Chronicle of a Threat
Foretold: the ex-FARC Mafia
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the ex-FARC mafia

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There were always going to be dissident elements from the FARC, from those who were unconvinced by the peace deal or simply refused to consider it. However, the ex-FARC mafia is now growing at such a rate that Colombia’s entire peace process is at risk.

Almost every peace process has had combatants who refuse to give up their arms. There was no reason that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC) should be any different.

Looking abroad first, the Northern Ireland peace process saw the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA, more commonly known as the IRA) reach the “Good Friday Agreement” with the British government in April 1998. It did not take long for the “Continuity IRA” and the “Real IRA,” which has now morphed into the “New IRA,” to appear. But while a series of bombs have been set off and some isolated killings have taken place, Irish dissident groups have been unable to win any significant support or rebuild the military capacity of the PIRA.

And there have been dissident breakaways in former Colombian peace deals. The Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación – EPL) demobilized in March 1991, with some 2,200 guerrillas surrendering their arms. However, up to 20 percent of the guerrilla army remained in the field. Today a last remnant still exists, although its members are battered and perhaps on the road to extinction, more due to a war with the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN), than thanks to any campaign by the Colombian state.1

The demobilization of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC) saw a variety of dissident groups spring to life, commonly termed the BACRIM (“bandas criminales”). To this day the most powerful of these groups, the “Urabeños,” now called the “Clan del Golfo” by the government, still number over 2,000 members.

Colombian dissident groups are so hard to eradicate because of the criminal incomes which sustain them, especially the drug trade (cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and even some synthetic drugs), illegal mining (principally gold) and extortion.

The EPL today appears to be on their last legs, while the Urabeños have suffered a series of blows, pushing them back from a nationwide movement into a regional criminal power in their home territories of Antioquia, Chocó and Córdoba. Neither of these dissident movements were able to rebuild the strength or appeal of their predecessors. Surely the FARC dissidents, or as InSight Crime has named them the “ex-FARC mafia,” are condemned to the same inevitable, albeit slow, path to extinction?

This will hopefully be the case. But there are red flags, which hint that the ex-FARC mafia may become something more dangerous than the EPL and the Urabeños combined.

The Red Flags

1. **Leadership** - One of the most senior and respected leaders of the FARC has deserted the peace process. Indeed, many in the rebel rank-and-file thought that Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez,” ² should have been the FARC commander-in-chief, not Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, alias “Timochenko.” ³ Normally dissident factions are not led by their most senior commanders, particularly those who negotiated the peace deal, as with Márquez.

2. **Numbers** - The number of FARC dissidents now stands at around 3,000 combatants, already accounting for more than 20 percent of the 13,000 FARC members who demobilized. This number continues to grow and is likely to keep growing in the short and medium-term. While there are no indications that the ex-FARC mafia will ever reach the numbers of the FARC prior to demobilization, it is clear that the dissident elements are a threat to national security and could become more than just a localized threat within Colombia.

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3. **Faith in the FARC peace process** - This is low, among the Colombian public, among former rebel combatants, and even within the government itself. Unless significant action is taken to reassure those rebels that remain in the peace process, the risk of further desertion is high. Add to this the killing of former FARC members (169 to date), including some likely carried out by security forces, and the precariousness of the peace accord becomes clear.

4. **Criminal economies** - The criminal economies that sustained the FARC for more than five decades are more lucrative than ever, with Colombia producing record amounts of cocaine. However, the ex-FARC mafia rely on more than cocaine. Marijuana, especially in the violence-ridden department of Cauca is a big earner, while the profits from poppy and the heroin it produces are also considerable.

5. **State weakness** - The Colombian state has been unable to fill the vacuum in much of the territory formerly under the influence of the FARC. It is laboring under significant financial constraints, which has allowed criminal groups and illegal economies to flourish in certain parts of the country. Another aspect of this has been the widespread killing of human rights and community leaders as well as land restitution activists, making the state appear impotent. Between January 2016 and May 2019, up to 800 community leaders and former FARC members have been killed.

6. **Ideology** - Many elements of the ex-FARC mafia continue to profess the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the FARC, suggesting that they intend to rebuild an insurgent force, not just a criminal enterprise. The EPL and Urabeños (who call themselves the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, harking back to their paramilitary heritage) also maintain an ideological façade, but have never engaged in serious grassroots political work or acted like anything other than criminal syndicates. There is evidence of some ex-FARC mafia elements continuing political actions, especially in Meta and Guaviare, but these efforts seem sporadic.

7. **Poor political performance of the FARC party** - While nobody expected the transition from a rebel army to a political party to be an easy one, the results to date of the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común - FARC) have been distinctly underwhelming. A key argument when the FARC leadership sold the peace agreement to their rank-and-file was that the military struggle for power could be replaced by the political fight. Yet the FARC made remarkably little impact in Colombia's 2019 recent regional elections. Only two local councilors were

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elected directly under the FARC banner, although another six former FARC members were elected under coalition or on other party lists. Equally worrying has been the killings of former FARC members and threats to FARC political activity. The shadow of the extermination of the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica - UP) is still fresh in the mind of many FARC politicians. The UP was a political party set up by the FARC in 1985 during the peace process with then president Belisario Betancur. Anything up to 3,000 of its members, including a presidential candidate, were assassinated. This massacre drove many left-wing activists to take up arms. While the current climate is not the same, there are systematic threats against FARC political activists in large parts of Colombia.

8. Venezuela - The situation in Venezuela gives the ex-FARC mafia a sanctuary, and possibly a powerful international ally. While a FARC presence in Venezuela is nothing new, and former president Hugo Chávez provided the Colombian rebel group with sanctuary and limited support, he did not sell them weapons they requested, particularly surface-to-air missiles, that could have neutralized the Colombian state's principal strategic advantage. The current government of Nicolás Maduro is far more isolated than Chávez ever was, and is battling economic collapse. Colombia is directly supporting the US-backed opposition movement, headed by Juan Guaidó. It is very much in the interests of Venezuela to distract and undermine the Colombian government by providing aid to the ex-FARC mafia. Iván Márquez lived for many years in Venezuela and has links with senior Chavista officials. It is likely that he and much of the ex-FARC mafia leadership is based in Venezuela at this moment.

