

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 organization rooted deep in the history of Colombia. Due to its long history, the FARC has played different roles in different time periods, and consequong 197.45 541.35 T96(t)-4(or)23(A)v4(s)6(t)- web23(A).35 T9feren

gained the support of the Colombian army. Despite the polarization of its politics, Colombia remained relatively peaceful during the '30s and early '40s. This changed rapidly following 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.³ In September of 1947, Gaitan disclosed a secret document detailing the Ospina government's plan to import huge quantities of weapons into the country in order to handle the growing liberal unrest.⁴ The liberals assumed he

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 Colombian government had essentially abandoned the countryside. In the midst of this chaos, the FARC guerrillas entered the scene and played the role of government and law enforcement. The guerrillas were welcomed in the villages as they gave a sense of order to the mayhem. As a byproduct of this acceptance, the guerrillas cemented their control of the Amazon area and gained even more support from the populous. The guerrillas quickly took advantage of their solidification of control by taxing the growth and sale of coca. This new source of funding allowed the guerrillas to buy more weapons and recruit more soldiers, and rapidly became a key source of income for the FARC. With the capture of the cartel leaders by U.S. and Colombian forces towards the end of the 1990’s, the FARC became the only power in southern Colombia and the sole governing force.

Recruitment and Training

Recruitment was not a significant challenge for the FARC during the 20th century. The Colombian military and the paramilitary death squads always made it easy for the FARC to recruit members, providing plenty of incentive through their oppression and abuse of the farmers living in the Amazon region. The Colombian military had, and to a certain extent has, a reputation for brutality in the regions controlled by the FARC, and the paramilitaries, frequently

⁹ Bruce, Victoria, Karin Hayes, and Jorge Enrique Botero. *Hostage nation: Colombia's guerrilla army and the failed war on drugs*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. Kindle loc. 394.

¹⁰ Ruiz, p 110.

¹¹ Bruce, Haynes, Botero, Kindle loc 1259.