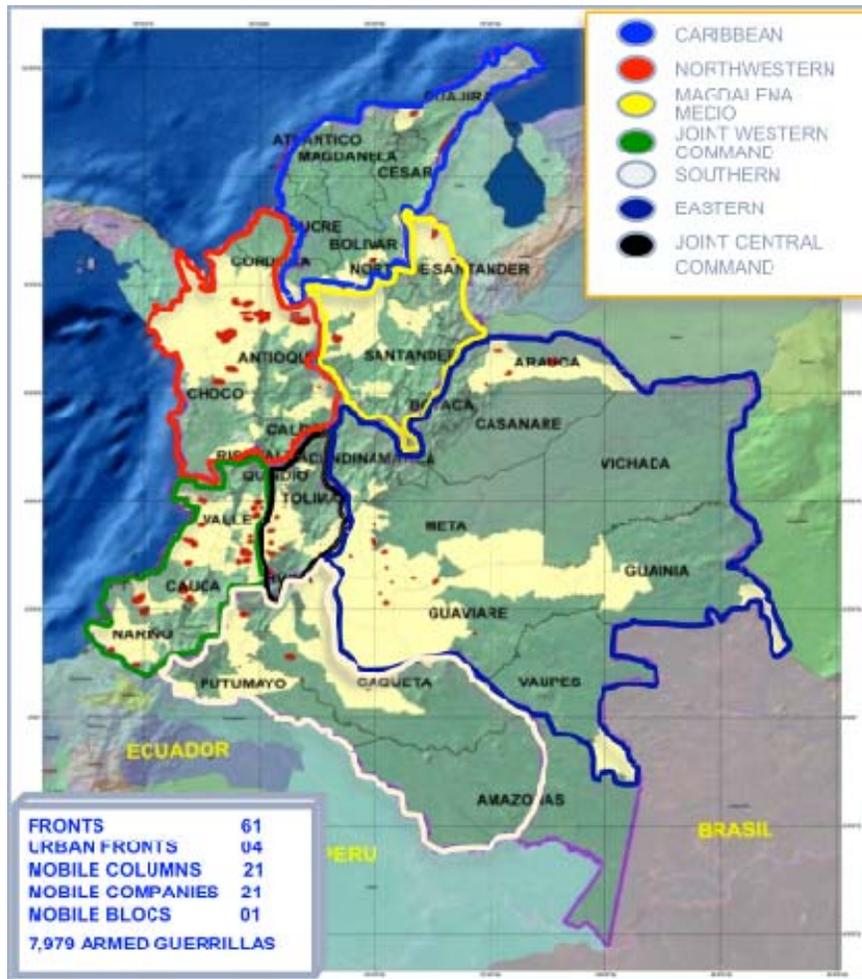


Figure 6. FARC's size, presence and influence in 2010 (From ESICI).

⁹² "Balance Real de la Guerra," Revista Semana, December 13, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-opinion/balance-real-guerra/118723.aspx> (Accessed July 27, 2010).

It is also clear that the FARC has lost the battle for the minds and hearts of the Colombian population.⁹³ It has failed completely in the political aspect of its revolutionary struggle. In a country of 44 million inhabitants, less than 3% approve or support the FARC. The FARC has not been able to attract mass support for its project, even, remarkably, within the three possible groups: voluntaries, forced, and neutrals (passive supporters).⁹⁴

On the military side, the death of four members of the Secretariat has been a big loss for the FARC, which sees its new Commander as an ideologist without the proper military experience. Lately, the FARC has lost many experienced mid-level commanders, which in turn has degraded its operational capability and cohesiveness. Armed Forces pressure and their ability to intercept FARC's communications have rapidly deteriorated the FARC's exercise of command and control, and subsequently, its military actions.

Increased security throughout the country has also significantly reduced opportunities for kidnapping and extortion, which has seriously affected the FARC's finances. Since the security agencies have also established greater territorial control, the FARC has lost influence in zones with coca activity, damaging its finances even more.⁹⁵

In the international arena, after a very complicated period when the diplomatic relations with Venezuela were frozen, President Chávez recently stated that an armed struggle is not the solution to the social conflict, and, on a few occasions, has called upon the FARC to cease its use of violence.⁹⁶ Ecuador

⁹³ "Jaque a las FARC," Revista Semana, December 13, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/jaque-farc/118709.aspx> (Accessed July 27, 2010).

⁹⁴ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, *The FARC at Their Worst Moment in History*, Bogota, 2009, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed July 28, 2010), 5.

⁹⁵ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, *The FARC at Their Worst Moment in History*, Bogota, 2009, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed July 28, 2010), 4.

⁹⁶ "Presidente Chavez pide a guerrilleros Colombianos liberar secuestrados," El Pais, August 8, 2010, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/internacional/noticias/presidente-chavez-pide-guerrilleros-colombianos-liberar-secuestrados> (Accessed August 21, 2010).

has been distancing itself from the FARC and has been more receptive to collaboration with the Colombian government whenever the FARC cross the border.⁹⁷ In a recent communiqué from the FARC, the group asked for an opportunity to discuss the Colombian conflict in the Union of South American States (UNASUR), but not a single country approved the request.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, according to the documents found in Raul Reyes's laptops, the FARC has more international contacts than was previously believed. Only time will tell if President Chávez's change in posture towards FARC is genuine or not.

K. CONCLUSION

The FARC's growth rate during the 1990s was impressive, but its numbers have dropped dramatically since that time. Even though it had a well-structured plan to overthrow the government, it was not able to carry it out. Moreover, the actions and methods it employed in its search for power generated little support from the Colombian population. Nevertheless, it has yet to be defeated and still possesses the military capability to threaten some rural areas in Colombia. We now turn into an analysis of the group as a social movement.

⁹⁷ "Golpe al Frente 48 de las FARC en frontera, surgio de reunion entre Colombia y Ecuador," *El Tiempo*, January 10, 2010, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7008388> (Accessed August 15, 2010).

⁹⁸ Colombia Reports, "Brazil rejects FARC's Unasur mediation proposal," August 26, 2010, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/11521-brazil-rejects-farcs-unasur-mediation-proposal.html> (Accessed August 17, 2010).

IV. THE FARC AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

Even though the FARC was, at its zenith in the late 1990s, one of the largest and oldest guerrilla groups in the world, its current situation has changed significantly over the years. Its main objective to seize the political power in Colombia is impossible. The FARC has taken steps that have prevented the group from achieving its main objective. However, it is important to note that the group still possesses a significant military capacity as well as sources of financing that allow them to remain active.⁹⁹ This chapter draws on the Political Process Model in order to understand the conditions that were present in the Colombian society that allowed the FARC to be born, grow and consolidate as a strong movement against the government.

B. EXPANSION OF POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Political Instability – La Violencia

In 1948, the political situation in Colombia was poor. Many disagreements existed between the two political parties. The assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who the public saw as a progressive and charismatic figure who would end social inequalities, created turmoil that led to the emergence of guerrilla groups from both political parties that fought against each other. The Communist party took advantage of the situation and endorsed its own guerrillas.¹⁰⁰ All were trying to kill each other over different ideologies. In some cases, political leaders hired “death squads” for this purpose. It was very common to see a family, with different political ideas, slaughtered on their own ranch. When this happened, some influential figures took advantage of the situation to reclaim lands as their

⁹⁹ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, *The FARC at Their Worst Moment in History*, Bogota, 2009, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed September 30, 2010), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 31.

own, often stealing them from the owners through forced displacement. Because they supported agrarian reform, the communist guerrillas slowly gained acceptance from the population.

The government offered an amnesty program for the guerrillas, but since it did not address the land problem, the “agrarian self-defense groups” did not come in from the cold. Their main purpose was to protect the peasants from the big landowners who arose during this period and to bring about a change in government. In some cases, the excesses by the army against the guerrillas, and sometimes toward civilians, led more people to seek the protection of the communist groups and join them.

In 1964, the army attacked one of the self-defense strongholds, Marquetalia. The groups disbanded and their leaders realized that they needed to join forces in order to take effective action against the government. With the objectives to change the government, implement land reform, modify the system in order to bring forth social equality and embrace an anti imperialism posture, the Southern Bloc, later known as the FARC, was born.¹⁰¹ During these initial years, the FARC gained many supporters and achieved recognition for its proposed agrarian reform.

2. Enhanced Political Positions – Patriotic Union

After some years of trying different approaches (small initiatives) to achieve a peace in Colombia, the government proposed a truce with the FARC in 1984. Marulanda agreed and even committed to cease kidnappings. People viewed this gesture with hope for a new period. In 1985, the FARC saw the truce as an opportunity to expand its political position and created, in conjunction with the Communist Party, its own political party, the Patriotic Union (UP). Some FARC commanders held positions of responsibility in the new party, and in the Congressional elections of 1986, the party earned 5 seats in the Senate and 9 in

¹⁰¹ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 34–39.

the House of Representatives.¹⁰² However, the real achievement was the presence of supporters outside the Communist Party. In the 1988 municipalities' elections, the UP gained 23 seats for mayors around the country. In some villages, the FARC was able to co-govern through the mayors and assemblies sympathetic to the group; in others, they governed through intimidation.¹⁰³ Thus for a time, the FARC was able to expand its political power. However, in 1987, the truce ended, and for the next three years, unlawful elements of society began an extermination campaign of UP members. At the end of 1990, with a great number of its members assassinated, the FARC's cadre returned underground.

Not only did the FARC take this opportunity to explore the political field, but it also created urban militias. Since the group never honored its commitment to cease kidnappings and continued to assassinate regional leaders, many of the UP's militants ended their association with the armed struggle.¹⁰⁴ The general environment of this period allowed the FARC to gain some supporters in the form of militias, but it lost a unique opportunity to gain political influence.

3. Ideological Openness

Ideological openness toward the FARC never existed in Colombian society. There was never a period of time when extensive and radical social change found acceptance among Colombians. In fact, the majority of the population was indifferent to the general situation, and when people did get involved, it was to voice a lack of support. The FARC has maintained its very small group of hardcore supporters, but the forced supporters and the passive supporters have changed over time.¹⁰⁵ The former has been reduced by the

¹⁰² Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 50.

¹⁰³ This practice would extend well into the late 90s.

¹⁰⁴ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 50–52.

¹⁰⁵ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, *The FARC at Their Worst Moment in History*, Bogota, 2009, <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa> (Accessed September 30, 2010), 4.

increased state presence in territories influenced by the FARC, and the latter has decreased because of their disapproval of the means used to generate the social change.

C. INCREASE IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

Any social group needs a variety of resources to guarantee its survival and to grow; in some cases, the FARC's methods have played against the group.

1. Education of Members

Most members of the FARC only have an elementary education; however, one of its founders, Jacobo Arenas, came from the Communist Party with a very clear idea about the theses of Marx and Lenin. He took upon himself the task of indoctrinating the FARC. He developed, along with others such as Marulanda, the FARC's ideology. As a rural movement comprised mostly of peasants, the FARC's leadership was reluctant to accept highly educated people into its ranks.¹⁰⁶ However, the leadership understood the utility of "intellectuals" to promote and refine its own ideology and to have more groups from which to recruit. This is how Guillermo Leon Saenz, a former anthropology student, became the FARC's top ideologist after Jacobo Arenas died, and then assumed full leadership of the group, after the death of Marulanda.

2. Financial Resources – Self Financing

When the FARC began, it only had rudimentary weapons that had belonged to its founding members. Over time through a series of ambushes, the group was able to procure better weapons from the army. It survived with help from supporters in rural areas. Eventually, the leadership realized that to grow they needed better forms of financing. They began kidnapping wealthy individuals and extorting enterprises but eventually it did not distinguish whom it kidnapped. In addition, once the FARC recognized the huge potential of the drug

¹⁰⁶ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 80.

business, it got involved. Initially, it just taxed transactions between growers and buyers, but eventually it planted its own coca fields, as well as creating the means to produce and sell it. This practice provided the FARC with its biggest source of revenue, which in the 2003 was around U.S. \$1.5 billion.¹⁰⁷

3. Organizations to Recruit From

During its existence, the FARC has mainly recruited from the peasant population using a variety of methods. In some cases, mostly during its early years, the FARC appealed to low-educated peasants by giving them a gun, paying them a basic salary, and providing them with their basic needs, stressing that being a member of the FARC was a better livelihood than hard agricultural work. It also promised them a better future once the seizure of power was completed. This method actually worked; many people were convinced to joining the FARC.¹⁰⁸

The FARC also became aware of the left-wing tendencies of a couple of Colombian universities. After welcoming a few “intellectuals” from these institutions, the FARC recognized the potential of recruiting members from urban educational institutions in order to form the urban militias it hoped would play a vital role during the final stages of its strategic plan. This initiative met with limited success.

