

# THE FARC'S INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

[ AN OVERVIEW ]



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## Introduction

Until the months leading up to Colombian presidential elections in May 2006, many observers believed the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had entered a tactical retreat, preferring to maintain a focus on cocaine production and the strengthening of defensive positions.

Yet as the elections grew closer, the FARC took a more offensive posture, attacking the Colombian military and populace with bombs and raids. The FARC sought to destabilize Colombia enough to force voters to think twice about reelecting Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, who during his first term took every opportunity to take the fight to the FARC.

Uribe was reelected, yet the FARC remain a constant nuisance. After a car bomb exploded in Bogota on 19 October, Uribe made public a plan that would completely eradicate the FARC from Colombia. He has declared his goal is to destroy the FARC by 2010. On 12 December, the Colombian Congress passed a "war tax" that will be used to raise some of the extra money to combat the FARC. Uribe's is set on bringing peace to Colombia, and he wants to make the achievement of this goal a cornerstone in his legacy. But he has a long road ahead. Defeating the FARC will not be easy.

At the end of 2006, the tactical stalemate between the Colombian government and the region's most powerful insurgency continues. The FARC continue to be a strong force within Colombia. More geopolitically significant to the region is the FARC's expanding presence in countries that both border Colombia and the United States.

For many years, the FARC has supplied Mexican organized crime with cocaine. This is no secret. The FARC has developed Venezuela into a significant cocaine transshipment point. Peru and Ecuador have become places of retreat, recruitment, and coca cultivation.

In this special report we present an overview of the FARC's activity in Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Mexico, giving special attention to the FARC's deepening presence in the borderlands hardly controlled by Colombia's neighbors. Maps accompany the discussion.

