

ENDING COLOMBIA'S FARC CONFLICT: DEALING THE RIGHT CARD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Latin America's oldest guerrilla organisation, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), is under severe stress. Close to seven years of the Uribe presidency have hurt the FARC's capability and morale. Several top commanders have been captured, killed in combat, murdered by their own men, or died of natural causes, as in the case of Manuel Marulanda, the FARC's historic leader. Thousands of foot soldiers have deserted, bringing the guerrillas' troop strength down by almost half, to perhaps 10,000 today. Still, under its new leader, Alfonso Cano, the FARC has shown renewed internal cohesion and continued capacity to adapt to changes in the security environment. The Uribe government remains wedded to its hardline military approach until the FARC has no option but to negotiate surrender, but this strategy is problematic. President Uribe should keep military pressure up but emphasise devising a political strategy capable of drawing a weakened but still largely intact FARC into peace talks. Priority should also be on strengthening rule of law, protecting human rights and increasing citizen security.

Strong pressure notwithstanding, the FARC still has remarkable adaptive capacity. Key units and some members of the central command (the Secretariat) have withdrawn to strongholds in the jungle and mountains, as well as in neighbouring countries, to evade government offensives and regain strength. The way in which hostage releases and redeployments have been conducted recently suggests that Cano is having some success in reasserting leadership. New tactics rely heavily on ambushes and indiscriminate use of unconventional explosive devices, in a manner that violates international humanitarian law. While command-and-control structures have been decentralised at the tactical level, the FARC Secretariat remains capable of coordinating actions around the country. Still substantial income from drug trafficking enables the insurgents to continue the war but has also led to alliances between some FARC units and Colombia's many organised criminal outfits and new illegal armed groups (NIAGs).

The successes of the government's security strategy have resulted in part from the modernisation and growth of its security forces, aided by substantial international

technical and financial support, in particular from the U.S. Perhaps even more important have been improvements in the quality and quantity of strategic intelligence, which have enabled precision air raids to kill important rebel commanders and disrupt command-and-control structures. The government is also carrying out an aggressive campaign to undermine rebel morale and induce defections. Still, it is unclear whether Uribe's effort to splinter the movement will produce positive results. If small FARC groups were driven as a result into the Colombian or even Latin American criminal underworld, it could prove counterproductive.

Further, the Uribe administration has not matched its security strategy – the Democratic Security Policy (DSP) – with an equally rigorous political strategy for ending the conflict. Efforts to consolidate state presence and rule of law throughout the country lack long-term vision and are insufficient to strengthen sustainable civilian institutions at the local level. Counter-drug policies have proven ineffective. Drug trafficking is at the heart of the activities of the organised criminal groups, the FARC, parts of the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) insurgency and NIAGs, which include rearmed former paramilitaries and paramilitary groups that did not demobilise. Security forces continue to be associated with and responsible for corruption scandals and serious human rights abuses, and the authorities are still a long way from guaranteeing citizen security countrywide.

If Colombia is to end the almost half-century-old FARC conflict, the government should take urgent steps to:

- ❑ sustain military pressure but undertake serious efforts to complement it with a strategy for establishing peace negotiations with the still-functioning FARC Secretariat, while seeking to prevent criminalised FARC fragments from joining with organised criminal and paramilitary successor groups;
- ❑ keep all options open for swiftly freeing the FARC's remaining hostages, including in a hostages-for-prisoners swap. The numbers and character of any FARC prisoners released should depend on the ultimate release of all hostages in FARC captivity,

including hundreds held for ransom, and a rebel agreement to end kidnapping;

- renew and energise efforts to hold direct talks with the FARC Secretariat, while considering international facilitation by governments such as Brazil and possibly Chile to establish communication channels and build confidence; and
- boost efforts to expand rule of law across the country, strongly improve protection of human rights and increase citizen security through effective consolidation of accountable state presence in Colombia's regions.

Bogotá/Brussels, 26 March 2009

ENDING COLOMBIA'S FARC CONFLICT: DEALING THE RIGHT CARD

I. INTRODUCTION

The announcement in late May 2008 of the death of the FARC's founder, Pedro Marín (alias "Manuel Marulanda"), on 26 March¹ and the appointment of Guillermo Sáenz (alias "Alfonso Cano")² as the insurgents' new top commander came in the midst of one of the rebel group's darkest periods. The cumulative six-year effect of the military offensive launched by President Álvaro Uribe's government was showing tangible and often devastating results. In 2007, four experienced field commanders were killed in precision air raids.³ On 1 March 2008, second-in-command Raúl Reyes was killed in a bombing raid inside Ecuador;⁴ later that month

another Secretariat (central command) member, Iván Ríos, was shot dead by one of his own men.⁵ Thousands of fighters have been killed in combat or captured; even more have deserted. Between 2007 and 2009, 30 hostages, including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three former U.S. contractors escaped, were released by the insurgents or were rescued by security forces.⁶

During its first years, the declared goal of the Uribe administration was to force the FARC to the negotiation table through military pressure and make it agree to disarm and demobilise. The strategy since early 2007, in contrast, appears to be mainly one of complete military neutralisation by isolating the Secretariat, deepening internal fissures and thus splintering the organisation.

Spurred by military and hostage-liberation successes in 2007-2008, the government has stepped up efforts to promote the desertion of commanders and their units, virtually ended international facilitation of any rapprochement with the FARC and attempted to leave the Secretariat no option but to surrender, be captured or die in combat. The reluctance to work as hard on the design of a negotiation strategy as it did on its military strategy has been guided by the conviction that in

¹Pedro Marín (alias "Manuel Marulanda" or "Sureshot") was born circa 1930 and took up arms with the Liberal party guerrillas when partisan violence broke out in 1948, later switching to the communist guerrillas operating in southern Tolima department. He took his alias after the name of a unionist killed by security forces. Following the military operation against the communist guerrillas in Marquetalia in 1964, he and companions created the FARC, eventually becoming its undisputed commander until his death at approximately 80, apparently of natural causes, on 26 March 2008. "Un campesino en armas", *Semana*, 26 May 2008. The government says he died at a time when it was bombing heavily close to his hideouts in western Meta department. "Tirofijo está muerto", *Semana*, 26 May 2008, pp. 22-25.

²Guillermo León Sáenz (alias "Alfonso Cano"), a Bogotá-born, university-educated ideologue, became the heir of Jacobo Arenas, one of FARC's founders and for decades its main ideologue, upon the latter's death in 1990.

³"J.J.", leader of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas urban front in Cali and Buenaventura, on 6 June 2007; "Cristóbal", commander of the Bogotá structures of the clandestine communist party (PCCC or PC3), on 15 July 2007; "Negro Acacio", leader of the 16th front in Vichada, on 1 October 2007; and "Martín Caballero", leader of the 37th front, in the Montes de María ranges south of Cartagena, on 24 October 2007.

⁴Luis Édgar Devia Silva (alias "Raúl Reyes"), born in 1948, was a member of the Communist Youth movement (JUCO) and a unionist before joining the FARC in 1975. Within a few years, he was promoted to the Secretariat and appointed head of the "International Front", charged with establishing contacts with Latin American and European countries. He took part in the 1999-2002 peace talks and was the key hostages-for-prisoners negotiator until his death in March 2008.

José Gregorio Pérez, *Raúl Reyes Canciller de la Montaña* (Bogotá, 2008).

⁵Manuel Jesús Muñoz Ortiz (alias "José Juvenal Velandia" or "Iván Ríos"), born in 1961, was a member of the Communist Youth movement (JUCO), a university student in economics and Unión Patriótica party member before joining the FARC. He was one of the youngest FARC peace negotiators in 1999-2002 and was promoted to the Secretariat in 2003 after the death of Efraín Guzmán. He reportedly worked closely with Cano to set up the FARC's clandestine political movements and was known as an ideological hardliner. He led the José María Córdoba bloc that operated in the north west before being killed by his bodyguard, Pedro Pablo Montoya (alias "Rojas"). "Quién era Iván Ríos", *El Espectador*, 7 March 2008.

⁶On 2 July 2008, former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, three U.S. citizens and eleven police and military officers held hostage by the FARC were rescued by the military in Operation Jaque. Army intelligence officers infiltrated the FARC and tricked it into turning the hostages over to a fake humanitarian mission.

essence the FARC is merely a terrorist organisation, deeply involved in drug trafficking, that does not want a settlement of the armed conflict and will always seek to use any political opening for its strategic advantage. While this analysis is partly accurate, it fails to recognise that after four and a half decades of armed struggle, the FARC continues to maintain a Marxist-Leninist ideology that is backed by a corresponding military-political organisation and strategy – however anachronistic this may seem two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁷

Crisis Group's findings, based on research in the capital, Bogotá, and the departments of Antioquia, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Meta, suggest the FARC's military capacity has been weakened, including as a result of its loss of almost all political support in Colombian society as well as abroad.⁸ But it is not close to defeat, and its new leadership is seeking to adapt to the changed strategic scenario. This report examines the state of the FARC and the need for a more effective and consistently applied political strategy to complement the Uribe administration's military measures.

II. FARC STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Over the years, the FARC has shown remarkable resilience in the face of government pressure and other challenges.⁹ Created in 1966 under the auspices of the Colombian Communist Party,¹⁰ the group established its base in the mountains of the departments of Tolima, Huila and the southern parts of Cundinamarca, as well as in the Andes foothills in Meta and Caquetá departments, from where most of its early leadership and supporters originated.¹¹ These regions, with little state presence at the time, were settled by landless peasants, many of whom fled in the 1940s and 1950s from violence elsewhere.¹² This base allowed the FARC to consolidate and progressively expand across the country.¹³ A second generation of leaders developed in the early

⁹ Juan Ferro and Graciela Uribe, *El orden de la guerra. Las FARC-EP: Entre la organización y la política* (Bogotá, 2002); Daniel Pécaut, *Las FARC: ¿una guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* (Bogotá, 2008); Fernando Cubides, *Burocracias Armadas* (Bogotá, 2005); and Francisco Gutiérrez, "Criminales y rebeldes: una discusión de la economía política del conflicto armado desde el caso colombiano", *Estudios Políticos* no. 24 (2004), pp. 37-71.

¹⁰ On FARC's history and origins as a peasant self-defence group stemming from the 1940s and 1950s, the "Era of Violence", see Crisis Group Latin America Report N° 1, *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, 26 March 2002, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ The main leaders of the FARC in the 1960s and 1970s were Manuel Marulanda, Jacobo Arenas, Isauro Yosa, Isaías Pardo, Jaime Guaraca, Darío Lozano, Efraín Guzmán and Ciro Trujillo, all ex-members of the peasant self-defence groups established in the district of Marquetalia, which were attacked by the army in 1964, and of the Liberal party guerrillas, created in the late 1940s, many of whom did not disarm in the mid-1950s and carried on the armed struggle in the FARC.

¹² Violence broke out on 9 April 1948 after the killing of Liberal leader Jorge E. Gaitan. The Liberal party leaders set up guerrilla forces in many parts of the country, while the government, led by the Conservative party, used militias (the "pájaros") as well as the police and armed forces to fight the rebels and eliminate political rivals. After the coup led by General Gustavo Rojas in 1953, the new government was able to demobilise the Liberal guerrillas but not the emerging communist guerrillas.

¹³ The FARC initially set up operations in Marquetalia, Riochiquito, El Pato, Casa Verde, and the Duda and Guayabero river basins. From there, it expanded to the Sumapaz mountain ranges in the eastern Andes and deployed units to Tolima, Huila and Cauca departments and the Middle Magdalena valley in central Colombia in the late 1960s; and to Antioquia and Valle departments in the early 1970s. During its fourth conference in 1970, it decided to organise in fronts operating in different parts of the country. *El orden de la guerra*, op. cit., pp. 180-200; and *Burocracias armadas*, op. cit., pp. 31-49.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, Colombians for Peace representative, Washington D.C., 3 March 2009.

⁸ See "Reflexiones acerca del conflicto y posconflicto en Colombia", in Markus Schultze-Kraft, *Pacificación y poder civil en Centroamérica. Las relaciones cívico-militares en El Salvador, Guatemala y Nicaragua* (Bogotá, 2005), pp. 421-447.

1980s, when the FARC started recruiting more broadly among urban students, intellectuals and workers.¹⁴

From early days, the organisation adopted a military structure with effective command and control.¹⁵ It has two decision-making bodies: the Secretariat, seven full members and two deputies, and the joint general staff (Estado Mayor Conjunto, EMC), composed of another 25 senior commanders.¹⁶ According to the FARC's statutes, the EMC is responsible for appointing members of the Secretariat, adjusting strategic plans at more or less regular conferences,¹⁷ taking financial decisions and appointing the commanders and general staffs of blocs and fronts.¹⁸ Since 1993, the Secretariat's seven members have been posted to different regions to decentralise bloc commands.¹⁹ In the early 1980s and 1990s, the EMC issued long-term strategic plans that allowed the organisation not only to increase troop strength, acquire more and better weaponry and continue expanding operations across the country but also to prepare and carry out increasingly large offensives against government forces.²⁰

¹⁴Current Secretariat members Alfonso Cano, Timochenko, Pablo Catatumbo and Iván Márquez and the late Raúl Reyes were part of the second generation of top commanders, who had been students in the communist youth groups (Juventudes Comunistas, JUCO) and labour union and political activists and were incorporated into the leadership in the early 1980s.

¹⁵According to the FARC statutes (disciplinary rules), military structures are divided into blocs (comprising at least five fronts in a particular region) or joint commands (less than five fronts); fronts (two or more columns); columns (two companies, 110 fighters); companies (two guerrilla units, 54 fighters); guerrilla units (two squads, 26 fighters); squads (twelve fighters); and tactical combat units (six fighters). "Estatutos FARC-EP" (unknown place and date of publication), chapter II, pp. 3-5.

¹⁶Ibid. The five-member Secretariat set up in January 1973 was expanded to seven in 1993. *El orden de la guerra*, op. cit., pp. 182, 195. Two deputy members were appointed after the killing of two members in early 2008.

¹⁷See Articles 2 and 3-k in the FARC's statutes. The conferences periodically assemble all EMC members to draw up mid- and long-term strategy. The first eight took place in 1965, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1974, January 1978, May 1982 and April 1993.

¹⁸*El orden de la guerra*, op. cit., pp. 28-29; and "Estatutos FARC-EP", op. cit.

¹⁹This was decided in the eighth conference in 1993.

²⁰The FARC's first strategic plan was set out in the seventh conference in 1982, including an eight-year goal of increasing the number of fronts from 24 to 48; becoming an offensive military force (the "people's army"); setting up propaganda tools (radio and publications) and combining strategic military growth with a political offensive that led to a ceasefire with the Belisario Betancourt and Virgilio Barco governments (1984-1987) and creation of the Unión Patriótica (UP)

The FARC's leadership gained more decision-making autonomy after breaking ties to legal left-wing politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in particular the Colombian Communist Party.²¹ While other left-wing rebel groups negotiated and signed peace deals in that period,²² the FARC justified continued armed struggle on the grounds that the political reforms under way since the mid-1980s, in particular introduction of mayoral elections in 1988 and a new constitution in 1991, were insufficient. It also accused the state of complicity in the killing of some 3,000 leaders and members of the Unión Patriótica (UP) – a party it helped establish in 1985 during the peace talks under Presidents Belisario Betancur and Virgilio Barco – as well as generalised violence against left-wing, social and labour union figures in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.²³

This period was followed by an escalation of military action across the country, prompting a spike in serious transgressions of international humanitarian law (IHL) by both the rebels and the increasingly numerous paramilitary groups. Large segments of society became disheartened by the FARC's increasing violence – destruction of villages, massacres, selective killings, terrorist attacks on infrastructure and civilian targets, forced displacements, kidnapping, use of makeshift anti-personnel mines and recruitment of child soldiers

party in November 1985. At the eighth conference in 1993, the FARC proposed a "national reconstruction and reconciliation government platform"; increased Secretariat members; improved the chain-of-command and control structures of regional blocs and communications among blocs and fronts; and appointed a Secretariat member as chief of international relations. *El orden de la guerra*, op. cit., pp. 186-187, 195.

²¹The FARC began distancing itself from the Communist party by setting up the UP party, sponsored by its ideologue, Jacobo Arenas. Many militants left the communists to join.

²²The M-19, the indigenous Quintín Lame Resistance Movement (MRQL), the core of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and a splinter National Liberation Army (ELN) group demobilised between 1989 and 1993. The FARC and the ELN continued fighting.

²³Paramilitaries killed UP presidential candidates Jaime Pardo in October 1987 and Bernardo Jaramillo in March 1990. Many UP leaders like Congressmen Braulio Herrera and Iván Márquez, elected in 1986, took up arms again after the ceasefire was broken and the peace talks failed in 1987. The UP was left without leaders, and its civilian militants became easy targets for paramilitary and extreme right-wing groups. Crisis Group Latin America Report N°5, *Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries*, 16 September 2003; and Steven Dudley, *Armas y urnas: historia de un genocidio político* (Bogotá, 2008), pp. 143-161.

– especially when it was engaged in peace talks with the Andrés Pastrana government (1998-2002).²⁴

The FARC continued political work through two underground groups: the Clandestine Colombian Communist Party (PCCC or PC3) and the Bolivarian Movement for the New Colombia (MBNC), both created in 2000 by its main ideologue and current top commander, Alfonso Cano.²⁵ Their cadres work in independent cells under the supervision of FARC front commanders and are charged with promoting FARC's struggle. This effort is inspired by a mix of Marxism-Leninism, the revolutionary ideas of South American independence hero Simón Bolívar, anti-imperialist thought and Latin American unity-and-sovereignty discourse.²⁶ Except for a few Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas memoirs, however, the FARC has produced little in the way of ideological or political documents.²⁷

While the PCCC is in charge of clandestinely preparing for creation of a FARC political apparatus to emerge when the leadership considers conditions viable, MBNC militants participate more visibly in a wide range of social and political issues, including workers' demonstrations and activities in favour of peasants' land rights, without openly revealing their FARC affiliation.²⁸ The Bolivarian Youth Movement (MJB) was established in 2003 to co-opt students in secondary schools and universities.