9. Support from the United States – While the US is deeply invested in the Venezuelan situation, and to a lesser extent is interested in Colombian drug production, it is far less supportive today toward fighting illegal factions than before. Whatever its failings as a counter-narcotics strategy, the US-backed “Plan Colombia” was fundamental in containing FARC ambitions in the early 2000s and in forcing the group to the negotiating table. There is not the same will or funding coming from the White House at the moment. Colombia must shoulder much more of the burden in fighting the ex-FARC mafia, although these dissident groups now have a far greater capacity than ever before. But again, operational funding is short, as much of the country’s defense spending goes to salaries.

10. The National Liberation Army (ELN) - The last remaining insurgent army in the field has been enjoying significant growth over the last three years, revealing the government’s inability to contain it and indicating that the ex-FARC mafia may have the same room for maneuver and expansion. There is a significant risk that the ELN, or at least elements within it, may well ally themselves with sections of the ex-FARC mafia. Together, the ELN and ex-FARC mafia may be able to field as many as 7,000 fighters. This is still nowhere near the 13,000 that the FARC once commanded but the needle is moving upwards.
Government Strategy

Can the government address the red flags listed above? Or indeed is the government part of the problem and itself feeding the ex-FARC mafia through its policies?

It is easy to lay the blame for the strengthening of the ex-FARC mafia at the door of the government of President Iván Duque. It inherited a peace deal it had sought to block, winning the October 2016 referendum on the peace agreement, which then president Juan Manuel Santos largely ignored.

But Santos also squandered much of the time he had to prepare for the post-conflict situation. There was no way Duque would have been able to fully carry out the implementation of the peace agreement as left to him by Santos, even if he had wanted to. And he did not.

Duque made it clear from the start that he wanted to change the legal framework of the agreement, essentially moving the judicial goalposts. He was unable to do so, thanks to a ruling by the Constitutional Court, but for the FARC, this was evidence enough that the president was trying to undermine the peace deal and would not honor the promises for which they had laid down their arms. Duque was never a true believer in the crop substitution program begun by the Santos administration and even less of a fan of its high cost. If and when aerial spraying of drug crops starts again in 2020, it will only confirm to coca farmers and communities living in former FARC-held areas that this government has betrayed promises made to them.

The perception, true or false, that Duque and his political godfather, former president Álvaro Uribe, want to fatally undermine the FARC agreement has been one of the driving forces for the ex-FARC mafia. Márquez quoted this as the main reason for his desertion of the process.

“This is the continuation of the rebel fight in answer to the betrayal by the state of the Havana peace accords. We were never beaten or defeated ideologically, so the struggle continues,” Márquez said during a rebel address announcing his return to arms in August 2019.

The full nature of the ex-FARC mafia threat has yet to fully manifest itself. It is not clear the number of fighters Márquez took with him out of the peace process, or the territory from which he will operate. Apart from a couple of propaganda videos, there is very little evidence of the capacity of this section of the ex-FARC mafia.

The dissident factions under Miguel Botache Santillana, alias “Gentil Duarte,” have also not launched widespread attacks on Colombia’s security forces. Is this because they do not have the capacity to do so, because they are successfully being contained by the military, or because they have a different strategy altogether? InSight Crime field research in Meta
and Guaviare during 2017 suggested the latter. Sources in the local government, security forces and among former rebels all stated that the ex-FARC mafia here had deliberately adopted a largely non-confrontational approach.

“Do not be deceived,” said an official source in San José de Guaviare, “the dissidents here are a sleeping lion.”
2. Evolution of the Ex-FARC Mafia

Even before the signing of the peace agreement, it was clear that not all of the former guerrillas would welcome and join the process.

By mid-2016, just when the signing of the peace agreement was starting to materialize, a letter arrived for the Secretariat of the FARC, whose legions were preparing to put down their weapons. The letter expressed discontent with the process and came from Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, alias “Iván Mordisco,” a guerrilla fighter with more than 20 years of experience who led the 1st Front.²

Mordisco was the first member of the former group to declare himself a dissident. He had made his name in the FARC as an explosives expert and sniper, as well as a good financial manager, particularly in relation to drug trafficking.⁸

Mordisco had risen to the leadership of the 1st Front in the aftermath of the FARC’s most humiliating defeat, “Operation Jaque,” in July 2008. The guerrillas were tricked into handing over their political hostages to a fake humanitarian commission made up of members of the military. As well as the hostages, the commander of the 1st Front Gerardo Aguilar, alias “César,” delivered himself up and was quickly extradited to the United States. Mordisco replaced the ill-fated César and inherited the 1st Front as well as a deep suspicion of everyone, including the FARC top leadership.

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² Interview with Interior Ministry, Miraflores, July 27, 2017
The Ex-FARC mafia is made up of groups of former combatants from the now-defunct FARC, that either did not demobilize or that abandoned the peace process with the government and resumed illegal activities. They maintain, at least superficially and in their political discourse, elements of the FARC’s ideology and they try to regain the social control that the FARC previously had in the territories under its control. It is common for the Ex-FARC mafia to summon the local population for meetings, establish restrictions on hours of movement, and even hand out manuals about cohabitation within the communities.

### 1st Front

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<td>NÉSTOR GREGORIO VERA</td>
<td>Putumayo, Vaupés, Vichada</td>
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“The 1st Front voted on the peace issue,” a FARC militant told InSight Crime in September 2016. “Only a handful of us voted to remain in the peace process and we found ourselves forced to walk through Guaviare for days until we found another loyal unit.”

The historic front’s loss was a major blow to FARC leadership as they tried to promote the Havana peace accords.

The FARC Secretariat published a statement, that all unit troops should submit to the will of the majority: “if the commanders and combatants involved desire to throw themselves into an uncertain adventure, they must use a distinct name from the real structures.”
The then president of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos also sent a message to the 1st Front: “Do not doubt it. Accept this process because it will be your last opportunity [...] so whoever has any doubt, it is better to leave it aside and accept [the process], because it is the last opportunity you have to change your life [...] Because by any other means, you will end up—I promise you—in a grave or in a prison cell.”

The government message was reinforced by then army commander, General Alberto José Mejía, who warned that 240,000 men would be in charge of confronting the illegal armed groups and that the military would attack “with all of its force and capacity.”

Mordisco was not a well-known commander, he did not have a renowned military history, let alone status within the wider movement. While he was a competent commander, with a strong track record, and his departure was unfortunate, it was easy enough for the FARC to absorb.