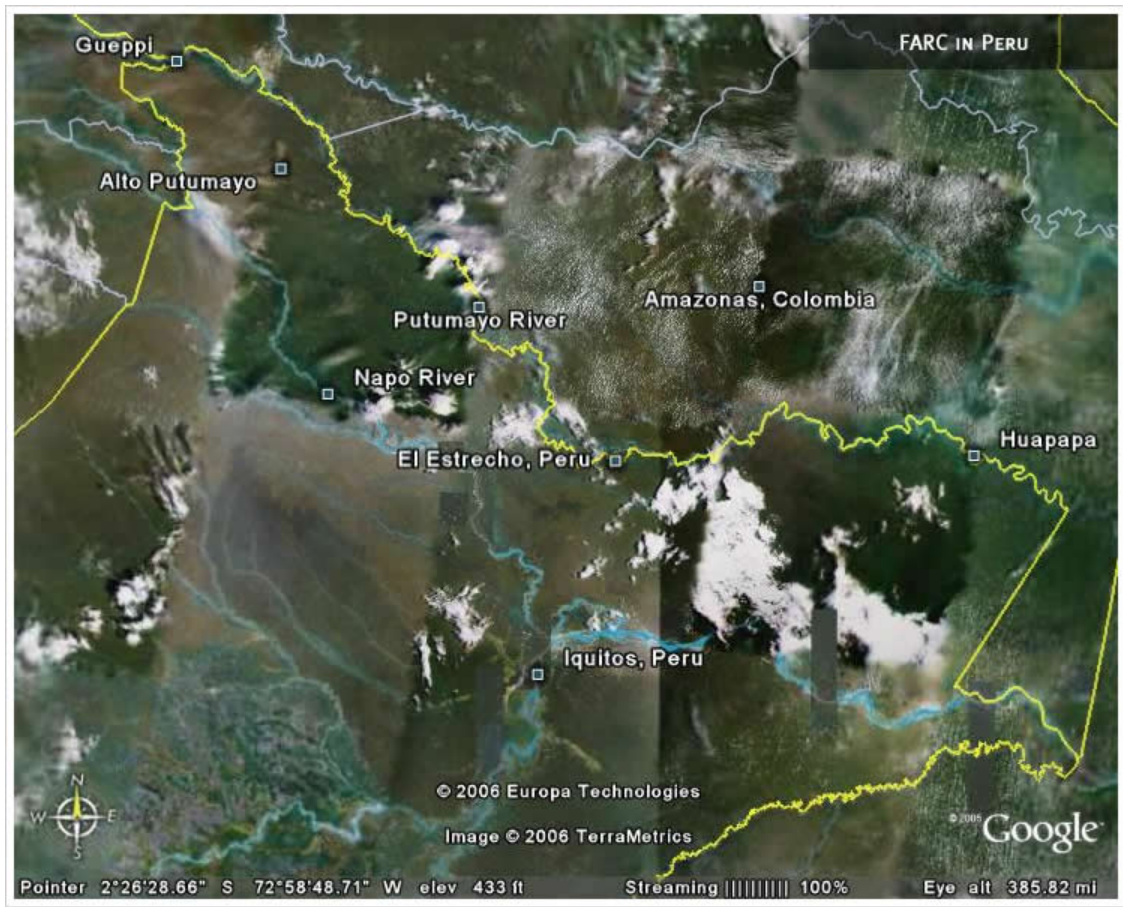
## PERU

Announcements made by the Colombian government in early November affirmed that FARC operatives have established a presence in Peru's northern borderland regions. Peru and Colombia share a 1,626km (1,010mile) border that follows the natural divide of the Putumayo River in a sparsely populated area which, in recent years, has seen an increase in coca crops.

In northern Peru, the FARC have for many years used the territory as a retreat zone where they can go out to bars and take time to stock up on supplies and food. Now it appears as though the FARC infiltrate Peru on more substantive operations. According to reports out of Peru, the FARC now recruit young Peruvians to enlist in their struggle. They are also operating vast coca plantations on Peruvian sovereign territory.

### Expansion of Coca Crops and Military Endeavors

Light was shed on this infiltration in an exclusive interview with head of FARC's southern bloc, Pedro Rivera Crisancho also known as "Tiberio", published by Peruvian daily *El Comercio* in February 2002.



Tiberio, who controlled the production and trafficking of drugs in Colombia's Amazonas department, confirmed that he had visited the Peruvian community of Huapapa several times to buy food. He also said that his missions in that community extended to recruitment of poor indigenous Peruvians and settlers to work in coca-leaf harvesting as well as for other jobs.

He added that the FARC did not intend to cause any international problems for Peru but that his troops would remain in those borderlands to "help the many who are dying of hunger and for lack of medicines whether they are Peruvians or Colombians."

And remain they have. Robinson Rivadeneyra, the regional president of Loreto, a northern Peruvian department bordering Colombia, maintains that some 80 percent of the young people in the region are involved in the harvesting of coca, involved in the military forces of the FARC or both.

He states that the FARC actively recruit poor young people in the region. The FARC pays these young people US\$250 per month.<sup>1</sup> Usually they work on the coca plantations seasonally and then are contracted to serve in the military camps as active members of the insurgent troops for some time. Those military spells range from six months to a year and this is obligatory service, according to Rivadeneyra.

The regional president alleges that this is not simply a recruitment of young people, but that the FARC have implemented a type of draft as well.

"The young people dedicated to the trafficking of drugs and the illegal extraction of wood are drafted...they tattoo them on the shoulder in such a way that they can never leave the guerrilla. For this reason, the authorities mark them as disappeared."

Rivadeneyra also confirmed that there is a permanent transit orchestrated by the FARC on the border in which fuel and supplies for the production of cocaine powder and move into Colombia.

A 19 November, 2006 report published by the Peruvian daily *La República* obtained exclusive information from military sources that revealed FARC operations in Peru. According to the military sources, Front 63, one of some 70 blocs of the FARC, has infiltrated the Peruvian towns of Lupita, Libertad and Puerto Esperanza – all of which are located in Alto Putumayo close to Güeppi where there is a Peruvian military outpost.

