

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

A BRIEF HISTORY

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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

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.

Paramilitary Groups

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 army 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, hoping they would succeed in obliterating the guerrilla organizations and establishing peace. Eventually the government saw that these groups were doing more harm than good and that the tactics used by them were not only unsuccessful, but provided the FARC with angry recruits bent on revenge. In 1989 the government outlawed paramilitary organizations, but that did not dismantle what had been established, nor did it dismantle the relationship established between the military and the paramilitary groups. The Colombian Peace Commission found that from 1988 to 1997 there were over 20,000 murders committed by illegal organizations. Of those, paramilitaries and drug cartels were responsible for over 80%, while the guerrilla groups (FARC and ELN among others) were responsible for 20%.¹⁶ Paramilitaries would not only attack the guerrillas, but would protect themselves, attacking any police found investigating them, journalists reporting on them, or lawyers trying to prosecute them. In addition, paramilitary groups turned to the same sources of funding as the FARC; kidnapping, extortion, and drug trafficking. By encouraging the formation of paramilitary units in the 1960s, the Colombian government opened the door to the formation of armed groups outside their direct control. These morphed into organizations that are arguably doing more harm to Colombia than the very organization they were formed to fight.

In conclusion, the government condoned, but frequently did not control the army, and the army tacitly condoned, but ultimately did not control the paramilitary groups. The result of this complex situation was that the government was typically not in a position to successfully negotiate for peace. Any agreement for amnesty to which they came meant very little in reality, as the paramilitary, and to a limited extent the military, could not be forced to respect it.

Revenue Streams

The FARC has two main sources of income- kidnapping and drug trafficking. Hostage taking serves several purposes for the FARC. The primary purpose of kidnapping is to extract ransom money, which then funds their guerrilla activities. In the late 1990's, the FARC was kidnapping over one thousand Colombian citizens per year, with ransoms ranging from a couple hundred to a couple million dollars.¹⁷ The secondary purpose of kidnapping is the political bargaining power the FARC achieves through the practice. The FARC does not only kidnap citizens, but also members of the Colombian army and national police force, which it considers prisoners of war rather