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Colombia: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), including demobilization of former combatants; information on dissident groups, including number of combatants, areas of operation, activities and state response (2016-April 2018)

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1. Overview

A peace agreement with the FARC was signed on 24 November 2016 (Amnesty International 22 Nov. 2017; BBC 19 Feb. 2017). Sources report that the FARC has disbanded since the signing of the peace agreement and that it has become a political party (AFP 20 Feb. 2018; Al Jazeera 14 Mar. 2018). Sources indicate that the political party's name is Revolutionary Alternative Common Force [Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común, FARC party] (*The Guardian* 1 Nov.

2017; Al Jazeera 14 Mar. 2018; *El País* 1 Sept. 2017). According to sources, the political party secured 0.22 percent of votes in the lower House of Representatives (Cámara de Representantes) and 0.34 percent of votes in the Senate (Senado de la República) in Colombia's congressional elections of March 2018 (RCN 11 Mar. 2018; Infobae 12 Mar. 2018). Sources report that despite the results of the elections, the FARC party is guaranteed to have five seats in both the lower House of Representatives and the Senate as part of the peace agreement (BBC 12 Mar. 2018; *The Irish Times* 12 Mar. 2018).

The Guardian cites the director of the Fundación Paz y Reconciliación [1] as stating that "'just one year after the [peace agreement] was signed[,] we are seeing fewer kidnappings, fewer landmine victims, fewer murders'" (*The Guardian* 5 Dec. 2017). Nonetheless, according to Amnesty International, the peace agreement with the FARC "is having a very limited impact on the lives of scores of Indigenous and afro-descendent communities in the department of Chocó" (Amnesty International 22 Nov. 2017).

2. Demobilization of FARC Combatants

According to media sources, there are 26 transition zones [also referred to as cantonments, demobilization zones or demobilization camps] for former FARC combatants (*The Guardian* 27 June 2017; BBC 19 Feb. 2017). Media sources indicate that approximately 7,000 FARC combatants have demobilized (*The Guardian* 27 June 2017; Al Jazeera 14 Mar. 2018; Reuters 15 Aug. 2017). Reuters reports that in 2017, "[m]ore than 11,000 fighters and collaborators from the [FARC] handed over their weapons" (Reuters 23 Nov. 2017).

Sources indicate that after demobilizing, former combatants go through a reintegration process that is headed by the Reincorporation and Normalization Agency [Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización, ARN] [2] (Flisi 13 Feb. 2017; Kaplan and Nussio 3 Aug. 2017). According to the ARN, the reintegration process targets "demobilized people of illegal armed groups who are willing to reintegrate into the social and economic life" (Colombia n.d.a). According to the same source, the "Reintegration Route lasts 6 years and a half [o]n average" (Colombia n.d.c). The ARN further indicates that

[w]hen a person joins the Reintegration Process, he/she receives economic support for his/her reintegration if he/she attends at least 90 per cent of the activities scheduled by [ARN].

Each person undergoing a Reintegration Process commits to develop at least 80 hours of Social Service actions that are fundamental to generate spaces for reconciliation. (Colombia n.d.a)

The same source adds that the process can be accessed by persons accredited as demobilized by the Operational Committee for the Abandonment of Weapons (Comité Operativo para la Dejeción de las Armas, CODA) or the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, OACP), who demobilized after 24 January 2003, including people who were part of the FARC, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN), the People's Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Columbia - AUC) groups (Colombia n.d.a).

Sources indicate that the demobilization of FARC members has left a void in Colombia's countryside (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017; International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 2) and that "rival armed actors have taken their place, waging a battle for spoils: control of isolated communities and territories, many rich in illicit business" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 2). According to the Secretary General of Amnesty International, "armed conflict is still very much the reality for millions across" Colombia (Amnesty International 22 Nov. 2017). Al Jazeera reports that, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) [3], "[f]ighting between the groups looking to take over FARC territory has resulted in more than 56,000 displacements in the first half of 2017" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). According to Amnesty International, in the department of Chocó,

[t]housands have been forced to flee their homes out of fear of the various armed groups operating in the area. Internally displaced Indigenous and afro-descendant communities are particularly vulnerable as they have had to leave their livelihoods behind with no state protection and support. (Amnesty International 22 Nov. 2017)

Andrew Anderson, the Executive Director of Front Line Defenders [4], cites Colombia's Ombudsperson as stating that social leaders and human rights defenders have been killed as a result of "the attempt by illegal armed groups to

occupy the territory from which the Farc have withdrawn" (Anderson 23 Aug. 2017). According to Al Jazeera, 117 social leaders and human rights defenders were killed in 2016 (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). Al Jazeera reports that according to the INDEPAZ NGO [5], 106 social leaders and human rights defenders were killed between 1 January and 28 September 2017 (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). According to Andrew Anderson,