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Perhaps more important for the government was the fact that the 1st Front was based in Guaviare, with influence in Vichada and Guainía. As such, the Front was located in the middle of thousands of hectares of coca cultivations and sat astride two principal
drug trafficking corridors into Venezuela and Brazil. Additionally, the Front also had international drug trafficking contacts. Money was never going to be a problem for these dissidents.

The 1st Front quickly went on to build new drug trafficking routes via the north of the Amazonas department, in the Puerto Córdoba and La Pedrera region, where the Apaporis and Caquetá rivers meet. This fed the increasingly hungry Brazilian demand for cocaine.

A few months later, on September 22, 2016, the FARC’s Tenth Conference took place in the Yarí region of Meta department. There, representatives from the rebel army sat down to discuss, and ultimately approve, the peace agreement negotiated in Havana. Among the leaders who participated was Miguel Botache Santillana, alias “Gentil Duarte,” who publicly supported the process. With this being their final act as an illegal group, the guerrilla leadership and the national government met again on November 24, 2016 for the signing of the peace accords.

Days later, just as the implementation of the accords was taking its first shaky steps, Gentil Duarte, who just months prior had sent letters to urge Iván Mordisco against abandoning the peace process, declared himself to be a dissident. The FARC’s strategy to

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snuff out the dissident movement had failed. Unlike Mordisco, Duarte had status within the FARC and was part of the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central – EMC) one of the rebel army’s most important governing bodies, from which the members of the ruling Secretariat were chosen. He was one of the disciples of the former FARC Field Marshal, Víctor Julio Suárez, alias “Mono Jojoy,” and the long-time commander of the 7th Front. He had joined the guerrilla at 18 years old and gradually rose in prominence in the Eastern Bloc until winning the leadership of the powerful 7th Front with influence across the southwestern part of Meta, one of the guerrilla heartlands. Unlike Mordisco, Duarte was known across the rebel movement and had serious credibility.

Duarte overnight became one of the most wanted criminals in the country, with a bounty of up to 2 billion pesos (about $601,000) on his head.14

During field investigation in Guaviare during 2017, a government source explained to InSight Crime that the dissident group already was starting to organize itself in the region. “They are leaving a group unmolested here that has experience, that knows the routes, that already knows how to operate. They are allowing it to grow because they believe that it is in the jungle, in the middle of nowhere, and for this reason they believe that it is irrelevant,” the official commented.

In December 2016, the FARC political party expelled Duarte, along with some other commandants that had joined him, including, Luis Alfonso Lizcano Gualdrón, alias “Euclides Mora,” Géner García Molina, alias “Jhon 40,” Ernesto Orjuela Tovar, alias “Giovanny Chuspas” and Miguel Díaz Sanmartín, alias “Julián Chollo.”

These FARC veterans had several things in common. They were all Eastern Bloc and all with experience in the lucrative drug trade. Together they had the ability to rebuild a good part of the Eastern Bloc and once again occupy territory across the eastern plains and into the Amazon.

Gentil Duarte’s ambitions extended well beyond the former territory of the Eastern Bloc. Once back on his home turf, Duarte started to strengthen his group, to weave and rebuild alliances at home and abroad.15 He recruited other mid-ranking commanders like Noé Suárez Rojas, alias “Grannobles” (Mono Jojoy’s brother) and Julián Orledis Gutiérrez Gualdrón, alias “Nicolás,” the brother of Euclides Mora. He reached out to allies in Venezuela and Brazil, ensuring he had international buyers for the cocaine he was producing on the Eastern Plains.

He also contacted the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional - ELN), to delineate territory and influence, both in Colombia and in Venezuela. Already he had

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14 El Tiempo. El hombre más buscado de Colombia alias “Gentil Duarte” disidente de las FARC. https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/el-hombre-mas-buscado-de-colombia-alias-gentil-duarte-disidente-de-las-farc-184076

Duarte and his crew now dominated key cocaine trafficking routes that reached into Brazil and Venezuela.\textsuperscript{17}

In financial and drug trafficking terms it is difficult to underestimate the importance of Jhon 40. He has become one of Duarte’s strongest allies and the financial brains of this dissident faction. He had been the head of the FARC’s 16th and 43rd Fronts.

During his years in the guerrilla, he worked closely with Tomás Molina Caracas, alias “El Negro Acacio,” who was the FARC’s drug trafficking czar. In 2006, Jhon 40 was already considered one of Meta department’s drug kingpins.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} InSight Crime. Disidencia de la guerrilla penetra el Amazonas venezolano. https://es.insight-crime.org/noticias/analisis/disidencia-de-la-guerrilla-colombiana-penetra-el-amazonas-venezolano.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} Semana. Gentil Duarte, el capo disidente. https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/el-hombre-mas-buscado-de-colombia-alias-gentil-duarte-disidente-de-las-farc-184076

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid
Jhon 40 currently leads the Acacio Medina Front dissident unit, much of it based in Venezuelan territory, with close to 300 men under his command. He brings the cocaine shipments from eastern Colombia to buyers in Venezuela, as well providing financial support to the other dissidents led by Duarte. He is in charge of the relationships with drug buyers on Colombia's borders with Brazil and Venezuela.

Following the ousting of the five dissident commanders, the Defense Minister under the Santos administration, Luis Carlos Villegas, declared them to be high-value targets, stating that they could be neutralized by the military forces via aerial attacks. It seemed that the danger posed by the FARC dissidents was starting to grow, but, according to sources from the Defense Ministry, the orders were to play down the threat they presented, so as to not undermine the peace process.

At the beginning of 2017, soon after FARC combatants concentrated at the various transition camps around the country, Walter Arizala, alias “Guacho,” abandoned the peace process. Initially, he had presented himself at the camp in El Playón, in the municipality of Tumaco, in Nariño. Returning to the fray, Guacho recruited former members of the

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22 InSight Crime spoke with several sources among public security forces in 2017 but none wish to reveal their identity for security reasons.
Daniel Aldana Mobile Column and created a new group which he called the Oliver Sinisterra Front (FOS). He had no serious profile within the FARC, but he took up arms again in the cocaine capital of Colombia.\textsuperscript{23}

The importance of Tumaco in drug trafficking terms is impossible to overstate. Just in this municipality there are more coca crops than in all of Bolivia. Tumaco has it all for the drug trade: coca crops, cocaine laboratories, departure points into Ecuador and the Pacific Coast, as well as the town of Llorente, a center for negotiating cocaine shipments, the type of cocaine stock exchange.\textsuperscript{24}

