

# **LAS FUERZAS ARMADAS REVOLUCIONARIO DE COLOMBIA EJERCITO DEL PUEBLO**

## **A BRIEF HISTORY**

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The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia ± 3HR5OHV\$P)\$&LVDRUJDQDWLRQ rooted deep in the history of Colombia. Due to its long history, the FARC has played different roles in different time periods, and consequently is viewed by different people in vastly different ways. To some, the FARC is the hero of the commoner, to others a terrorist organization, and to others still, a narco-trafficking ring. In order to understand what the FARC is today, it is necessary to understand its history. The FARC is an organization that was born out of necessity, out of fear, and out of violence and has evolved in response to the ever-changing politics in Colombia. They are an organization that tried to negotiate with the Colombian government several times, only to be slaughtered upon reentry into society. They are an organization that protected villages from the brutal Colombian military during La Violencia. In its early years, the FARC was an organization formed to protect the citizens of Colombia, yet the modern FARC attacks military targets with zero concern for civilians in their way. The FARC of today is not the FARC of 1964.

gained the support of the Colombian army. Despite the polarization of its politics, Colombia UHPDLHGUHODWLYHOSHDFHINXGKLDQWKHYDQHDUON7KL VFKDQHQGUISwing the 1946 elections. In 1946, Gaitán ran for president without the support of the liberal party, causing a split that resulted in the victory of the conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Perez. Ospina was elected president of Colombia with only 42% of the vote.<sup>3</sup> In September of 1947, Gaitan GLVFORVHGDVHFUHWGRFHXQGHWDLOLDQKH2VSLQJRYHUHQV SODQRLPSRUWKJHTBQWL weapons into the country in order to handle the growing liberal unrest.<sup>4</sup> The liberals assumed he was preparing to violently crush all opposition and reacted by arming themselves, setting the scene for a civil war.

With the messy political situation and the resulting violence, the people of Colombia were ready for a change. Gaitán was certain to win the 1950 election, assuming he could stay alive. Gaitán refused bodyguards, claiming the act of accepting bodyguards would transform his image from a man of the people into a corrupt politician. He believed he was immune ± that no one would be stupid enough to assassiDWHKLP6KRUWOEHIRUHKLVVDVVLQWLRQH VWDWHG?I,DPNLOOHGR RQVWRQZOOEHOHIWQKQGLa Violencia was officially ushered in on April 9, 1948 with the assassination of Gaitán. The assassination shattered what little faith the people of Colombia had for their government and sparked the greatest riot the western hemisphere has ever seen, known as Bogotazo. Although official numbers do not exist, historians estimate that over 2,000 people were killed and 5,000 injured in that single night<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, Bogotazo was but the beginning of a long war within Colombia.

The assassination of Gaitán sparked a civil war that Colombia is still recovering from. The Colombian Liberal Party and Colombian Communist Party formed guerrilla units and fought against the Colombian Conservative Party, the Colombian military, and sometimes even against each other. Order rapidly disintegrated and violence escalated to appalling levels. Torturous methods of execution, such as crucifixion and dismemberment by chainsaw became commonplace, as did violence against women and children.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of La Violencia, thousands of farmers fled from the developed farming lands to the relative security of the Amazon jungle, previously only inhabited by small tribes of indigenous peoples. During the 1950s, small villages began to spring up in the Amazon, surrounded by plots of cleared land. As a result of the violence, the jungle was being rapidly colonized without the knowledge or planning of the powerless Colombian government. The Colombian military considered these villages to be communist threats, and systematically destroyed each one that it found, frequently brutally murdering the civilians. For roughly ten years, violence overtook Colombia, ultimately resultin

## The Founding of the FARC

The FARC was born out of the violence during and after La Violencia and the corresponding loss of faith in government. Referring to La Violencia, Pedro Marín, founder of the FARC, ~~ØRWH~~<sup>3</sup>The police and armed Conservatives would destroy the villages, kill inhabitants, burn their houses, take people prisoner and disappear them, steal livestock and rape the women. The goal of the Conservative groups was to inflict ~~WHUURURØKHSRSØDWRQ~~ response to the violence at the hand of the military and paramilitaries, a teenager named Pedro Marín fled the Amazon and went into hiding in the Cordillera Central. There he began to form a guerrilla army of displaced Colombians. Tensions came to a head in 1964 when the Colombian Army set its sights on Marquetalia, a small town that had declared itself an independent republic during La Violencia. The Colombian army attacked the barely armed village of approximately one-thousand farmers. This attack sent the members of the community fleeing for the mountains, where a group of about fifty of them would officially unite to form the FARC. Shortly after, founder Pedro Marín adapted the nom de guerre Manuel Marulanda. Colombian historian, Arturo ~~ØDSHØRWH~~<sup>3</sup>~~LWK2SHUDWLRQDUTMWDOLDWKHGLUHFWLQFODVVRIWKHFRØUUFUHDWHGWK~~



overthrew the established government of Gomez and placed General Rojas in power. Since this point, traditional government has been slowly wrenching power from the military, but frequently the two have not been operating as one force.

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