One of its main recruiting efforts targeted people living in the poor outskirts of the main cities. It has been trying to seduce this sector of the population into joining the urban Bolivarian Militias, and, to some extent, it has been successful.

¹⁰⁷ “Las Cuentas de las FARC,” *Revista Semana*, January 30, 2005, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/cuentas-farc/84475.aspx> (Accessed October 1, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 83.

However, due to the decreasing numbers of FARC's combatants and its current lack of popular support, the group has turned more to forced recruitment,¹⁰⁹ especially of minors.¹¹⁰

4. Free Spaces

Since its beginnings, the FARC has had strongholds in the jungle. With the development of the "Bolivarian Militias" in the urban areas, the group established safe houses in some cities. However, due to the pressure of the military, rural commanders rarely ventured to urban areas. Moreover, in the 90's the FARC held territorial influence in over 40% of the country and had strongholds that the military was not able to reach. It was the perfect environment for the group. It created many rearguard areas that guaranteed its survival.¹¹¹ The main event that allowed the FARC to grow was the time that it controlled the DMZ. Its members were able to walk freely in those counties because not even the National Police was allowed there. For all practical purposes, the FARC "owned" that land for almost four years.

5. Indigenous Groups – Peasants

The peasants were the strongest indigenous group from which the FARC recruited its members and leadership and developed solidary incentives and communication networks. The FARC started as an agrarian self-defense movement, and to some extent, they have remained so. Most of its members belong to that group, as do the majority of its top leadership. There are some exceptions, where the FARC has been trying to recruit from Universities, but it

¹⁰⁹ "Las FARC por dentro," *Revista Semana*, November 28, 2009, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/farc-dentro/131972.aspx> (Accessed October 2, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "You'll Learn not to Cry. Child Combatants in Colombia," September 2003, www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/hrw_2003__child_combatants_.pdf (Accessed October 2, 2010).

¹¹¹ German Pataquiva, "Las FARC: Su Origen y Evolucion," *UNISCI Discussion Papers No. 19* (January 2009), <http://www.ucm.es/info/unisci/english/index.html> (Accessed October 2, 2010), 171.

has not proven very successful. Even now, the FARC's top commander, who most consider an "intellectual," does not have strong acceptance because of his "lack" of military background.¹¹²

D. DEVELOPMENT OF INSURGENT CONSCIOUSNESS

The main grievances that led to the rise of the FARC were the desire for land reform and the social inequalities present in the Colombian society. During the first years of La Violencia, most of the members of the self-defense agrarian groups only wanted their farms back. Marulanda used to say, "All that I want is my farm back as well as my pigs and my chickens."¹¹³

The Communist Party saw a big opportunity to use these groups to vindicate the social struggle or social revolution that was carried out in other countries. Using the Marxist-Leninist ideology as a vehicle, the groups were convinced that not only were the reforms that they wanted possible, but also the seizure of the government was necessary in order to establish a "free and just" system. When the ideology was far more developed, leaders told the cadre that the struggle was also against United States for its imperialistic posture towards America and to recover the riches from natural resources they had stolen.

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the FARC developed an improved political project to attract more supporters. It launched the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, which sought to establish an underground political party to attract more supporters. Its platform found inspiration from a combination of the Bolivarian (unification of Latin America) and Marxist-Leninist ideologies.¹¹⁴ The FARC claimed the only solution to the country's crisis was the adoption of a new political system in which political power should rest with the workers. The FARC

¹¹² Pécault, *Las FARC: Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* 181.

¹¹³ It is hard to prove that this is an exact sentence from Marulanda, however, by popular legends, those were his words when asked why he became a guerrillero.

¹¹⁴ "El camuflaje de los Farianos," *Revista Semana*, June 16, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-opinion-on-line/camuflaje-farianos/112758.aspx> (Accessed October 2, 2010).

argued that the system should be based on a scheme of national sovereignty defense and the institution of a fourth popular power (moral power against the system's corruption). The state should control the economy (no free markets) and institute land reform. It should also resist the American empire in defense of biodiversity, without imposed trade agreements.¹¹⁵ Like Venezuela, Colombia holds the Liberator, Simon Bolivar, in a special place, and the FARC has used his name and ideas to frame the purpose of its armed struggle.

E. CONCLUSION

Although the factors for the rise of a social movement were present in Colombia and the FARC took advantage of unique political opportunities to increase its influence, current reality is completely different.

The FARC has lost its main asset: popular support. It does not matter how much money it can gather to finance its political project; the people of Colombia do not want it. On February 4, 2008, the biggest rally against any cause in the world's history took place in Colombia and in 155 cities around the world. It was a rally against the FARC.¹¹⁶ It shows how big its lack of public support is.

The FARC has also abandoned its guiding ideology. Ever since the 1990s, the group has immersed itself in the drug business. The leadership cares more about the money produced by cocaine, than the seizure of power necessary to produce their desired social transformation through a Marxist-Leninist-Bolivarian government. However, it is important to note that in an effort to attract more sympathizers, the FARC embraced Bolivarianism, attempting to appeal to the nationalism of the Colombians and its neighboring countries. Indeed, the next chapter presents the evolution of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution in order to understand why both movements appeal to each other.

¹¹⁵ As it is stated in documents seized by the Colombian Army to the FARC.

¹¹⁶ Colombia soy Yo, "El 4F, Nuestra Historia," <http://www.colombiasoyyo.org/el4f> (Accessed July 27, 2010).

V. VENEZUELA'S TRANSFORMATION PROCESS: FROM LIBERAL DEMOCRACY TO DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Venezuela's transition from a much-celebrated "liberal democracy" that set it apart from many other countries in Latin America, to its current position as "democratic socialist" state that seeks to not only transform Venezuela, but also spearhead a "Bolivarian" alternative to liberal democracy and capitalism. It first looks at the conditions of Venezuelan society during the 1980s and 90s that helped facilitate Hugo Chávez' rise to power. Then it will turn to a brief history of the Bolivarian Revolutions' birth and its implementation in Venezuela.

B. BACKGROUND

Although Venezuela has had periods of dictatorships, many consider the country one of the oldest and most stable democracies in Latin America. Moreover, many political scientists refer to its history as the "Venezuelan exceptionalism thesis."¹¹⁷ The thesis establishes that, throughout its history the country has not had internal struggles, keen class conflicts, or racial issues like other countries in Latin America.¹¹⁸ For many years, political analysts presented the exceptionalism view by labeling Venezuela a model democracy due to its stability, marginalization of the left, and avoidance of militant independent trade unions.¹¹⁹ In the second half of the twentieth century, after overthrowing a military dictator, the existing political parties subscribed an agreement for sharing power in the country; it was called the *Punto Fijo Pact*. Essentially, it allowed the parties to alternate power and design alliances and coalitions in order to govern the country. It also permitted the parties to incorporate smaller parties into their

¹¹⁷ Steve Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics, Class, Conflict and the Chávez Phenomenon* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 1.

¹¹⁸ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 2.

own structure. It was much praised, and Venezuela enjoyed a period of stability and sustained development. It created the ability to overcome the guerrilla violence of the sixties. During the seventies, the world considered Venezuela another Saudi Arabia because of its enormous oil deposits. However, far from satisfying social demands, and due to the economic measures adopted at that time, clientelism and corruption arose, which led to a growing popular dissatisfaction.¹²⁰ In February 1989, the government issued a package of economic adjustments, which led to riots in different cities around Venezuela, including Caracas. In just few hours, rioter sacked and looted the capital city. After the intervention of the army and a curfew the following day, the situation was under control, but the death toll was in the hundreds. The incident, known as *El Caracazo*, served to demonstrate the unrest of the people with the current government and its policies.¹²¹ In other words, the conditions for the emergence of social movements seeking transformation of the country were present in the Venezuelan society at that time. More importantly, the social movement (Bolivarian Revolution) was already created and almost completely organized to take action.

C. MBR-200 – REVOLUTIONARY BOLIVARIAN MOVEMENT – 200

1. Born and Shape of the Revolution

Hugo Chávez Frías is the founder of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement – 200. During his childhood, his influences included members of the Communist Party in Barinas, especially Jose Esteban Ruiz Guevara. Chávez read Marx and Mao and learned the basic ideas about capitalism, communism, and revolution. His heroes at that time included Simón Bolívar, Ezequiel Zamora, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara. Ruiz was fundamental for linking the nationalism

¹²⁰ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 54.

¹²¹ Cristina Marcano and Alberto Barrera T., *Hugo Chávez: The Definitive Biography of Venezuela's Controversial President* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 55.

of Bolivar and Zamora to the communism of Castro and Guevara.¹²² Chávez attended the military academy and graduated as a Second Lieutenant in 1975. In his years at the academy, he tried to create an activist group called the “Army for the Liberation of the Venezuelan People”; however, it did not attract great support and disappeared.

In the years that followed, he continued to discuss his ideas of revolution with his closest friends. In December 1982, he and three of his closest friends repeated Bolívar’s oath against Spanish rule made in 1805 and created the MBR-200.¹²³ This was their way to honor the birth of the Liberator Simón Bolívar. Chávez explained the purpose of this movement in a speech in Havana in 1994: “We had the audacity to found a movement within the ranks of the Army of Venezuela. We were tired of the corruption, and we swore to dedicate our lives to the creation of a revolutionary movement and to the revolutionary struggle in Venezuela, straight away, within Latin America.”¹²⁴

Chávez started to live a double life. By day, he was a military officer, but night, he was a revolutionary giving shape to the revolutionary process. Over countless nights, he incorporated more military officers and prominent civilians such as Douglas Bravo¹²⁵ into his movement. He also recruited others who would help him later in the revolutionary process.

The popular uprising known as *El Caracazo* served to confirm to Chávez that the conditions for a change of regime were in place, and it was time to take action.¹²⁶

¹²² Douglas E. Schoen and Michael Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home: Hugo Chávez and the War Against America* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 22.

¹²³ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 28.

¹²⁴ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 31.

¹²⁵ He was the leader of the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PVR) and the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), a guerrilla group founded in the sixties.

¹²⁶ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 55.

2. Coup d'état

On February 4, 1992, Chávez instructed his comrades in arms to launch military operations in key regions of Venezuela in order to take over the government and overthrow president Carlos Andres Pérez. The coup, postponed over the years for lack of support, was a failure, and Chávez had to surrender. The only condition of surrender he made was to address his men on national television, so he could order them to surrender. That opportunity was given to him. When he was about to address the nation, he was asked to submit his written statement. He refused, but the government still allowed him to speak on air. He saluted the people of Venezuela using Bolívar as a reference and stated that *for now* they had not accomplished their movement's objectives. He asked his comrades to lay down their weapons and assumed full responsibility for the Bolivarian military movement.¹²⁷ It is important to note that the civilian members of the group were never involved in the coup attempt.

3. Imprisonment

Chávez and his comrades were sent to prison. He was not charged with any crime, and the subsequent polls showed that 62 percent of Venezuelans supported the coup. Chávez was seen as a hope for the poorest poor; even former president Rafael Caldera said that he understood Chávez, that a hungry people would not defend democracy.¹²⁸ The whole episode served Chávez's purpose and provided him with a popularity that he could otherwise never have reached. He became a hero of the Venezuelan people.

That year a series of events took place that helped consolidate the image of Chávez as a savior. In May, president Pérez faced charges of embezzlement. Supposedly, he used a secret fund (around U.S. \$2 million) to pay for the protection of Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro. The subsequent trial led to the president's dismissal and in the streets the people shouted, "Chávez was

¹²⁷ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 38.