However, it was the murder of three Ecuadorean journalists from El Comercio, in April 2018, that turned Guacho into public enemy #1 on both sides of the border and into the FARC’s most visible dissident. However, he was not as powerful as the government claimed, and according to some analysts, Guacho was more “fame than force.”\textsuperscript{25}

While Guacho never formally joined the dissident group of Gentil Duarte, the ex-FARC mafia leaders exchanged some letters. In one of them, Guacho thanked Gentil Duarte for “having understood that we are not outlaws, that the staff and I in charge of the FOS are revolutionaries looking for changes in equality in regards to social justice.”\textsuperscript{26}

While the letters reveal ideological pretensions, these were not translated into the FOS’ actions, which were focused on obtaining drug trafficking routes and moving shipments of cocaine. The actions of the FOS were not framed in the subversive struggle, but rather based around the protection of their business: drug trafficking. The FOS used the FARC name, the former FARC drug trafficking business and international contacts to set up a powerful drug trafficking organization. Intelligence agents in Colombia described Guacho as “a drug trafficker with an armed structure.”\textsuperscript{27} His principal client was the Sinaloa Cartel, which was prepared to buy every kilo of cocaine Guacho could produce.

With several financers within the area and the infrastructure to ship drugs abroad, the FOS was simply a criminal structure, which we call FARCRIM. This is to draw parallels with the dissident groups that were born out of the AUC demobilization, which the government described as BACRIM (from the Spanish “bandas criminales”).

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27 \textit{La FM}. “Guacho” y los vínculos que tenía con el cartel de Sinaloa. https://www.lafm.com.co/colombia/guacho-y-los-vinculos-que-tenia-con-el-cartel-de-sinaloa
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On December 21, 2018, during “Operation David,” Guacho was killed in the rural area of Llorente. The new administration of President Iván Duque was quick to claim the killing as a victory against the FARC dissidents.

Guacho’s death did not spell the end of the FOS. While weakened the FOS’ support network and the trafficking infrastructure remain in place and continue operations both in Tumaco and across the border in the Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas.

While most of the attention was focused on Guacho and the Ecuadorian border, Duarte and his crew were keeping busy. They managed to entice another senior commander into their ranks. Edgar Mesías Salgado, alias “Rodrigo Cadete,” deserted from the reintegration zone in Icononzo, Tolima, in later 2017.

Cadete was another of Mono Jojoy’s disciples and a guerilla fighter with more than 35 years of experience with the FARC. He served as commander of the 39th Front for many years, and he stood out for his military skills, despite his Front losing territory to the AUC paramilitaries in Meta.

Once united with Duarte, Cadete was sent to Putumayo on an assignment in order to re-absorb and reunify some dissidents there, and to try to forge an alliance with Pedro Oberman Goyes Cortés, alias “Sinaloa,” another dissident commander in charge of elements of the former 48th Front. The alliance did not work out, however, but Cadete’s role became key to coordinating ex-FARC mafia in the south, under Duarte’s direction.

Faced with the growing ex-FARC mafia phenomenon, the Defense Ministry issued a directive in October 2017, framing them as Residual Organized Armed Groups (Grupos Armados Organizados - GAO Residual), creating a new legal framework allowing the military to carry out aerial bombardments against the ex-FARC mafia.

One month before signing this directive, the military had their first result: in the middle of the jungles of Guaviare, the encampment of Euclides Mora had been localized and he was killed. One of Duarte’s right-hand men, who had been the head of security for Mono Jojoy and leaders of several fronts, fell.

30 Semana. Los detalles de la Operación en contra de Euclides Mora. https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/los-detalles-de-la-operacion-en-contra-de-euclides-mora-disidente-de-las-farc/541941
It would take five months for the military to claim another scalp from the Duarte faction. On February 2, 2019, Cadete was killed during Operation Zeus in Caquetá. The piece that Duarte had been using to unify the ex-FARC mafia in the southern part of the country was no longer on the criminal chessboard.

With the implementation of the peace accords still at a very fragile stage, Santos handed the presidency over to Duque on August 7, 2018. The incoming president described the country as “in turmoil” in his inauguration speech and although he never mentioned the dissidents, he promised to combat these structures and revise the accords.

Additionally, Duque mentioned that “promises have been made and compromises with social organizations without determining the source of funding,” making it clear that the outgoing government had not left the money to implement the peace process.

Duque’s arrival increased uncertainty among former combatants, amid fears that the peace agreement was going to be modified. The transition from a government that had signed the peace agreement and started implementation, to one that openly questioned the peace process, generated discord among the ranks of the former combatants. Other FARC commanders began to leave the concentration zones and disappear.

By September 2018, several mid-level commanders had left the FARC camps: José Manuel Sierra Sabogal, alias “Zarco Aldinever,” Alberto Cruz, alias “Enrique Marulanda,” Elmer Caviedes, alias “Albeiro Córdoba,” and Nelson Díaz, alias “Iván Alí.”

A year into his administration, the president admitted that “the peace process is fragile but we are advancing, the government will be forceful with those that return to commit crimes after agreeing to the peace accords.”

Duque sought to reassure the former FARC combatants that implementation was going ahead.

“When my administration began, only two collective productive projects had been developed during the 20 months of implementation by the former government (…) in ten months of this administration, I can say that we already have 25 that encompass more than 1,200 people,” he said.

Nevertheless, the ex-FARC mafia was growing. By the middle of 2019, they already had presence in 18 of Colombia’s 32 departments, in around 117 municipalities, as well as footholds in Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador. At that time, they numbered around up to 2,500 combatants.

31 El Tiempo. Dan de baja a Rodrigo Cadete jefe de disidencia de las FARC en bombardeo. https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/dan-de-baja-a-rodrigo-cadete-jefe-de-disidencia-de-las-farc-en-bombardeo-322274
The Duque administration seemed incapable of containing the growth of the ex-FARC mafia and the perception, true or false, that the government did not intend to honor all aspects of the peace agreement continued to push some former combatants into the arms of the dissidents. The government seemed to lack a clear strategy to contain the ex-FARC mafia and, least publicly, played down the threat and evolution of this group.

A series of red flags should have alerted the government to a potential crisis on the horizon. The first was the case of Seuxis Pausías Hernández Solarte, alias “Jesús Santrich.” Arrested on drug trafficking charges in April 2018, and threatened with extradition, this case had become a rallying call for the FARC and a test case for the fragile peace process. It also drew special attention from one of the top FARC commanders, Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez.”