El Estrecho is another small town that has been vulnerable to FARC penetration. It is attractive to the guerrillas because on the Colombian side of the border there is only thick vegetation, while on the Peruvian side there are small shops to retrieve supplies and bars to frequent at night.

According to the military source, the guerrillas cross the Peruvian border in small groups – six or seven people – and generally do not wear their well-known FARC uniform to avoid attracting attention.

The FARC's Peruvian accomplices have created a center of operations in Iquitos, the only real urban center of the shared Amazonian region. From this urban base, Peruvians collaborate with the FARC to assist in the FARC's growing Peruvian businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Valderrama, Oscar L., "Penetracion de las FARC en Loreto es Permanente," *La Primera*.



Various reports estimate coca cultivation in northern Peru has reached about 5,000 hectares. According to the *La República* report, up to last year there was an area of coca plantations totaling 1,500 hectares in Putumayo, that figure has now more than doubled, reaching 3,050 hectares. The zones in which these crops are most concentrated, as reported by the military source, are: the Putumayo Sector with 750 hectares, the Napo sector with 1,000 hectares and the Erene sector with 1,300 hectares.



### National Government Denies Military Presence

Peru's Defense Minister, Allan Wagner, has been busy since rumors emerged of FARC activity in Peru's northern borderlands. After a visit to military facilities on 1 November in Iquitos, Wagner concluded the FARC had no bases nor were they recruiting insurgents in Peruvian areas surrounding the Napo and Putumayo rivers.

Nonetheless, media reports began circulating in mid-November about the presence of the FARC in Peru's border region with Colombia. Wagner asked his countrymen for their confidence and promised that Peru would not hesitate to act immediately if the allegations of FARC in the nation were found to be true.

After sending an invitation to his Colombian counterpart, Juan Manuel Santos, the two Defense Ministers, accompanied by the Peruvian Minister of the Interior Pilar Mazzetti, met on 25 November to fly over the mutual borderland on a fact-finding trip of the region. They inspected from above the Alto Putumayo zone at the Peru-Colombia border, particularly along the zone of Angusilla, between El Estrecho and Güeppi.

The motivation of the trip was to formulate new mechanisms that would permit effectively combating the supposed presence of FARC in Peruvian territory, a group which – to the surprise of the visiting defense minister Santos – was classified as a narco-terrorist organization by his Peruvian host.

After the trip, Wagner stated that "what there is, is an increase in illegal cultivation of coca leaf in Alto Putumayo and along the border, fomented by the FARC, which is a terrorist band and a corporation of drug traffickers." He emphasized that they had not confirmed any FARC military presence in the Alto Putumayo region of Peru.

Yet due to the "worrisome growth of coca plantations" said Wagner, the Peruvian government is implementing "Plan Putumayo": a social, military and development plan that will effectively reinforce state presence in the Alto Putumayo and Napo regions of Peru's Loreto department.

Underscoring the already excellent cooperation and intelligence sharing between Peru and Colombia, Wagner added that operative and intelligence activities performed in conjunction with the Colombian Armed Forces would be increased "because we don't want that area to become another Huallaga," referring to the valley where most Peruvian coca leaf is cultivated and allegedly protected by remnants of the Sendero Luminoso.<sup>2</sup>

Rivadeneira maintains that Wagner utilizes "the politics of an ostrich" – or buries his head in the sand – in regards to the FARC. Peruvian daily *El Comercio* reports, however, that Wagner believes "in the factual and official information provided by the intelligence services of the Armed Forces in the region."

"This information indicates that there is no military presence of the FARC in Peruvian territory," he said in the report.

Wagner maintains that Peruvian authority has control over whatever kind of infiltration by elements of the FARC, "with or without uniform", and that for three years there has been in place a system of intelligence exchange and cooperation with Colombia for the border region. According to Wagner the contact is permanent and the system functions correctly.

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<sup>2</sup> Long considered Peru's disbanded insurgency, the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) reappeared in 2006, killing Nacional Police soldiers and generally causing trouble in Peru's Andean provinces. Some analysts believe remnants of the Shining Path work with organized crime as a protection force watching over Peruvian coca crops in Huallaga and other Peruvian departments.