¹²⁸ Enrique Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2008), 52.

right.”¹²⁹ Congress nominated a temporary president and planned for new elections at the end of the year. In November, Venezuela faced another failed coup attempt. Former president Rafael Caldera won the new election and took office in 1994.

4. Political Opportunities

One of Caldera’s first official acts was to grant amnesty to Chávez and his comrades. The Chávez case was dismissed, which allowed Chávez to participate in politics. In December that same year, Chávez traveled to Cuba for his first meeting with Fidel Castro.

Caldera won on an anti-neoliberal platform, but throughout his presidential term, primarily because of pressure brought on by a banking crisis, he adopted neoliberal policies and reforms, including the privatization of many state companies and industries, including (partially) the oil industry.¹³⁰ Consequently, the state company, Venezuelan Petroleum (PDVSA), started to follow its own agenda. It was becoming more of a transnational corporation, which reduced the state’s capacity to regulate its activity and share in its earnings,¹³¹ which led to the withdrawal of governmental subsidies for basic food, such as milk, pasta, meat and fuel. These policies accentuated exclusion and inequality in Venezuela, which opened the door for a new candidate with a new and completely different political perspective.¹³²

¹²⁹ Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 63.

¹³⁰ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 102.

¹³¹ Edgardo Lander, “Venezuelan Social Conflict in a Global Context,” in *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an “Exceptional Democracy,”* ed. Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker S. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 26.

¹³² Lander, “Venezuelan Social Conflict,” 27.

D. MVR – FIFTH REPUBLIC MOVEMENT

1. Presidential Elections

When Chávez got out of prison, he traveled around the country in order to convince people to refrain from voting in the upcoming local elections; however, he eventually came to see that this was not the best strategy. By 1996, most of the population had lost confidence in the traditional parties; inflation, unemployment, insecurity and the poor quality of public services were a major concern amongst Venezuelans.¹³³ At that time, Luis Miquilena, an old communist, advised Chávez to utilize the democratic process. Chávez reconstituted his movement, changing its name to the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR)¹³⁴ and transforming it into a political party. In 1998, after conducting an exhaustive grassroots campaign against his rivals, Chávez was elected president of Venezuela.¹³⁵

2. Initial Referendum – New Constitution

In his initial speech, Chavez confirmed his intention to call for a referendum in order to convene a Constituent Assembly. Although he faced huge opposition from the Congress and Supreme Court of Justice, he called the referendum by decree. Three months later, the people approved it with 80% of the vote. Members of the MVR comprised 95% of the members of the Assembly.¹³⁶ They wrote a new Constitution and held new elections for the Presidency, Congress, and local positions in the states. Venezuela became the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chávez was reelected and the new

¹³³ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 117.

¹³⁴ Throughout its history, it has been considered that Venezuela has had Four Republics or major regime changes. Chávez used that name to signal the people that his political proposal would represent a change and a refounding of Venezuela.

¹³⁵ Lieutenant Colonel R. Neal David, “Democracy in Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela: Developing or Faltering Due to His Politics, Activities, and Rethoric?” (master’s thesis, United States Army War College, 2008), 10.

¹³⁶ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 131.

elections helped him to eliminate any opposition that he had faced in the old Congress and in the states. Almost all of the government and its institutions were sympathetic to his policies.

The new constitution included guidelines for restructuring the judiciary, achieving political democracy through direct participation, increasing the branches of power to five, and incorporating Citizen Power and Electoral Power. It also granted the military the right to vote, and took involvement in military promotions away from the National Assembly (formerly Congress and now unicameral). It also gave the president the power to legislate directly on any matter (called “ley habilitante” or enabling law). Furthermore, the new constitution eliminated the public financing of political parties, and allowed for excessive state intervention in the social aspects of the country (housing, education, health, etc.). For all practical purposes, the result was an increased concentration of power in the president.¹³⁷

The country also started to play a more active role in OPEC, complying with its strict quotas. This increased the price of the oil internationally and allowed the government to reconstitute its public finances and acquire the funds needed for its ambitious social programs.

3. The Bolivarian Revolution

Chávez combined the ideas of Simón Bolívar, Ezequiel Zamora, and Simón Rodríguez and created a neo-populist (representing directly the “people” or “El Soberano” (The Sovereignty) as Chávez calls it) and sometimes-authoritarian government. He integrated the military into domestic politics and used state resources to improve the quality of life for the poor.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Margarita López Maya, “Hugo Chávez Frías: His Movement and His Presidency,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 85.

¹³⁸ Harold A. Trinkunas, “Defining Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution,” *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (Jul/Aug 2005): 39.

The revolution was not only domestic; it had a foreign component that relied heavily on the defense of the revolution by positioning Venezuela as a leader in Latin America. It opposed globalization and neoliberal economic policies and sought for the emergence of a multipolar world with new and different hegemonies.¹³⁹

To fulfill his objectives, the leader of the Venezuelan revolution depended on another revolutionary leader: Fidel Castro. Ever since Chávez was elected President, the ties between the two leaders have strengthened; in fact, Castro and Cuba's support have been a fundamental component of the Bolivarian Revolution.¹⁴⁰ It has helped Chávez gain the support of the people by blaming "Norte Americanos" for the country's economic and social difficulties.¹⁴¹ While playing the part of a new leader capable of exporting the so-called revolution to other Latin America countries, Chávez has supported leftist candidates and organizations throughout South America. He has also tried to acquire a Fidel Castro like role as a leader of influence against the United States.¹⁴²

4. Coup Attempt

Although Chávez earned huge popular support, one of the consequences of his new policies was the polarization of society and the radicalization of the opposition. The policies adopted by the new government opened a gap in Venezuelan society.¹⁴³ In turn, these grievances led to a failed coup attempt in 2002, which was conducted by the civil-military elite. Chávez reclaimed his

¹³⁹ Trinkunas, "Defining Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution," 39.

¹⁴⁰ The term Bolivarian Revolution, XXI Century Socialism and Democratic Socialism are interchangeable as Hugo Chávez uses them.

¹⁴¹ Jerrold M. Post, "El Fenomeno Chavez: Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Modern Day Bolivar" (The Counterproliferation Papers No. 39, USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2007), 5.

¹⁴² Lieutenant Colonel David, "Democracy in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela," 15.

¹⁴³ Post, "El Fenomeno Chavez," 7.

position after only two days.¹⁴⁴ In the years to follow, Chávez kept on talking about the Bolivarian Revolution, but suddenly, in 2006, he started to use a new term, the XXI Century Socialism.

E. XXI CENTURY SOCIALISM?

When Chávez won the 2006 election, he promised a more radical turn into a socialist system. In the words of Heinz Dieterich, XXI Century Socialism is a participative democracy. Due to the “participative” character of it, this type of democracy embraces the four different areas of human social relations: economic, political, cultural, and the military. In this context, the state is no longer based on or controlled by a particular social class (oligarchy). It manages a wide-range of functions that serve the interests of the “people.” The economy is democratically planned in its micro and macro areas. Labor input determines the objective value and, in turn, this leads to an egalitarian economy in search of a social justice.¹⁴⁵

1. Bolivarian Circles

Bolivarian Circles are the basic unit of Chavista organizations. They promote the Bolivarian ideology throughout the population, and facilitate the exchange of information and discussion. They are mainly structured using neighborhood organizations.¹⁴⁶ The idea is for people to gather in their community, discuss their problems, and then channel them through the respective organizations for a solution. They are social organizations that attempt to operationalize the principle of participatory democracy embodied in the new Constitution. Some members of the opposition have denounced the circles and

¹⁴⁴ Kenneth Roberts, “Social Polarization and the Populist Resurgence,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 71.

¹⁴⁵ Heinz Dieterich S., *Socialismo del Siglo XXI* (Bogota: Fundacion para la Investigacion y la Cultura, 2007), 50.

¹⁴⁶ Cristóbal Valencia Ramírez, “Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution: Who Are the Chavistas?” in *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an “Exceptional Democracy,”* ed. Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker S. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 127.

have claimed that they have armed themselves and are acting instead as circles of terror.¹⁴⁷ They have also accused them of receiving funding from the government and resembling the committees for the Defense of the Revolution in Cuba.¹⁴⁸ Some circles even received military training from ETA members.¹⁴⁹ Bolivarian Circles are no longer limited to Venezuela. There are similar organizations established in different countries around the world, including Spain, the United States, Canada, France, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, and Brazil. Their purpose is to obtain international legitimacy and public support for the Bolivarian Revolution.¹⁵⁰

2. Cuban Missions

Since one of the founding pillars of the revolution is the development of social programs aimed at the less-favored part of society, the government established different “missions” in the city neighborhoods. The ulterior motive is to gain the unrestricted support of the people. The “missions” consist of teams of doctors, nurses, teachers, sport trainers, etc, located in the poorest neighborhoods to improve the living conditions of the society. Fidel Castro helped institute these missions in 2003. He sent thousands of experts (including “security experts for Chávez security”) from Cuba in exchange for low-cost and sometimes no-cost oil.¹⁵¹ The “security experts” have deeply infiltrated the military and security apparatus to help avoid another coup. Current figures

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Hellinger, “Political Overview,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 52.

¹⁴⁸ Maria Pilar García-Guadilla, “Civil Society,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 192.

¹⁴⁹ Manuel Marlasca and Luis Rendueles, “La Chávez Connection,” *Interviu.es*, November 19, 2007, <http://www.interviu.es/reportajes/articulos/la-chavez-connection> (Accessed September 28, 2010).

¹⁵⁰ Hands Off Venezuela! “International Days of Action in Solidarity with Venezuela,” September 20, 2010, <http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org/> (Accessed September 28, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 74.

estimate that Cuba receives around 100,000 barrels of oil per day.¹⁵² They also benefited from the construction of a new refinery at Cienfuegos (Cuba).

3. Bolivarian Militias

The president possesses the ability to legislate by decree. He initially issued 48 laws. Recently, he issued 26 more. The laws vary and touch all aspects of Venezuelan life. One, the “Organic Law of the Armed Forces” created a new parallel military structure. Based on a concept of a civilian-military alliance, the law created a newly armed body that reports directly to the president. It is the National Reserve, otherwise known as the Territorial Guard or the Bolivarian Militia. Even members of the government saw this move as a counterbalance to the armed forces, designed to avoid another coup attempt.¹⁵³ This organization not only defends national sovereignty, but it also carries out tasks in economic, social, geographic, and environmental development. Once again, it resembles the Cuban model, and it is not known if its purpose is only to support national defense or to achieve political and social control of Venezuelan society by intimidating the opposition.¹⁵⁴

4. Support to Leftist Groups and Terrorist Organizations

Not only has Chávez been sympathetic to left wing organizations throughout the hemisphere, but also he has been supportive of organizations long considered terrorist groups. As noted early in his annual state of the nation address to the National Assembly in 2008, he asked the Colombian government, the governments of the Continent, and Europe to remove the FARC and ELN from their list of terrorist groups and recognize them as belligerent forces.¹⁵⁵ The

¹⁵² Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 74.

¹⁵³ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 167.

¹⁵⁴ Ignacio J. Osacar, “Las Milicias Bolivarianas,” Nueva Mayoría.com, October 28, 2009, http://www.nuevamayoria.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1891&Itemid=38 (Accessed September 28, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ Scribd.com, “Discurso Hugo Chavez AN-11 Enero 2008,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/1036303/Discurso-Hugo-Chavez-AN11enero2008> (Accessed July 13, 2010).

purpose of his initiative was unclear until in a military operation, condemned by Venezuela, the FARC's number two, aka Raul Reyes, was killed and his laptops were retrieved. Some documents on the laptop illustrated the supporting role that Chávez had been playing. Chavez wanted the terrorist groups recognized as belligerent forces to force the Colombian president Alvaro Uribe to negotiate a political settlement with the FARC. The FARC would then promote a candidate to take power.¹⁵⁶ Back in 2004, the FARC's "chancellor," Rodrigo Granda, was arrested in Caracas while participating in a congress of left-wing organizations, later known as Continental Bolivarian Coordinator, and deported to Colombia. However, Granda had Venezuelan citizenship.¹⁵⁷

There have been other instances of Chávez support of terrorist groups. Recently, the Spanish judge Eloy Velasco charged six ETA members, as well as some FARC's members with attempting an assassination on Colombian government officers in Spain. In his indictment, he suggested the cooperation of the Venezuelan government in the collaboration effort between these two groups. One of the ETA individuals charged is a member of the Venezuelan government, Arturo Cubillas Fontan, who has lived in Venezuela for a long time. Some believe he has facilitated the link between the two terrorist groups.¹⁵⁸

As noted in the previous chapter, the primary source of the FARC's funding is narcotrafficking. A study of the FARC's finances in 2003 concluded that the revenues produced by the drug business were around U.S. \$691 million.¹⁵⁹ As Colombian government's countermeasures in this area have improved, the amount of cocaine going through Venezuela has skyrocketed.