Following Santrich’s capture, Márquez decided to abandon his seat in Congress and temporarily move to the Miravalle concentration zone in Caquetá, where he linked up with another top guerrilla leader, Hernán Darío Velásquez, better known as “El Paisa.”

Then the two men disappeared amid rumors of meetings with ELN rebels and elements of the ex-FARC mafia. One meeting was supposed to have taken place in April 2019, in Elorza, in the Venezuelan state of Apure and the second a month later also in Apure. The first allegedly involved Iván Márquez and the ELN leaders Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias “Pablito,” alias “Lenín” and Adelmo Aguirre, alias “Bateman,” while at the second it seems Márquez, El Paisa and Jhon 40 got together.

The nature of the ex-FARC mafia and the threat it presents to Colombia was about to change.

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**Ex-FARC Mafia Timeline**

**June 2016**
The first combatant to declare himself a dissident is Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, alias "Iván Mordisco," Mordisco decides to continue with the guerrilla warfare in the Suárez department, his criminal enclave.

**November 2016**
Miguel Díaz Sanmartin, alias "Julian Chollo," distances himself from the peace accords. He controls the state of Amazonas and the gold mines in the Yapacana Natural Park, Venezuela.

**November 24, 2016**
The peace agreement is signed between the national government and the FARC-EP.

**December 13, 2016**

**October 27, 2017**
Herman Darío Veláquez, alias "El Paisa," leaves the Miravalle, Caquetá Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space (ETCR).

Between October and November 2017, Gentil Duarte reaches out to the FOS, to Guacho in a letter trying to unify the dissidents.

**June 16, 2018**
The national government appoints Guacho as a high value target. The "dissidents' phenomenon of starts to become visible.

**August 7, 2018**
Iván Duque assumes the presidency of Colombia, declaring a war on the dissidents.

**September 11, 2018**
Románia reappears in the form of a written letter in which he claims he will continue to be committed to peace while the State complies with the implementation process and the productive projects for ex-combatants.

**February 2, 2019**
Rodrigo Cadete dies during Operation Zeus. It is up until this moment, the biggest blow to the dissidents.

**October 2019**
The Ex-FARC mafia phenomenon continues to grow in size and strength. Today it is present in 18 departments and around 117 municipalities.

**September 22, 2016**
The 19th FARC Conference in Yari, Caquetá takes place. The guerrilla decide how they will go about the transition to civilian and political life. Important FARC leaders participate in this conference, including Miguel Santacilia, alias "Gentil Duarte," who later abandon the peace process.

**December 2016**
Gentil Duarte joins the dissidents. The FARC Secretariat sent him to try to dissuade Mordisco from abandoning the process.

**December 1, 2016**
Implementation of the peace accords begins.

**February 18, 2017**
Reintegration and transition to 2 Transitory-Hamlet Zones for Normalization.

**June 27, 2017**
Surrender of weapons to the United Nations Verification Mission (7132 arms surrendered).

**September 11, 2017**
Edgar Mestas Salgado, alias "Rodrigo Cadete" abandons the ETCR. Tolima reintegration zone, distancing himself from the peace process.

**April 9, 2018**
Seuxis Pas saving Hernandez, alias "Jesus Santrich," is captured by the public prosecutor's office.

**August 28, 2018**
Luciano Marín, alias "Iván Márquez," disappears from public life. As of April 11, he announced that he would be temporarily leaving the ETCR in Miravalle, Caquetá.

**August 31, 2018**
Henry Castellanos, alias "Románia," disappears from the ETCR in El Diamante, Meta.

**December 21, 2018**
Guacho is killed in the village of Santa Catalía, in the Llanos sector of the municipality of Tumaco, Nariño, during Operation David. The National Government takes it as a victory.

**August 29, 2019**
Iván Márquez reappears along with leaders of the Southern and Eastern Bloos, like Románia, El Paisa, Jose Manuel Sierra Sanovel, alias "Zarco Aldinerve" and Jesús García, among others, declaring his return to arms.
In August 2019, the nature of the ex-FARC mafia changed from a localized nuisance to a national security threat. Iván Márquez and several of the more notorious FARC commanders announced their intention to take up arms again.

In Márquez’s own words, this return to arms was because the state had “betrayed the peace accords.”

Márquez was the second-in-command of the entire guerrilla army. For many years he had led the rebels’ Caribbean Bloc from Venezuela. After the 2011 death of Guillermo León Sáenz Vargas, alias “Alfonso Cano,” many guerrillas thought he should have become the FARC’s leader instead of Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, alias “Timochenko.”

Márquez was a long time member of the then seven-man FARC governing body, the Secretariat. He took the lead negotiating peace with the government, starting in 2012. After the agreement was signed in 2016, he was part of the verification commission for the implementation of the peace deal.

Since joining the FARC in 1985, Márquez moved steadily up the ranks, seeing combat in Urabá and being elected as an alternate congressman for the Patriotic Union. His military and political experience, plus his leadership role in the FARC, give him a strong position in taking on a similar role in the ex-FARC mafia, assuming the other disparate elements will accept a man many blame for the “surrender” of the peace agreement.

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37 Communiqué on return to arms by Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich, former FARC commanders, August 2019.
38 Interview with Álvaro Villarraga, former director of the National Center for Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica). Bogotá, Colombia. September 2019
Márquez was not alone in deserting the process. In the video announcing the return to arms, he had some of the most battle-scarred FARC field commanders by his side.

After Iván Márquez, perhaps the most important of these commanders was Hernán Darío Velásquez, alias “El Paisa.”

El Paisa rose to prominence commanding the Teófilo Forero Mobile Column, one of the FARC’s elite units.³⁹

Based in the departments of Huila and Caquetá, the Teófilo Forero column first came into the public eye when it took over the protection of the Secretariat in the 42,000 square kilometer “despeje” or safe haven granted to the guerrillas to initiate peace talks with President Andrés Pastrana between 1999 and 2002.⁴⁰

El Paisa was responsible for iconic FARC operations, such as the infamous 2001 mass kidnapping from the Miraflores building in Neiva, the hijacking of the commercial plane that ended the peace talks with the government in 2002, and the 2003 car bomb attack at

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⁴⁰ Ibid.
the exclusive El Nogal social club in Bogotá. All of these had tremendous impact, while also demonstrating sophisticated capacity for planning and execution.

His return to arms, coupled with his experience and ability to execute the type of complex and high profile operations, gives El Paisa a privileged place among the new group of FARC dissidents. He provides yet more credibility to the ex-FARC mafia and will attract other veterans as well as new recruits.