[a] number of factors have led to the rise in activist killings since the signing of the [peace] deal. After half a century of conflict, the country's justice institutions are overloaded, and impunity is rampant. There is rarely a consequence for killing a human rights defender. Additionally, the persistence of paramilitary structures means land rights activists and those working on peace education are still facing armed resistance to their work. And while authorities are beginning to recognize the critical role human rights defenders play in building a stable Colombia, smear campaigns from public authorities still jeopardize activists' reputations within their communities, which in turn erodes networks of local protection. (Anderson 23 Aug. 2017)

3. Dissident Groups

According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), "the government estimates that around 1,100 FARC members rejected the [peace agreement] and formed a breakaway group, supported by drug trafficking and illegal mining" (AFP 20 Feb. 2018). Other sources put the number of FARC members who did not demobilize at approximately 1,000 to 1,500, which accounts for around 15 percent of former FARC combatants (InSight Crime 17 Oct. 2017), at around 1,000 (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 2), or at approximately 800, or between 700 and 1,000, according to different estimates (Reuters 23 Nov. 2017).

Sources indicate that former FARC members are continuing to engage in drug trafficking (InSight Crime 17 Oct. 2017; Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). According to Al Jazeera, "[s]ecurity forces have ... identified criminal networks led by FARC dissidents that are controlling drug trafficking corridors in the regions of Meta and Narino, as well as cocaine processing sites in Antioquia" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017).

According to the same source, "[m]any of the FARC dissidents have joined the ELN, EPL, small criminal gangs and larger organised crime groups" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). According to International Crisis Group, there are "[a]t least nine

FARC dissident groups [that] continue to carry out violent attacks, refusing to assemble in the 26 cantonments and hand over their weapons" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 3). *El Colombiano*, a Medellín-based newspaper, states that according to Directive 37 of 2017 (Directiva 37 de 2017) of the Ministry of Defence (Ministerio de Defensa), the government classifies FARC dissident groups as Residual Organized Armed Groups (Grupos Armados Organizados Residuales, GAO Residual) (*El Colombiano* 15 Jan. 2018). Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN), a Colombian radio network, cites the Minister of Defence as stating that FARC dissidents are located in five regions that follow traditional narco-trafficking corridors and are remote areas where there is no government presence (RCN 9 Aug. 2017). AFP mentions "[d]issident FARC fighters patrol[ing] the jungle along the Inirida River in Colombia's Guaviare region" (AFP 20 Feb. 2018). According to International Crisis Group, the FARC dissident groups

operate across the country, principally in the departments of Nariño, Cauca, Caquetá, Guaviare, Vaupés, Guainía and Meta. While differing considerably in size, origin and military muscle, they share four traits: they represent only a sub-set of their original FARC units (to date no complete front has left the FARC); they all are involved in illegal economic activities; they seek to consolidate territorial control; and they operate in areas where they were active during the armed conflict, often expanding outward. (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 3)

According to International Crisis Group, "many dissident groups are more abusive than their FARC predecessors as they compete among themselves, sometimes brutalising local communities to maintain control" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 5). Al Jazeera cites the Education Secretary for the Municipality of Toribio as stating that "[f]ormer FARC guerillas ... know how to recruit vulnerable people and are employing more extreme tactics because they need these groups to grow quickly" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). According to Al Jazeera, "[t]he recruitment of minors by dissident-led groups has ... been seen outside Cauca with reports of young people b[e]ing targeted in the regions of Meta, Guaviare and Caqueta" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017). Al Jazeera cites the Education Secretary for the Municipality of Toribio as stating that "young people are especially vulnerable to recruitment in rural regions like Toribio" (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017).

Sources report of incidents where police officers were killed by alleged FARC dissidents (Al Jazeera 24 Oct. 2017; AFP 20 Feb. 2018).

According to International Crisis Group, "[t]he FARC [party] leadership has tried to maintain some contact with dissidents to convince them to return to the peace process" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 6). Reuters reports that "FARC [party] leaders have renounced the dissidents and emphasized that the group will move forward as a peaceful political party" (Reuters 23 Nov. 2017).