²⁴ FARC's offensive actions increased from over 200 in 1990 to 300-400 per year from 1992 to 1997; they then rose steeply to about 1,100 in 2002, surpassing even the security forces' offensive actions (less than 900 in 2002). At the same time FARC transgressions of international humanitarian law increased from about 200 between 1990 and 1998 to 400-1,100 between 1999 and 2003. Mauricio García, "El conflicto armado colombiano: ¿El fin del fin?", Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), Bogotá, September 2008, pp. 11, 13. For more on human rights and international law violations by all armed actors in the conflict, see Noche y Niebla database held by CINEP at www.nocheyniebla.org.

²⁵ The Bolivarian Movement for the New Colombia (MBNC) was launched by Cano in April 2000, when the DMZ granted by the Pastrana government was in effect. See Crisis Group Report, *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, op. cit.

²⁶ "Estatutos FARC-EP", op. cit., chapter I.

²⁷ Marulanda wrote mainly about his experience as a guerrilla fighter, Arenas mainly about the FARC's Marquetalia experience and analyses of Colombian politics. According to Pécaut, FARC's slender production of ideological and political documents has been key in its ability to avoid major internal tensions and divisions. *Las FARC: una guerrilla sin fin*, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

²⁸ *El orden de la guerra*, op. cit., pp. 144-151.

A. ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

The FARC has shown a high capacity to adapt to circumstances. From a group operating in a limited area of Colombia, it evolved into a mobile guerrilla force capable of expanding to many parts of the country. In the 1980s and early 1990s, it adjusted to particular regional dynamics: blocs were set up to gather together the fronts and mobile units operating in specific regions; in 1993, each of the seven Secretariat members was charged with supervising a regional bloc, and commanders started being rotated among blocs and fronts to prevent them from becoming too powerful and corrupt.

Establishing broad logistics support has also been crucial for expansion. Networks of militiamen (*milicianos*) were set up in the 1970s in both urban and rural areas to assist military units by gathering intelligence and providing other support. Their clandestine nature has allowed for precise control and flow of information, as well as meticulous planning of operations against specific targets that has been almost impossible for security forces to detect. Militiamen were crucial for the establishment of networks in major cities and serve as providers of supplies and information to guerrilla camps, even in distant areas.²⁹ After the eighth EMC conference in 1993, urban units began coordinating actions with rural fronts to help prepare conditions for an insurrection in the big cities (supposedly the final step before taking power). Expanded urban and rural networks improved FARC's effectiveness in raising revenue through kidnappings, extortion and money laundering during the 1990s.

Well-established finances enabled the FARC to acquire modern weapons, improve communication systems and expand troop size in accordance with its strategic plans. The organisation grew and consolidated its grip on many rural areas through extortion, kidnapping³⁰ and the levying of "taxes" in regions with economies based on cattle-growing, extensive agriculture, exploitation of natural resources or illicit economic activities (mainly cocaine production and trafficking).³¹ The Secretariat's central-

²⁹ Their numbers and capabilities are still controversial. Crisis Group interviews, conflict analysts, security experts, government officials, security force and intelligence officials, Bogotá, Medellín, Cúcuta, Pasto, Villavicencio, September-November 2008.

³⁰ While wealthy entrepreneurs and cattle growers have traditionally been the main targets, many from the middle and lower classes have also been victims of kidnapping and extortion by the FARC or criminal gangs that "sell" the victim to the FARC.

³¹ Crisis Group Latin America Report N°11, *War and Drugs in Colombia*, 27 January 2005, pp. 8-13. Crisis Group Latin

ised management used wealthier fronts, usually those heavily involved in drug trafficking, to support the more recently established and economically less affluent ones.

B. AN ORGANISATION UNDER STRESS

The cumulative effect of the government's sustained offensive has dealt heavy blows to the FARC. Several of its units have been weakened or wiped out by the death, capture or desertion of commanders – including three members of the Secretariat – and thousands of fighters. Fear of attack or infiltration by security forces and rank-and-file loss of morale have been making the leadership's control of troops ever more difficult.

Moreover, popular support has been low for many years. The FARC has contested the state violently for decades, systematically disregarding international humanitarian law by committing grave abuses and atrocities.³² Its clear lack of interest in a peace agreement during the 1999-2002 talks with the Pastrana administration is important for explaining the public's increasing faith in a purely military solution.³³ On 3 February 2008, a day before the massive marches were held against kidnapping and the FARC, polls showed 96 per cent in major cities rejected the group.³⁴

1. Strategy and tactics

Despite the insurgents' claims to the contrary,³⁵ government security forces believe that the losses and the forced succession of top commanders have strained relations within the Secretariat and weakened its cohesion.³⁶ A gathering of the 25-member EMC to decide

on Marulanda's succession and replacement of the three dead commanders was impossible due to the security forces' improved electronic surveillance of communications and monitoring of movements.³⁷ Inability to hold the ninth EMC session in early 2007 put the FARC at a strategic disadvantage. Reportedly, the session was conducted by email.³⁸ However, the inability to thoroughly assess the military and political situation may still distort leadership perceptions. Allegedly Cano and Mono Jojoy³⁹ – a notorious military commander – blamed each other for the mistakes that allowed the government to free fifteen hostages in Operation Jaque in July 2008.⁴⁰

Other sources believe that the FARC was able to adapt more or less efficiently to the unfavourable environment. Raúl Reyes was quickly replaced by Joaquín Gómez in the southern bloc; Iván Ríos, by "Mauricio" in the eastern bloc; and Marulanda by Cano. Reportedly, it had been decided a few years earlier that Cano would

contact Pablo Catatumbo instead of Raúl Reyes to discuss a hostages-for-prisoners swap in Florida and Pradera municipalities. Crisis Group interviews, government security agencies, joint staff of the armed forces, and source involved in efforts to achieve a swap, Bogotá, 8, 14, 17 October, 17 December 2008.

³⁷ According to FARC's statutes, the Secretariat has to be appointed by a full meeting of the EMC.

³⁸ Román Ortiz and Gerson Arias, "La apuesta de la Novena Conferencia de las FARC", *Siguiendo el conflicto* no. 48, Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP), March 2007.

³⁹ Víctor Julio Suárez Rojas (alias "Mono Jojoy" or "Jorge Briceño Suárez") was born to FARC members in the rural zone of La Uribe (Meta department), joined at an early age and rose fast to the Secretariat in 1993 due to his military skills. During the 1999-2002 peace talks, he was known as the FARC's military strategist; he leads the eastern bloc, in the Orinoco plains and on the eastern slopes of the eastern Andes. "El Mono Jojoy: Hijo de la Guerilla", *El Tiempo*, 22 December 1996. "El Mono Jojoy: Hecho en la Guerra", *El Tiempo*, 29 June 1997; and "Bloque Oriental, la Élite de las FARC", *El Tiempo*, 28 December 2005.

⁴⁰ It was Cano who authorised contacts with the international facilitators in late June 2008, a trip that inadvertently helped the military prepare a scam humanitarian civilian mission and rescue the hostages. Mono Jojoy, the bloc commander and Secretariat member in charge of the hostages, allegedly halted regular contact with the troops holding the FARC's most important political bargaining chips for fear of intercepts. Crisis Group interview, ex-FARC hostage, Cúcuta, 30 October 2008. According to a former eastern bloc combatant, there is feeling within the organisation that Cano is to blame for Operation Jaque. Combatants also believe that "Cesar", the 1st front commander arrested in the operation and formerly close to Mono Jojoy, was bribed into giving up the hostages. Crisis Group interview, Bogotá, 20 November 2008.

America Report N°25, *Latin American Drugs I: Losing the Fight*, 14 March 2008, pp. 8-9.

³² *Burocracias armadas*, op. cit., p. 138.

³³ In a March 2008 Gallup poll, 82 per cent of those surveyed approved the government's FARC strategy. "Crisis regional disparó la imagen positiva del presidente Álvaro Uribe!", *El Comercio*, 14 March 2008. For more details on the peace talks, see Crisis Group Report, *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, op. cit., and Section II.A below.

³⁴ "El factor Piedad", *El Universal*, 3 February 2008. The polls were consistent with a December 2001 Gallup survey in which less than 3 per cent had a favourable opinion of the FARC. Cited in *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, op. cit., p. 9. While Gallup polls reflect general sentiments, most surveys do not include rural areas, so cannot capture the complex relations that peasants in secluded areas have with the FARC.

³⁵ "Farc asegura que su nuevo jefe tiene respaldo total", *La Opinión*, 27 October 2008.

³⁶ Internal tensions had been brewing since early January 2008, when the Catholic Church and the government attempted to

be appointed in the event of Marulanda's death.⁴¹ Also, the seven-member Secretariat was broadened to include two deputy members, Bertulfo Alvarez of the Caribbean bloc and Pastor Alape of the Middle Magdalena Valley bloc, apparently so that quick replacements would be possible in future. As internal deliberation in the Secretariat has likely become more difficult, recent directives by Cano suggest he is giving less specific orders, so field commanders can readily adapt to local circumstances and avoid debilitating friction.

Still, coordination between senior and mid-ranking commanders has become increasingly difficult. Security forces are exerting continued pressure in the FARC heartland on the eastern slopes of the eastern Andes (Meta department), where Secretariat commanders Mono Jojoy and Mauricio are believed to operate. Intense operations have been launched in the Cañón de las Hermosas, in the border region between Tolima, Huila and Valle del Cauca departments, where Cano operates. The government hopes that by keeping them on the run, Cano and other prominent commanders will be unable to consolidate their commands, and internal fissures will be deepened. Similar operations are being launched against rebel units engaged in major drug trafficking, especially those of the commanders Fabián Ramírez and Gener García (alias "John 40") in Caquetá and Meta departments. The aim is to interrupt the FARC's cash flow and internal financial redistribution schemes.⁴²

Secretariat and EMC members appear to be increasingly isolated and incommunicado: in the north-western bloc the late Iván Ríos⁴³ was reportedly cut off,⁴⁴ as was "Karina", the notorious 47th front commander in south-eastern Antioquia department. After surrendering in May 2008, Karina said she had not communicated with the Secretariat for two years.⁴⁵ Communication problems with the eastern bloc's 1st front became evident when

it proved unaware of the whereabouts of Emmanuel Rojas, the son of former hostage Clara Rojas, who was born in captivity and whom the FARC had promised to release in late 2007.⁴⁶ Lack of coordination between units in the same geographical area was a factor on 18 June 2007, when a detachment massacred eleven Valle del Cauca departmental deputies it was guarding as hostages after it mistook another FARC unit for the enemy.⁴⁷

Sources affirm the Secretariat has sent commissions to assess the situation of the fronts across the country, and regular rotation of commanders among fronts and regions is still standard procedure.⁴⁸ However, this may have also suffered setbacks due to fear of vulnerability to government strikes and of betrayal. Following Iván Ríos's assassination, Iván Márquez, who commands the Caribbean bloc, reportedly also supervises restructuring of the north-western bloc.⁴⁹ Secretariat members and top field commanders have adopted tighter security measures, including employing close relatives as personal bodyguards. In the eastern bloc, Mono Jojoy has reportedly purged his bodyguards several times and now relies on family members. In the western joint command in Nariño, 29th front commander

⁴¹To prepare for the succession, some two years ago Cano was given combat assignments in Chocó and Tolima departments. He did well and gained new legitimacy as a military commander. Crisis Group interview, former international peace facilitator, Geneva, 2 December 2008.

⁴²Crisis Group interviews, intelligence officers and senior defence ministry official, Bogotá, 17, 24 October 2008; *Ibid.*

⁴³Secretariat commander Iván Ríos was assassinated by "Rojas", a bodyguard, in March 2008, a few days after the Colombian raid in Ecuador that killed Raúl Reyes.

⁴⁴Information on Ríos's laptop showed he had very limited communications with other Secretariat members and took refuge in the high mountains of eastern Caldas while cut off from the other north-western bloc units. Crisis Group interviews, conflict analyst and senior intelligence officers, Medellín and Bogotá, 1, 17 October 2008.

⁴⁵Crisis Group interview, conflict analyst, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

⁴⁶Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°17, *Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off*, 29 April 2008, p. 7.

⁴⁷"Diputados del Valle murieron en medio de fuego amigo entre guerrilleros de las Farc", *El Tiempo*, 28 July 2008. A 2007 forensic analysis by the Attorney General's Office found that the deputies had been shot at mid-range by AK-47s, the FARC's standard weapon, but was unable to determine whether in a "friendly fire" incident or a clash with a new illegal armed group or other insurgents. "Los diputados del Valle fueron asesinados con 95 disparos de fusil AK-47, el arma usada por las Farc", *El Espectador*, 28 November 2007. The only survivor, ex-deputy Sigifredo López, whom the FARC released in February 2009, said the detachment guarding him and his eleven comrades believed it was under attack from security forces and fired at the hostages. "Farc asesinaron a mis 11 compañeros por paranoia", *El Tiempo*, 6 February 2009.

⁴⁸Allegedly, the commissions were sent secretly to avoid distorted reports by commanders of units with disciplinary problems. Crisis Group interviews, political analyst, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commander, Bogotá, 7 October, 20 November 2008.

⁴⁹Ríos's appointed successor, Mauricio, a long-time eastern bloc commander, did not take over the bloc's supervision. Its commander is now Isaías Trujillo, a veteran fighter who operates in the Atrato River basin and Urabá region (Chocó and Antioquia departments). Crisis Group interviews, conflict analyst, journalist, high-level military officer, international observer, and senior intelligence officers, Medellín and Bogotá, 1, 6, 17 October 2008.

"Aldemar" is believed to have ordered the execution of over 50 of his men suspected of betrayal.⁵⁰

2. Combatant strength and firepower

FARC troops have been decimated, not only in combat⁵¹ but also increasingly by surrender, desertion and individual demobilisation.⁵² Official sources say that from 2003 to January 2009 security forces killed 10,806 and captured 26,648.⁵³ The demobilisation rate of combatants, which remained stable at about 1,300 annually between 2003 and 2006, more than doubled in 2007-2008. The most recent figures show that between 2002 and February 2009 11,615 fighters abandoned the ranks and demobilised.⁵⁴ Between 1 January and 11 Novem-

⁵⁰The purges should not be overstated. Clandestine guerrilla organisations are – and often perceive themselves to be – vulnerable to infiltration and betrayal. In Latin America, they tend to eliminate members when under pressure or engaged in infighting; examples are with factions of the Salvadoran Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in the 1980s and the ELN in Colombia in the early 1970s. Crisis Group interviews, security expert and intelligence officers, Nariño, 4, 6 November 2008, and former European peace facilitator, Geneva, 2 December 2008. See Crisis Group Latin America Report N°2, *Colombia: Prospects for Peace with the ELN*, 4 October 2002.

⁵¹In different regions, FARC units are fighting against security forces and/or rival illegal armed groups. See this section below.

⁵²Since the government is not negotiating with the FARC, combatants who want to leave the organisation first have to defect from the ranks and then are at liberty to approach the authorities. Most of them do and are treated as "individually demobilised former members of an illegal armed group". Following screening and interrogation at the ministry of defence, the individual ex-FARC fighters are referred to the reintegration program of the High Counsellor for Reintegration. A few ex-FARC commanders, such as Karina, have applied for prosecution under the Justice and Peace Law (see below). The process under which FARC combatants demobilise is not friendly to women fighters. For example, the authorities require combatants to reside for a time in military installations to complete demobilisation but do not provide adequate separate facilities for female ex-combatants. Crisis Group interviews, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commanders, Bogotá, 20 November 2008.

⁵³Crisis Group email communication, defence ministry, 10 March 2009.

⁵⁴Demobilisation of FARC combatants increased from 529 in 2002 to 1,376 in 2003, dropped slightly to 1,300 in 2004 and 1,135 in 2005, but increased to 1,558 in 2006. It rose by almost 60 per cent in 2007, to 2,480, then to 3,027 in 2008. By 2 February 210 had defected in 2009 and entered the government demobilisation and reinsertion program (PAHD). Defence ministry, figures based on records of the Humanitarian Assistance to the Demobilised Combatant Program (Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado, PAHD),

ber 2008, the FARC fronts with the most defectors have been mainly those whose commanders were killed in combat or deserted: the eastern bloc's 16th and 39th fronts, in Vichada and eastern Meta (512 demobilised, 16 per cent of the total demobilised in that slightly more than ten-month period); the southern bloc's 32nd and 49th fronts, in Putumayo and Caquetá (322 demobilised, 10 per cent); the north-western bloc's 47th front, in Antioquia and Caldas (358 demobilised, 11 per cent).⁵⁵

Government estimates of FARC troop strength are inconsistent: 7,000-8,000 according to Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos, approximately 10,000 according to a security agency.⁵⁶ Though the government's military strategy has achieved some important results, this raises doubts about the accuracy of official figures and suggests that the FARC's replenishment capacity may be more effective than the government acknowledges.⁵⁷

Increasing FARC defections make it easier for the government to collect intelligence. Ex-fighters are interrogated at the defence ministry – "sucked dry of information", a U.S. embassy official said⁵⁸ – before being sent to the presidency's high counsellor for reinsertion (Alta Consejería para la Reinserción, ACR). Based on their information, interception and infiltration of units has increased dramatically. Demobilised combatants are also instrumental in encouraging former comrades to defect. Increasingly, defection of mid-ranking and senior commanders with over ten years in the FARC helps to convince those previously under

spreadsheet available at www.mindefensa.gov.co; information given during Crisis Group interview, 24 October 2008; and Crisis Group email communication, high counselor for reinsertion program office, 26 November 2008.

⁵⁵"Entregas voluntarias desmovilizados año 2008", defence ministry, 11 November 2008, Excel spreadsheet at www.mindefensa.gov.co.

⁵⁶Crisis Group interview, security agency analysts, Bogotá, 14 October 2008.