Henry Castellanos Garzón, alias “Romaña,” could also be seen lounging in a chair in the video. He made a name for himself by popularizing the FARC’s random kidnapping strategy known as “miracle fishing” (“pescas milagrosas”).

These kidnappings became a favorite financing tactic of the guerrillas in the late 1990s, when they would set up illegal roadblocks and kidnap any individual they thought was worth a decent ransom.

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Romaña’s fierce reputation and loyalty was such that he was sent to Nariño in 2017 to control the chaos created in Tumaco which resulted from the guerrillas’ demobilization process. However, even he was overcome by the maelstrom of violence and criminality. Threats forced him to leave the area in November of that same year.\(^{44}\)

Despite his reputation as a hardline battlefield commander, Romaña spoke calmly and presented himself as a measured, conscientious leader when InSight Crime interviewed him at the FARC’s 10th Conference in September 2016.

His background and leadership of ex-combatants in Meta and Nariño, in addition to his knowledge of key areas in the Eastern Plains, could allow him to rebuild rebel structures and influence in his former areas of operation.

Another battle-hardened veteran, José Vicente Lesmes, alias “Walter Mendoza,” a guerrilla with 37 years of experience in the FARC, also appeared in the video.

Walter was a tactical visionary within the FARC. He helped found the guerrillas’ Arturo Ruiz Mobile Column and pioneered the development of the FARC’s mobile columns, the rebel “shock troops.”

Before demobilization, he led the Libardo García Mobile Column in Buenaventura, then spent part of his long career in the Joint Western Command (Comando Conjunto

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\(^{44}\) RCN Noticias, “Romana, jefe de Farc, abandonó zona de reincorporación por amenazas de muerte,” November 2017. [https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/romana-jefe-de-farc-abandono-zona-de-reincorporacion-por-amenazas-de-muerte](https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/romana-jefe-de-farc-abandono-zona-de-reincorporacion-por-amenazas-de-muerte)
del Occidente), which had presence in the departments of Cauca, Nariño and Valle del Cauca.\textsuperscript{45}

In 2016 he was appointed a pedagogue for the peace process, tasked with explaining the importance of the accords to the FARC rank and file.\textsuperscript{46}

Mendoza’s ability to talk about various guerrilla and political issues was seen first hand by InSight Crime during an interview in 2017. At that time, the veteran commander discussed topics ranging from the FARC’s political activity, to a discourse on Gentil Duarte’s position and rejection of the peace process. During this interview, Mendoza insisted he was a “faithful follower of the guerrilla structure,” and would not abandon the peace process.\textsuperscript{47}

However, his loyalty to the peace process was always suspect. In 2014, when the peace negotiations were underway in Havana, he was seen in a video aggressively explaining to dozens of suspected guerrillas that “the FARC was never going to hand over its weapons.”\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} InSight Crime. Profile of José Vicente Lesmes, alias “Walter Mendoza.” September 2019.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibíd.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Walter Mendoza. Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación La Playa – La Variante. Tumaco, Nariño. February 2017
\textsuperscript{48} Canal 1, Veterano de las Farc dice que nunca van a entregar las armas, February 2014. https://canal1.com.co/noticias/veterano-de-las-farc-dice-que-nunca-van-a-entregar-las-ARMAS/
Mendoza’s history on Colombia’s Pacific coast and his position in the peace process as a pedagogue give him an important position in the ex-FARC mafia. He has great credibility as a guerrilla leader and smooth orator, which will likely allow him to influence other ex-combatants. In addition, his extensive experience in the guerrillas’ operational structures and his ability to develop innovative war tactics make him an important asset to the ex-FARC mafia.

José Manuel Sierra, alias “Zarco Aldinever,” commanded several guerrilla fronts in the department of Meta. He also has knowledge of Cundinamarca.49

Aldinever was in the FARC’s 26th, 51st and 52nd Fronts in Meta, Cundinamarca and Boyacá, and was one of the Eastern Bloc’s senior commanders. Within that Bloc he was responsible for securing financing through drug trafficking, taxing coca and cocaine production and smuggling routes in the zones he controlled. He also became part of the FARC’s Central General Staff as a representative of the same bloc.50

Aldinever could make a significant contribution to ex-FARC financing across the Eastern Plains, although his former areas of operation are now dominated by Gentil Duarte and his group of dissidents.

50 Ibid.
Also rooted in the military wing of the former Eastern Bloc is Olivio Merchán Gómez, alias “Loco Iván,” who was in the FARC for more than 30 years.

Merchán, who was also present at Márquez’s declaration of a return to war, participated in several guerrilla victories dating back to the early 1990s, and commanded several Eastern Bloc fronts in Meta and Arauca.51

He was responsible for logistics at the FARC’s 10th Conference, the last meeting the guerrillas held as a rebel group, although even there his doubts about the consequences of the rebel demobilization were evident. At the time he pointed out the possibility that “the state doesn’t comply [and] what happened in the previous processes happens” and “they begin to kill us.”52

Loco Iván brings a great deal of experience and extensive knowledge and contacts in Meta and Arauca.

One of the younger generation rebel leaders who joined the dissidents is Nelson Enrique Díaz, alias “Iván Alí.”


52 El Tiempo, El temor es que empiecen a matarnos: alias El loco Iván, September 2016. https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/entrevista-con-alias-el-loco-ivan-36876
Ali was a commander in Guaviare, where he used his knowledge to control key drug trafficking corridors.\(^{53}\) His skill in communications and public relations put him at the head of the international press and public relations at the FARC’s 10th Conference, where InSight Crime conducted a series of interviews with him.

By 2017, Iván Ali was settled into the FARC concentration zone in San José de Guaviare and was responsible for more than 500 former combatants, setting up productive projects to sustain the demobilized rebels. There, he met with InSight Crime to explain multiple issues facing the implementation of the peace process.\(^{54}\)

“\[quote\]If we have to return to the mountains, we’ll go,\[\]” he said. Iván Ali saw “the peace process with the closed eye of optimism, but with the open eye of mistrust,” and even acknowledged that the ex-FARC rebels led by Duarte had approached him.\(^{55}\)

Ali is undoubtedly a strong figure within the new dissidents. His charisma, youth, ideology and contemporary thinking give him a great ability to lead, not only among ex-guerrillas in Guaviare, but also with new recruits.