3.1 First Front (Frente Primero)

According to InSight Crime, First Front (Frente Primero) [also known as GAO Residual Oriental, Armando Ríos, Armando Ríos Front or the Armando Rios First Front] is "the main organization within an alliance of FARC dissidents" and it is the "most important of the criminal groups comprised of ex-members" of the FARC (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). *El Colombiano* cites Colombian police authorities as stating that First Front is the [translation] "largest of the dissident groups," with approximately 110 members (*El Colombiano* 10 Apr. 2017). Other sources report that First Front has 200 members (Reuters 6 July 2016), or approximately 400 members (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018; Noticias RCN 7 July 2016). According to *El Colombiano*, the First Front leader is Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, alias "Iván Mordisco" (*El Colombiano* 10 Apr. 2017). InSight Crime indicates that First Front has a "horizontal leadership structure" and is led by "ex-FARC commanders" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). The same source states that First Front leaders include Néstor Gregorio Fernández, alias "Iván Mordisco"; Miguel Botache Santillana, alias "Gentil Duarte"; Géner García Molina, alias "John 40"; Luis Alfonso Lizcano Gualdrón, alias "Euclides Mora"; and Miguel Díaz Sanmarín, alias "Julian Chollo" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018).

According to InSight Crime, First Front is "highly mobile" and "its main operational base is in the village of Barranquilita in Miraflores" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). Sources indicate that First Front has a presence in Guaviare (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 4; Noticias RCN 7 July 2016; *El Colombiano* 10 Apr. 2017), with its greatest force present between the municipalities of Calamar and Miraflores (*El Colombiano* 10 Apr. 2017). According to International Crisis Group, "First Front has expanded from its traditional strongholds in Guaviare toward the regional capital, San José del Guaviare, into south-east Meta and parts of Vichada and Caquetá" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 4). According to InSight Crime, First Front's

princip[al] areas of influence are in Guaviare, Vaupés, Meta and Guainía. In Guaviare, the group has a presence in the municipalities of Calamar, Miraflores and El Retorno. In Vapués, it is concentrated in Cararurú and the municipalities that border Brazil, Pocoa and Taraira. In Meta, dissidents reportedly have a presence in Macarena, Vistahermosa, Uribe and Puerto Rico, while in Guainía dissidents are concentrated in Mapiripana, Morichan Nuevo and Pana Pana on the border with Brazil. (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018)

According to InSight Crime, the most common criminal activities of First Front have included "harassing and attacking security forces with explosives, engaging in forced recruitment, and extorting and threatening the civilian population" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). According to sources, First Front is involved in the drug trade (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018; Reuters 6 July 2016; *El Colombiano* 10 Apr. 2017).

According to InSight Crime, "other dissident fronts with which [the First Front] is allied are the 7th, 14th, 16th, 17th, 27th, 40th, 42nd, 43rd and 44th Fronts" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). According to International Crisis Group, "[i]n Guaviare and Meta, First and Seventh Front dissidents attack soldiers and police to protect the coca trade, actions that locals regard as protection for their livelihood from what they consider an insensitive state" (International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 4). According to InSight Crime, "[i]n Guaviare, [First Front] has established an alliance with the Urabeños" (InSight Crime 14 Mar. 2018). For further information on the Urabeños, see Response to Information Request COL105773.E of April 2017 and COL106086.E of April 2018.

International Crisis Group provides a table listing "confirmed and alleged FARC dissident groups," their leaders, areas of operation and estimated size, as of October 2017:

Confirmed and Alleged FARC Dissident Groups

| Confirmed Dissident Faction | FARC Units Involved in Faction | Leader | Area of Operation | Estimated Size |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---|----------------|
| First Front | 1, 16 and Acacio Medina | Ivan Mordisco | Guaviare, Vaupes, Guianía, Vichada and southeast Meta and Caquetá | 300-400 |

| Confirmed Dissident Faction | FARC Units Involved in Faction | Leader | Area of Operation | Estimated Size |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Seventh Front | 7, 14 and 62 | Gentil Duarte | Southern Meta, Caquetá, northwest Guaviare | 70-100 |
| 40 th Front | 40 | Calarcá | Western Meta | 40-60 |
| GUP | Daniel Aldana Mobile Colum | David | Nariño | 250-350 |
| Ejército Patria Libre | 6 | Previously Simón el negro, killed in June 2017 | Northern Cauca | N/A |
| Jacobo Arenas Mobile Column | Jacobo Arenas Mobile Column | Pija | Northern Cauca | 80-100 |
| 29 th Front | 29 | Previously Vaca, killed by own troops in August | Nariño | N/A |
| Ché Guevara Front | ELN and 29 | N/A | Nariño | N/A |
| Guacho's Group | Daniel Aldana Mobile Column | Guacho | Tumaco | N/A |
| Previously Confirmed, Now Unclear | Front | Leader | Area of Operation | Estimated Size |
| 32 nd Front | 32 | Caballo | Putumayo | N/A |
| Miller Perdomo Mobile Column | MPMC | N/A | Northern Cauca | N/A |
| 17 th Front | 17 | Benjamín | Huila | 10 |
| Teófilo Forero Mobile Column | TFMC | N/A | Northern Caquetá | N/A |
| Reported but Never Confirmed | Front | Leader | Area of Operation | Estimated Size |
| 57 th Front | 57 | N/A | Northern Choco | N/A |
| 21 st Front | 21 | N/A | Tolima | N/A |
| 48 th Front | 48 | N/A | Southern Putumayo | N/A |
| 3 rd Front | 3 | N/A | Northern Cauca | N/A |