⁵⁷Though security forces always acknowledged in public that the FARC had 17,000-20,000 fighters at the zenith of its military capacity in the early 2000s, the figure could have been manipulated. A former senator and hostage told Crisis Group the military command in the early 2000s gave a figure two times higher, excluding militiamen and other FARC subsidiary structures, in a congressional hearing. A demobilised, mid-ranking FARC commander confirmed this to Crisis Group. Crisis Group interviews, Cúcuta and Bogotá, 30 October, 20 November 2008. A critical review of official figures is in "Las cifras no cuadran", Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES), 12 November 2008, at www.codhes.org.

⁵⁸Crisis Group interview, U.S. embassy official, Bogotá, 2003.

their command to desert.⁵⁹ But the majority of demobilised fighters (mostly unschooled and from rural origins) remain in big cities to decrease the risk of being targeted by the FARC, making reintegration to civilian life more difficult. No information is available on how many ex-fighters return to the conflict or enter organised criminal outfits or new illegal armed groups (NIAGs).⁶⁰

FARC weaponry includes assault rifles, in particular AK-47s, Galils and FALs, machine guns, submachine guns, side arms and hand grenades.⁶¹ It is unlikely the insurgents have surface-to-air missiles – they have never been used in battle – but it appears the FARC is seeking to acquire them to defend against air-to-ground attacks.⁶² The FARC increasingly relies on non-conventional ordnance, such as mortars constructed from propane gas cylinders, as well as antipersonnel landmines and booby traps. These explosive devices are made of wood, glass bottles and plastic and are virtually impossible to detect and deactivate. The FARC's indiscriminate use of such weapons violates international humanitarian law and seriously affects not only security forces but also civilians in rural communities, who often are forced to resettle in a hopefully safer region.⁶³ Some

FARC explosive experts have reportedly been trained by members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Spanish Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in high-tech, long-distance triggering mechanisms.⁶⁴

3. Politics, recruitment, indoctrination

FARC discourse seeks to highlight the legitimacy of armed struggle, focusing on land reform and other agrarian issues,⁶⁵ and reflects the movement's obstinate belief that, despite the continuous modernisation and transformation of Colombian society in the last half-century, it represents the political vanguard.⁶⁶ Although the urban population considers it an anachronism, this discourse may still find some limited echo, particularly in desperately poor rural and marginalised urban areas where the state, including its security forces, has little presence and more often than not is unable to provide basic social services. FARC fighters overwhelmingly are from rural and poor sectors and in the great majority of cases are unschooled.⁶⁷ Continuing

⁵⁹ In 2006, 12 per cent of demobilised FARC members were leaders with five to ten years of experience; in 2007, 27 per cent were. From January to August 2008, 34.2 per cent (1,978 fighters) had such experience; 12.3 per cent had ten to fifteen years, 2.7 per cent more than fifteen; 253 were troop commanders, eighteen ideologues and 82 specialists. "The FARC at their Worst Moment in History", defence ministry, 2008, p. 10; and "La desmovilización: instrumento para la paz y arma efectiva contra el terrorismo", defence ministry, 10 September 2008, p. 4.

⁶⁰ 13 per cent of captured NIAG members are demobilised fighters who took up arms again, but there is no information how many who rejoin armed groups are ex-FARC, ELN or paramilitaries. Crisis Group interview, ACR officials, Bogotá, 22 October 2008.

⁶¹ FARC networks buy weapons not only in the Colombian black market but also from European and Middle Eastern dealers, and corrupt military rings in Central America, Ecuador and Venezuela; Colombian authorities believe the FARC still receives support from networks in the neighbouring countries. On 7 June 2008, two Venezuelans (one belonging to the military) were caught in eastern Colombia smuggling ammunition to the FARC. Crisis Group interview, senior military officers, Bogotá, 8 October 2008.

⁶² The FARC reportedly failed to buy surface-to-air missiles through Martín Villa, a survivor of the 1964 government bombing raid on the FARC's base camp in Marquetalia, in Peru during the Alberto Fujimori administration. Crisis Group interview, former European peace facilitator, Geneva, 2 December 2008.

⁶³ Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists, conflict analysts, international humanitarian NGO workers, international observer and police officials, Medellín, Cúcuta, Pasto, Villavicencio, October, November 2008.

⁶⁴ In Bogotá on 11 August 2001, three Irishmen were arrested and charged with coming to train the FARC on explosives and urban warfare; in late 2004, they escaped back to Ireland while on bail. On the ETA-FARC connection, see "Actas de reunión de ETA confirman alianza con las Farc", *El Espectador*, 13 November 2008. Electronic triggering mechanisms are now often used on explosive devices. Crisis Group interview, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commander, Bogotá, 20 November 2008.

⁶⁵ FARC negotiators at the 1999-2002 peace talks repeatedly cited their four-decade-old agrarian program. "Programa agrario de los guerrilleros de las FARC", FARC, 20 July 1964; in Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, *Las verdaderas intenciones de las FARC*, (Bogotá, 1999), pp. 24-31.

⁶⁶ In a ten-point document, the FARC explained the reforms it promotes. "Plataforma para un gobierno de reconstrucción y reconciliación nacional", FARC, 20 July 1964, in *Las verdaderas intenciones de las FARC*, op. cit., pp. 32-36, and *Las FARC: una guerrilla sin fin*, op. cit., pp. 141-157.

⁶⁷ For many young fighters, becoming a guerrilla has been a way to escape rural hardships. *El orden de la Guerra*, op. cit., pp. 62-70. The FARC is a chauvinistic organisation where discrimination against women is common. With the exception of two commanders, Anayibe Rojas (alias "Sonia"), extradited to the U.S. on drug-trafficking charges in 2005, and Karina, who defected in May 2008, its high number of women in the ranks has not translated into proportionate numbers in the leadership. A crude depiction of discrimination against women in the FARC is in the notes of Tanja Nijmeijer, a Dutch fighter whose diary was seized during a raid on a FARC camp in the east on 18 July 2007; excerpts were translated into Spanish by the security forces and published in the local media. "La guerrillera holandesa", *Semana*, 8 September 2007.

human rights violations by government forces, especially the army, may drive people into the insurgency.⁶⁸

Once recruited, fighters do not normally receive any further education, and their political knowledge is basic at best. Using a “discourse of hunger and misery”, commanders tell the rank and file simply that Colombia’s elites and oligarchy are to blame for the economic and social hardship they and their families are enduring.⁶⁹ In daily life, fighters are mainly busy surviving. Many demobilised combatants are largely unaware of the FARC’s political and military structures or objectives beyond their own immediate area.⁷⁰ Those few who have had secondary or even university education complain that senior commanders are dogmatic and rarely stimulate open discussion.⁷¹

Lack of political motivation and loss of morale among many fighters due to sustained military pressure have become serious challenges for the FARC. As taking power by force seems more distant than ever, many defectors argue that the organisation has lost its purpose.⁷² With rare exceptions – especially the old or disabled – fighters are not allowed to leave the organisation. This aims to prevent information leaks and loss of troops who are difficult and costly to replace. Punishment for unsuccessful defectors is death, sometimes also for their families. While once strong internal cohesion has gradually been eroded by a “culture of distrust”, splintering into factions or overt disobedience of units to orders from superiors in the chain of command remains uncommon and, with Alfonso Cano’s new lead-

ership style, is not likely to become a major problem in the foreseeable future.⁷³

Replacement of fighters continues to be solved often by forced recruitment of children in rural areas, including those under the age of fifteen.⁷⁴ Sources in Antioquia, Norte de Santander and Meta and Nariño believe such forced recruitment of minors remains high, but under-reporting is still a big problem due to peasants’ and farmers’ fear of reprisals. According to another source, recruitment of minors – though not exclusively – among vulnerable indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the Amazonian and Pacific coast jungles is helping to replace troops with less risk of infiltration by security forces.⁷⁵ Despite the clear violation of international humanitarian law and national and international campaigns to denounce the practice, some FARC units give priority to replenishing their fighting force over ethical and political considerations.⁷⁶

4. Withdrawal and survival

After pushing the FARC out of heavily populated areas and regaining control of road arteries and other strategic infrastructure, the security forces are focusing on attacking traditional FARC strongholds.⁷⁷ The insurgents

⁶⁸ See “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia, 2008”, UNHCHR, 5 March 2009.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, FARC former hostage and demobilised mid-ranking commander, Cúcuta, Bogotá, 30 October, 11, 20 November 2008.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, police intelligence officers, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

⁷¹ Former FARC commander, intervention in “¿Quieren las FARC una salida política o no?”, debate organised by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and *Semana* magazine, 21 February 2008.

⁷² *Ibid*; and Crisis Group interviews, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commanders, Bogotá, 20 November 2008. The accounts of former commanders Karina and “Isaza” – who helped hostage Oscar Lizcano to escape – shortly after their defections are telling about loss of morale. “La rendición de ‘Karina’”, *El Tiempo*, 20 May 2008; “Isaza dice que las Farc están en vías de desaparición y exhorta a las desmovilizaciones”, *El Tiempo*, 28 October 2008; and “Dice que las Farc están ‘muy reducidas’ y los guerrilleros ‘sin moral’”, *El Tiempo*, 29 October 2008.

⁷³ Fighters learn not to confide their inner feelings to other comrades out of fear of being denounced. Crisis Group interview, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commander, Bogotá, 20 November 2008.

⁷⁴ According to FARC statutes, only combatants over fifteen are accepted. However, this is not respected by field commanders. Demobilised FARC mid-ranking commanders insist figures on forced recruitment of children are lower than what the press reports and that many youngsters without parents or living in extreme rural poverty demand to join. They may say this, however, to avoid being accused of breaches of international humanitarian law. The situation of the rights of children in Colombia’s armed conflict, especially their recruitment, is closely monitored by the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council. Crisis Group interviews, Bogotá, 20 November 2008; and “Children and armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General”, UN Secretary-General, 21 December 2007, pp. 26-27.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, human rights advocate, Bogotá, 13 February 2008.

⁷⁶ Recruitment is needed not only to replenish fallen fighters and defectors, but also to acquire cooks, couriers, spies, coca harvesters and others. Crisis Group interviews, Bogotá, Medellín, Cúcuta, Villavieco, September, October, November 2008.

⁷⁷ Such operations are being carried out in western Meta, Caquetá and Arauca departments in the east; Tolima department in central Colombia; Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo departments in the south west; Nudo de Paramillo (Antioquia and Córdoba) and southern Bolívar department in the north and north east; and the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander

are fiercely resisting in some areas, apparently, for example, in the eastern bloc. This region still includes the biggest structures with a number of strong units, such as those protecting Mono Jojoy in western Meta department, and the southern bloc's 48th front in Putumayo department near the Ecuadorian border. The central and western joint commands are also still very active.⁷⁸ The FARC's main tactical advantage remains its knowledge of the terrain and the local populations.

In other areas, the FARC has withdrawn to almost inaccessible high mountain ranges or tropical jungles of the border regions with Venezuela,⁷⁹ Brazil,⁸⁰ Ecuador⁸¹ and Panama,⁸² where it has been present for decades and has good networks for supplies, weapons and drug trafficking. Secretariat members Iván Márquez and "Timochenko" are believed to operate close to the Venezuelan border in the Perijá and Catatumbo ranges, respectively. As part of the defensive strategy, mobile columns carry out light-armed attacks (*hostigamientos*) to keep security forces busy and away from important units that still control territory along the border offering quick escape to Venezuela.⁸³

department in the north east. Crisis Group interview, senior military intelligence officer, Bogotá, 22 October 2008.

⁷⁸ In Meta department, the eastern bloc still has eleven operational fronts, with three mobile units in support; led by "El Zarco", the 53rd and 40th fronts are in charge of Mono Jojoy's security. Crisis Group interviews, international observer and police officials, Bogotá, Villavicencio, 6 October, 11 November 2008.

⁷⁹ The 19th, 41st and 59th fronts of the Caribbean bloc have withdrawn to the Perijá mountain ranges; the 33rd front and the Arturo Ruiz mobile column of the Middle Magdalena bloc, to the Catatumbo wooded high mountains; the 10th and 45th fronts of the eastern bloc, to the Arauca River margins; and the 16th and 39th fronts to the Orinoco River margins in Vichada and Guainía.

⁸⁰ Units of the eastern bloc have pulled back to south-eastern Guaviare, Guanía and Vaupés departments, where the remaining hostages are believed to be held. Crisis Group interviews, security counsellor and demobilised FARC mid-ranking commander, Bogotá, 7 October, 20 November 2008.

⁸¹ The 29th front and the Daniel Aldana mobile columns operate in south-eastern Nariño department and the 48th front, in Putumayo department. Units close to Ecuador are considered FARC's logistics reserve. Crisis Group interview, international observer, Bogotá, 6 October 2008.

⁸² The 57th and 58th fronts operate in the Darién and Urabá regions in northern Chocó department.

⁸³ Throughout 2008, mobile columns along the Ecuador border in Nariño department have attacked the Pasto-Tumaco highway and electric grid pylons. Mobile columns along the Venezuelan border in Norte de Santander have attacked the oil pipelines. Crisis Group interviews, security agency analysts and police officials, Bogotá, Cúcuta, Pasto 14, 31 October, 6 November 2008.

The progressive weakening of several fronts has also forced the FARC to withdraw to, and regroup in, regions where military operations are less intense. The north-western bloc's 34th front moved from western Antioquia department to the Middle Atrato River basin in Chocó department, while the eastern bloc's still powerful 1st front withdrew to the dense jungles of Guanía and Vaupés departments. Decimated fronts and columns have also merged with stronger units to form "inter-fronts" (also called joint area commands), such as the High Ariari inter-front led by Henry Castellanos (alias "Romaña") on the mountain slopes of western Meta department, as well as those in Meta, Vichada, Sucre and eastern Antioquia departments.⁸⁴ Units are reducing their size to avoid air-to-ground attacks and using hit-and-run tactics by highly-mobile, often plain-clothed three-man cells ("triads").⁸⁵

The FARC is resorting heavily to snipers and antipersonnel mines in order to avoid unnecessary exposure of its troops.⁸⁶ While in the past it used minefields to defend safe havens like those in eastern Antioquia, newer minefields have delayed government offensives and manual coca crop eradication in areas such as the Nudo de Paramillo ranges in northern Antioquia and southern Córdoba departments, as well as in Nariño, Meta and north-eastern Antioquia.⁸⁷ Light-armed attacks

⁸⁴ Romaña was a notorious mid-ranking commander who carried out frequent mass kidnappings on the Bogotá-Villavicencio road in the mid- and late 1990s. An inter-front led by Gentil Duarte in the Low Ariari region operates in southern Meta. Reinforcements are being sent to the decimated 16th front from the 44th, 1st and 39th fronts. Remnants of decimated fronts are trying to support one another, like the 35th and 37th in Sucre department and the 9th and 47th in eastern Antioquia. Crisis Group interviews, security agency officials and conflict analyst, Medellín, Bogotá, Villavicencio, 1, 14 October, 11 November 2008.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, political analyst and security agency analysts, Bogotá, 7, 14 October 2008.

⁸⁶ The military reportedly intercepted an internal memo from Cano stating that the use of minefields and booby traps is "the only factor that we know that stops and frightens them [the security forces]". Colombia signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel mines and on their Destruction (Ottawa treaty) in 1997 and ratified it in 2000. Implementing Law 759 entered into effect in July 2002. While the government is making strong efforts to comply with the 2011 deadline for complete mine clearance, the FARC and to a lesser extent the ELN continue to plant large numbers of new anti-personnel mines. "La nueva estrategia de Cano", *El Espectador*, 27 September 2008.

⁸⁷ Minefields are prominently used in Ricaurte, Samaniego, Santa Cruz and Barbacoas municipalities (Nariño department); Cubarral, El Castillo, Vista Hermosa and La Macarena municipalities, on the slopes of the Macarena ranges in

and ambushes of military and police motorcades and selective killings of police and soldiers (“*plan pistola*”) increased from 568 in the first nine months of 2007 to 641 for the same time-span in 2008.⁸⁸

The withdrawal to mountains, jungles and borders does not allow the FARC to launch offensives to win back territory. At the same time, fear of infiltration by the security forces and intelligence agents has led it to threaten and displace populations in several regions. The Middle Magdalena bloc's 33rd front has displaced farmers in La Gabarra (Norte de Santander department), and eastern bloc fronts in southern Meta and northern Guaviare departments have entered reservations of the Nukak and Guayabero indigenous peoples, who have been forced to leave ancestral forests and find refuge in San José del Guaviare, the department capital. The Sikuni people (Guaviare and Arauca departments) and the Awa people (Nariño department) were subjected to selective killings in early 2008, and at least 27 members of the latter community were massacred in early February 2009.⁸⁹

The north-western bloc's 18th front has displaced inhabitants of La Caucana district in Tarazá (Antioquia), a former paramilitary (AUC) stronghold, and western central command's Mariscal Sucre Mobile Column killed four teachers in July 2008 after issuing threats to dissuade them as well as local staff of international humanitarian assistance organisations from entering municipalities such as Santa Cruz and Samaniego (Nariño department).⁹⁰ A social worker and his driver were killed after a medical mission organised by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) was ambushed on a rural road in San Vicente del Caguán

Meta department; and in the Lower Cauca region of northern Antioquia. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian NGO worker, senior military officers, security agency analysts, human rights liaison police officer and provincial public prosecutor, Medellín, Bogotá, Villavicencio, 1, 7, 14 October, 11 November 2008; and Markus Schultze-Kraft, “Narcotráfico en América Latina: un nuevo consenso internacional”, *Política Exterior*, November/December 2008.

⁸⁸ Unofficial statistics, shared during by security agency official during Crisis Group interview, Bogotá, 22 October 2008. In a late November 2008 attack, one policeman and one civilian were killed while twelve people were wounded in Puerto Asís (Putumayo department), when a police unit answered a call concerning the kidnapping of an entrepreneur.

⁸⁹ On 17 February, the FARC admitted responsibility for murdering eight of the 27 members of the Awa community. See also “Muerte en el resguardo”, *Semana*, 16 February 2009.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists, conflict analysts, international humanitarian NGO workers, international observer and police officials, Medellín, Cúcuta, Pasto, Villavicencio, October, November 2008.