¹⁵⁶ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 89.

¹⁵⁷ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 90.

¹⁵⁸ "Venezuela Helped ETA and FARC Plot Against Uribe," BBC News, March 1, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8543349.stm> (Accessed September 29, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Republica de Colombia, *Las Finanzas de las FARC*, Bogota, 2005, http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Documentos_Home/Finanzas%20de%20las%20Farc.pdf (Accessed September 29, 2010), 5.

“The number of drug flights leaving Venezuela increased tenfold from 21 metric tons in 2002 to 220 metric tons in 2007.”¹⁶⁰ To some extent, this has helped maintain the FARC’s finances.

5. A New Bloc of Power – Oil, the Best Weapon

In another effort to extend his power outside the Venezuelan boundaries, Chávez, has been using his country’s most important asset to gain and maintain support and build regional and transcontinental alliances.

In 2005, Venezuela signed an agreement with some Caribbean nations to create PetroCaribe. It is simply a program designed to sell oil to these nations under favorable conditions and at good prices. It sometimes offers the possibility of paying with goods in equivalence.¹⁶¹ Venezuela created another initiative with Argentina and Brazil, called PetroSur. They also launched the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) as a way to unify and integrate Latin America. At first, only Cuba and Venezuela participated, but with time, more countries joined the initiative. ALBA proposes preferential commercial treatment to under-developed nations. In addition, it does not involve of the World Bank (given the World Bank’s neoliberal leanings), and it openly opposes neoliberal programs. These agreements have helped the revolution to gain allies in its stance against imperialism.

Overtly, Chávez has supported the campaigns of Latin American candidates who embrace his anti-U.S. message. Consequently, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have been his closest allies, especially Bolivia. Some people also argue that he has tried to support candidates in Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Peru.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy*, by Mark Sullivan, Congressional Rep. RL32488, Washington, The Service, July 28, 2009, <http://openocrs.com/document/RL32488/> (Accessed September 26, 2010), 43.

¹⁶¹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 203.

¹⁶² Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 85.

A clear example of his achievements is the growing utilization of UNASUR to deal with common issues of South America, rather than OAS where Venezuela is weaker.

Venezuela has also increased its economic and diplomatic relations with Iran, China, and Russia. With the latter, they have not only engaged in commercial activities with the purchase of more than U.S. \$6 billion in weapons, but they have also negotiated military agreements. The former shares their anti-American stance and their interest in building nuclear plants with energy-driven purposes. They also share an interest in investment in different types of industries.¹⁶³

F. DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM OR AUTHORITARIAN SOCIALISM?

It is true that the social programs have benefited a vast amount of the population, but the question remains: is it really a new form of socialism or is it a path to authoritarianism through the emulation of the Cuban revolution?

In 2007, Chávez proposed some changes through a constitutional reform. This proposal included, but was not limited to, the elimination of presidential term limits, limitations on central bank autonomy, and more power for the state to conduct expropriations. When the package was submitted to the referendum, he lost. Chávez turned to an old phrase, “we have lost... only by now,” to express his displeasure with the result. Finally, in 2009, he won a referendum to eliminate the presidential term limits, allowing him to stay in office indefinitely, even though the polls showed the people did not want him to consolidate his power any further.

Chávez has also managed to expand the Supreme Court of Justice from twenty to thirty-two judges, taking advantage of the opportunity to appoint the new judges from his supporters, thus controlling the judiciary.¹⁶⁴ Also in a turn to

¹⁶³ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 106.

¹⁶⁴ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 281.

a “more” democratic State, Chávez called for the transformation of government coalition parties into a single party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). He also calls for the incorporation of social movements into the party; however, some parties are refusing, worried that it will lead to a single way of thinking.¹⁶⁵

One of the main issues addressed by Chávez during his campaign was the fight against the corruption embedded in the previous regimes. However, after ten years in government, Venezuela shows no signs of improvement. Furthermore, some founders of the MVR have resigned from the government, as they are tired of not achieving any real change.¹⁶⁶ Every year, Transparency International conducts a study in order to rank the world’s countries in terms of corruption, one being the least corrupted and 180 the most corrupted. In year 2009, the Corruption Perception Index indicated that out of 180 countries, Venezuela was 162.¹⁶⁷

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9 - 1.4
179	Afghanistan	1.3	4	1.0 - 1.5
178	Myanmar	1.4	3	0.9 - 1.8
177	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4 - 1.7
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2 - 1.8
175	Chad	1.6	6	1.5 - 1.7
174	Uzbekistan	1.7	6	1.5 - 1.8
173	Turkmenistan	1.8	4	1.7 - 1.9
172	Iran	1.8	3	1.7 - 1.9
171	Haiti	1.8	3	1.4 - 2.3
170	Guinea	1.8	5	1.7 - 1.8

¹⁶⁵ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 127.

¹⁶⁶ Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 347.

¹⁶⁷ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2009,” http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table (Accessed September 28, 2010).

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
169	Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3	1.6 - 1.9
168	Burundi	1.8	6	1.6 - 2.0
167	Angola	1.9	5	1.8 - 1.9
166	Congo Brazzaville	1.9	5	1.6 - 2.1
165	Democratic Republic of Congo	1.9	5	1.7 - 2.1
164	Guinea-Bissau	1.9	3	1.8 - 2.0
163	Kyrgyzstan	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.1
162	Venezuela	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.0
161	Cambodia	2.0	8	1.8 - 2.2

Table 1. Corruption Perception Index 2009 (From Transparency International)

Chávez's proposal to exert control over the people and increase the direct involvement and control of the state over the economy is the antithesis of democracy and a free economy. The Index of Economic Freedom, established by The Heritage Foundation, illustrates that the country's economy has decreased over the last few years (along with the economies of Ecuador and Bolivia) in comparison to other countries of South America (Chile, Colombia, and Peru).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ James Roberts, "Economic Freedom in the "Bolivarian Andes" is Melting Away," *The Heritage Foundation*, June 29, 2010, <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/economic-freedom-in-the-bolivarian-andes-is-melting-away> (Accessed September 28, 2010).

“Bolivarian” Means Less Economic Freedom

Three Andean nations following Hugo Chavez’s “Bolivarian Alternative”—Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela—have scored progressively worse in the *Index of Economic Freedom*, while three market-driven nations in the same region have seen their scores improve.

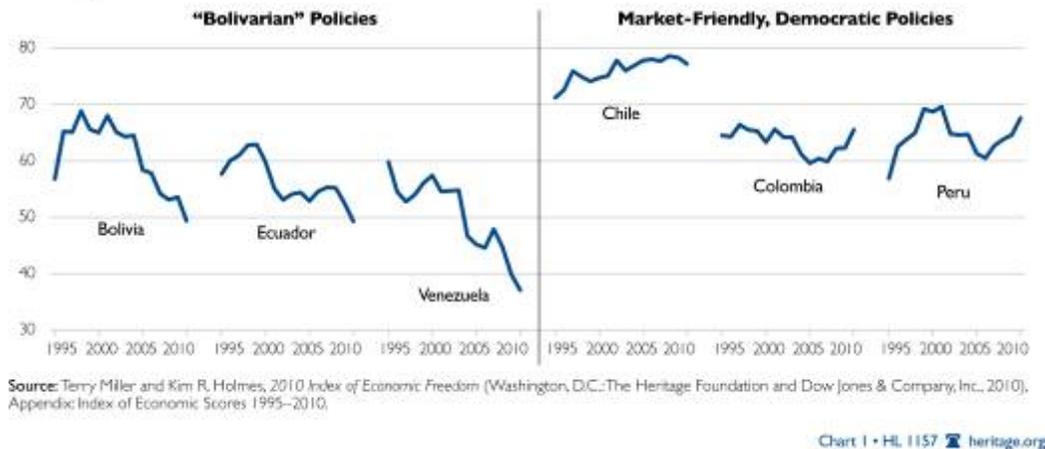


Figure 7. Economic Freedom (From The Heritage Foundation)

At the beginning of 2010, the Organization of American States published a report addressing achievements of Chavez’s government in illiteracy, healthcare and poverty. It also expressed concerns about limitations in the liberty of expression, freedom of the press, human rights abuses, political intimidation, impunity in cases of violence, authoritarianism, no real separation of powers, and a lack of inversion and sustainment of economic and energetic infrastructure. Chavez does not recognize the report as impartial.

Chavez has nationalized many companies and industries, including hotels, steel and cement production, telecommunications, and department stores. In addition, the government oversees price controls on more than 400 basic food products as a way to control inflation. This has not worked, and the food companies have been operating at a loss, which has created food shortages all around the country.

Venezuela’s political system has become a so-called Socialist Democracy, but in this process, the government has become more authoritarian than democratic, exercising control over the rights of the citizens and constraining the liberty of expression. In addition, the government has established dubious links

with rogue and left wing states, as well as with international terrorist groups, like the Colombian FARC and ELN, even giving them some sort of support. In the meantime, President Chavez has managed to import the Cuban model into his own government, trying to achieve a Cubanization of his country in order to become the heir of the Cuban revolution. Far from becoming a safe country, Venezuela now has one of the highest murder rates in the world; also, the DEA estimates that more than 200 tons of cocaine goes through Venezuela to United States, Europe, and Africa every year, making it the principal transit nation. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that Hugo Chávez imposes a strong anti-American influence on the region and has been trying to gain sympathy from other South American countries to support both his stance and his continuation as president. So far, Hugo Chávez has the greatest accumulation of power of any Venezuelan president since 1958.¹⁶⁹ In all respects, the so-called Democratic Socialism is nothing but an authoritarian government in disguise.

G. CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that Venezuela needed a social transformation in order to improve the quality of life of its citizens. It is also true that the Bolivarian Revolution was perceived by most of the people as the feasible solution of Venezuela's complex problems due to its promises of change. After almost 12 years of Chávez government, there have been improvements in some areas such as illiteracy, health care and poverty, but there have also been huge setbacks, such as limits placed on freedom of expression and the press, human rights abuses, political intimidation, and impunity in cases of violence.

The creation of parallel-armed structures, such as the territorial and Bolivarian militias that report directly to the president, has only served to ensure that a coup would not happen again. During the process of the revolution, the President has been able to concentrate more power in himself than in any other

¹⁶⁹ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 272.

country in Latin America; the separation of powers is now only a blurry line in Venezuela. The support from Cuban advisors has been paramount in both previous achievements.

Not all Venezuelan problems have been addressed or solved, especially the shortage of basic food products throughout the country. However, instead of dealing with these issues directly, the government has been more worried about expending resources abroad that would give them the support for a leading role in Latin America. The worst thing is that by trying to achieve that position, the government has been supporting also terrorist groups. The years ahead are increasingly going to be characterized by problems for Chávez at home because of his failure to deliver to the degree that he was expected to after over a decade in office.

Ironically, the words uttered by Simón Bolívar (truly admired by Chávez and follower of his doctrine and precepts) when he addressed the Second National Congress of Venezuela in Angostura, on February 15, 1819, point to what Chávez has been doing and the political system that he is creating in Venezuela: an authoritarian government.

The continuation of authority in the same person has frequently proved the undoing of democratic governments. Repeated elections are essential to the system of popular government, because there is nothing so dangerous as to suffer Power to be vested for a long time in one citizen. The people become accustomed to obeying him, and he becomes accustomed to commanding, hence the origin of usurpation and tyranny. A proper zeal is the guarantee of republican liberty, and our citizens must very justly fear that the same Magistrate who has governed them for a long time, may continue to rule them forever.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Simón Bolívar, "Address at Angostura," in *The World's Greatest Speeches: Fourth Edition*, ed. Lewis Copeland, Lawrence W. Lamm and Stephen J. McKenna (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2007), 386.

