

LAS FUERZAS ARMADAS REVOLUCIONARIO DE COLOMBIA ± EJERCITO DEL PUEBLO

A BRIEF HISTORY

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The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC) is an organiz

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, wrote, "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 terror on the population".⁹ In 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 Alape, wrote, "With Operation Marquetalia, the directing class of the country created the FARC movement in Colombia".¹⁰

Solidification of Power

Over the course of the politically turbulent 1970's and '80's, the villages of the Amazon came to resemble the wild west of the United States. For example, drinking and fighting became so prominent on the weekly day off, that many villages established a ritual of collecting and counting the dead on Monday mornings.¹¹ In addition to the violence, the coca plant became the main source of income for the farmers, and the cocaine base became an accepted currency. The

supported by the military, had an even more brutal reputation. Children and teenagers in the countryside matured in an environment where the military was to be feared for their brutality and the guerrillas respected for their protection. In addition, the guerrilla-controlled areas historically have been areas of extreme poverty, which with the exception of military raids, received absolutely no support from the Colombian government. This combination of factors made it easy for the FARC to recruit guerrillas.

One author summarizes FARC ideology as, “The Colombian government is corrupt; the American government is imperialistic; FARC is the people’s army; the FARC and the poor are persecuted by the state”.¹² Beyond those simple tenants, their ideology is hard to pinpoint. They’re against drugs, yet profit off of the trade of cocaine and heroin. They’re for the protection of the citizens, yet using their guerrilla tactics, frequently kill civilians. They teach a Marxist ideology, yet consistently rebuffed approaches from Cuba and the former USSR.¹³ Despite the seeming contradictions, every guerrilla is taught FARC ideology. All FARC recruits are sent to a training camp somewhere in the Amazon region. There they are not only taught guerrilla tactics and methods of navigating the dense jungle, but also spend four hours of each day in an academic setting being taught economics, political science, and FARC ideology - all from the skewed perspective of a senior member of the FARC.¹⁴

Recruitment of Children

The FARC has recently received attention from human rights watch groups for their recruitment of children. They do not deny the allegations, with one of the guerrillas saying, “The children love the guerrillas because here there is love, warmth for them. We will not lie and say that there are no children in the organization. There are children in the organization, but they are particular cases and practically obligatory cases.”¹⁵ The children that the FARC allow into the organization are orphaned, often as a result of the violence of the Colombian Army and paramilitary groups. They have no clothes, no food, and no one to take care of them. Without the FARC, most of these children would find their way to a major city where they could then beg, become child prostitutes, and scrounge for food. The guerrillas take them in and give them clothing, food, education (albeit a skewed one), and put them to work in the kitchens of their camps. These children grow up indoctrinated with FARC ideology and frequently mature to become leaders in the FARC. The military and paramilitaries of Colombia, along with the government of Colombia, have created this situation through indiscriminate violence and nonexistent social services, and they are finally beginning to see that the old traditional methods are causing more harm than good.

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. The paramilitary groups further complicate the relationship between military and government. In the late 1960s, the Colombian Air Force established the paramilitary groups as legitimate special operations groups. Violence was encouraged in these groups and oversight was minimal at best. The government turned a blind eye to the methods of torture and murder used by these groups, as they would succeed in obliterating