(Caquetá department) on 7 December 2008.⁹¹ On 13 January 2009, the 29th front's indiscriminate attack using gas cylinders filled with explosives on the small Pacific coast village of Roberto Payán (Nariño) killed four people, including three children, and injured twelve.

5. Urban warfare

With Cano's appointment and the difficulties faced by FARC rural units, security forces fear an increase of urban terrorism.⁹² Urbanisation of the conflict would aim to discredit the government's security policy, which is highly popular in large and medium-sized cities. According to multiple sources, the FARC wants to gain attention and regain the initiative by assassinating senior officials and conducting sabotage with explosives, while concurrently seeking to recruit university students.⁹³ Several attacks with explosives, presumably carried out by FARC militiamen or commandos, have been launched in cities like Bogotá, Cali, Buenaventura, Neiva and even small villages like Ituango (Antioquia department).⁹⁴ The police have seized several caches of explosives on the outskirts of Bogotá, and rural FARC militiamen or commandos have been detected and arrested when attempting to penetrate cities.⁹⁵

⁹¹ The medical mission was part of the civic-military campaigns sponsored by the armed forces as a way of “winning the hearts and minds” in conflict areas.

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, military, intelligence and police senior officers, Bogotá, Medellín, Cúcuta, Pasto, Villavicencio, October, November 2008.

⁹³ Ibid; and Crisis Group interview, international observer, Bogotá, 6 October 2008.

⁹⁴ In Bogotá, explosive attacks, allegedly carried out by the eastern bloc urban militias, were recorded against several shops and other establishments throughout 2008 and January 2009. A police post was attacked in Suba district in June 2008. Between 2007 and early 2009, the FARC was responsible for over 22 attacks with explosives in Buenaventura and the bombing of police headquarters and police intelligence headquarters in Cali; in downtown Neiva, two hotels were attacked with explosives in October 2008 and a shopping centre on 17 January 2009; in Ituango, an explosive device killed seven people and injuring 55 on 14 August 2008. “Informe misión de acompañamiento humanitario a comunidades urbanas del distrito especial de Buenaventura”, Defensoría del Pueblo (ombudsman's office), 21-24 July 2008. The attacks against civilian property may be aimed at forcing shopkeepers and entrepreneurs to resume paying extortion money. Crisis Group interview, political analyst, Bogotá, 7 October 2008. On 7 March 2009, the FARC allegedly blew up the main water pipeline in Villavicencio, leaving about 300,000 people without running water for several days.

⁹⁵ In recent raids by the authorities, militiamen from the eastern bloc have been arrested while attempting to enter Bogotá.

Threat perception differs from one city to another. In Cúcuta, Medellín and Villavicencio, authorities believe FARC urban structures have been severely disrupted,⁹⁶ while in Cali and Buenaventura the insurgents remain highly active despite significant hits against their urban militias.⁹⁷ They now work as independent cells or with criminal organisations to help in intelligence gathering and the logistics necessary for terrorist attacks.

It is impossible to determine how many militiamen are active,⁹⁸ but it appears that the support networks involved in acquisition of food, medicine, electronic and communication devices and uniforms have been progressively weakened. The paramilitary offensives of the late 1990s and early 2000s drove urban fronts out of major cities like Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Cúcuta. The remnants were then ordered to support the rural fronts, which have endured the bulk of the Uribe administration's offensive. Militiamen have increasingly become a pool from which to replace fighters lost through combat or defection. This has made logistics more vulnerable to interception by security forces, which exert tight controls via checkpoints on roads and rivers that lead to and from combat areas.

6. War economy

While not as pervasive as five or six years ago, kidnapping and extortion remain important sources of income for the FARC, especially in border regions.⁹⁹ Respond-

Crisis Group interview, police intelligence officials, Villavicencio, 11 November 2008.

⁹⁶ Crisis group interviews, police intelligence officials, Medellín, Cúcuta, Villavicencio, 1, 31 October, 11 November 2008.

⁹⁷ In Cali and Buenaventura, despite the death of commander "J.J.", the capture of his replacement "Santiago" and another twenty militia commanders and the demobilisation of about 150 militiamen in the last two years, the structures were soon replaced by experienced commanders led by "Mincho" and "Narices". They no longer control entire neighbourhoods, but rather key blocks and streets. "El frente Manuel Cepeda, un monstruo de mil cabezas", *El País*, 7 September 2008.

⁹⁸ None of the senior security agency officials interviewed by Crisis Group could give even a rough estimate of the FARC's rural to urban combatant ratio. Crisis Group interviews, military, intelligence and police senior officers, Bogotá, Medellín, Cúcuta, Pasto, Villavicencio, October, November 2008.

⁹⁹ According to the defence ministry-connected National Fund for Personal Liberty Defence (FONDELIBERTAD), kidnappings by organised crime groups and FARC and ELN guerrillas dropped sharply from 2,882 victims in 2002 to 521 in 2007 and 437 in 2008; extortion increased from 2,083 cases in 2002 to 2,347 in 2004 but declined to 1,082 in 2007 and 830 in 2008. www.antisecuestro.gov.co/Noticias/2009/enero/22/004.html. Independent sources, however, believe that official statistics showing organised crime as primarily respon-

ing to sustained pressure, guerrilla units involved in such activity have modified their methods: victims are no longer held in sanctuaries for long periods but are moved constantly to avoid detection, and ransom demands are less substantial.¹⁰⁰ Extortion is believed to have increased, although this is difficult to corroborate due to underreporting. Civil society sources also believe criminal gangs or individual FARC members are acting at times on their own, using the movement's name for personal gain.¹⁰¹

Drug trafficking, which continues to be the main activity ensuring FARC financial survival, accounted in 2003 for most of the estimated \$1 billion the insurgents made from illegal activities.¹⁰² Available estimates indicate that since then its income has dropped substantially, to some \$500-600 million per year – still a formidable amount for an insurgent organisation that has also seen the number of its fighters drop.¹⁰³

To make up for losses, the FARC has also strengthened its presence in areas with coca crops, along trafficking routes and transshipment points on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts and along the borders with Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela. Units are involved at various stages: "tax" collection on coca growers ("*gramaje*"); cocaine processing in newer illegal laboratories ("*crista-*

sible for kidnapping and extortion mask FARC involvement. The FARC is especially active close to the Venezuela and Ecuador border, acting independently or in cooperation with cross-border gangs. Venezuelan and Colombian engineers, shopkeepers and cattle growers continue to be targeted in Arauca; cattle growers are kidnapped or extorted in Meta, southern Cesar and Caquetá. Rustling is increasing in parts of Boyacá, Cundinamarca and Meta departments; The Swiss food giant Nestlé was forced to close its milk-processing operation in Caquetá due to FARC attacks and threats; cattle-smuggling from Venezuela is believed to be controlled by the FARC. Crisis Group interviews, security counsellor, País Libre Foundation and provincial public prosecutor, Bogotá, Villavicencio, 7, 9 October, 11 November 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, País Libre Foundation representative, Bogotá, 9 October 2008.

¹⁰¹ Recent extortion victims state that racketeers are young and inexperienced, thus unpredictable and likely more dangerous. Crisis Group interviews, farmers' representative and País Libre Foundation, Bogotá, 26 September and 9 October 2008.

¹⁰² "Tendencias y Resultados 2007", defence ministry, 24 January 2008, p. 12.

¹⁰³ Estimated FARC 2007 income decreased by 40 per cent over five years, the result of the near collapse of the 16th front after the killing of Negro Acacio, the increasing control of drug trafficking by Mexican criminal organisations and a drastic reduction of kidnappings. "Alfredo Rangel, "¿En Qué Quedaron Las Farc?", *El Tiempo*, 16 March 2008. See also Crisis Group Report, *Latin American Drugs I: Losing the Fight*, op. cit., p. 9.

lizaderos") at high altitude that take advantage of cloud cover to avoid detection and raids by anti-narcotics police in areas such as western Cauca department; and selling to international criminal organisations, such as Mexican cartels in Valle del Cauca and Nariño departments.¹⁰⁴ As rebel units become smaller, they can survive on more modest budgets.

According to demobilised fighters, increasing financial decentralisation – with a Secretariat that does less micro-managing – presents a challenge to some commanders' loyalty. With less control from superiors, many commanders have become more involved in regional and local illegal economies for personal profit, especially in units along strategic corridors and the borders, where they can charge for the passage of drugs.¹⁰⁵ This has led to an increase in abuse of subordinates who question their actions and spurred defections of disgruntled combatants.¹⁰⁶ An ex-hostage told Crisis Group that stories of insurgents defecting with big sums of money abounded during his years in captivity.¹⁰⁷

7. Relations with other illegal armed groups

Several FARC units not only pursue tacit coexistence but are also establishing alliances with the ELN insurgents and new illegal armed groups (NIAGs) – many of them run by former paramilitary foes.¹⁰⁸ Depending on the territories and individual commanders, FARC units operate in tolerated-cohabitation, territorial-division or division-of-labour schemes for drug production and trafficking. In other regions, they openly fight for control of crops, territories and strategic corridors.

Following Marulanda's death, the ELN's main command (Comando Central, COCE) called for an alliance between the two guerrilla movements.¹⁰⁹ However, in Arauca, Nariño and Cauca departments, competition for drug crops and export routes, combined with ingrained rivalries over territory and personal feuds between com-

manders, have prevented this.¹¹⁰ In south-western Cauca and Nariño departments, the ELN has forged an alliance with the Rastrojos NIAG to contain FARC advances in their strongholds of El Tambo and Leyva municipalities. In Nariño department, the FARC's Mariscal Sucre Mobile Column has attacked ELN strongholds in Samaniego and Santa Cruz municipalities.

Deals have been brokered with heavily decimated ELN formations in other regions, such as the Lower Cauca in north-eastern Antioquia and Chocó and southern Bolívar departments. The FARC's 36th front has links with ELN remnants in Nechí, El Bagre, Zaragoza and Anorí, in north-eastern Antioquia, while the battered 9th and 47th fronts have ties to the small ELN Carlos Alirio Buitrago redoubts in eastern Antioquia.¹¹¹ Conversely, in the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander department, an attempt to carry out joint operations did not last long. The ELN and FARC still have profound differences: the ELN has attempted to establish a social base and only recently has become involved in drug trafficking, while the FARC has mostly imposed its presence on local communities and has been instrumental in promoting coca cultivation since the 1980s.¹¹²

On the Orinoco plains in eastern Colombia, drug-trafficking operations are shared by the FARC and the Popular Revolutionary Anticommunist Army (ERPAC), a NIAG led by Pedro Oliveira (alias "Cuchillo").¹¹³ Drug kingpin Daniel Barrera (alias "El Loco") reportedly acts as an intermediary between Cuchillo and Gener García (alias "John 40"), the commander of the FARC

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group Report, *War and Drugs*, op. cit.; and interview, anti-narcotics senior police official, Bogotá, 8 October 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interviews, security expert and intelligence officers, Nariño, 4, 6 November 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, demobilised FARC mid-ranking commanders, Bogotá, 20 November 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, former FARC hostage, Cúcuta, 30 October 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group Latin America Report N°20, *Colombia's New Armed Groups*, 10 May 2007.

¹⁰⁹ For background on FARC-ELN rivalries and the repeated unsuccessful efforts to stop the bloodshed, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°16, *Colombia: Moving Forward with the ELN?*, 11 October 2007.

¹¹⁰ In Arauca, the "open war" between the guerrillas has left 300 killed in the last three years; army officers reportedly helped the ELN. As a result, the ELN has strengthened its strongholds close to the Venezuela border. "Cómo el ejército se alió con el ELN en Arauca", *Semana*, 19 January 2009, p. 24. In the south west, intense fights between the groups left about 200 dead between November 2006 and February 2007. Colombian intelligence sources estimated that about 150 FARC and 30 ELN had been killed. "FARC contra ELN", *Semana*, 3 February 2007; and Crisis Group interviews, international observer, political analyst and security agency officials, Bogotá, 6, 7, 14 October 2008.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, conflict analyst and journalist, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, NGO representative, Cúcuta, 31 October 2008.

¹¹³ Estimates of ERPAC's manpower differ: police sources believe it has about 500 men operating in small groups that travel by motorcycle and buy coca paste from farmers; others believe it could have 2,000 and military structures. Cuchillo, a former mid-level commander of the AUC's Centauros Bloc, established his own group after Centauros Bloc commander Miguel Arroyave was murdered in 2004. Crisis Group interviews, police intelligence and NGO representatives, Villavicencio, 11 November 2008.

43rd front and one of the Secretariat's main financiers. The coca paste produced in FARC-controlled territory is sent to laboratories controlled by the FARC or the ERPAC. The cocaine is sent to Venezuela via corridors controlled by the ERPAC. However, this arrangement is highly unstable and has already led to open confrontation, as the two groups are competing for control of coca crops, laboratories and export corridors in Meta, Guaviare and Vichada departments.¹¹⁴

The Urabá Gulf continues to be a main transshipment point for cocaine to the U.S. and weapons and ammunition coming into Colombia. The 57th and 58th fronts, which operate in the Darién and Urabá regions of northern Chocó along the Panama border, are the most powerful units of the north-western bloc. While some drug loads come from the Chocó jungles, the biggest shipments are from the coca growing region in Tarazá and Caucaasia municipalities in the Lower Cauca (northern Antioquia), where the 18th and 36th fronts control the strategic corridors.¹¹⁵ Mario Rendón

¹¹⁴Recent operations against John 40's 43rd front are hampering the shipment of coca paste produced in Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico municipalities in southern Meta department, and San José del Guaviare in Guaviare department, to FARC-controlled processing laboratories and transshipment routes to Venezuela through Vichada department. Despite having sent an experienced commander, Albeiro Córdoba, son of the late Secretariat member Efraín Guzmán, to reestablish control over coca processing areas in Vichada, the FARC has been weakened by defections following the killing of Negro Acacio, 16th front commander and the main contact with drug-trafficking networks in the Amazonian basin, in late 2007. ERPAC has taken advantage and expanded operations from San Martín in the Ariari River basin, in central Meta, to San José del Guaviare and El Retorno (Guaviare department), establishing new coca paste transportation corridors, laboratories and export routes. It has clashed with the FARC in Caño Jabón and the hamlet of Puerto Elvira in Mapiripán municipality (south-eastern Meta), Cumaribo in Vichada department and on the "cattle trail" ("*trocha ganadera*") between Guaviare and Meta departments. Reportedly, it used tactics in Puerto Elvira similar to those of the late AUC: they spread rumours of their arrival and threats, causing the displacement of about 100 families in February 2008. Afterwards, the army was able to consolidate its presence and conduct offensive operations from there to the east in Vichada, Guaviare and Guainía. Crisis Group interview, conflict analyst, Villavicencio, 12 November 2008.

¹¹⁵The 18th front, operating from Ituango municipality to the Nudo de Paramillo range in southern Córdoba, still has presence in the key Llorona pass that connects Urabá to the rest of Antioquia department. It is believed to have grown from 250 fighters in 2002 to 295 in 2007. The Nudo de Paramillo mountainous area is a vital stronghold for about 650 men of the 18th, 5th and 58th fronts and the Mario Vélez mobile column. Crisis Group interviews, conflict analyst and journalist, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

(alias "Don Mario"), a former senior paramilitary commander who abandoned the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process and set up a NIAG, is expanding trafficking operations from Urabá to the processing laboratories and urban centres of the Lower Cauca, using the FARC-controlled corridors in Nudo de Paramillo, southern Córdoba department.¹¹⁶ Conversely, the FARC is attempting to expand its control as far south as La Caucana region, an ex-AUC stronghold in Tarazá, Antioquia, forcing displacement of inhabitants.¹¹⁷

On the Pacific coast and the slopes of the western Andes, the 30th front has expanded its presence from the municipalities of Dagua and Buenaventura in Valle del Cauca department¹¹⁸ toward municipalities along the Middle Micay River in Cauca department,¹¹⁹ gaining control over many trafficking routes. According to press sources, it works closely with local trafficking groups such as one led by Jorge Rentería (alias "Jorge Morfi"), who provide it with weapons, explosives and ammunition.¹²⁰ Further south, however, in Nariño department, the 29th front, which is deeply involved in trafficking, has launched numerous offensives against the Nueva Generación NIAG, up the Patía River into Cumbitara and Policarpa, two municipalities with large coca crops.

In Norte de Santander department, the 33rd front has withdrawn to the isolated Catatumbo mountain range but still controls coca crops in Tibú, La Gabarra, Teorama and Ocaña municipalities, despite the massive manual eradication campaign carried out since June 2008.¹²¹ Sources working in the region believe FARC finances have been weakened and the cash flow decreased,¹²²

¹¹⁶Reportedly, Don Mario ordered "La Zorra" to control the Lower Cauca region from Cáceres. Don Mario is capable of fighting the FARC, which lets him transport drugs to the Urabá Gulf, while he allows them to unload weapons. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Medellín, 1 October 2008. In recent months, Don Mario's NIAG adopted the name Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia) and began distributing leaflets in the Urabá region and other villages of the north in an attempt to create a counter-insurgency facade.

¹¹⁷Crisis Group interview, conflict analyst, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

¹¹⁸"Panorama Actual del Valle de Cauca", Observatorio de DDHH de la Vicepresidencia, January 2003.

¹¹⁹Including the villages of Río Viejo, Rotura, Iguana, Zaragoza, Los Cinco Viejos, Arenal, San Joaquín, Taporal, Calle Larga and San Isidro y Bajito.

¹²⁰"Abatido alias el 'Indio'", *El Espectador*, 9 September 2008.

¹²¹Crisis Group interview, journalist, Cúcuta, 30 October 2008.