## ECUADOR

On 20 October 2006, the Colombian administration announced the presence of Colombian guerrilla Luis Eduardo Devia, known as "Raúl Reyes", in Ecuador. Reyes is considered the FARC's top spokesman. Diplomatic strains are evident. The Ecuadorian administration has demanded concrete evidence to back claims made by the Uribe administration.

### **A New President Creates New Concerns for Uribe**

After enduring over a month of intense presidential debate in Ecuador, left-leaning economist and Hugo Chavez sympathizer, Rafael Correa defeated his opponent Alvaro Noboa in the runoff elections that took place on Sunday 26 November.

The FARC question had been a hot topic for presidential debate in Ecuador. A great divide opened when the candidates were forced to define their positions in reference to the FARC. The victorious candidate, Correa, was heavily criticized and forced to defend himself after a presidential forum on 26 October when he said of the FARC, "I will not call them terrorists," adding, "I believe they are guerrillas." Later in his own defense, Correa asserted that this is the official position of Ecuador's government and that qualifying a group as terrorist would be "declaring war on them."

He also stated his belief that Uribe's declarations pertaining to FARC presence in Ecuador have a specific objective. "Obviously this position benefits the war candidate," he said in reference to Álvaro Noboa, who fired back on 8 November when he alleged that Correa had received campaign financing from the FARC.

It was well-known that Uribe favored the candidacy of Noboa, who was eager to classify the FARC as terrorists and promised to work alongside Colombia and the United States to tighten security on the northern border in order to eliminate FARC spillover into Ecuador.

Upon announcement of his victory after the 26 November elections, Correa is likely to stand by his words. Although he says he aspires to maintain good relations with president Uribe, Correa will not involve Ecuador in Colombia's war against the FARC.

The Ecuadorian government will not classify the FARC as terrorists, yet Correa has said that he will not permit that "they put even half a foot in our territory, not the FARC, not the paramilitaries, nor the Colombian Army."

US interests in Ecuador will also likely become strained under Correa, who, like Hugo Chavez, is openly critical of George W. Bush. Correa has pledged to close down the U.S. military base in Manta, a key location for U.S. drug interdiction efforts in South America. Correa has also said in reference to international affairs he will seek ties of "mutual respect" with all countries including Colombia and the United States. His words remain unrealized.

## Evidence of FARC Spillover

The presidential discourse on the FARC comes in the wake of various episodes in which FARC's spillover into Ecuador has resulted in the violation of territorial sovereignty.

On 15 October, during "Operation Diamond", a Colombian military operation which took place between Caucasia in Colombia and Puerto Mestanza in Ecuador, the Colombian military set out to capture the FARC's head of finance Ovidio Solarte. During the operation, Colombian military members shot and killed three people accompanying Solarte, two of which were Ecuadorian citizens. The shootings took place on the river Río San Miguel. It appears that Solarte managed to escape.

In the past few months there have been numerous other incidents on the border, including the explosion on Ecuadorian soil of a grenade launched by the Colombian army in which three people were injured. The Colombian air force has also been caught straying into Ecuadorian airspace in operations to combat the FARC.





On 28 January 2006, local media in Ecuador reported accounts from witnesses and police of heated battles. The battles followed an alleged violation of territorial sovereignty by Colombian Black Hawk helicopters and warplanes. After the incident Quito issued a formal protest against the “violation of sovereignty” and demanded an apology. Colombia denied the alleged incursion was intentional and promised to issue a formal response following the completion of an investigation into the matter.<sup>3</sup>

Southwest Colombia has long been a FARC stronghold particularly in the departments of Putumayo, Nariño and Caquetá. The Colombian Army has never consolidated control on its southeastern border. The Ecuadorian military rarely comes within twenty miles of the 586 kilometer (400 mile) long border between the two countries due to poor road access.