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VI. VENEZUELA'S BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The idea of creating a political change in Venezuela was born in the early 1980s, when the Bolivarian Revolution began as the dream of four army officers. With time, it quickly gained more followers until it became a big underground movement. Even though some of its members wanted to take action immediately, the conditions were not appropriate until the beginning of the 90s. The Bolivarian Revolution occurred in two stages. The first began with an oath to Simón Bolívar in 1982 and ended with a failed coup attempt in 1992. The second began after Chávez was released from prison in 1994 and the political movement started. This chapter draws on the Political Process Model in order to understand what conditions were present in the Venezuelan society that allowed the Bolivarian Revolution to be born and later consolidate itself as Venezuela's ruling party.

B. EXPANSION OF POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Political Instability – El Caracazo

At the end of the 80s, Venezuela, known as the American Saudi Arabia was facing a serious corruption problem. The government had to take extreme economic measures to maintain sustainability. This, in turn, led to a growing discomfort among the people. In February 1989, the government eliminated subsidies for basic food products, as well as fuel and public transportation. In response, the people rose up and rioted. Caracas was looted and sacked. The incident served to demonstrate the people's unrest and Bolivarian revolutionaries took note and realized that the moment for action had arrived. The movement's military leaders attempted a coup d'état three years later.¹⁷¹ It failed, but it gave

¹⁷¹ They had to wait until having command of Army battalions in order to have the manpower to carry out the coup.

them the publicity needed to become a political movement later on. The people began to see the Bolivarian movement as an appealing alternative to common politics.

2. Enhanced Political Positions – Case Dismissed

With new presidential elections after another coup attempt, Rafael Caldera won. One of his first official acts was to grant amnesty to Hugo Chávez and his comrades and dismiss the case against him. Chávez was never charged with a crime even though almost 400 people were killed during the coup attempt. Some authors believe that Caldera acted in this way to prevent a popular uprising.¹⁷² His decision allowed Chávez to participate in politics. Following advice from Luis Miquilena, Chávez decided to enter the political arena using the democratic process. While the movement had no presence in the current government, the case's dismissal gave Chávez an opportunity that he otherwise could have not achieved.

3. Ideological Openness – Tired of the System

There was an old adage that illustrates Venezuela's growing discomfort with the ruling politicians, "Venezuela is a rich country, I am poor, therefore somebody is stealing my money."¹⁷³ The people's distrust in the conventional political parties opened a gap to Chávez's advantage. Chávez decided to transform his previous revolutionary movement into a political party using initially, "The hope is on the streets" as its slogan. He traveled around Venezuela listening to the grievances of all sectors of the population, building support for his movement, and promising a new era, an era without corruption, founded in social justice. He realized that the people actually supported him, as they were tired of the common politicians. The conditions were ripe for a radical change in Venezuela. "When Chávez entered the picture as forcefully as he did and began

¹⁷² Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 64.

¹⁷³ Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 53.

to speak as forcefully as he did, nobody hesitated, not for a second. He was the perfect avenger, tailor-made for the disenchantment and frustration of the Venezuelan people.”¹⁷⁴

C. INCREASE IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

1. Education of Members – Left Wing

In this particular movement, the education of its members played a fundamental role in creating the necessary ideological structure. The father of his friends, Jose Esteban Ruiz Guevara, influenced the founder of the Bolivarian Movement during his youth. Ruiz Guevara was a militant in the Communist party and told Chávez that the way ahead was to understand Marxism and consider the constructive function of the Red Army.¹⁷⁵ Chávez also absorbed the ideas of Simón Bolívar and Ezequiel Zamora. In his years at the military academy, he refined his ideas by taking political studies. Later on, as a Captain, he was able to identify officers with similar ideas and bring them into his project. In the beginning, it was an idealistic one. Then he met Douglas Bravo, a former guerrilla leader and the head of the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution, wrote the revolution’s political project.¹⁷⁶ After that, more communist militants joined the movement. The educational level of the group’s members played a major role in shaping the project. Most of the “conspirators” had university degrees, and many had thoroughly studied left-wing theories. With that mindset, they helped shape the project.

2. Financial Resources of Supporters

During the first stage of the project, the resources for the coup attempt came directly from the military. At that time, the movement did not have to rely on external economic support. However, during the second stage, when the political

¹⁷⁴ Teodoro Petkoff, *Una Segunda Opinion, la Venezuela de Chávez. Libro hablado con Ibsen Martínez and Elías Pino Iturrieta* (Caracas: Grijalbo Mondadori, 2000), 77.

¹⁷⁵ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 27.

project was established, the situation changed completely. When Chávez got out of prison, he did not have any resources available; he did not even have a house in which to live. He relied on support from old communist militants to start his life again. He also turned to Luis Miquilena, who urged him to use the democratic process to take over the presidency, and introduced him to certain members of the economic elite.¹⁷⁷ Some believe that the FARC supported Chávez with U.S. \$150,000 to start his political campaign.¹⁷⁸ When the project became stronger and political leaders recognized its feasibility, Chávez's movement (MVR) gained support from other left-wing political parties such as Homeland for All (PPT), Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), and Movement for Socialism (MAS). They shared resources, thus making possible the sustainment of the movement.¹⁷⁹

3. Organizations to Recruit from – Army and Left-wing Parties

During the initial stage of the “revolutionary project,” Chávez took advantage of his position as a military instructor, teaching history in the Venezuelan Military Academy when he was a captain. While in this position, he identified cadets and officers who were suited for his project.¹⁸⁰ The main pool for recruitment was the Army; however, when he met some communist militants, he understood the value of including them in his project. His own uncle, Narciso Chávez, from the Party for the Venezuelan Revolution, was among the militants.¹⁸¹ Although the incorporation of civilians into the revolutionary movement helped to create a political plan to follow, after the seizure of power, “Chávez had no interest in the participation of civil society, acting as a concrete force. Civil society could applaud him but not participate.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 115.

¹⁷⁸ Villamarin, *Complot contra Colombia*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Krauze, *El Poder y El Delirio*, 65.

¹⁸⁰ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 28.

¹⁸¹ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 51.

¹⁸² Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 86.

During the second stage of the “Bolivarian Revolution,” the situation was different for Chávez. He was forcefully retired from the Army along with his co-conspirators, which left them no opportunity to use resources from the Army. He was convinced that he had to create his own political movement (MVR) in order to achieve power through the democratic process. His overt actions gained the support of most of Venezuela’s left-wing parties.

4. Free Spaces – Safe Houses

During the years prior to the coup attempt, the use of safe houses was paramount for the security and survival of the movement. Most of the houses used throughout the country belonged to members of the movement, and it was in these places where all the meetings concerning the action plans took place. Through these meetings, new people (supporters of any kind) were brought into the movement.

5. Indigenous Groups – The Poorest

The Bolivarian Revolution began and grew within the Venezuelan Army. From this group came most of the members of this revolutionary project, as well most of the resources used for the coup attempt.

In the second stage of the “revolution,” the previous network of co-conspirators was part of the political movement: however, the main targets for support were Venezuela’s poorest sectors of the population.¹⁸³ With a campaign based mostly on solutions to poverty and corruption, the MVR was able to capture the receptive poor who were disenfranchised with a populist discourse.¹⁸⁴ This sector of the society became the main constituents of the “revolution,” allowing Chávez to win the elections.

¹⁸³ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 117.

¹⁸⁴ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 46.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF INSURGENT CONSCIOUSNESS

The main force that drove Chávez to create his “revolutionary project” was a profound sentiment of nationalism and anti-Americanism. He decided to work with a conspiracy against the government back in 1977.¹⁸⁵ Very slowly and carefully, Chávez identified potential recruits within the Army who shared his beliefs. To bring them in, he drew on the ideas of Simón Bolívar. In fact, when the new members were sworn in, Bolívar’s oath against the powerful Spanish rule was repeated, only taking out the word Spanish after “powerful,” and referring to the empire of the north.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, he used Bolívar’s ideas to attract more people to the movement. He also focused on fighting the other enemies of Venezuela, hunger, corruption, indigence, unemployment, and the misuse of the nation’s immense riches.¹⁸⁷ In an effort to create a plan to follow the coup, Douglas Bravo wrote a four-part strategy:

First, use Venezuela’s oil as a weapon against U.S. capitalism and imperialism by convincing OPEC to limit production and raise prices. Second, ally with Islamic oil nations in a bloc against Israel and the United States. Third, stir up nationalism and militarism in Venezuela by using Bolívar as a symbol and thereby crushing the oligarchy. Finally, build on these successes to initiate a triumphant revolution in Latin America and the world.¹⁸⁸

Even though it was an appealing strategy, Chávez never considered it during the first stage of the revolution. However, he did implement it later as president.

The congruence of Bolívar’s ideology and the desire to fight against the political system in order to transform it helped to develop the insurgent consciousness of the Bolivarian Revolution.

¹⁸⁵ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 40.

¹⁸⁶ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 48.

¹⁸⁷ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez*, 49.

¹⁸⁸ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 27.

Later on in the political project, what drew the constituents to support the movement was the promise to end corruption, end social inequalities, achieve social integration, enhance the quality of public services, and improve security, especially in the cities.¹⁸⁹

E. CONCLUSION

The conditions for the origin of the revolutionary process in Venezuela were present since the 80s. The increasing corruption and the deterioration of living conditions of the Venezuelans were the force that drove the project from an idealistic dream to a concrete reality. The coup attempt propelled Chávez and his movement into the public's consciousness. Without the media exposure achieved at that time, his political rise would not have been possible.

The use of the iconic Bolívar's figure and ideology was a fundamental step to appeal to the Venezuelan's nationalism, thus attracting more sympathizers and giving "the people" someone with which to compare Chávez.

Even though he had the resources necessary for a coup, the second stage of the "Bolivarian Revolution" required the help of left-wing militants to put together the political project. Without their knowledge and orientation, the movement would not have achieved its main objective, the conquest of the Venezuelan presidency.

The ideology of Bolivarianism has brought the FARC and the Bolivarian Revolution together. This topic is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Lander, "Venezuelan Social Conflict," 29.

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VII. LINKS BETWEEN FARC AND VENEZUELAN BOLIVARIAN MOVEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters discussed the history of the FARC, its latest developments, and the evolution of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. This chapter explores the convergence of both organizations. The Colombian government has been striking the FARC very hard lately, however, there are some top members who are not accessible for targeting, since they have their camps in Venezuelan territory. In addition, even though the effort against narco trafficking in Colombia has increased, the FARC is still able to use it as a financing source moving it through Venezuela as a transit country, but the main purpose is to attract international support and recognition.

B. BOLIVARIAN CONTINENTAL MOVEMENT

1. Bolivarian Camp for Our America

As previous chapters explained, the FARC launched its own Bolivarian Movement during the tenure of the DMZ. As expressed by David, a former FARC member, once the movement launched, they made contact with the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement and the Bolivarian Encounter for 2003 materialized as a joint proposal.¹⁹⁰ In an e-mail (June 26, 2003) discovered in Reyes's computers, Ivan Marquez told the Secretariat members that President Chávez agreed with the event and pledged that PDVSA (July 8, 2003) would pay for the movement of 1,000 people from Maracaibo to Caracas to attend the meeting.¹⁹¹ The Bolivarian Continental Movement (MCB) began as a meeting of left-wing organizations from all over the American Continent, held at Fort Tiuna

¹⁹⁰ "El Hombre que Estuvo dentro de la Coordinadora," *El Tiempo*, May 11, 2008, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2930787> (Accessed November 3, 2010).