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\(^{55}\) Ibid.
Also joining the dissidents with Márquez was one of the FARC “aristocrats”: Alberto Cruz Lobo, alias “Enrique Marulanda,” a son of the FARC founder Pedro Marín, alias “Manuel Marulanda” or “Tirofijo.”

Enrique operated within the Eastern Bloc and worked with Zarco Aldinever and Romaña, He has a more military background and was a bodyguard to FARC commander Mono Jojoy up until his death in 2010.

During the peace process, he led one of the concentration zones in Meta, where InSight Crime interviewed him. With clear leadership ability and a deep knowledge of guerrilla politics, he explained the many problems facing the peace process and its high risk for failure.

Next to Enrique Marulanda in the video was Julio Enrique Rincón Rico, alias “Nelson Robles,” a former commander of the 52nd and 55th Fronts of the Eastern Bloc.

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58 Ibíd.
He is a veteran guerrilla who fought in Meta and Cundinamarca alongside legendary FARC commander Carlos Osorio Velásquez, alias “Marco Aurelio Buendía,” in the 52nd Front.  

Robles has influence in strategic areas such as Vistahermosa and Uribe in Meta department, both key municipalities for coca plantations and drug trafficking.

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59 Semana. Identifican y piden expulsar otros siete guerrillos que aparecen con Iván Márquez, October 2019. https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/solicitan-que-sean-excluidos-de-la-jep-siete-comparecientes-de-las-farc-que-estan-con-ivan-marquez/636355
Francisco Antonio Durango Úsuga, alias “Ariel Rodríguez,” was a commander in the historic 5th Front in the Urabá sub-region of Antioquia and the 18th Front in the Nudo de Paramillo of Antioquia.

In a 2016 interview, when he was commander of the 5th Front, he explained that if the “government didn’t guarantee they would combat paramilitaries (referring in part to the Urabeños who have strong presence in the area),” it would be difficult to implement the peace process.60

Ariel has extensive knowledge of, and influence around, the Nudo de Paramillo, one of the most strategic rebel areas in northern Colombia. His experience includes not only fighting the security forces, but the AUC and now the Urabeños in this region.

In fact, his influence has already shown itself through the allegiance of the dissident 18th Front to Márquez’s cause. It recognized Márquez and his leadership as “the new FARC-EP Secretariat.”61

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60 La Silla Vacía, Especial Nudo del Paramillo: Las Farc y su posición frente al paramilitarismo, April 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=89&v=rlzdLRsmjp4
Among the other former rebels worth a mention is Enrique Muñoz, alias “Villa,” a former member of the 33rd Front and leader of the Antonio Santos Mobile Column.\(^\text{62}\)

Since 2018, there have been rumors in Norte de Santander about ex-FARC mafia cells led by Villa. Although he dismissed accusations of operating outside the agreement, insisting that he was “moving the peace process forward collectively and personally,”\(^\text{63}\) his appearance alongside Márquez ended any speculation.

In fact, Villa may currently be leading a small group made up of about 20 members of the 33rd Front in Catatumbo, according to InSight Crime field research.\(^\text{64}\)

Finally, to the left of Márquez in pride of place in the video and brandishing a rifle (even though he is blind) was Seuxis Pausías Hernández, alias “Jesús Santrich.”

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\(^\text{64}\) David Erazo, UNODC Norte de Santander. Cúcuta, Norte de Santander. October 2019
Santrich’s importance to the FARC; and now to the ex-FARC mafia is as an ideologue and liaison with elements in the Chavista regime in Venezuela.65

He came to prominence initially as part of the FARC negotiating team in Havana and was given one of the 10 congressional places reserved for the FARC’s political party, although he never took up his seat. This was due to his 2018 arrest on drug trafficking charges. His detention and threatened extradition was one of the factors that triggered Márquez and El Paisa to abandon the peace process.66

Márquez’s group, unlike the dissidents under Gentil Duarte, come from many different FARC Blocs, including those of the Caribbean, Western, Eastern, Southern and José María Cordoba fighting divisions, as well as from several mobile columns, with leaders drawn from the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central) and the Secretariat. This may allow the ex-FARC mafia to create a nationwide network once again.

In his pledge to take up arms again, Márquez announced the birth of “the new Marquetalia” in an effort to seize power from the current government, which he deemed to be composed “outlaws and the mafia of corruption and impunity.”67

Márquez went on to explain the new insurgent struggle by describing the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, created in 2000, as its main political instrument.68 In addition, the ex-FARC mafia seems intent on reviving tools like the Continental Bolivarian Coordinator, a program created in 2005 to organize clandestine political activity in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, in order to strengthen the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia.69

InSight Crime was there in the “despeje” in 2000 when more than 2,000 FARC rebels massed for the launch of the new Bolivarian Movement. It was the greatest military parade the FARC had ever put on. Márquez is harking back to the glory days of the FARC, while also seeking to establish the political credentials of his faction of the ex-FARC mafia.

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66 Ibid.
67 A New Stage of Struggle for the Awakening of Consciousness, Manifesto issued by Iván Márquez and allies. August 2019.
69 Minutes of the Meeting of the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, communiqué from Santrich and allies. August 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcLesfe6d7Y
Can Márquez Unify the Ex-FARC mafia?

The video announcement was loaded with FARC symbolism. The backdrop had a FARC flag and some of the pantheon of FARC heroes and martyrs. Iván Márquez was seeking to reunite the disparate elements of the ex-FARC mafia under the historic banner, and his leadership. And if anyone can do it, it is Márquez.

However, the current elements of the ex-FARC mafia seem united only in their history. While Márquez played up the ideological struggle, many other elements of the dissidents are driven only by money and control of the criminal economies that sustained the rebel army for five decades.

And while Márquez’s seniority is not in doubt, he is a late arrival to the dissidents, and since he was the principal architect of the peace accord, must shoulder much of the blame for the demobilization and subsequent “betrayal” by the government.