¹²²According to local sources, the FARC is being forced to give promissory notes for future payment to coca farmers.

forcing coca growers to sell their harvest to intermediaries (“traquetos”), who work closely with new NIAGs, such as the “Black Eagles”, that have cocaine laboratories and export routes along the border with Venezuela. According to defectors, this NIAG’s chief is Daniel Barrera (“El Loco”), who also acts as intermediary between the FARC and the ERPAC on the Orinoco plains.¹²³

8. Insurgent relations with the population and clandestine networks

In urban areas, where three out of four Colombians live, FARC support has virtually vanished due to the combined effect of the organisation’s privileging of armed struggle over political action and the government’s success in depicting it as the main security threat to society. While the march against paramilitary and state violence drew tens of thousands into the streets – mostly of Bogotá – on 6 March 2008, marches principally against the FARC on 4 February and 20 July 2008 attracted millions in Colombia and abroad, reflecting a high degree of repudiation by Colombians from all walks of life of kidnapping and other serious FARC transgressions of international humanitarian law.¹²⁴

By contrast, the FARC reportedly continues to exert control over and carry out indoctrination of populations in remote areas of Chocó, Meta, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Guajira and Santander departments, as well as the coffee belt region (Quindío, Caldas and Risaralda departments). For instance, 57th front commander “Benkos” is known for meeting with the communities in the Lower Atrato region of Chocó department, where agro-industrial projects for biofuels (made of African palm oil) and mining are located.¹²⁵ Despite its withdrawal to the Chocó jungles, the 34th front continues to periodically summon leaders of the Community Action Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal, JAC) of the western Antioquia municipalities;¹²⁶ similar actions

are carried out in western Meta department.¹²⁷ In Ocaña, in Norte de Santander department, 33rd front commander “Rubén Zamora” still contacts civil society, and Secretariat commander Timochenko has allegedly summoned people to his base camp in the Catatumbo region.¹²⁸

The FARC’s ability to promote – or coerce – social protest and mobilise people against the government is evidently limited today. Among more recent examples are the marches of coca growers and harvesters (*raspachines*) against aerial and manual eradication of coca crops in southern Nariño department in May 2006 and early 2008¹²⁹ and marches by coca growers against manual eradication in the Lower Cauca region of northern Antioquia in early 2008, promoted by the 18th and 36th fronts.¹³⁰ However, these marches have not sparked protests in broader rural sectors, as the FARC is perceived to use residents as human shields against eradication campaigns, while leaving community leaders vulnerable to retaliation by NIAGs or repression by security forces.

In September-October 2008, sugar cane cutters in Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments demanded better working and living conditions and job stability from sugar mills profiting from heavy government-subsidised biofuel investments.¹³¹ In the same months, indigenous peoples in Cauca department demanded the government fulfil agreements to give land to their communities. After twenty Paez indigenous people were massacred in El Nilo (Cauca department) in 1991, the government agreed to compensate the communities with 15,663 hectares, including through the assignment of public land and the purchase of private land.¹³² In 1999, the Pastana administration committed to buying an additional 8,000 hectares to support development of the indigenous communities. The purchase of 4,800 hectares is pending due to soaring land prices in the region.¹³³

Crisis Group interview, human rights worker, Cúcuta, 31 October 2008.

¹²³ The Black Eagles operates with about 280 men in Ocaña, El Tarra, Tibú, Puerto Santander, El Zulia, San Cayetano, Los Patios, Villa del Rosario and Cúcuta, in Norte de Santander department. According to defectors, this group also has cocaine processing laboratories in Venezuela. “A la caza del ‘águila’ mayor”, *La Opinión*, 26 October 2008; and “Nos volamos sin importar que nos jugábamos la vida”, *La Opinión*, 28 October 2008.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, former FARC hostage, Cúcuta and Bogotá, 30 October, 11 November 2008.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, international humanitarian workers, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, conflict analyst, Medellín, 1 October 2008.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, farmers’ representative, Villavencio, 11 November 2008.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian NGO worker, Cúcuta, 31 October 2008.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, NGO workers based in Nariño department, Bogotá, January, February 2007. See Crisis Group Report, *Colombia’s New Armed Groups*, op. cit., pp. 11-14.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, conflict analyst and political analyst, Medellín, Bogotá, 1, 7 October 2008.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, labour union representatives, Bogotá, 5 February 2009.

¹³² The government and Cauca indigenous community leaders signed the agreements of La María (1995), Novirao (1996) and El Nilo (2005) for the purchase and transfer of lands to the communities. www.mininteriorjusticia.gov.co.

¹³³ “Reunión de Uribe con indígenas se frustró, pero el mandatario les propuso una nueva cita”, *El Tiempo*, 27 October 2008.

Indigenous peoples claim they need the lands to ensure food security for their growing population. Security forces charged both protests were infiltrated by pro-FARC individuals. This was preceded by the arrest of Liliyany Obando, director of a peasants union (FENSU-AGRO), as an alleged FARC member¹³⁴ and claims that the FARC's 6th front, led by "Sargento Pascuas", had infiltrated a small, radical sector of the indigenous movement – the so-called "Quintín Lame's grandsons" ("Los Nietos del Quintín Lame") – that participated in the large protests along the Panamerican highway in March 2007 and October 2008.¹³⁵ However, most indigenous communities in the south have come into direct confrontation with the FARC because they refuse to be extorted and let the insurgents use their territory as safe havens or recruitment sites.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ According to Colombian authorities, Obando is mentioned several times in the communications retrieved from Raúl Reyes's electronic storage devices as a key contact for recruitment of new FARC members and logistics personnel using FENSUAGRO as cover. In late February 2009, its secretary general, Juan Efraín Mendoza, was captured during an army operation against FARC units of the eastern bloc led by Bernardo Mosquera (alias "Negro Antonio"), José Guzmán (alias "Gaitán") and "Mariana Pérez", the latter of whom was killed, in the Sumapaz high mountain ranges south of Bogotá. Mendoza maintains he was kidnapped by the FARC on 25 February. The military says he was captured while attempting to escape through the mountains with other rebels. The union has declared its total independence from any illegal armed group, denounced repeated official harassment of its leadership and said it holds the government responsible for future actions against its over 120,000 associates. "Comunicado público que cese el señalamiento y estigmatización contra FENSUAGRO y sus dirigentes", FENSUAGRO press communiqué, 5 March 2009.

¹³⁵ The background involves a longstanding conflict for recovery of ancestral property rights. Quintín Lame (1880-1967) was an indigenous activist who fought for the land rights of the indigenous peoples of southern Colombia in the early 1900s. The Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC) was created in 1970 to defend the rights of the indigenous peoples to land and autonomy. The Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL) was created by the Cauca department indigenous peoples in 1984 to defend their communities from violence by large estate owners or insurgent groups. It demobilised in 1991, when some leaders served in the constituent assembly that wrote the 1991 constitution. Ricardo Peñaranda "Resistencia civil y tradiciones de resistencia en el suroccidente colombiano", in Francisco Gutiérrez (et al), *Nuestra guerra sin nombre* (Bogotá, 2006), pp. 552-555; "Las Farc alientan a indígenas del Cauca", *El Colombiano*, 18 October 2008; and Crisis Group interviews, senior intelligence officials and security agency analyst, 17, 22 October 2008.

¹³⁶ These disputes resulted in the killing of six members of the Awa indigenous community in 2007 and at least four in the first half of 2008. In November 2008, the local leader of

The FARC has also attempted to reach out to sectors in the military. Repeated efforts to infiltrate the security forces have had some success overall,¹³⁷ and according to press sources, in mid-2008 a political officer of the eastern bloc's 53rd front close to Mono Jojoy contacted retired senior officers, including generals, proposing to use them as intermediaries for "good faith, direct contacts" with the government, bypassing "lying politicians".¹³⁸ There may even have been such direct contacts between FARC commanders and military officers in other regions.¹³⁹

Winning the cities has always been the FARC's ultimate objective. However, its urban structures have historically been easier to detect and dismantle. As a result, the clandestine PCCC and MBNC became the preferred means for promoting and expanding its ideology nationally. While the underground networks of both prevent infiltration and protect the identities of members, their secret nature does not allow for rapid growth and development into mass movements. FARC field commanders are supposed to supervise these underground

the Gualcalá indigenous council was killed together with his mother. In February 2009, the FARC admitted to killing another eight Awas. See section II.B.4 above. "El pueblo Awá se mantiene alerta", International Peace Observatory, 7 September 2006; "Indicadores sobre derechos humanos y DIH Colombia: Enero – junio 2008", Human Rights Observatory, 2008; and 19-25 March and 19-25 November 2008 entries of the Weekly Press Logbook, Human Rights Observatory.

¹³⁷ On 1 February 2005, about 100 FARC attacked a naval infantry base in Iscuandé (Nariño), killing sixteen soldiers and injuring another 25. An inquiry found the FARC had previously infiltrated the troops. In October 2006, a car bomb that went off at the War College in Bogotá was allegedly brought in with the help of FARC member Marilú Rodríguez. Despite her arrest, little is known about the investigation. "Gobierno acepta que una guerrillera se infiltró en las FF.MM.", *El Espectador*, 13 November 2007. In a raid against the eastern bloc's 42nd front in Mesetas municipality (Meta), the army found classified information belonging to the Omega Task Force, the elite unit in charge of the most important operations of the anti-FARC "Patriot Plan". "Infiltrado el corazón de las Fuerzas Militares", *Semana*, 28 July 2007. Drug cartels, such as the Norte del Valle group, have probably been more effective than the FARC in infiltrating and corrupting security forces. Reportedly, the Vencedores, Palacé and Jamundí high mountain army battalions of the 3rd brigade in Valle del Cauca department were infiltrated by the Machos illegal armed group led by Diego Montoya (alias "Don Diego"), one of the Norte del Valle cartel bosses. Don Diego was captured in September 2007. "Corrupción hasta el tuétano", *Semana*, 8 November 2007.

¹³⁸ Steve Salisbury, "Las FARC querían dialogar con militares, no con políticos", *El Nuevo Herald*, 20 July 2008.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian NGO worker, Cúcuta, 31 October 2008.

cells, but they increasingly have to worry more about their own survival.¹⁴⁰

Intelligence, police and military sources believe that Alfonso Cano's new strategy is geared to using the 2010 general elections to reposition the FARC politically. Infiltration of left-wing and government opposition sectors on university campuses and social protests could make the socio-political environment more volatile, damaging Uribe's ambitions for re-election or to ensure a like-minded successor.¹⁴¹ Distribution of leaflets with revolutionary propaganda and parades at the Antioquia and National Universities in Medellín and the District University in Bogotá of hooded individuals who identified themselves as Bolivarian Youth Movement (MJB) members have raised alarms about FARC intentions on campuses.¹⁴² Responsibility for the parade at Antioquia University was claimed by the 36th front, revealing links between urban militias, MJB, PCCC and MBNC cells with fronts involved in drug trafficking.¹⁴³

9. International networks and the hostages-for-prisoners swap

In an attempt to appeal to a broader popular base in Latin America, the FARC has moved closer to the Bolivarian ideology.¹⁴⁴ Though its reinterpretation of

Simón Bolívar's thinking through a Marxist-Leninist lens is FARC's own,¹⁴⁵ its promotion as part of FARC's "anti-imperialistic" and Latin American unity agenda is intended to open doors in neighbouring countries.¹⁴⁶

Secretariat member Iván Márquez heads the FARC's "international front". With Cano, he was one of the initiators of the international Bolivarian Continental Coordination (*Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana*, CCB) in 2003.¹⁴⁷ According to the Colombian authorities, the computers seized after the killings of Raúl Reyes and Iván Ríos contained internal Secretariat communications indicating a closer than expected relationship between the FARC and the CCB.¹⁴⁸ While the CCB groups lack much popular support in Latin America, they are connected via political operators who share information and gather regularly.¹⁴⁹

dissolved in 1830 after his death. His stood for the unity of Latin American countries and their sovereignty against European interventions in the former colonies. Since the late 1970s, Bolívar's ideas have been integrated into the discourse of the Colombian guerrillas, especially the M-19; in the 1980s, a short-lived confederation of insurgent groups was named the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Body (*Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*, CGSB). FARC's current motto is "for the new Colombia, the greater fatherland and socialism" (*por la nueva Colombia, la patria grande y socialismo*), an allusion to the Gran Colombia of the nineteenth century. In Venezuela, Bolivarian ideology is a cornerstone of President Hugo Chávez's thinking.

¹⁴⁵ For a critical analysis of recently-appointed Secretariat member Pablo Catatumbo's earlier work on FARC's Bolivarian ideology, see *Burocracias armadas*, op. cit., pp. 142-144.

¹⁴⁶ An international observer with deep knowledge of the FARC does not believe it has gone any further into developing such Bolivarian thinking. Crisis Group interview, international observer, Geneva, 2 December 2008.

¹⁴⁷ The CCB was created to bring together Latin American social organisations to support struggle against "interventionism, neo-colonialism, and capitalist globalisation", and against Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative, among other objectives. It includes chapters from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela. At its second congress, in Quito, Ecuador, 24-27 February 2008, it decided to become the Bolivarian Continental Movement (MCB), continental socio-political movement to organise anti-imperialist revolutions "Plataforma de lucha", CCB, 7 August 2003; "Proclama bolivariana desde el centro del mundo", 26 February 2008, at www.conbolivar.org.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, intelligence and senior military officials, Bogotá, October 2008.

¹⁴⁹ According to excerpts of communications retrieved from Raúl Reyes's computers released by the authorities, Narciso Isa Conde, a Dominican Republic national who works with Latin American journals, and Amílkar Figueroa, a Venezuelan legislator and member of the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), were closely involved in CCB activities. Conde

¹⁴⁰ Clandestine political work may also be hampered in cities like Medellín, Cúcuta and Villavicencio, where large ex-paramilitary populations and police informant networks make it difficult for guerrilla supporters to go undetected. Crisis Group interviews, political analysts, journalists and humanitarian NGO workers, Medellín, Cúcuta, Villavicencio, October, November 2008.

¹⁴¹ Military sources believe the 2007 regional and local elections reflected some PCCC influence in municipalities of Atlántico, Antioquia and Tolima departments. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence and military senior officials, Bogotá, 8 October 2008.

¹⁴² Late Secretariat member Iván Ríos reportedly kept a detailed registry of infiltration activities in the universities of Antioquia and the coffee belt region. The attorney general's office recently accused 67 students and professors of being members of FARC support cells. In a raid on a FARC camp in La Macarena (Meta) in February 2008, security forces discovered records of 55 FARC members working or studying in universities. "Aulas por trincheras", *Semana*, 16 November 2008.

¹⁴³ The integration of militias and the clandestine political movements in order to conduct joint actions may be under way. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence and military senior officials, Bogotá, 8 October 2008.

¹⁴⁴ The ideology is a current of political thought inspired by the life and writing of Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), whose armies liberated the Andean republics of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. He was the architect of Gran Colombia (Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador), which

Since setting up the “international front” under Reyes in the early 1990s, the FARC has patiently been building a network of contacts in Latin America and Europe to advocate its struggle. In Europe, these contacts tend to be legal-resident Colombians, mostly in Spain, Italy, Greece, Switzerland and Sweden. There are also some local organisations, such as the Danish Fighters and Lovers Association, with little to no appeal for mainstream European society.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, these networks have been active in denouncing the Colombian government and lobbying to increase pressure against it in international forums.

During the 1999-2002 peace talks with the Pastrana administration, the “international front” sought to broaden the insurgents’ contacts and operations. However, the FARC’s strategic goal of obtaining international recognition as a belligerent force suffered a heavy blow with the end of those talks and its 2002 inclusion on EU and Canadian lists of foreign terrorist organisations. (The U.S. put the FARC on its list in 1997.)

Since mid-2007, a FARC under heavy military and political pressure from the Uribe government has made the hostages-for-prisoners swap a key objective – internally and abroad.¹⁵¹ International pressure, especially from French President Nicolas Sarkozy, pushed Uribe to authorise Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to facilitate the swap in August 2007.¹⁵² Chávez’s involvement, even after Uribe dismissed him as facilitator in November, his defence of the FARC’s belligerent status in January 2008, and the FARC’s unilateral release of six hostages in January and February 2008¹⁵³ gave the insurgency a political platform, however short-lived.¹⁵⁴

spoke at the 2008 congress. “El misterio de Lucía”, *Semana*, 21 April 2008, pp. 24-28; “La izquierda de la izquierda”, *Semana*, 15 March 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Small groups also support the FARC in Sweden, where ANNCOL news agency and the Café Stereo radio station broadcast related material. Crisis Group interviews, former Colombian diplomat and former international peace facilitator, Bogotá, Geneva, 28 November, 2 December 2008.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, French Colombia and FARC expert, Paris, 17 November 2008. A possible swap was a big political issue during Uribe’s first administration but has become a priority since 2007; see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°4, *Hostages for Prisoners: A Way to Peace in Colombia?*, 8 March 2004.

¹⁵² For the involvement of Chávez, see Crisis Group Briefing *Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off*, op. cit., and Crisis Group Latin America Report N°27, *Venezuela: Political Reform or Regime Demise?*, 23 July 2008.

¹⁵³ In January and February 2008, the FARC unilaterally released a first group of six politician hostages, including one former vice-presidential candidate. This was followed by Operation Jaque, the government rescue operation, in July

Frictions with the Colombian government after the raid on Raúl Reyes’s camp in March 2008, as well as Chávez’s open display of bias towards the FARC and the international condemnation and pressure it prompted, distanced Ecuador and Venezuela from the project of the swap. On 8 June 2008, Chávez unexpectedly called upon the FARC to abandon guerrilla warfare and unconditionally release all hostages. This was followed by a similar statement from President Rafael Correa offering Ecuador as a site for peace negotiations. Following Operation Jaque, both again, as well as Cuba’s Fidel Castro, called on the FARC to release all hostages.

After the attack on Reyes, the Ecuadorian military began a modernisation process with the purchase of new surveillance and interdiction equipment to be assigned to the northern border with Colombia.¹⁵⁵ Ecuador also implemented a new defence strategy aimed at denying sanctuary to the FARC or other Colombian illegal armed groups.¹⁵⁶ Venezuela has shown little evidence of a similar response at its borders with Colombia. The above-mentioned killing of eleven Valle del Cauca deputies in June 2007, as well as the embarrassing incident of Clara Rojas’s son Emmanuel in early 2008, the Operation Jaque hostage rescue and the escape of former Congressman Oscar Lizcano on 26 October 2008¹⁵⁷ further undermined the FARC’s political efforts.