¹⁹¹ Rafael Guarín, "Opinion: El Brazo Continental del Farchavismo," *Hispanic American Center for Economic Research – HACER*, January 15, 2010, <http://www.hacer.org/latam/?p=1819> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

(Venezuelan Ministry of Defense headquarters) in the outskirts of Caracas, back in August 2003. At that time, it was called Bolivarian Camp for Our America (Campamento Bolivariano por Nuestra America). The purpose was to keep current the ideas of Bolivar concerning the union of Latin America and the Caribbean and to support the Venezuelan revolution as a way to achieve the independence of Latin America from the “Empire.” The primary conclusion was the necessity to create a bigger and better-structured organization in order to coordinate the work of the organizations throughout Latin America. The name of the new organization was the Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (CCB), and a new congress was scheduled for 2005.¹⁹²

2. I and II Congresses – Bolivarian Continental Coordinator

They held the first congress in Caracas in 2005 with representation of more left-wing organizations. In the conclusions, a new board was proposed, selecting the Dominican politician Narciso Isa Conde¹⁹³ as the President and Amilcar Figueroa (aka Tino)¹⁹⁴ as one of the board members, as well as FARC’s commander Manuel Marulanda Velez, along with Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez, Daniel Ortega, James Jones, Alfonso Cano and Ivan Marquez¹⁹⁵ as Honorary Presidents.¹⁹⁶ During the congress, all the participants approved the PCC maxim of “the combination of all forms of struggle” unanimously as a way to achieve and impose the Bolivarian (Marxist-Leninist) ideology throughout Latin America.

¹⁹² Movimiento Continental Bolivariana, “Campamento Bolivariano por Nuestra America, un Espacio para la Unidad,” August 29, 2003, http://www.conbolivar.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=84&Itemid=65 (Accessed November 3, 2010).

¹⁹³ A left-wing politician from Dominican Republic.

¹⁹⁴ A left-wing politician from Venezuela, also Venezuela’s representative to the Latin American Parliament.

¹⁹⁵ Member of the FARC’s Secretariat. It is believed that he currently has his camp in Venezuela.

¹⁹⁶ “El Hombre que Estuvo dentro de la Coordinadora,” *El Tiempo*, May 11, 2008, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2930787> (Accessed November 3, 2010).

The second congress was held in Quito on February 26, 2008. The opening greeting was a video message from Raul Reyes, thanking everyone for their attendance to the event as well as their support for belligerency recognition of FARC and its withdrawal from the list of terrorist groups.¹⁹⁷ Among the conclusions of the second congress were:¹⁹⁸

- The necessity to use all kinds of struggle, even non-pacific and civil disobedience, in order to change the current political system
- Being supportive with all the processes of advanced reforms towards the socialist revolution and against imperialism, especially:
 - The Cuban revolution, the pioneer in the socialist revolution
 - The process towards the new revolution represented in the new Bolivarian power in Venezuela
 - The advanced political and social reforms in development in Ecuador and Bolivia
- The Colombian process is of singular importance, not only due to its strategic location, but also because the congruence of new and higher levels of military and political development of the forces pushing for a change, as well as the incapacity of the actual regime to contain the growth of the armed insurgency
- That it is imperative to demonstrate solidarity with the forces that are trying to displace President Uribe's government, opening the way for the establishment of the New Colombia
- The extraordinary value of Commander Chavez's and the Bolivarian government's posture, as well as Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba,¹⁹⁹ against Uribe as an instrument of the Bush administration and American imperial power
- The FARC must be recognized as a belligerent force

¹⁹⁷ "MOVIMIENTO CONTINENTAL BOLIVARIANO, BRAZO POLITICO DEL TERRORISMO EN LATINOAMERICA," YouTube Video, 3:30 fragments from RCN news, posted by "colombiasinPF," December 26, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8AgjwRzYec&feature=related> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

¹⁹⁸ Movimiento Continental Bolivariana, "Proclama Bolivariana desde el Centro del Mundo," February 26, 2008, http://www.conbolivar.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=282&Itemid=132 (Accessed November 3, 2010).

¹⁹⁹ She is a Colombian Senator very committed with getting the freedom of the people kidnapped by FARC. By doing so, she has had meetings with Chavez and FARC's Secretariat members. In Reyes's computers she is called Teodora and currently she has been dismissed of her position for supporting ties beyond normal with the FARC.

- If the global war against terror were expanded to include Iran, Syria, North and South America, China and India, the CCB would join the fight.
- The CCB should transform itself into the Bolivarian Continental Movement in order to face and defeat the imperialism and bring freedom to Latin America

Three days later, Raul Reyes died when the Colombian Air Force bombed his camp in Ecuador. The Colombian Army retrieved his body and the soldiers provided on-site medical attention to some of the wounded that were found there including, among others, Lucia Morett Alvarez, a Mexican citizen who attended the Bolivarian congress. She was in Reyes's camp to complete an investigation about Latin American culture.²⁰⁰

In one of the e-mails found in Reyes's computers, Ivan Marquez wrote to Marulanda and the Secretariat that the idea to convert the CCB to the MCB came from some Venezuelan partners. "We are growing" Marquez states, indicating not only the importance of moving into the international political arena,²⁰¹ but most of all, FARC's membership in the MCB (and MCB support of FARC).

3. Bolivarian Continental Movement

The congress that constituted the MCB met in Caracas on December 7, 2009.²⁰² Finally, the organization moved from being just an association of left-wing movements to becoming in and of itself, a movement founded by FARC, and one that supports violence and armed struggle as a means for bringing about societal changes. Once again, the opening greeting was in charge of Alfonso Cano, one of the Honorary Presidents of the movement, who sent his message in video. During the FARC's ninth conference, held in 2007, special

²⁰⁰ "El Misterio de Lucia," Revista Semana, April 19, 2008, http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=111118 (Accessed November 3, 2010).

²⁰¹ "Confirmado: La Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana es un organo de las FARC," El Comercio, April 20, 2008, <http://elcomercio.pe/edicionimpresa/html/2008-04-20/confirmado-coordinadora-continental-bolivariana-organo-farc.html> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁰² Movimiento Continental Bolivariana, "Declaracion Bolivariana de Caracas !Con la espada de Bolivar hacia el Nuevo Ayacucho!" December 9, 2009, http://www.conbolivar.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=505&Itemid=136 (Accessed November 4, 2010).

emphasis was made about having more presence throughout the continent. It was the first time the FARC spoke about the “big motherland.”²⁰³ In addition, the FARC admitted that they created the CCB through the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia with the support of revolutionary sectors of Venezuela as a movement to coordinate the left-wing organizations in America.²⁰⁴ In this congress, Carlos Casanueva, the movement’s general secretary, ratified Alfonso Cano as the Honorary President of the MCB.²⁰⁵ Once again, the request for recognition of the FARC as a belligerent force was made by the MCB.

The Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe and the Commander of the Colombian Military Forces, General Freddy Padilla de Leon, expressed their dissatisfaction with the MCB’s proceedings. General Padilla requested the MCB reject the FARC’s message and stated that if the MCB was sincere about its intention to bring forth social change it should distance itself from FARC. Otherwise, it would be seen as an accessory to human rights violations and terrorist activities and raise doubts among other democracies concerning what its true ends and purposes are.²⁰⁶ The Colombian government, through the External Relations Ministry, requested in an official communiqué that the Venezuelan government clarify to the international community if it recognizes, approves, or tolerates the existence of movements or political parties that overtly support terrorism and organized crime.²⁰⁷ The Venezuelan government has yet to respond to this request.

²⁰³ Big motherland refers to Latin America.

²⁰⁴ “Confirmado: La Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana es un organo de las FARC,” *El Comercio*, April 20, 2008, <http://elcomercio.pe/edicionimpresa/html/2008-04-20/confirmado-coordinadora-continental-bolivariana-organo-farc.html> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁰⁵ Rafael Guarín, “Opinion: El Brazo Continental del Farcavismo,” *Hispanic American Center for Economic Research – HACER*, January 15, 2010, <http://www.hacer.org/latam/?p=1819> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁰⁶ “Jefe Militar Colombiano pidió a Movimiento Bolivariano Rechazar el Saludo de las FARC,” *Noticias 24*, December 8, 2009, <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/126019/jefe-militar-colombiano-pidio-a-movimiento-bolivariano-rechazar-el-saludo-de-farc/> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁰⁷ “Que Venezuela Aclare si Aprueba que Movimientos Apoyen el Terrorismo,” *Caracol TV*, December 10, 2009, <http://www.caracoltv.com/noticias/politica/articulo161509-venezuela-aclare-si-aprueba-movimientos-apoyen-el-terrorismo> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

C. SUPPORTING THE FARC

1. Contacts with Venezuelan Officials

During the final months of 2007, Chávez played a role as a mediator between the Colombian government and the FARC in an effort to achieve the release of political hostages held by FARC. During this process, Ivan Marquez met with Chávez a couple of times in Miraflores Palace; however, more topics were discussed under the table. In one email found in Reyes's computers and dated November 20, 2007, Tirofjo tells the FARC's Secretariat that the meeting of Ivan Marquez with Chávez was a success. In the meeting, Marquez explained to Chávez the FARC's strategic plan as well as asked him for a U.S. \$300 million loan (called by FARC "the dossier"), which Chávez agreed to.²⁰⁸ In a letter written by Marquez to Tirofjo, he told him that Chávez also ordered some generals to establish "rear-areas" for the FARC near the border with Colombia for rest, recovery and treatment of any wounded. He also set up some kind of a staff for that purpose. He also said that if President Uribe touched one of the FARC's delegates, he would have a foe for life. In the words of Marquez, the relationship between the FARC and the Venezuelan Army is superb; they even have had established friendship with five top generals.²⁰⁹ In a subsequent meeting, Marquez informed Tirofjo on January 4, 2007, that he had met with two Venezuelan generals, Hugo Carvajal and Cliver Alcala, the Director of Venezuelan Military Intelligence and the Commander of Brigade 41, located in the border with Colombia. As a conclusion of the meeting, the generals offered to give FARC 20 rockets with the possibility of more, as well as including weapons for the FARC in Venezuela's legal weapons shipments from Russia.²¹⁰ According to Marquez, the liaison designated by Chávez to supervise the weapons deals

²⁰⁸ "Los Secretos del PC de Reyes," Revista Semana, March 8, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/secretos-del-pc-reyes/110107.aspx> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁰⁹ "Los E-mail Secretos," Revista Semana, May 17, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/emails-secretos/111918.aspx> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²¹⁰ "Los E-mail Secretos," Revista Semana, May 17, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/emails-secretos/111918.aspx> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

was Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, Venezuelan Minister of Interior. The following graph captures some of the events discussed previously linking the FARC and the Venezuelan government.

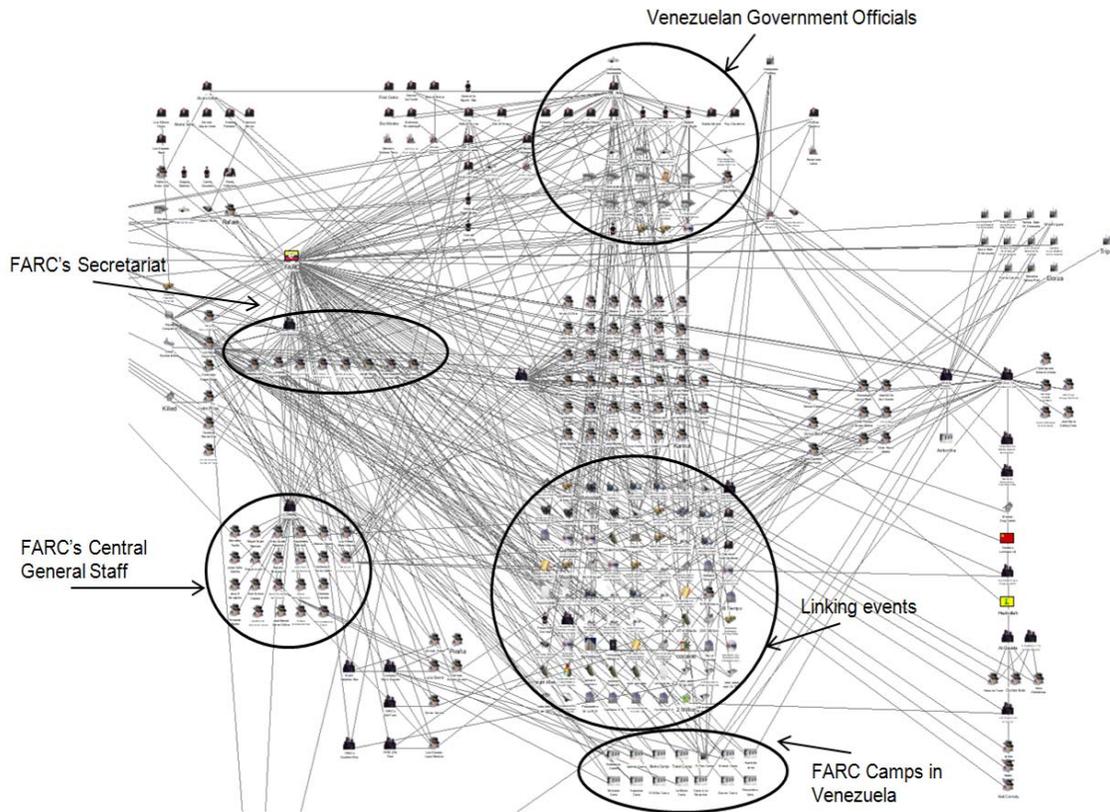


Figure 8. Link Diagram of FARC Network²¹¹

2. Supporting Role – Finances and Weapons

On January 20, 2007, a couple of weeks after the meeting with the two generals, Marquez reported to the Secretariat that he and Timochenko did receive the rockets; AT-4 85 mm antitank rockets, 2 launchers and 10 rockets each. The generals promised up to 1,000 more.²¹² The Colombian Army in

²¹¹ The Diagram is the result of an investigation made in Palantir (www.palantir.com) using open source documents about the links between Venezuelan government and the FARC.