Seeking refuge across the border to escape Colombian authorities has been a FARC strategy for many years. Crossing the border for logistics support is also common.

Lago Agrio lies 19 kilometers (12 miles) from the border in the remote province of Sucumbios and sits inside a heavily-used border-crossing zone. FARC operatives have used the area for supply procurement and recuperation since the mid 1990s, perhaps longer. The FARC has an established presence in Sucumbios and, according to some reports, even had its own radio station that broadcasted political propaganda. But not all of the FARC’s activity in Ecuador has been political, logistical, or recreational.

When FARC took over six Ecuadorian villages in February 2002, inhabitants were forced to abandon their homes at gunpoint. Within five months in early 2002, over 100 people had been killed at the hands of the FARC and their rivals in the Colombian paramilitary forces. Hundreds of people have been kidnapped along the border, according to various reports.

Police estimate that 60 percent of the population in Lago Agrio is involved in regular commerce with the FARC. Taxi drivers report regularly recruitment to smuggle supplies into Colombia. FARC operatives instruct the drivers on how to get around authority by bribing the Ecuadorian army and police along the road for untroubled passage. The bribe calculation is some US\$2 per cylinder. Reports estimate that through these smuggling operations FARC receives 1500 cylinders of propane per week from Lago Agrio. The guerrillas use these cylinders as home-made mortar rounds when attacking military installations in southwestern Colombia.

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<sup>3</sup> “Ecuador Destroys ‘Guerrilla Camp’,” BBC, 2 February, 2006.

## VENEZUELA

The same 20 October 2006 statement in which the Colombian administration announced presence of Raúl Reyes in Ecuador, also confirmed the presence of Luciano Marin Arango, known as "Iván Márquez", in Venezuela. Marquez is known to be a high-level FARC field commander. Creating a tense diplomatic situation, Venezuela has asked Colombia to provide evidence of the guerrillas. Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo stated that the evidence will be delivered shortly. As of this publication, communication between Colombia and Venezuela concerning this evidence has not been made public.<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of this report, we have obtained information that details areas inside Venezuela where the FARC operate a hospital, maintain a complex of camps as well as a sustained presence in the mountains of the Venezuelan states of Zulia and Tachira. We do not know if this information has been shared with Venezuelan authorities.



<sup>4</sup> As far as we know, it has not been made public. If you have seen reports, please contact us.

Venezuela has become a growing point of concern over the past eight years as a territory sensitive to FARC penetration. There are various reasons for this sensitivity.

Venezuela's borderlands enjoy very little state presence. Corruption within the Venezuelan National Guard and military units stationed along the border facilitates the FARC's ability to bypass law enforcement. And Chavez has continually refused to work alongside Uribe in his efforts to eradicate the FARC.

These factors have all made Venezuelan territory attractive to the FARC. Uribe will now face another full term of the Chavez administration. It is an administration that implicitly allows refuge to the FARC simply by not fully cooperating with Colombia.

### **Diplomatic Tensions**

An exemplary case of FARC expansion into Venezuela occurred in late 2004 when, in a diplomatic crisis known as the "Granda Affair", a FARC leader was captured by Colombian authorities in Caracas in a blatant disregard for Venezuelan sovereignty. On 13 December 2004, Rodrigo Granda, a high ranking representative of the FARC who was known to be living in Caracas, was kidnapped from a café in Caracas. The Colombian administration initially denied that the leader was captured in Venezuela, insisting that Colombian authorities had instead intercepted him in Colombia. More information emerged revealing that bounty hunters hired by the Colombian government had indeed violated Venezuelan national sovereignty, nabbing Granda in Venezuela's capital city and transporting him to the border where Colombian authorities arrested him.

Uribe initially condemned Chavez's lack of cooperation in using law enforcement to combat the FARC. In response to the incident and the criticisms that followed, Chavez withdrew his ambassador from Bogotá. He temporarily suspended all diplomatic and trade links with Colombia and ordered that all agreements and business with Colombia to be "paralyzed" following Granda's seizure. Chavez finally demanded that President Uribe apologize for the invasion of Venezuelan territory and the kidnapping of Granda. A summit between the two presidents in February 2005 resolved the matter.