2008, in which fifteen hostages were freed, and the FARC’s unilateral and unconditional release of a second group of six hostages (two politicians and four members of the security forces) in February 2009.

¹⁵⁴ The releases were the first step of a plan which supposedly would have led to freedom for all “political” hostages. In return Chávez and friendly countries (including Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and France) would have pressured Uribe to recognise the FARC as a political actor and subsequently allow France to propose its removal from the EU’s terrorist organisation list. Crisis Group interview, source involved in efforts to achieve an exchange, Bogotá, 10 November 2008.

¹⁵⁵ President Correa announced the purchase of radars, communication equipment, drones and light attack planes and the repowering of the jet fighter fleet. “Presidente quiere renovar flota militar para controlar frontera”, *El Universo*, 22 April 2008.

¹⁵⁶ “Combate en la frontera norte”, *La Hora*, 23 September 2008. “Los GIAC, la nueva amenaza a las FF.AA.”, *El Comercio*, 4 March 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Ex-Congressman Oscar Lizcano was kidnapped in Riosucio (Caldas department) by the FARC’s Aurelio Rodríguez front on 5 August 2000. After being cornered by the army in eastern Chocó department, the commander in charge of the security detail, Wilson Bueno Largo (alias “Isaza”), defected, brought Lizcano with him in late October 2008, received a COP1 billion (\$450,000) reward and was given, with his girlfriend, asylum in France. Pilar Lozano, “El Ejército co-

Against this backdrop, the FARC has been forced to adopt a more moderate strategy with regard to a hostages-for-prisoners swap. In a communiqué dated 5 July 2008, it acknowledged the government's success in Operation Jaque but continued to call for an exchange, surprisingly without mention of the prior demilitarisation of Florida and Pradera municipalities (Valle del Cauca department), previously a pre-condition. In a late October 2008 reply to an open letter sent on 11 September 2008 by Senator Piedad Córdoba and a group of over 100 Colombian academics, politicians and civil society representatives calling themselves Colombians for Peace (*Colombianos y Colombianas por la Paz*), the Secretariat agreed to begin an exchange of letters ("epistolary exchange") with civil society to find alternatives for addressing a deal.¹⁵⁸

In its second letter, the citizens' group asked the FARC to end kidnapping. The FARC's 17 December response, made public four days later, defended the claim for belligerency status and justified continued kidnapping of security forces, politicians and civilians as a way of funding the struggle.¹⁵⁹ The FARC's response also alluded to the possibility of eventually stopping kidnapping and announced the unilateral release of another six hostages, including former Valle del Cauca deputy Sigifredo López and former Meta governor Alan Jara.

Although this second unilateral hostage release could have been interpreted by large parts of the movement as giving in to the government's pressure and resolve to rescue the hostages by force, the Secretariat appears to have understood it as the only way to regain some political credibility. In subsequent communications, including New Year's messages to the troops from the Secretariat and Cano, dated 22 and 26 December respectively, the command did not refer to the issue, stressing

instead political struggle as a complement to military strategy.¹⁶⁰

In its third letter to Colombians for Peace, dated 30 December and published on 7 January 2009, the FARC reinforced its political objectives by calling on "friendly countries", in addition to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society organisations, to serve as guarantors in the unilateral release of hostages.¹⁶¹ In the next days, the government accepted the ICRC's proposal to use Brazilian air force helicopters in the release. According to a source close to events, Brazil met the criteria of being a neighbour with aircraft and crews capable of flying in Colombia's difficult topography.¹⁶²

The decision to release the hostages unilaterally shows that a degree of political cohesion and capacity to act exists within the FARC leadership. The release was announced by Cano, but the hostages were held by the eastern bloc and the western joint command, indicating a decision made by consensus. The FARC appears to have decided to carry out a hostages-for-prisoners swap involving only security force officers, whom it considers prisoners of war. In a communiqué dated 18 December, Secretariat member Pablo Catatumbo, the commander and friend closest to Cano, was named as head of the three-man commission charged with negotiating the deal with the government.¹⁶³

lombiano cercó a la guerrilla antes de rescatar a Lizcano", *El País*, 26 October 2008; Graham Keeley, "Trek to freedom for Óscar Lizcano held captive by Farc for eight years", *The Times*, 27 October 2008; "'Isaza' disfruta de su recompensa en Francia", *El Espectador*, 9 December 2008; "'Isaza' irá a Francia con una visa permanente que le permitiría estudiar y trabajar", *El Tiempo*, 8 December 2008.

¹⁵⁸The letters exchanged between Colombians for Peace and the FARC can be accessed at www.piedadcordoba.net. Civil society and women's organisations have long promoted humanitarian solutions to the hostage crisis as part of efforts to establish peace negotiations with the FARC and end the conflict. Organisations such as Movimiento Madres por la Vida (MMV) and Red Nacional de Iniciativas Ciudadanas por la Paz y contra la Guerra (REDEPAZ) have called attention to violence by both the insurgents and paramilitary groups.

¹⁵⁹"Farc anuncia liberación de Alan Jara, Sigifredo López y 4 secuestrados más", Radio Santa Fé, 22 December 2008.

¹⁶⁰Alfonso Cano, "Saludo de fin de año del camarada Alfonso Cano", 26 December 2008; and "Saludo de las FARC-EP", ANNCOL, 31 December 2008. The eastern and southern bloc commands issued communiqués in December reiterating their political goals and calling for respect of international humanitarian standards. "Saludo de fin de año a todos los Guerrilleros y masas organizadas de las FARC EP", Estado Mayor del Bloque Oriental, 26 December 2008, at http://frentean.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html.

¹⁶¹"Farc piden intervención de 'país hermano' para liberaciones", *El Espectador*, 7 January 2009.

¹⁶²Crisis Group interview, international observer, Bogotá, 13 February 2009. Also see Section IV.B below.

¹⁶³"Las FARC nombran a un nuevo miembro en la comisión negociadora sobre el canje de rehenes", *El País* (Spain), 24 December 2008.

III. GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

A. PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS

Since the early 1980s, a succession of governments has attempted but ultimately failed to design and implement a successful military-political strategy to resolve the conflict with the FARC. In particular, the administrations of Presidents César Gaviria (1990-1994) and Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) sought to pressure the insurgents by launching operations against the Secretariat and other leadership elements in the group's main strongholds.¹⁶⁴ These offensives, however, responded mainly to a lack of results at the negotiation table or were an effort to gain popular approval, rather than part of a long-term strategy to expand the presence of the state and the rule of law across the country and achieve lasting peace. Secretariat members escaped the attacks, fighters moved to other regions, and the FARC returned with reinforcements to deal blows to the security forces.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴In 1990, the day the constitutional assembly in which the FARC refused to participate was installed, the Gaviria administration ordered the siege of La Uribe, site of Marulanda's headquarters (Casa Verde). Marulanda escaped, and the Secretariat retreated. In 1997, Samper launched Operations Destructor I and II to capture members of the Secretariat in Meta, Caquetá and Huila. After a month of intense airstrikes and combat, the government acknowledged failure.

¹⁶⁵Between August 1996 and November 1998, the FARC launched large attacks on military and police bases in the south, causing a crisis in the security forces. While the guerrillas strengthened themselves, the security forces remained reactive, with limited intelligence. 31 soldiers were killed in a joint FARC-ELN ambush in Puerres (Nariño department) in April 1996. On 30 August, the FARC's southern bloc attacked the base at Las Delicias (Putumayo), killing 29 soldiers and kidnapping 60. A few days later, 24 soldiers were killed in La Carpa (Guaviare). In February 1997, nineteen were killed in San Juanito (Meta). In July, a FARC unit shot down a helicopter and attacked a military patrol, killing 30. On 27 December, the FARC attacked the communications base in Patascoy (Nariño), killing eleven soldiers and taking eighteen hostage. In March 1998, a special unit of the 3rd army brigade lost 63 soldiers. The FARC carried out several offensives across the country during the 1998 presidential election, leaving more than 100 dead and kidnapping more security personnel. Shortly before the Pastrana inauguration on 3 August 1998, it attacked the anti-narcotics base in Miraflores (Guaviare), killing 40 police and military and taking 56 hostages. On 1 November, it launched a major operation against Mitú, the capital of Vaupés department, that left sixteen members of the security forces dead and kidnapped 61. Francisco Leal, *La Inseguridad de la Seguridad, Colombia*

The illegal paramilitaries contained the FARC and in many regions rolled it back throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Especially in the north the AUC occupied territory, killed alleged guerrilla supporters and militias and used terror tactics to intimidate the population. At the same time, it developed an image of a counter-insurgent force that was only responding to FARC and ELN brutality, obtaining support in the process from the regional political and economic elites.¹⁶⁶ After AUC demobilisation (2003-2006), however, it became increasingly apparent that outright defeat of the guerrillas had not been the paramilitaries' priority. Large-scale clashes with the insurgents occurred but were in many cases the result of the paramilitaries' drive to control strategic areas for drug trafficking and other illegal activities.¹⁶⁷ Some paramilitary blocs sought collaboration with FARC fronts based on a tacit territorial division and business arrangements.¹⁶⁸

The government's efforts to achieve a military victory over the FARC have been hampered by the great difficulties associated with containing coca cultivation and drug trafficking. Since the early 1980s, narcotics have been the insurgents' main source of income. Before 2000, governments saw the growth of the FARC and drug trafficking as separate issues. Security forces focused on dismantling the trafficking organisations, while the FARC extended its presence and control in coca crop areas and worked hand-in-hand with emerging baby cartels, acquiring thereby the means to buy the arms it needed on the international black market.¹⁶⁹

1958-2005 (Bogotá 2006), p. 149; "Más de 12 años de secuestros de las FARC", *El Mundo* (Spain), 26 October 2008.

¹⁶⁶For analysis of the paramilitary groups, see Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°5, *Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries*, 16 September 2003; N°8, *Demobilising the Paramilitaries in Colombia: An Achievable Goal?*, 5 August 2004; and N°17, *Uribe's Re-election: Can the EU Help Colombia Develop a More Balanced Peace Strategy?*, 8 June 2006, pp. 4-7; also *Las Farc ¿Una guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?*, op. cit., pp. 131-140.

¹⁶⁷Practices such as killing of civilians, including massacres, and displacement tended to increase sharply as the paramilitaries attempted to take over territories previously controlled by the FARC.

¹⁶⁸In the Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander), for example, the FARC controlled the upper half of the Catatumbo River in the more mountainous areas and the AUC's Catatumbo Bloc held the lower part of the river.

¹⁶⁹In regions such as Southern Bolívar, the FARC sets prices and taxes for cultivation, processing and selling, while in others, such as Meta and Norte de Santander, it has been known to purchase paste and base with bonds for resale to traffickers. In other regions, such as the Pacific Coast in Nariño, it is believed to be involved in shipping drugs overseas. In Vichada and Caquetá, the 16th and 43rd fronts are

From the early 1980s until the arrival of Uribe in 2002, all Colombian governments sought in one way or another to negotiate with the FARC. Often they were constrained in this by lack of public support and indeed by the outright opposition of influential political, economic and military actors to any rapprochement.¹⁷⁰ In 1998, faced with a seriously adverse military situation that threatened to get out of control, the Conservative party presidential candidate, Andrés Pastrana, made negotiations a key component of his campaign after he trailed the Liberal party candidate, Horacio Serpa, in the first round. The FARC was then so strong that it was capable of large attacks against government forces and military outposts. Pastrana applied a two-tier strategy to this difficult situation: he sought to modernise and strengthen the security forces through cooperation with the U.S. in Plan Colombia but also to end the conflict by holding what were ultimately unsuccessful peace talks.

As president-elect, he met with FARC Secretariat members Manuel Marulanda and Mono Jojoy and, once in office, he created a demilitarised zone (DMZ) encompassing five municipalities in the south as a concession to the insurgents. Despite agreement on a joint agenda,¹⁷¹ the talks never got to the stage of true peace negotiations. The FARC appeared more interested in

involved in cocaine processing. Crisis Group Report, *Drugs in Latin America I*, op. cit.

¹⁷⁰The military reportedly blamed the peace talks of the Betancur government (1984-1987) for preventing a military victory and strengthening the guerrillas. *La seguridad de la inseguridad*, op. cit., pp. 84-85. Establishment of a DMZ in which to negotiate by President Samper, who was deeply immersed in a scandal over drug money in his campaign, was strongly resisted by the armed forces commanding general, Harold Bedoya. Samper's approval ratings plummeted, and his end-of-term peace efforts received little public backing. Similarly, the Pastrana negotiations began to lose support as the FARC's abuses inside the DMZ became known. Sensing this, members of the opposition and other economic and political sectors began to promote a tough stance vis-à-vis the FARC in the 2002 presidential and congressional campaigns.

¹⁷¹The "Joint Agenda for the Change towards a New Colombia" was signed by Peace Commissioner Víctor G. Ricardo and the FARC representatives in La Machaca district (Caquetá department) on 16 May 1999. It contained one procedural and twelve substantive points to be discussed at the negotiating table: need for an agreed political solution; human rights protection as a state responsibility; a comprehensive agrarian policy; exploitation and conservation of natural resources; the country's socio-economic structure; justice reform; the fight against corruption and drug trafficking; political reform and the broadening of democracy; state reform; accords on respect for international humanitarian law; armed forces reform; international relations; and formalisation of the final agreements. Guillermo Fernández de Soto, *La ilusión posible* (Bogotá, 2004), pp 147-150.

keeping the talks alive while building up its strength. It used the argument of lack of effective government action against spreading paramilitary violence to block any significant advances in the talks. Pastrana extended the duration of the DMZ eleven times but finally ended the talks in February 2002.¹⁷²

B. WHAT IS DIFFERENT UNDER URIBE?

Building on Plan Colombia and the beginning of military modernisation in 1999, Uribe sought to establish a long-term security policy, his Democratic Security Policy (DSP).¹⁷³ As a first measure, it focused on regaining control of areas close to large urban centres, highways and infrastructure. In 2002-2003, security forces launched a series of offensives that pushed the FARC out of strategic locations in Cundinamarca and Antioquia departments.¹⁷⁴ The 2004-2006 effort focused on the south. Operation "Plan Patriota" deployed 17,500 troops in large-scale actions against strongholds of FARC fronts and mobile columns in dense tropical jungle zones of Caquetá, Meta and Guaviare departments.¹⁷⁵ Having forced the FARC into a "strategic retreat", how-

¹⁷²Crisis Group Report, *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, op. cit.; and Carlos Lozano, "El Conflicto con las FARC medio siglo a la espera de la Paz", in Alfredo Rangel (et al.), *Que, cómo y cuándo negociar con las FARC* (Bogotá, 2008).

¹⁷³The counter-drug and counter-insurgency strategy has been mainly supported through the U.S.-Colombia multi-billion dollar Plan Colombia, under which Washington has provided some \$6 billion. Colombia has also received military and security technical assistance from other countries, including the UK and Israel.

¹⁷⁴Operations "Libertad I and II" helped to dismantle or badly cripple eleven FARC fronts in Cundinamarca department and kill five commanders, including "Marco Aurelio Buendía", in 2003. Between 2002 and 2003, Operations "Mariscal", "Meteoro", "Orión" and "Marcial" were carried out to dismantle urban militias and fronts in the Medellín slums as well as the FARC and ELN fronts in eastern Antioquia department. These units had continuously disrupted traffic on the Bogotá-Medellín highway with roadblocks and attacked the electric grid. Operation Orión has been harshly criticised due to the alleged cooperation with urban paramilitary units. Jineth Bedoya, *En las trincheras del Plan Patriota* (Bogotá, 2008); and "General Mario Montoya Uribe dejó huellas nefastas en Antioquia", Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC), 11 May 2008.

¹⁷⁵Operation "Jorge Mora" was carried out in Putumayo department in 2004. In Operation "Emperador" in Meta department in 2006, the army carried out intensive strikes against the FARC to protect manual coca eradication in the Macarena National Park. Ibid; see also Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°9, *Colombia's Borders: The Weak Link in Uribe's Security Policy*, 23 September 2004; *War and Drugs in Colombia*, op. cit.; and *Uribe's Re-election*, op. cit.

ever, the offensive appeared to reach its limit in 2005-2006. In the lead-up to the May 2006 presidential elections, the FARC countered with deadly ambushes and other attacks against security forces, local governments and civil society.¹⁷⁶

Uribe acknowledged the need for security forces to adapt to the new circumstances and reduce their vulnerability to hit-and-run tactics.¹⁷⁷ Their rapid growth from 307,000 in 2002 to almost 404,000 in 2007 had not been matched by an equal increase in and training of commanding officers and adjustment of operational procedures, with the result that command-and-control structures were weakened.¹⁷⁸ Also, the element of surprise had been lost: combat incidents initiated by the army dropped from over 1,250 in 2003 to less than 1,050 by 2005.¹⁷⁹ The government realised that forcing the FARC to retreat would not be enough. Stronger coordination between army, navy, air force and police, improved training of elite units, enhancement of tactical, logistical and technical capabilities and better intelligence gathering, analysis and sharing, as well as the defection of more FARC fighters, were required to erode the insurgency's internal cohesion and deal blows to its as yet untouched command and financial structures.¹⁸⁰

The government finally recognised that military advances would be temporary if security forces were unable to

consolidate their presence and support reestablishment of the rule of law in the regained territory. In 2007, it launched its Democratic Security Consolidation Policy (DSCP) aimed at expanding security force presence in remote areas, in order to provide a foundation for civilian state institutions, notably those of the justice sector, and integrated social investment programs, including rural infrastructure investment and economic alternatives to coca cultivation.