²¹² "Los E-mail Secretos," Revista Semana, May 17, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/emails-secretos/111918.aspx> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

various FARC camps found parts of these rockets in the jungle during military operations in July 2008. After speaking with the manufacturer, Saab Bofors Dynamic, located in Stockholm, Sweden, the Colombian government learned that the weapons were legally sold to the Venezuelan Army some years ago.²¹³ Both requested an explanation from the Venezuelan government, but it has yet to produce a convincing one.

In an email dated September 6, 2007, Marquez wrote to the Secretariat that Tino (i.e., Amilcar Figueroa – member of the board of the MCB) brought him two Australian arms dealers that offered Chinese Surface-to-Air Missiles as well as AK ammunition, machine guns, and sniper rifles.²¹⁴ Marquez also wrote that the plan would be carried out with the help of General Henry Rangel Silva (Director of Venezuela’s Intelligence Agency at that time) and Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin. The General would be in charge of providing documents to the arms dealers, and Chacin came up with a plan to deploy the weapons in the Amazon region, which is not closely guard by the military.²¹⁵

According to Marquez, Rodriguez Chacin (aka El Cojo) was designated by Chávez to oversee “the dossier.” On October 6, 2007, after a couple of meetings with Rodriguez Chacin, Marquez informed the Secretariat that “the dossier” was not a loan but an act of solidarity from Chávez. On February 8, 2008, Marquez informed the Secretariat that Chávez (aka Angel) told him directly that he had the first 50 ready and in subsequent meetings, he would discuss the schedule for the rest of it,²¹⁶ but most important, how to transfer the funds to the FARC. Some

²¹³ “Venezuela’s Rockets,” *Revista Semana International*, July 28, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-print-edition/venezuelas-rockets/126766.aspx> (Accessed November 5, 2010).

²¹⁴ “Los E-mail Secretos,” *Revista Semana*, May 17, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/emails-secretos/111918.aspx> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

²¹⁵ “Venezuela Still Aids Colombia Rebels, New Material Shows,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/03/world/americas/03venez.html?ref=venezuela> (Accessed November 5, 2010).

²¹⁶ “Los E-mail Secretos,” *Revista Semana*, May 17, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/emails-secretos/111918.aspx> (Accessed November 5, 2010).

funds would be given as a share in the country's oil business as well as giving the FARC contracts with state entities through ghost companies.²¹⁷

Additional confirmation of the Venezuelan government's support for FARC has come from Jesus Urdaneta Hernandez, who was one of the officers who in December 1982 made the oath with Chávez, participated in the 1992 coup and was one of Chávez's closest friends. When Chávez was elected, Hernandez was given the position of Chief of the National Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (DISIP),²¹⁸ but after a year in office, he quit because of widespread corruption in the government and Chávez's financial support of the FARC. He later confirmed that in 2000, Chávez proposed to send the FARC U.S. \$300,000 in aid.²¹⁹

Another Chávez government official that is said to have links with the FARC is General Hugo Carvajal, the Chief of Military Intelligence General Directorate (DGIM). Besides the meetings with Marquez, General Carvajal has also met with Grannobles, the commander of FARC's 45th Front in a ranch in the state of Barinas (Venezuela). In this meeting, the General provided Grannobles identifications for the members of his group in Venezuela, as well as protection and food. He also helped moving 21 guerrilleros from different locations throughout Venezuela by helicopter for the meeting in order to provide them with identification documents.²²⁰ In fact, when the Colombian National Police in the state of Boyaca, Colombia on February 25, 2008, captured Heli Mejia (aka Martin

²¹⁷ "Is Hugo Chavez Friends with FARC?" Spiegel Online International, April 8, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,545910,00.html> (Accessed November 5, 2010).

²¹⁸ Was renamed recently as the Bolivarian Intelligence Service, SEBIN.

²¹⁹ "Con esos Amigos..." Revista Semana, July 31, 2000, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/esos-amigos/13496.aspx> (Accessed November 8, 2010).

²²⁰ "El Montesinos de Chavez," Revista Semana, February 2, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/montesinos-chavez/109223.aspx> (Accessed November 8, 2010).

Sombra), a member of the FARC's General Staff, he had in his possession a free-circulation permit issued by the local authorities of the city of Machiques, located in the Venezuelan state of Zulia.²²¹

3. Camps in Venezuela

For some time the Colombian government has believed that the FARC has had camps located in Venezuela. On March 19, 2010, German Vargas Lleras, a politician, announced that at least four camps were located in Venezuelan territory with the tacit approval of the Venezuelan government and were even being protected by the Army.²²² He stated that the camps are located in the states of Tachira, Zulia and Apure, and that in one of the main camps, called "Asamblea," and belonging to Ivan Marquez, the Bolivarian Militias were being trained by the FARC. FARC defectors have been a valuable source of information about the location of camps in Venezuelan territory. Actually, in an OAS meeting held on July 22, 2010, Colombian Ambassador, Luis Alfonso Hoyos, presented evidence (videos, photos and maps) of these camps holding around 1,500 guerrilleros.²²³

²²¹ "Cae un Jefe del Estado Mayor de las FARC cuando regresaba de Venezuela," Noticias 24, February 26, 2008, <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/12329/cae-un-jefe-del-estado-mayor-de-las-farc-cuando-regresaba-de-venezuela/> (Accessed November 8, 2010).

²²² "German Vargas Lleras Revela Ubicacion de Jefes Guerrilleros de las FARC y el ELN en Venezuela," El Tiempo, March 19, 2010, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7441787> (Accessed November 9, 2010).

²²³ Jose De Cordoba, "Colombia: Venezuela Shelters Rebel 'Summer Camps,' Colombia Alleges," Wall Street Journal (Online), July 22, 2010, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=2088685311&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (Accessed November 9, 2010).



Figure 9. Location of Some FARC Camps in Venezuela (White Dots)

The establishment of an international commission in order to travel to those places was requested by the Colombian Ambassador, but was denied by Venezuela, stating that there was nothing like guerrilla camps in those locations.²²⁴ Even though the Ambassador told the delegates that there were around 87 camps, he focused on those around the city of Machiques, in the state of Zulia,²²⁵ where Ivan Marquez, Jesus Santrich (Seusis Pausanias Hernandez), Bertulfo (Ermilo Cabrera Diaz) and Timochenko (all members of the Secretariat

²²⁴ "Colombia, Venezuela trade Barbs at OAS Meeting." CNN, July 22, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-07-22/world/colombia.venezuela.oas_1_roy-chaderton-revolutionary-armed-forces-farc?_s=PM:WORLD (Accessed November 10, 2010).

²²⁵ "Colombia Prueba que hay Campamentos de las FARC en Venezuela," El Pais, July 23, 2010, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/colombia/noticias/colombia-prueba-hay-campamentos-farc-en-venezuela> (Accessed November 11, 2010).

and General Staff) were located.²²⁶ Because of these allegations, Venezuela broke diplomatic relations with Colombia without answering any of the issues raised at the meeting.²²⁷

D. MORE TERRORIST GROUPS?

1. Hezbollah Venezuela

Besides the close relationship that the Venezuelan government has with Iran and Syria, in the northwestern part of Venezuela (La Guajira) a cell of Hezbollah has formed. In an effort to spread its ideology, Hezbollah has been indoctrinating people from an indigenous tribe called The Wayuu,²²⁸ in an area shared by Colombia and Venezuela. The group openly calls itself “Hezbollah Venezuela,” and it has succeeded in turning the Wayuu towards a radical form of Islam that can fuel terrorist violence.²²⁹ While proposing the establishment of the “kingdom of God” in Venezuela by imposing a theocracy by force of arms,²³⁰ its main message is against government corruption and rule of the oligarchy.

On June 18, 2008, after an investigation made by OFAC, the Bush Administration accused Chávez’s government of providing cash and refuge to the militant Islamist group Hezbollah.²³¹ The communiqué stated that a former Venezuelan diplomat in Syria and Lebanon and a Venezuelan-Arab executive were helping Hezbollah in its fund-raising and giving its group’s members a safe haven in Venezuela. Chávez denied any charges as well as Venezuelan Minister

²²⁶ “Gobierno asegura Saber el Lugar Exacto del Campamento de Ivan Marquez en Venezuela,” *El Tiempo*, July 21, 2010, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7809259> (Accessed November 11, 2010).

²²⁷ “Colombia Proves Again that Venezuela is Harboring FARC Terrorist,” *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072905211.html> (Accessed November 12, 2010).

²²⁸ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 124.

²²⁹ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 125.

²³⁰ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 126.

²³¹ “U.S. ties Caracas to Hezbollah aid,” *The Washington Times*, July 7, 2008, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/jul/07/us-ties-caracas-to-hezbollah-aid/?page=2> (Accessed November 15, 2010).

for International Relations. Both said that the real terrorists were in the White House.²³² One of Chávez's opponents, Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, a former governor of the State of Zulia, also affirms that the government is involved in supporting terrorist groups as FARC and Hezbollah beyond just promoting ideological sympathy.²³³

2. Euskadi Ta Askatasuna – ETA

Spanish judge Eloy Velasco, of the National Court in Madrid, issued an indictment on March 1, 2010, against Arturo Cubillas, a Basque exile currently living in Venezuela.²³⁴ In the indictment, the judge stated that Cubillas, Venezuelan General Hugo Carvajal, and a faction from the Military Intelligence General Directorate have been helping a group from ETA get training from and with the FARC in camps located in Venezuelan territory. Cubillas is currently a member of the government, and his wife works directly for Chávez's cabinet. Some FARC defectors affirmed that they met with ETA members in a FARC camp near the city of Machiques. They also noted that Venezuelan military officers accompanied ETA members, and that Arturo Cubillas was the one who facilitated the meetings, as responsible for the ETA cell in Venezuela. After Velasco's complaint to the Venezuelan government, Chávez answered that no one was going to be extradited, and that Spanish investment in Venezuela could suffer.²³⁵

²³² "U.S. ties Caracas to Hezbollah aid," *The Washington Times*, July 7, 2008, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/jul/07/us-ties-caracas-to-hezbollah-aid/?page=2> (Accessed November 15, 2010).

²³³ "Chávez esta comprometido con la ETA y las FARC," *ABC Internacional*, June 21, 2010, <http://www.abc.es/20100621/internacional/chavez-esta-comprometido-farc-20100621.html> (Accessed November 15, 2010).

²³⁴ Simon Romero and Andres Cala, "Arrests in Europe Expose ETA's Ties to Venezuela:[Foreign Desk]," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2010, Late Edition (east Coast), <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.nps.edu/> (accessed November 15, 2010).