Although crisis was averted, some tension remains between the two neighboring countries. Both the Colombian and US governments have accused Chavez of supporting the FARC by harboring the Colombian insurgents.

Due to deteriorating cooperation between Caracas and Washington the counter narcotics program in Venezuela has lost strength. The systemic weakening of law enforcement in Venezuela complicates this situation, especially in Caracas and at the Maiquetia International airport, where high levels of corruption within the airport's governing body often undermines law enforcement. Despite Chavez's insistence that he does not support the FARC, there is ample evidence that FARC still carries out both political and logistical operations within Venezuela.

Several FARC camps exist inside Venezuela, where the Colombian insurgents stock up on supplies and rest. Human intelligence sources and satellite photography have also documented permanent FARC training camps and field clinics.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jane's Information Group, "South American cocaine trafficking operations shift towards Venezuela," 18 April, 2006.

Former Venezuelan National Assembly member Julio Montoya believes there are as many as 500 FARC members in Venezuela. He claims they have been nationalized and carry Venezuelan identification.

One source even believes that Chavez passively permits the FARC to use Venezuela as a secure refuge. It says that evidence exists of various incidents in which Venezuelan planes have penetrated Colombian airspace and opened fire against Colombian troops while combating FARC elements, shielding the FARC in a way that they can escape across the border to Venezuela.<sup>6</sup> This information is not confirmed.

### **Institutional Corruption Aids FARC Operatives**

Corruption within the Venezuelan National Guard and the military has given FARC ample opportunity to manipulate Venezuelan officials.

In late January 2002, a video released by Venezuelan journalists shows a meeting in which Venezuelan military members negotiate with the FARC to free a citizen captured by FARC operatives. One of the journalists, Ibéyise Pacheco, explains that in the dialogue between the military official in charge of the operation and the leader of the 33rd front of the FARC, Ruben Zamora, the men discuss the good relationship established between the two parties. Although the video confirms a working relationship between the Venezuelan Armed Forces and the FARC, the military members involved deny that the operation was anything more than a formal "humanitarian" mission.

Further claims against the honesty of the Venezuelan military lie in various confirmed reports that FAL rifles with the stamp of the Venezuelan Armed Forces have been found in the hands of FARC insurgents.

Corruption within the National Guard is comparable. In a report prepared by Jane's Information Group, a FARC guerrilla, who chose to remain anonymous, asserted that FARC colleagues would typically transport 1,000 to 1,500 kg of cocaine every two weeks from labs in Guainía and Vichada, in eastern Colombia. The cocaine would be taken by motorized canoe to the Venezuelan border at San Mariapo, on the eastern bank of the Orinoco River in the Venezuelan Amazonia. Upon arrival in Venezuelan territory they would make a payment to the National Guard before continuing on the transport route.

Agents with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and their Venezuelan counterparts in the National Guard have worked reasonably well together to combat drug trafficking over the years. But tensions heightened in 2004 when the DEA declared that some National Guard members were corrupt and involved in drug trafficking. The term "Sun Cartel" began to circulate; it referred to the insignia of general's rank, a sun, used in the Venezuelan National Guard instead of stars.

This action prompted Chavez to order his government officials to stop working with the DEA. "The DEA was using the fight against drug trafficking as a mask to support drug trafficking [and] to carry out intelligence in Venezuela against the government," Chavez said. The current relationship between the National Guard and the DEA remains tense.

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<sup>6</sup> Rijock, Keneth, "AVenezuela continua ofreciendo refugio seguro a criminosos da guerra," Midia Sem Mascara, 27 March, 2006.



## **Translocation of Trafficking Operations towards Venezuela**

Conditions for drug-trafficking have recently ripened in Venezuela. Venezuela is separated from Colombia by a porous 2,200km (1,367 mile) border, which some traffickers in the region call “the gateway to heaven” because of the virtual lack of border enforcement.