(International Crisis Group 19 Oct. 2017, 37).

According to *Vanguardia Liberal*, a Bucaramanga newspaper, 57th Front is present in Urabá region of Antioquia and Chocó, 16th Front is present in Vichada and Guainía, 7th Front is present in Meta bordering Cundinamarca and 44th Front is present in Meta bordering Guaviare (*Vanguardia Liberal* 23 Sept. 2016). According to InSight Crime, "300 dissidents who formerly belonged to the FARC's 38th and 42nd Fronts" are present in the southwestern department of Putumayo (InSight Crime 17 Oct. 2017). According to the same source, there are 400 dissidents "operating in the municipality of Tumaco" and "at least 400 FARC dissidents in the Miraflores municipality" (InSight Crime 17 Oct. 2017). A map created by InSight Crime providing the locations of "Dissident Elements and Desertions from FARC Fronts" is attached to this Response.

4. State Response

Information on state response was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

El Colombiano reports that, according to Directive 37 of 2017 by the Ministry of Defence, tracking down FARC dissident groups is a "priority" (*El Colombiano* 15 Jan. 2018). According to the same source, among the dissident groups, the key objective of authorities are:

- GAO Residual Oriental under the command of Miguel Santillana Botache ("Gentil Duarte"), Gener García Molina ("John 40") and Néstor Vera Fernández ("Iván Mordisco"), active in Caquetá, Guaviare, Vaupés, Guainía and Vichada;
- GAO Residual Occidental and GAO Residual Sur, active in Nariño and the border between Cauca and Caquetá, headed by Wálter Arizala Bernaza ("Guacho") and Jairo Ortiz Calderón ("Jairo 1") (*El Colombiano* 15 Jan. 2018).

Reuters reports that, according to the Ministry of Defence, an executive order of October 2017 "allows troops to conduct bomb attacks against FARC dissidents and crime gangs from airplanes and helicopters, and shields the military from criminal prosecution [R]aids can only be carried out if civilians are not close by" (Reuters 31 Oct. 2017). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Fundación Paz y Reconciliación is a non-for-profit NGO dedicated to the study and analysis of the armed conflict, criminality, governance and human rights in Colombia (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación n.d.).

[2] The ARN [formerly the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) (Colombia n.d.d)] is "ascribed to the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, in charge of coordinating, advising and executing - in partnership with other public and private entities - the Reintegration Route of demobilized people of organized illegal armed groups. In addition, the ARN designs, implements and assesses the State policy addressed to social and economic Reintegration of people or illegal armed groups who voluntarily demobilize in an individual or collective manner. The ACR works in coordination with the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and Justice and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace" (Colombia n.d.b).

[3] IDMC is "the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement" and is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent NGO (IDMC n.d.).

[4] Front Line Defenders is a NGO that "protects people who work, non-violently, for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Anderson 23 Aug. 2017). It "maintains its headquarters in Dublin, an EU Office in Brussels, and regionally-based field staff in the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East" (Front Line Defenders n.d.).

[5] INDEPAZ is an NGO that undertakes research on the themes of development and peace (INDEPAZ n.d.).

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Internet sites, including: Agencia EFE; Centro de Recursos de Análisis de Conflictos; Colombia – Ministerio de Defensa Nacional; *De Volkskrant*, *ecoi.net*; *The Economist*, *El Espectador*, Fundación Paz y Reconciliación; Human Rights Watch; Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz; IRIN; *Miami Herald*; *The New York Times*; Radio France internationale; *Semana*; *Time Magazine*; UN – UN News; US – Department of State; Washington Office on Latin America.

Attachment

InSight Crime. 1 September 2017. "Dissident Elements and Desertions from FARC Fronts." [Accessed 4 Apr. 2018]

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