Since 2000, when Plan Colombia was launched, the government has combined its counter-insurgency and counter-drug strategies. According to official reports, the sustained military operations have severely disrupted FARC's drug-trafficking activities.¹⁸¹ However, the overall results of Plan Colombia in reducing drug trafficking are meagre. Despite the aerial spraying of more than a million hectares across the country since 2002¹⁸² and increasing levels of manual eradication, coca cultivation areas decreased from 165,000 to 76,000 hectares between 2003 and 2006 but sharply rose again to 99,000 hectares in 2007.¹⁸³ Cocaine flows remained constant as potential production stayed stable at around 600 tons in 2006-2007. Seizures dropped from 140 tons in 2006 to 128 tons in 2007 but recorded a steep increase to 206 tons in 2008.¹⁸⁴

Uribe's military successes and overall tough approach with the FARC have allowed him to maintain high support.¹⁸⁵ Powerful economic sectors have financed much of the military strategy by twice paying a wealth tax, estimated to produce over nine trillion Colombian

¹⁷⁶ On 1 February 2005, the FARC killed sixteen naval infantry soldiers and injured another 25 in Iscuandé (Nariño). In an ambush less than a week later, nineteen soldiers and one officer were killed in Mutatá (Antioquia). An ambush on a patrol along the Fortul-Tame route (Arauca) killed eighteen on 5 April 2005. From 14 to 17 April, about 150 fighters of the 6th front and the Jacobo Arenas mobile column attacked Toribío municipality (Cauca), killing three police and a child and destroying several public buildings; three days later, FARC fighters returned and partially destroyed the hospital where injured victims of the first attack were being treated. FARC members massacred four members and the secretary at a session of the Puerto Rico (Caquetá) municipal council on 24 May 2005 and killed seven peasants (a further 25 people were reported as disappeared) in San Miguel (Putumayo) on 31 July. In Vista Hermosa (Meta), FARC attacked coca growers, killing thirteen on 2 October. "Los principales ataques de las FARC", *Semana*, 19 December 2006.

¹⁷⁷ "Rueda de Prensa del Presidente Uribe al término del Consejo de Seguridad", Servicio de Noticias del Estado (SNE), 12 February 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°11, *Tougher Challenges for Colombia's Uribe*, 20 October 2006.

¹⁷⁹ "Impacto de la Política de Seguridad Democrática sobre la confrontación armada, el narcotráfico y los derechos humanos", Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y DIH, August 2008.

¹⁸⁰ "Gobierno presenta cambios estructurales en la fuerza pública", SNE, 10 October 2006.

¹⁸¹ The FARC has a presence in 93 of 196 municipalities with coca crops. The government estimates its revenues may have dropped from over \$1.3 billion in 2002 to roughly \$500 million in 2007. "Tendencias y resultados 2007", defence ministry, 28 January 2008.

¹⁸² Markus Schultze-Kraft, "Narcotráfico en América Latina", op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁸³ Ibid; Crisis Group Report, *Latin American Drugs I*, op. cit; and "Colombia Monitoréo Cultivos de Coca", UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), June 2008. The U.S. estimates that coca growing in Colombia increased from 157,200 hectares in 2006 to 167,000 hectares in 2007. Press release, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), 10 September 2008.

¹⁸⁴ "Colombia Monitoreo Cultivos de Coca", op. cit., p. 44; "Logros de la política de Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática - PCSD", defence ministry, September 2008; and "Boletín, Balance operativo antinarcóticos. Enero 1 a noviembre 23 de 2008", Colombian Antinarcotics Police, November 2008.

¹⁸⁵ This has been combined with increasing popular rejection of FARC actions, as shown by the massive demonstrations against kidnapping, violence and FARC on 4 February, 20 July and 28 November 2008.

pesos (COP) (around \$4 billion), first in 2003, then over a four-year period (2007-2010).¹⁸⁶

The official line is that the FARC will only negotiate seriously if weakened militarily beyond the possibility of recovery.¹⁸⁷ Although on occasions Uribe has said he would be willing to discuss a constitutional assembly once the FARC agrees to disarm and demobilise,¹⁸⁸ it is clear he prefers outright surrender and prosecution under the Justice and Peace law (JPL), similar to the process with the AUC, to negotiating a substantive political agenda with the FARC.¹⁸⁹ He has launched a national and international campaign to discredit the FARC's political aspirations and deny any justification for its armed struggle, arguing Colombia is a democracy where every group can seek power through peaceful political activity.¹⁹⁰ He consistently labels the FARC a "terrorist group" due to its use of methods proscribed by international humanitarian law.¹⁹¹

Officials also describe the FARC as nothing more than a "narco-terrorist group" bereft of political aspirations.¹⁹² At the same time, they assert that most of its demands during the negotiations with the Pastrana administration, including paramilitary demobilisation, have already been met.¹⁹³ In an early 2008 tour of European capitals, Uribe obtained assurances that the EU would not remove the FARC from its list of terrorist organisations.

¹⁸⁶ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Making Military Progress Pay Off*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, senior government official and senior army intelligence officer, 21, 22 October 2008.

¹⁸⁸ In his second inaugural (9 August 2006), Uribe alluded to possible negotiations with the FARC. On 6 October 2006, the government confirmed the conditions for such talks. "Comunicado 006", Servicio de Noticias del Estado (SNE), 6 October 2006.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group Briefing, *Making Military Progress Pay Off*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Álvaro Uribe, "Lo válido para una democracia europea, es válido para una democracia latinoamericana", in Libardo Botero (ed.), *Crímenes Altruistas, las razones del presidente Uribe para abolir el delito político en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2007), p. 87.

¹⁹¹ Ibid; Section II.B.4 above; Schultze-Kraft, "Reflexiones", op. cit.

¹⁹² The term "narco-guerrilla" was coined in 1982 by U.S. Ambassador Lewis Tambs. Officials have modified it, calling the FARC a drug cartel. During a Washington visit, presidential adviser José Obdulio Gaviria said the FARC was turning into a drug-trafficking criminal gang. "Conflicto armado, postconflicto, paramilitarismo y aguilas negras", *El Tiempo*, 14 August 2008.

¹⁹³ "Rueda de Prensa de los presidentes Álvaro Uribe Vélez y José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero", SNE, 23 January 2008.

While the Uribe government has sought formulas to obtain release of the hostages,¹⁹⁴ it has also tried to minimise any political or strategic advantage the FARC might gain from promoting a hostages-for-prisoners swap, by refusing to create a demilitarised zone in which to conduct discussions and demanding a guarantee that freed FARC members will not take up arms again. On 27 March 2008, the government issued a decree authorising release of imprisoned insurgents, including those responsible for serious crimes such as kidnapping, if the FARC released hostages.¹⁹⁵ The French government agreed to grant temporary political asylum to freed insurgents. According to sources close to the process, the FARC showed interest in this formula, which did not include a demilitarised zone.¹⁹⁶

Concurrently, to apply pressure for a unilateral release, the government ordered security forces to form a "humanitarian circle" ("*cercos humanitarios*") around jungle and mountain areas where the FARC was holding the hostages. But as French and Swiss delegates sought contact with the FARC to discuss details in late June,¹⁹⁷ the government executed Operation Jaque. That operation was questioned because it was camouflaged as a humanitarian effort in which use of the ICRC emblem violated international law. It also appears that the Uribe administration used the Swiss and French facilitators, who at the time were given authorisation to establish contact with the FARC leadership to lay the groundwork for a new hostages-for-prisoners swap, to confuse the insurgents. Through the dramatic rescue of fifteen hostages, including Ingrid Betancourt and three U.S. contractors, the government gained the

¹⁹⁴ On December 2005, Uribe quickly agreed to a limited Zone of Encounter – 150 sq. km in Florida and Pradera municipalities – for 30 days, as proposed by France, Spain and Switzerland. The FARC rejected this on the grounds that it had not been consulted. In May 2007, Uribe unilaterally released some 180 FARC prisoners as well as FARC "foreign minister" Rodrigo Granda, a decision backed by French President Sarkozy.

¹⁹⁵ Executive Decree 880 of 27 March 2008 regulates Law 975 of 2005 (the Justice and Peace law, JPL), authorising the president to give benefits to demobilised members of illegal armed groups, if they undertake activities that considered a contribution to finding and establishing peace. In the case of hostage liberation, it allows the government to request judicial authorities to suspend a demobilised combatant's sentence conditionally.

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, source involved in efforts to achieve a hostages-for-prisoners swap, Bogotá, 10 November 2008.

¹⁹⁷ French envoy Noël Saez and Swiss envoy Jean Pierre Gontard were unable to meet Pablo Catatumbo but did meet "Aldemar", commander of the 29th front and Cano's delegate, in Nariño on 28 June 2008. "Antes de liberaciones, 'Alfonso Cano' habría aceptado contactos", *El Espectador*, 8 July 2008.

upper hand once more, both dealing the FARC a strong blow and deflecting international pressure for a swap.

In early February 2009, the government accepted the ICRC role and Brazilian logistical support as the only international facilitation for a unilateral FARC release of hostages. This came almost three years after it had requested establishment of a facilitation commission encompassing France, Switzerland and Spain,¹⁹⁸ but represented a shift from the mid-July 2008 announcement that had indicated willingness to establish direct contact with the rebels to negotiate a hostages-for-prisoners exchange with no outside help.

Seeking to discredit international facilitation immediately after Operation Jaque, however, the government used information retrieved from Raúl Reyes's computers to publicly charge that the Swiss and French facilitators were pro-FARC, had carried out errands for the insurgents since 2000 and had achieved nothing with their facilitation. Swiss citizen Jean Pierre Gontard is being prosecuted for purportedly having illegally transported a \$500,000 kidnapping ransom for the FARC in 2001.¹⁹⁹ Judicial investigations have also been opened against former Colombian facilitators, including Senator Piedad Córdoba, Álvaro Leyva and Carlos Lozano.²⁰⁰

IV. THE PROSPECTS

The FARC's resilience is being put to the test by seven years of sustained government military offensives that have clearly weakened it. Evidence suggests, however, that the insurgents are not close to defeat in the short or even medium term and that the best option for the Uribe administration would be to complement continued military pressure with a comprehensive strategy aimed at establishing peace negotiations, stepping up efforts to protect human rights, expanding the rule of law across the country and improving protection of vulnerable populations.²⁰¹

A. SHORTCOMINGS OF URIBE'S STRATEGY

Adopting that course of action would require policy changes. The current strategy foreclosing political talks is beset by a number of problems. Uribe has not moved quickly to name a replacement for Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, who stepped down on 12 March to run for office in 2010.²⁰² Further, the effort to continue eroding FARC command-and-control structures via the defection of fighters faces legal uncertainties.

The government has shown interest in using the Justice and Peace law (JPL) to encourage surrender and demobilisation of individual fighters and splinter groups of insurgents. On 27 February 2009, it issued Decree No. 614, allowing it to request judicial authorities to suspend arrest warrants against members of illegal armed groups who may help in achieving "humanitarian agreements", namely the release of hostages.²⁰³ Shortly thereafter, it used this decree to release from prison two commanders who had defected, "Karina" and "Olivo Saldaña",²⁰⁴ justifying the move on the grounds that both had agreed to give up the armed struggle and

²⁰¹ A blueprint for such a strategy can be found in Crisis Group Report, *Uribe's Re-election*, op. cit.

²⁰² During his time as commissioner, Restrepo was not considered an advocate of a political strategy for dealing with the FARC.

²⁰³ The suspension of an arrest warrant will not entail the end of a criminal investigation against a demobilised fighter. The measure applies only to fighters who give up the armed struggle and agree to become "peace advocates" ("*gestores de paz*").

²⁰⁴ Raúl Agudelo (alias "Olivo Saldaña") was the FARC joint central command's finance chief before his capture in August 2004. In prison he decided to quit the FARC and became a key government contact for the demobilisation of at least 70 fighters in Tolima department in early 2006 and a main advocate of Hands for Peace (Manos por la Paz), a grouping of imprisoned FARC fighters who refuse to be part of any hostages-for-prisoners swap.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group Briefings, *Hostages for Prisoners; Colombia: Making Military Progress Pay Off*, and Crisis Group Report, *Uribe's Re-election*, all op. cit.

¹⁹⁹ For Gontard's version of the events, see a televised interview broadcast on Swiss TSR's "Temps Présent" program, 5 February 2009, available at www.tsr.ch/tsr/index.html?siteSect=500000&bcid=647100#vid=10293552.

²⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, former senator, Bogota, 10 November 2008.

become “peace advocates” (“*gestores de paz*”) in order to encourage further defections. The government has been criticised, however, for not taking into account the rights of their victims.²⁰⁵

Decree No. 614 was coupled with announcement of a reform bill that would allow demobilised fighters to receive alternative sentences under the JPL if they confess to all crimes committed before the day of their demobilisation. This followed three days after a Supreme Court ruling virtually barring the use of the JPL to encourage FARC demobilisations.²⁰⁶ The court concluded that alternative sentences under the JPL are only possible for the confession of crimes committed before 25 July 2005 – the day the law came into force. Specifically, it ruled that 120 demobilised or imprisoned guerrillas who have requested JPL trials, including Karina, Olivo Saldaña and a third senior FARC figure, “Martín Sombra”,²⁰⁷ must be tried and sentenced under the common criminal law for crimes committed after 25 July 2005.

The JPL problem is not the only difficulty, however. Defection and demobilisation numbers depend to a large extent on the government's ability to make good on the incentives it promises to former combatants. As of February 2009, the program managed by the office of the High Counsellor for Reinsertion (ACR) covered 50,000 ex-paramilitaries and insurgents,²⁰⁸ but its long-term financial sustainability may be at risk due to the increasing numbers of ex-FARC and ex-ELN fighters, who are already 35 per cent of the total.²⁰⁹ The ACR will

also need to strengthen the training it offers in order to improve the prospects for successfully reinserting former combatants into society and providing them opportunities for normal lives.

Human rights violations committed by state agents continue to be of great concern,²¹⁰ and efforts to consolidate the presence of security forces and the rule of law in conflict-ridden areas are still at an early stage. The institution that seeks to coordinate the activities of a number of state institutions in the regions (Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral, CCAI)²¹¹ has been slow to begin its work. Although a central part of the administration's security consolidation strategy, it still lacks a clear legal and institutional foundation. Activities are under way in only 62 of 1,098 municipalities in eleven high-priority regions.²¹² Official figures show improvements in basic infrastructure, education and health as well as security in its priority areas.²¹³

Group, email communication with the ACR's office, 26 November 2008.

²¹⁰“Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights”, op. cit; and “2008 Human Rights Reports: Colombia”, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, 25 February 2009.

²¹¹ Within the framework of the DSCP, the defence ministry developed the Integrated Action Doctrine (DAI), which coordinates security and rule of law operations with social action. The CCAIs are the entities to coordinate the measures necessary to recover (or incorporate for the first time) areas previously controlled by the insurgency. Managed by the Acción Social presidential agency, they coordinate fourteen state institutions, including the security forces, justice sector and local civilian authorities. In the municipalities where a CCAI is not available, security forces are to coordinate activities with local authorities and civil society representatives. “Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security”, defence ministry, 2007, pp. 33-34.

²¹² The CCAIs cover eleven regions where military operations are taking place and the humanitarian situation needs urgent action: the southern zone (includes ten municipalities in Meta and Caquetá departments), Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (eight municipalities in Magdalena, Cesar and Guajira), Catatumbo (ten municipalities in Norte de Santander), Córdoba (three municipalities), Apartadó and Middle and Lower Atrato (nine municipalities in Antioquia and Chocó), Arauca (four municipalities), Tumaco (one municipality in Nariño), northern Cauca (six municipalities in Cauca), Putumayo (six municipalities), Buenaventura (one municipality in Valle del Cauca), Montes de María (four municipalities in Bolívar and Sucre).

²¹³ Acción Social reported that, between 2004 and late 2008, participation of communities in CCAI programs had increased as well as health care (1.6 million people) and high-school education coverage (709,000 students). Homicides had dropped from 2,323 in 2007 to 1,589 in 2008 in the municipalities included in the program, half of which have permanent pres-

²⁰⁵ Neither Karina nor Olivo Saldaña have confessed all their crimes or begun the reparation process for their victims. “Fuerte polémica por decisión de excarcelación de la desmovilizada guerrillera de las Farc ‘Karina’”, *El Tiempo*, 6 March 2009.

²⁰⁶ The 24 February 2009 Supreme Court ruling came after a paramilitary confessed to having participated in a massacre on 28 February 2006, seven months after the JPL was passed. “Delitos cometidos después del 25 de julio de 2005 no serán cobijados por Ley de Justicia y Paz”, *El Tiempo*, 26 February 2009.

²⁰⁷ Hely Mejía Mendoza (alias “Martín Sombra”) has been a FARC member for more than 40 years and a member of the general staff (EMC); known as the “jailer”, he was in charge of guarding many prominent hostages in the east. The 120 in question also include members of the ELN and two smaller insurgent groups, the EPL (Popular Liberation Army) and the ERG (Guevarist Revolutionary Army).

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior government official, Bogotá, 22 October 2008. “Llegamos a los 50.000 desmovilizados en Colombia”, press release, ACR office, 20 February 2009, at www.reintegracion.gov.co.

²⁰⁹ The ACR's office budget is COP180,000 million (about \$78.3 million) per year between 2008 and 2010, out of which the international community contributes 4 per cent. Crisis

The Comprehensive Fusion Centre (Centro de Fusión Integral) in La Macarena region (western Meta department) has been set up with contributions from the defence ministry and U.S. cooperation. It is part of the government's effort to promote investment in basic infrastructure and development projects so as to encourage voluntary coca crop eradication and alternative crops. So far, over \$43 million has been invested, and the intention is to replicate the experience in other parts of the country.²¹⁴

Nevertheless, local sources in Meta told Crisis Group some communities remain apprehensive about a FARC resurgence should the government fail to keep the CCAI promise of permanent presence.²¹⁵ Moreover, local civilian governance and decentralisation at the municipal level could be at risk due to the security forces' excessive role in many programs, as well as the expanded executive and financial powers of the CCAI regional heads ("padrinos", "godfathers"). Their lavish budgets and lack of long-term state-building vision leave regional and local governments dependent on them for public works and investments while failing to create the conditions for permanently strengthening authority and management capacity. A source working closely with local and indigenous communities in Putumayo and Arauca and on the Caribbean coast told Crisis Group that CCAI regional heads arrive with development projects – frequently biofuel and agro-industrial – designed in Bogotá that fail to take local community initiatives, often led by women, and needs into account.²¹⁶

B. THE HOSTAGE ISSUE

After Operation Jaque, the escape of Oscar Lizcano and the massive civic marches against kidnapping, the government hoped the FARC Secretariat would feel compelled to release all hostages – political, security force and "economic" – unconditionally.²¹⁷ However, the Colombians for Peace initiative of exchanging open

ence of prosecutors from the attorney general's office. "Hechos de Acción Social para la Recuperación Social del Territorio", Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, November 2008.