Tensions between the United States and Venezuela have resulted in weakened counter narcotics operations. There are many incentives for trafficking in Venezuela.

The risk of extradition to the United States has been minimized due to cold US-Venezuela relations. The Venezuelan petro-economy is booming and a surplus of U.S. dollars facilitates money laundering. Venezuela, which has a developed oil and petro-chemicals industry, is also an important supplier of precursor chemicals for Colombian cocaine producers.

As a result of these conditions, the FARC has infiltrated Venezuela with great fervor and an eye for new trafficking routes and a comfortable relationship for years to come – well beyond Uribe's current term of office.

According to Venezuela's National Anti-Drugs Office, Venezuelan authorities seized 31.2 tons of cocaine in 2004; only a year later they intercepted 58.4 tons of cocaine – representing an 87 percent increase. The 2005 seizure total is over ten times greater the 1990s average of 5 tons per year. That statistic, coupled with the estimate made by counter-narcotics experts that seizures generally represent only about 10 percent of total traffic through a country, demonstrate a significant increase in trafficking in the country.

Apart from the rise in total tonnage seized, there is a decline in the number of people arrested for drug related offences. In 2005, 1,082 persons were detained, 10 percent fewer than in 2004 and barely one-tenth of the average number arrested yearly in the 1990s, which was around 10,000.

Until recently considered only a medium-level transit country for trafficking, Venezuela has quickly risen in importance, becoming a primary country through which the FARC and others export cocaine produced on the continent. Many reports confirm that FARC operatives have infiltrated maritime ports and in particular have bribed officials at Maiquetía International Airport.

On 11 April 2006, in the biggest seizure documented in recent years by Mexican authorities, 5.5 tons of high-purity cocaine were intercepted at the airport in Ciudad del Carmen. The transport plane originated in Caracas. Mexican authorities believe the FARC had sent the shipment to members of the Sinaloa Federation, a well known Mexican drug smuggling organization.

## MEXICO

The FARC can be linked directly to Mexican trafficking organizations, as a major supplier for the drug smuggling operations in that country. The transition that led to the FARC's downstream integration in Mexico came about as conditions for trafficking directly out of Colombia worsened.

The FARC lost control of trafficking strongholds, such as the urban areas surrounding the Pacific port of Buenaventura to the paramilitary trafficking organizations. Tighter governmental controls of shipments leaving Colombia were also implemented. Finally with the elimination of the Colombian Cali, Medellín, and Norte de Valle drug smuggling organizations, Mexican drug trafficking organizations such as Tijuana, Juarez and Gulf cartels rose to fill the lacuna.

### FARC Connections with Mexican Cartels

In the late 1990s, the FARC established a clandestine network and trafficking partnership with the Arellano Felix smuggling organization in Tijuana, also known as the Tijuana Cartel. The FARC organized the trafficking networks into Tijuana where the Arellano Felix Organization greatly dominated smuggling routes and had access to the states along the west coast from California to Washington state. Upon the arrest of Colombian Dr. Carlos Ariel Charry Guzman and Mexican Enrique Guillelmos Salazar Ramos, investigators discovered links between the FARC and the Arellano Felix organization. They learned of operations in which the FARC supplied cocaine to the organization in exchange for cash and weapons.

On 23 November 2000, the attorney general in Mexico revealed the link between the Felix organization and the FARC and made the connection public. After Charry was captured, the FARC switched their loyalties to the Gulf Cartel with whom they worked with until 2004 when they again switched loyalties to work with the Joaquín Guzmán Loera, alias "El Chapo", who is now considered the head of the Sinaloa Federation, considered Mexico's most powerful criminal organization.