²³⁵ Juan Forero, "Venezuela's Hugo Chavez allegedly helped Colombian, Spanish militants forge ties," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/19/AR2010051905472.html> (Accessed November 15, 2010).

E. DRUG TRAFFICKING IN VENEZUELA

Over the years, narco trafficking became the main financing source of the FARC; however, due to the effort of various government agencies in 2009, the coca cultivation dropped 29%, production dropped 39%, and the interdiction program reported that it had seized 205 metric tons.²³⁶ In the 2010 report from the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs from the Department of State, Venezuela was considered a major drug-transit country. The high levels of corruption and the weak judicial system allowed the flows of drugs to the United States, Europe, and West Africa to increase dramatically.²³⁷ A couple of FARC defectors, identified as Rafael and Marcelo, confirmed that the FARC not only uses Venezuela as a safe haven, but also as a transit point for selling drugs internationally:

Different methods exist to transport the drug from Colombia to Europe, but what they all have in common is the participation, by omission or commission, of the Venezuelan authorities.

The most direct route is the aerial one. Small planes take off from remote jungle strips in Colombia and land in Venezuelan airfields. Then there are two options, according to intelligence sources. Either the same light planes continue on to Haiti or the Dominican Republic (the US government says that since 2006 its radar network has detected an increase from three to 15 in the number of 'suspicious flights' a week out of Venezuela); or the cocaine is loaded on to large planes that fly directly to countries in West Africa such as Guinea-Bissau or Ghana, from where it continues by sea to Portugal or the north-western Spanish province of Galicia, the entry points to the EU Schengen zone.

A less cumbersome traditional method for getting the drugs to Europe in small quantities is via passengers on international commercial flights - 'mules', as they call them in Colombia. One of the guerrilla deserters I spoke to, Marcelo, said he had taken part in

²³⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," March 1, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/137411.pdf> (Accessed November 16, 2010), 201.

²³⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," March 1, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/137411.pdf> (Accessed November 16, 2010), 648.

'eight or nine' missions of this type over 12 months. 'Operating inside Venezuela is the easiest thing in the world,' he said. 'Farc guerrillas are in there completely and the National Guard, the army and other Venezuelans in official positions offer them their services, in exchange for money. There are never shoot-outs between Farc and the guardia or army.'

Rafael said he took part in operations on a bigger scale, their final objective being to transport the cocaine by sea from Venezuelan ports on the Caribbean Sea. His rank in Farc was higher than Marcelo's and he had access to more confidential information. 'You receive the merchandise on the border, brought in by lorry,' he said. 'When the vehicle arrives the National Guard is waiting, already alerted to the fact that it was on its way. They have already been paid a bribe up front, so that the lorry can cross into Venezuela without problems.'

'Sometimes they provide us with an escort for the next phase, which involves me and other comrades getting on to the lorry, or into a car that will drive along with it. We then make the 16-hour trip to Puerto Cabello, which is on the coast, west of Caracas. There the lorry is driven into a big warehouse controlled jointly by Venezuelan locals and by Farc, which is in charge of security. Members of the Venezuelan navy take care of customs matters and the safe departure of the vessels. They are alive to all that is going on and they facilitate everything Farc does.'

Rafael described a similar routine with drug operations involving the port of Maracaibo which, according to police sources, is 'a kind of paradise' for drug traffickers. Among whom - until last week when he was gunned down by a rival cartel in a Venezuelan town near the Colombian border - was one of the 'capos' most wanted internationally, a Colombian called Wilber Varela, but better known as 'Jabón', which means 'soap'. 'Varela and others like him set themselves up in stunning homes and buy bankrupt businesses and large tracts of land, converting themselves almost overnight into personages of great value to the local economy,' a police source said. 'Venezuela offers a perfect life insurance scheme for these criminals.'²³⁸

²³⁸ John Carlin, "Revealed: Chávez role in cocaine trail to Europe," *The Observer*, February 3, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/03/venezuela.colombia> (Accessed November 16, 2010).

The situation has deteriorated so much in Venezuela that the FARC is no longer the only organization involved in drug trafficking in the country. Colombian drug cartel kingpins are also able to operate their business from Venezuela. An officer from DISIP assured that in more than one opportunity, General Carvajal has provided drug traffickers and guerrilla members with Venezuelan legal identification documents and even with IDs from DGIM, which allows them to move and operate freely all around the country.²³⁹

F. CONCLUSION

Support for the FARC by the Venezuelan government has been repeatedly confirmed. The governor of the state of Tachira, Cesar Perez Vivas, also confirms the presence of FARC members in different counties of the state; the inhabitants who see guerrilleros walking fearless in these towns and villages report this, while the central government's policy is to keep silent.²⁴⁰ As stated by Diego Arria, former Venezuelan Ambassador in the U.N., "Colombia used the OAS as an international scenario, not waiting for a reaction, but to show evidence to the world that Venezuela protects, shelters, aids and assists FARC and ELN."²⁴¹ Arria also stated that Chávez is no longer interested in confirming the accuracy of the Colombian denunciation, but instead threatens those who make such reports while continuing to support the guerrillas in Venezuela.

It appears that Chávez's Bolivarian revolution has begun to lose momentum in Venezuela, and except for Cuba, it has never garnered support from key regional players.²⁴² Moreover, the years ahead are likely to become

²³⁹ "El Montesinos de Chavez," Revista Semana, February 2, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/montesinos-chavez/109223.aspx> (Accessed November 8, 2010).

²⁴⁰ "Gobernador de Tachira pide deslinde de las FARC," Diario La Opinion, July 17, 2010, http://www.laopinion.com.co/noticias/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=355091&Itemid=126 (Accessed November 16, 2010).

²⁴¹ "Diego Arria: Colombia mostro al mundo que Venezuela protege a las FARC," El Universal, July 23, 2010, http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/07/23/int_ava_diego-arria:-colombi_23A4236813.shtml (Accessed November 16, 2010).

²⁴² Cuba would probably abandon Chavez if the U.S. embargo against Cuba was lifted.

increasingly difficult at home for Chavez because of his inability to deliver to the degree that he could have or at least was expected to after more than a decade in office. This suggests that if the FARC, in the face of the dramatic reversal of fortune it has experienced since the late 1990s, owes its current survival and potential 'comeback' to its use of Venezuelan territory and Chavez's support, then the FARC is in deep trouble and the Colombian government is in a very strong position to defeat it.

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VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSION

It is important to remember the strategy drafted by Douglas Bravo before the Chávez coup attempt in 1992:

First, use Venezuela's oil as a weapon against U.S. capitalism and imperialism by convincing OPEC to limit production and raise prices. Second, ally with Islamic oil nations in a bloc against Israel and the United States. Third, stir up nationalism and militarism in Venezuela by using Bolívar as a symbol and thereby crushing the oligarchy. Finally, build on these successes to initiate a triumphant revolution in Latin America and the world.²⁴³

As stated by Rafael, a FARC defector who used to operate in Venezuela, "FARC shares three basic Bolivarian principles with Chávez: Latin American unity; the anti-imperialist struggle; and national sovereignty."²⁴⁴ This ideological link between both is perfectly symbiotic. For Chávez, exporting the Bolivarian revolution to Colombia through the FARC would help reduce the U.S. presence and influence in the region. For the FARC, it sees being sympathetic and open to the Venezuelan Bolivarian revolution helps guarantee it a source of aid and support for its strategic plan. FARC's ninth conference brought to light two issues that are paramount for the organization: the procurement of Surface-to-Air Missiles as a way to neutralize the strategic advantage of the Colombian military forces and obtaining the money necessary to fulfill the strategic plan traced years ago. For both purposes, the alliance with Chávez is seen as necessary. Having the opportunity to use Venezuelan territory as safe haven gives FARC a serious advantage. Some of the Secretariat's members live openly in Venezuela where they do not have to worry about their security as they would if they were in Colombia. In addition, through links with the National Guard and the Army, the

²⁴³ Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home*, 27.

²⁴⁴ John Carlin, "Revealed: Chávez role in cocaine trail to Europe," *The Observer*, February 3, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/03/venezuela.colombia> (Accessed November 16, 2010).

FARC has created a network for arms trafficking, either due to their sympathetic support or by bribing them. Not only are the promises to receive money important for the FARC, but also the tolerance and support of the Venezuelan government has allowed the group to move cocaine through Venezuela on the way to markets in Mexico, Europe and Africa.

Moreover, in some of the emails found in Reyes's computers, Chávez and former Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba are mentioned as individuals who may be able to produce radical political change in Colombia. For example, the FARC believed that if it helped Chávez succeed in his role as mediator in the hostage release process proposed by Senator Cordoba, Chávez would achieve greater international recognition. Then, after his January 11, 2008 speech in which he asked that the FARC be given belligerent status, the FARC would attract international attention and sympathy. Moreover, since Cordoba would play a major role in this plan, she could then petition that she be selected as the Liberal Party's official candidate for the upcoming presidential election, and, with help from FARC, elected as the Colombian president. Since she sympathizes with the Venezuelan and FARC Bolivarian Movement, the FARC could then use her position to help it achieve the political participation and transformation it has sought for so long.²⁴⁵

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

While the FARC is not as strong as it used to be and has probably made itself more vulnerable by relying so heavily on Hugo Chávez and the Venezuelan government, it is still capable of wreaking havoc in Colombia. Thus, the Colombian government needs to address certain issues in order to hasten the FARC's demise.

²⁴⁵ "Los Secretos del PC de Reyes," Revista Semana, March 8, 2008, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/secretos-del-pc-reyes/110107.aspx> (Accessed November 17, 2010).

1. Address Social Inequalities – Taking Away the FARC’s Reason to Keep Fighting

The FARC began its armed struggle in order to achieve change that would address social inequalities in Colombia. After more than 40 years, the group still uses this as the main justification for its existence. It is imperative that the government do all it can to create more equality within Colombian society. It can start by passing the two initiatives that are currently before the Congress that address state corruption and land reform. If the Congress approves both initiatives as laws, the FARC would have lost “its main reason” to keep fighting (forcing them to prove that what they say is the true reason for its existence instead of trying to get rich through narcotrafficking).

2. International Campaign to Show the Real FARC

In the past, the FARC had been conducting an aggressive international campaign in order to present the group as “freedom fighters,” especially in Europe, to gain international support. This has been the main task of the International Front. Meanwhile, the Colombian government has been ineffective in countering this campaign. The government needs to conduct a more effective media campaign to show the world the true nature of the FARC, especially since the MCB currently endorses its armed struggle as legitimate.

3. Fight FARC’s Finances

The FARC left its founding ideology behind a long time ago; now, the group cares only for money. It is a terrorist group, “whose power and influence rest less on its political legitimacy and more in the benefits of having become the world’s biggest kidnapping organization and the world’s leading traffickers in

cocaine.”²⁴⁶ On this issue, the government needs to seek more international commitment, in not only the fight against narco trafficking, but also against the companies that the FARC uses to launder money.

4. Prosecute FARC’s Supporters

The information contained in the FARC’s computers seized in different military operations (Raul Reyes, Mono Jojoy, Front 48, Fabian Ramirez, etc.) have proven to be a valuable resource for understanding the underground activities of FARC and the networks of supporters that the group has established not only in Colombia, but also internationally. The government needs to exploit this information, especially in the prosecution of the supporters of a group that only has brought terror to Colombian society.

5. Monitor FARC’s Presence in Venezuela

After years of troubled relations between Colombia and Venezuela, the tide may be changing. President Santos and President Chávez had a meeting the day after Santos took office. After the initial private meeting, Chávez’s position changed radically and the Venezuelan government signed security and cooperation agreements with Colombia to oppose terrorist and narco trafficking groups. We can only hope that from now on the situation will be different for the FARC in Venezuela, and that the group will be expelled from the country. Nevertheless, it is in Colombia’s best interests to continue to monitor the FARC’s presence in Venezuela so that it can praise any help that Venezuela provides in the fight against the FARC or, if Venezuela continues to provide support for the FARC, denounce Venezuela once and for all.

²⁴⁶ John Carlin, “Revealed: Chávez role in cocaine trail to Europe,” *The Observer*, February 3, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/03/venezuela.colombia> (Accessed November 17, 2010).

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