²¹⁴ "Centro de Fusión Integral representa la verdadera consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática: Mindefensa", defence ministry, 7 February 2009.

²¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, farmers' representative, Villavicencio, 11 November 2008.

²¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian NGO official and government official, Bogotá, 19, 26 February 2009.

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 28 November 2008. "Vicepresidente Santos afirma que la expresión 'acuerdo humanitario' no tiene razón de ser", *El Tiempo*, 28 November 2008.

letters with the FARC, as well as the latter's subsequent unilateral release of six hostages, reopened the debate over an exchange.²¹⁸ This came amidst growing popular concerns about the country's future,²¹⁹ scandals over extra-judicial killings and other serious human rights abuses committed by security forces²²⁰ and large social protests in the south west.²²¹ The Uribe administration has downplayed the importance of the social protests, claiming they were infiltrated by the FARC and intended to destabilise the government.²²²

Cano and the other Secretariat members are trying to demonstrate that they are not divided on fundamental issues, and important decisions are still being taken by consensus.²²³ The recent bombings in Bogotá and Cali, ambushes of security forces and attacks on communities accused of lacking commitment to the FARC may

²¹⁸ On the hostages, political and military, held by the FARC and its many attempts to trade them for imprisoned fighters, see Crisis Group Briefings, *Hostages for Prisoners* and *Making Military Progress Pay Off*, both op. cit.

²¹⁹ While survey polls recorded a steep increase in worries about the country's future – from 14 to 42 per cent between July and October 2008, Uribe's approval ratings began to decline, albeit less steeply: from 85 per cent in July 2008, after Operation Jaque, to 75 per cent in October. 52 per cent expressed concerns for the economy, 23 per cent for insecurity in the main cities and 15 per cent for corruption at some levels of government. Gallup poll cited in "Se dispara pesimismo en Colombia, pero Uribe mantiene popularidad: encuesta", *El Economista* (Spain), 1 November 2008.

²²⁰ In late September 2008, forensic analysis showed that at least twelve exhumed bodies in Ocaña (Norte de Santander department) were of young men recruited by unidentified groups in Soacha, a poor municipality south of Bogotá, whom the military subsequently listed as killed in action. As a result of ongoing investigations, the government on 29 October relieved eighteen senior and two low-ranking officers and seven non-commissioned officers in units in Norte de Santander, Antioquia and Meta departments, as well as officers who operated in Cesar and Casanare departments. Crisis Group will analyse this issue in a forthcoming briefing.

²²¹ On the protests, see Section II.B above. Unionised judicial sector, customs and national registry office workers, as well as members of indigenous movements and sugar cane cutters, demanded better working and social conditions. On 17 November 2008 violent protests in several southern and central towns and cities after collapse of a series of "pyramid" investment schemes left thousands in dire economic conditions. Most of the "pyramids" are suspected of having served as money-laundering operations.

²²² In Nariño and Putumayo departments, security forces believe the FARC has been coercing the population to mobilise and protest against the government. Crisis Group interview, intelligence officers, Pasto, 6 November 2008.

²²³ Markus Schultze-Kraft, "Farc en el 2009: ¿renacimiento político 'inducido' como oportunidad para la resolución del conflicto?", *UN Periódico*, 8 March 2009, p. 6.

be intended to boost morale by giving fighters the impression that the organisation can still take the initiative after its 2008 setbacks.²²⁴

Concurrently the continued letter exchanges with Colombians for Peace²²⁵ show that the FARC is also attempting to reshuffle its political options.²²⁶ The Secretariat has become aware that its obstinacy in holding on to kidnapped civilians as well as military and police officers for years – in many cases, more than a decade – has been highly damaging to its credibility domestically and abroad. Having lost or given up its politician hostages, the leadership has stepped up its demand for a “prisoner of war” swap in which 22 police and military officers and non-commissioned officers would be exchanged for 500 imprisoned FARC members. While it has dropped the demand for a demilitarised zone in which to negotiate the deal, it is still far from agreeing to stop kidnapping for political or economic reasons and appears unimpressed by the over 1,000 imprisoned FARC members who have signed letters rejecting inclusion in an exchange list if it means being recycled back into the conflict.

The next objective of Senator Piedad Córdoba, Colombians for Peace's most outspoken promoter, is a “humanitarian exchange of prisoners”, the details of which, including the numbers and identity of the insurgents to be freed and the mechanism for doing so, would be negotiated by the two sides.²²⁷ According to one source, the subsequent, even more ambitious objective would be to persuade the FARC to end kidnapping and release the estimated 700 “economic” hostages it holds.²²⁸ The initiative to encourage the swap has received strong

support from the recently released politicians, especially Alan Jara and Sigifredo López.

Colombians for Peace could develop from a loose grouping of individuals that sends open letters to the rebels into a strong and independent advocate of what society has to demand from both the government and the FARC in order for a feasible peace roadmap to emerge. However, it includes many prominent personalities who are among Uribe's harshest critics, including Carlos Lozano,²²⁹ Iván Cepeda,²³⁰ Jorge Enrique Botero,²³¹ and Daniel Samper.²³² A new successful release of hostages, much less FARC's agreement to cease kidnapping, would likely trigger the political ambitions of many of them on the eve of the 2010 legislative and presidential elections.²³³ Particularly, Córdoba could be propelled into the primaries for the Liberal party's presidential nomination. If the grouping becomes a political platform, it might be unable to build bridges between the government and the FARC.

The events surrounding the release of three police and one soldier on 1 February, part of the FARC's unilateral release of six hostages in early 2009, ignited a heated debate about the use members of Colombians for Peace, the insurgents and the government each made of it.²³⁴ Uribe's consistently high approval ratings

²²⁴ These include bombings of civilian targets in Bogotá in late January 2009 and of the intelligence police building in Cali the day of Alan Jara's release; the ambush of a military patrol in Piendamó (Cauca) on 10 February and two massacres of at least 27 Awa indigenous people in the communities of Barbacoas and Ricaurte (Nariño), reportedly committed by the FARC between 5 and 11 February. The FARC has acknowledged the killing of eight alleged army informants.

²²⁵ See Section II.B.9 above.

²²⁶ In late February 2009, the FARC Secretariat sent an open letter to left-wing opposition Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA) party president Carlos Gaviria, a few days before the latter's second party congress. It saluted the PDA's democratic efforts and said the conflict could only be ended by a political agreement. Many sectors, including PDA members such as Senator Gustavo Petro, have been critical of the letter as well as of the PDA leadership's failure to take a clear stance against continued FARC violence and atrocities. “Carta de las Farc al Polo, otro punto de discordia”, *El Espectador*, 2 March 2009.

²²⁷ “Piedad Córdoba anunció nuevas liberaciones unilaterales de las Farc”, *El Tiempo*, 12 February 2009.

²²⁸ Crisis Group interview, human rights advocate, Bogotá, 13 February 2008.

²²⁹ Lozano is director of the weekly magazine *Communist Voz*.

²³⁰ Cepeda is a human rights activist.

²³¹ Botero is an independent journalist who has written several books about the conflict, including some about the FARC.

²³² Samper is a journalist and brother of former President Ernesto Samper.

²³³ Crisis Group interviews, human rights advocate and international observer, Bogotá, 13 February 2008.

²³⁴ Colombians for Peace guarantor and journalist Jorge Enrique Botero imprudently called the Venezuela-based Telesur broadcasting station from the hostage pickup zone to denounce an air force flyover. Cecilia Orozco, “La Cruz Roja fue clara: cese total de operaciones militares”, *El Espectador*, 7 February 2009. The FARC invited Radio France Internationale (RFI) correspondent Hollman Morris, cameraman Leonardo Acevedo and *Voz* magazine journalist Camilo Raigozo to broadcast the release from the zone. Morris claimed the rebels conducted them to the zone without their knowledge. On the way out, an army patrol allegedly harassed them, demanding their materials. “Journalists Hollman Morris, Leonardo Acevedo and Camilo Raigozo temporarily detained by army, asked to hand over their work”, Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP), 3 February 2009. The four released security force members asked RFI not to broadcast interviews they said were given under FARC threats. “Uniformados liberados le piden a Radio Francia Internacional no publicar su entrevista”, *El Tiempo*, 4 February 2009. Uribe insinuated that the journalists were “accomplices of terrorism”. The UN and OAS condemned his comments on Morris in “Comunicado de prensa conjunto N° R05/09; Relatores para la libertad de expresi-

are based on his tough approach towards the FARC, so his administration fears any concessions that give the insurgents a margin of manoeuvre could be damaging in advance of the 2010 elections. It responded to the unilateral releases with measures aimed at reducing possible political gain for the FARC. On 12 February, Uribe closed the door on a swap or further talks unless the FARC agreed to release all victims unilaterally, ordered stepped-up operations to free the hostages²³⁵ and criticised the “peace discourse” of the “FARC intellectual bloc” – a veiled allusion to Colombians for Peace – as intended to “confuse the country”.²³⁶ In part he was likely prompted by FARC violence before and after the releases, as well perhaps by Cano's demand in his latest letter to Piedad Córdoba for a “prisoner of war” swap to include commanders Ricardo Palmera (alias “Simón Trinidad”) and Anayibe Rojas (alias “Sonia”), both in U.S. prisons on drug charges.

C. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The ICRC and Brazilian contributions to the early 2009 releases have revived the possibility that other countries might help Colombia explore new peace efforts, even if such an interest has sharply diminished in Bogotá.²³⁷ With perhaps the most professional diplomacy

sión de la ONU y de la OEA manifiestan preocupación por señalamientos de altas autoridades del gobierno colombiano contra periodista”, Geneva/Washington D.C., 9 February 2009. The government questioned their failure to comment on the ethics of Morris's interviews and criticised him for violating security. Morris is under government protection after receiving threats. Colombian presidency, press communiqué, 11 February 2009; and “No Para La Polémica Sobre Periodistas”, *El Tiempo*, 12 February 2009. The military reconnaissance flights did not respect an agreement with the ICRC that only commercial planes could fly over, at 20,000 feet. While the defence ministry argued it acted in good faith, a source pointed to possible tensions within the high command, and even senior government, as behind an imprudent decision. “Colombia: aclaración del CICR acerca de los sobrevuelos ocurridos durante la liberación de cuatro miembros de la fuerza pública”, ICRC communiqué 33/09, 6 February 2009; “Juan Manuel Santos, Dice Que Se Habló De No Permitir Vuelos Militares Por Debajo De 20.000 Pies”, *El Tiempo*, 7 February; and Crisis Group interview, international observer, Bogotá, 13 February.

²³⁵ “Presidente Uribe ordena intensificar operativos militares de rescate de secuestrados”, *El Tiempo*, 13 February 2009.

²³⁶ “Piden a Uribe señalar a los del ‘Bloque Intelectual’ de las Farc”, *El Tiempo*, 9 February 2009.

²³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, French Colombia and FARC expert, French foreign ministry officials, Norwegian foreign ministry official, Paris, Oslo, 17 November, 9 December 2008. After the liberation of French-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt in Operation Jaque, Paris has kept a low profile. However, it

in South America, Brazil and Chile are perhaps the best candidates. After the February releases, Brazilian Defence Minister Nelson Jobim offered logistical support for any new humanitarian mission approved by the Colombian government.²³⁸ Sources involved in efforts to achieve a hostages-for-prisoners swap told Crisis Group that Brazil and possibly Chile would be willing to facilitate the release of hostages if agreed by Bogotá.²³⁹ France and Norway could be interested in supporting Brazil and Chile as facilitators.²⁴⁰

While the government has been apprehensive about FARC sympathies within some social and political sectors in Brazil and Chile,²⁴¹ Uribe has recently gained

granted asylum to Isaza, the FARC member who helped former congressman Oscar Lizcano escape in late October 2008, in keeping with its promise to accept FARC members released by the government in a hostages-for-prisoners swap or who help liberate remaining hostages, provided Colombian judicial authorities certify no criminal investigations are pending. “Francia pone condiciones al asilo de ‘Isaza’”, *El Espectador*, 27 October 2008. Switzerland and Spain have adopted an even lower profile.

²³⁸ “Após libertações na Colômbia, Brasil oferece mais ajuda”, *O Globo*, 5 February 2009.

²³⁹ In 2003 the administration of then Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and President Uribe agreed to allow Jairo Cuarán Collazos, (alias “Camilo”), commander of the 29th front, to remain in Chile after he agreed to desert the FARC. In 2006, Francisco Antonio Cadena (alias “El Cura Camilo”) was granted refugee status in Brazil after he deserted following his capture in 2005 by Brazilian authorities. Crisis Group interview, source involved in efforts to achieve a hostages-for-prisoners swap, Bogotá, 10 November 2008; and “Uribe telefona para Lula e agradece ajuda em resgate de reféns das Farc”, *Folha*, 6 February 2009.

²⁴⁰ Following the rescue of Betancourt, the French government pays lip-service to its continued commitment to help Colombia end the hostage drama and the armed conflict. However, in reality it has been tainted by its failure to achieve the release of Betancourt in 2007-2008 and is in no good position to act as a credible facilitator. Crisis Group interviews, French Colombia and FARC expert, Norwegian foreign ministry official, Paris, Oslo, 17 November, 9 December 2008.

²⁴¹ Allegedly, some members of the Workers' Party (PT) and of the da Silva administration have links to the FARC. “Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Brasil dice que nunca tuvo contactos con ‘Raúl Reyes’”, *Semana*, 7 August 2008. “Roque”, an alleged FARC-operative living in Chile, appears to have been active in sending Chilean Communist party activists to receive military instruction in FARC camps. The Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) and the Mapuche indigenous movement are also allegedly linked to the FARC, as well as Hugo Guzmán, a low-level official at the Chilean presidency communications office. “Nexos de funcionario chileno con las FARC”, Radio Trece, 9 September 2008; and “Colombia entregó a comitiva de Piñera informe Farc para presionar al gobierno”, *La Tercera*, 15 September 2008.

support from the presidents of both countries. Brazil signed a reinforced military cooperation agreement with Colombia and Peru on 20 July 2008, including procedures for joint border surveillance. The rapprochement continued after Colombia joined the Brazilian-led Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) initiative, currently presided over by Chile, that will have a regional security coordinating body, the South American Defence Council. Colombia received assurances that UNASUR will not support illegal armed groups in any way.²⁴²

On 17 February 2009, Uribe paid a first ever state visit to Brazil to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation at all levels with President da Silva. As a sign of growing trust, they created a bilateral foreign ministers' commission to meet in Colombia in the first half of 2009, then annually. The Brazil-Colombia neighbourhood commission on border issues is scheduled to meet in the second half of the year.²⁴³ The confidence-building development of quick and safe direct communications between the presidents of Colombia and Brazil, and possibly Chile, as well as their foreign ministers, could help set the stage for regional facilitation in ending the long FARC conflict.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the FARC's historic resilience and proven capacity to overcome military and political setbacks, President Uribe's strategy aimed at military victory and ending the conflict without political negotiations began to yield visible results in 2007. The government is confident that further attacks on the insurgents' command-and-control structure, sustained operations in its strongholds and the increasing rate of defections will slowly break the FARC's backbone. In time, units will crumble or splinter into factions that may become interested in negotiating their disarmament, demobilisation and reinsertion (DDR). The remaining FARC Secretariat members and hardline factions would then be more isolated, militarily and politically, and thus easier to defeat.

Uribe's broad popularity is based largely on the tough stance he has taken against the FARC. His political priorities in advance of the 2010 presidential elections and his conviction that the insurgents would again use any political pause to regain strength rather than negotiate seriously give him little motive to assign the same weight to a vigorous political strategy as to his security policy.

But the FARC has been adapting to more difficult circumstances with some success, and several of its fronts are capable of resisting offensives in key areas, especially in high mountain ranges and tropical jungles along the Pacific coast and the borders with Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama. In these locations the government's security consolidation strategy is incipient at best, and drug trafficking revenue continues to fuel the conflict. Even if some units eventually split away, partly as a result of the new, more decentralised system that gives them greater autonomy, the leadership under Alfonso Cano appears unlikely to give up as a result of the ongoing military pressure. And should the government's strategy of fracturing the FARC into easier-to-demobilise pieces succeed, it entails the serious risk of driving the resulting splinter groups not into a DDR program but into closer forms of cooperation with powerful organised criminal groups or NIAGs.

Sustaining military pressure is important, but the government should also strengthen its efforts to seek negotiations with a still-functioning rebel leadership. Likewise, it should keep all options for the liberation of the remaining hostages open, including an exchange of hostages for prisoners. Establishing communication channels and building confidence with the FARC's Secretariat could be helped by the already-proven and neutral support of international players, such as the ICRC, Brazil and possibly Chile.

Bogotá/Brussels, 26 March 2009

²⁴² One of the first challenges the South American Defence Council will likely have is to define effective cooperation mechanisms for member states to fight transnational threats, such as organised crime, illegal armed groups and drug trafficking. In early March 2009, a year after the attack on Raúl Reyes's camp in Ecuador, Colombian Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos justified the operation as legitimate self-defence. His suggestion that Colombia was entitled anywhere and at any time to capture or kill FARC commanders hiding in other countries has once more strained relations with Ecuador and Venezuela. The presidents of both countries have warned Colombia not to cross international borders in the pursuit of rebels.

²⁴³ "Brasil-Colômbia: Fortalecendo uma Relação Especial", joint communiqué, Brasília, 17 February 2009.

APPENDIX A MAP OF COLOMBIA



Base 802670AI (R00820) 6-01

Courtesy of The General Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since January 2000 has been former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in eighteen additional locations (Abuja, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Cairo, Colombo, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Ouagadougou, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo, Seoul and Tehran). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda,

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March 2009

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