In 2005, El Chapo Guzmán implemented a strategy involving former FARC members in Mexico to dominate turf controlled by the Gulf Cartel. He maintained operative cells of former FARC members and Central American street gang members, known collectively as "maras", in the state of Tamaulipas to weaken the Gulf Cartel in its own territory.<sup>7</sup>

According to some reports, these cells had the capacity to maintain over twelve hours of attacks with high impact weapons. By mounting this significant force on the Gulf Cartel's turf, El Chapo Guzmán sought to instill fear in the police units in the state so that they would not work collaborate with the Gulf Cartel, run by El Chapo's nemesis, Cárdenas Guillén.

### A Geopolitical Force?

The discovery of FARC connections with the Arellano Felix cartel coincided with the closing of the FARC's international office in Mexico City. In April 2002, Mexican authorities made the abrupt decision to shut down the FARC's Mexico City office at the Colombian government's request. The FARC's Mexico City office, staffed by Marco León Calarca and Olga Marín, had been a legally authorized presence in Mexico for over a decade and the decision to close it was greatly criticized.

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<sup>7</sup> La Libertad, "Narcotraficantes mexicanos reclutan terroristas colombianos y miembros de las "maras" centroamericanas," 4 September 2005.

Mexico was the only country in the region where the FARC had diplomatic representation. The loss of this diplomatic mission eliminated the only official representation of the guerrilla group that could answer for the FARC in the event of a peace process.

Although lacking formal representation, the FARC has continued to maintain a semi-political presence in Mexico. In July 2003, the Colombian ambassador in Mexico City, Luis Ignacio Guzman, voiced concern over increased FARC activities in Mexico including the infiltration of Mexican institutions. He asserted that the FARC have an office in the department of Philosophy and Letters in the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM). Through connections with UNAM the FARC has allegedly made contacts with Mexico's Popular Revolutionary Party (EPR).

The FARC-Mexico link highlights the much neglected aspect of FARC's international activity – its geopolitical activities. Although such activities have greatly diminished since the birth of the FARC more than 40 years ago, that FARC still have an active political sector that strives to make connections with leftist organizations in countries across the Americas.

## Conclusion

Inside Colombia, the FARC has managed to maintain a tactical stalemate. As president Alvaro Uribe pours more resources into the Colombian war machine, it's unlikely he will be able to completely eradicate the FARC's presence from Colombia. The nature of guerrilla warfare favors the FARC's ability to resist, but the organization's international operations provide a significant amount of support.

Ecuador and Peru clearly play a role of rear retreat areas. On the Ecuadorian side of the border, the FARC have little to worry about since Rafael Correa will probably not make fighting the FARC an agenda item for his administration.

On the Peruvian side of the border, a new president, Alan Garcia, will work closely with the United States and Colombia to combat drug trafficking in Peru, but the sheer remoteness of Peru's Alto Putumayo region heavily favors the FARC. The FARC would prefer to maintain a low profile in that region, but if fighting were to break out, the Peruvians would quickly learn how and why the FARC has managed to maintain a strong presence in Colombia. Again, thick bush and murky swamps favor the guerrilla.

Venezuela is the real case to watch. Reports from Zulia claim the FARC have mounted a regular kidnapping syndicate. Evidence of links between the FARC and Venezuela's National Guard remains elusive, but high levels of corruption presumed a reality in the National Guard combined with the enormous earnings of drug trafficking insinuates some level of cooperation.

Mexican drug smuggling organizations are always in need of a secure supply of cocaine. Dozens of small drug smuggling organizations in Colombia have risen to replace the cartels of the past, but few are able to ensure a steady flow of supply. This is why consolidated shipments are often used. The FARC, however, is Colombia's only remaining mega drug trafficking organization. It is able to draw on the resources of a large organization to ensure a constant flow of supply to Mexican cartels, which in turn will be sure to maintain a close relationship with any reliable upstream connections.

The FARC is not just a Colombian insurgency. It is an Andean insurgency and a threat to regional security, extending from Argentina to Mexico. The information shared in this overview is only a small fraction of the information available to support our assertions. The future of the FARC in the region sees greater expansion and strength. Colombia will always remain a stronghold, but overtime it will increasingly become just one piece of a larger and much more robust guerrilla network in the Americas.