Gentil Duarte, Iván Mordisco and Jhon 40 established the initial dissidents and have built a new criminal syndicate stretching across up to eight departments.
Duarte and his crew have already been seeking to reconnect with different ex-FARC elements across the country, reaching out to former rebel combatants in strategic areas like Caquetá, Nariño and Cauca. This has allowed them to quickly expand out of their home base in Guaviare and Meta departments.\footnote{InSight Crime, Death of 'Rodrigo Cadete' in Colombia Heavy Blow to FARC Dissidents, February 2019. \url{https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/death-rodrigo-cadete-colombia-heavy-blow-farc-dissidents/}}

In Cauca, Duarte, Mordisco and Jhon 40 have created alliances with the Dagoberto Ramos Column led by Israel Mén dez Quitumbo, alias “Indio.” Made up of former members of the FARC’s 6th Front and the Miller Perdomo and Jacobo Arenas Mobile Columns, the group has reportedly reached an agreement with Duarte’s envoys in Caloto and Corinto, municipalities crucial for drug trafficking and illegal mining.\footnote{El Pais, Reunión en Brasil, ¿la génesis de las disidencias que tienen en jaque al Cauca? August 2019. \url{https://www.elpais.com.co/contenido-premium/reunion-en-brasil-la-genesis-de-las-disidencias-que-tienen-en-jaque-al-cauca.html}}

This growth is being fed in part by the group’s structure, which has moved away from a vertically integrated organization, and now resembles a more horizontal network. Each group in the network divides criminal incomes and territory, and makes agreements to work together without necessarily implying any subordination.

In fact, Márquez seems quite aware of the advantage Duarte and his crew have. He tried to reach an agreement with them, according to military intelligence information, but the response seemed to be negative, with Márquez and his allies reportedly criticized for trying to act as leaders of the dissident movement.\footnote{Noticias Caracol, Iván Márquez buscó apoyo en el ELN y en Venezuela porque ‘Gentil Duarte’ se lo negó, September 2019. \url{https://noticias.caracoltv.com/colombia/ivan-marquez-busco-apoyo-en-el-eln-y-en-venezuela-porque-gentil-duarte-se-lo-nego}}

This may have prompted Márquez to seek support from the ELN, despite the fact that the ELN guerrillas and FARC had multiple conflicts in the past.\footnote{Ibíd.} In theory, it seems that Márquez is now dealing with former mid-ranking commanders now, who are reluctant to take orders and give up their newly acquired independence.

An example of this was with Pedro Goyes Cortés, alias “Sinaloa.” He was a junior member of the 48th Front in Putumayo. On demobilization, he and a handful of former rebels “immediately took over the area” and strengthened themselves by controlling drug trafficking, according to InSight Crime’s sources.\footnote{InSight Crime. Interview on field. Putumayo. May – April 2017.}

Their growth was such that Duarte’s envoys tried to ally with them in 2018 but were rejected. Sinaloa “did not want to work under their protection.” Consequently a war, that continues today, erupted over control of the area between competing ex-FARC elements.\footnote{InSight Crime. Interview on field. Putumayo. May 2019.}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{InSight Crime, Death of ‘Rodrigo Cadete’ in Colombia Heavy Blow to FARC Dissidents, February 2019. \url{https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/death-rodrigo-cadete-colombia-heavy-blow-farc-dissidents/}}
\item \footnote{Ibíd.}
\item \footnote{InSight Crime. Interview on field. Putumayo. May – April 2017.}
\item \footnote{InSight Crime. Interview on field. Putumayo. May 2019.}
\end{itemize}
At the end of the day, military strength and control over lucrative criminal economies are what will ensure leadership among ex-FARC elements. And it is not clear that Márquez has either.

Having experienced military commanders, leadership experience and political credibility mean little in today’s criminal landscape. Without serious manpower, arms and funding, Márquez has little to offer the disparate elements of the ex-FARC mafia and no chance of rebuilding any kind of unity or a nationwide network.

The days of a ruling Secretariat, where orders were obeyed, largely unquestioned, by rebel rank-and-file, are long gone. The ex-FARC mafia will struggle to even build the more horizontal structure of the ELN, where local units have a great deal of autonomy, but a higher level of ideological adhesion and loyalty to the Central Command (Comando Central - COCE.) Indeed, the best the ex-FARC mafia can hope for at the moment is to become a federation of criminal groups with a shared history. However, what is likely to keep that federation together is criminal interests, not ideology or shared history.
With Colombia now producing more cocaine than ever before, the rise of illegal mining, as well as widespread extortion, the ex-FARC mafia has all the resources it needs to rebuild itself into a national force.

Prior to their demobilization, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC) did not merely maintain control over strategic areas as part of their struggle against the state, they also kept a tight rein over criminal activities in those areas. This allowed them to become one of the best-financed guerrilla groups in Latin America.

The FARC had influence all links of the cocaine production chain, including protecting coca growers, regulating the coca base market and charging a tax (gramaje) from producers. A number of guerrilla units, including the 10th, 16th, 29th, 30th, 33rd, 48th and 57th Fronts, were all located in crucial drug trafficking areas and border areas, generating large profits through their involvement in the transnational drug trade.

Besides its drug trafficking operations, the FARC also charged “impuestos de guerra” (war taxes) or “vacunas” (vaccines) from residents in areas they controlled. According to calculations made by InSight Crime, at the time of its demobilization, the group was collecting around $75 million a year from these taxes. Annual FARC income in those days was in excess of $200 million a year.

In 2018, production of cocaine hydrochloride stood at around 1,120 tons, according to figures from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), while around 80 percent of the gold exported by Colombia was illegally extracted. Given their knowledge of drug trafficking and illegal mining, as well as Colombia’s current security panorama, the ex-FARC mafia now have access to ample sources of financing.


79 Portafolio, Producción ilegal de oro es más del 70% del mercado, April 21, 2019. https://www.portafolio.co/economia/produccion-illegal-de-oro-es-mas-del-70-del-mercado-528760
Drug Trafficking

Cocaine

Cocaine trafficking was one of the most important pillars of the FARC’s financing for decades, and it is now the most lucrative criminal economy for the ex-FARC mafia. From the collection of taxes to the production and transportation of cocaine as well as smuggling it into other countries, the FARC earned income from all links across the drug trafficking chain. These profits have been so important that dissident elements from all the above mentioned FARC fronts, except the 57th, have emerged.

The Eastern Plains and the Colombian Amazon are important regions for the drug trade. The dissident 1st Front controls the cultivation, production and transportation of cocaine in much of the departments of Amazonas, Caquetá, Guainía, Guaviare, Meta and Vaupés. The rebels also charge a tax (“gramaje”) to third-parties seeking to acquire coca paste or cocaine.\(^{80}\) Shipments of drugs are sent along strategic routes to Venezuela and Brazil, with the ex-FARC mafia maintaining alliances with drug trafficking groups in both countries.

Drug routes to Venezuela often pass through the San Fernando de Atabapo border crossing, or head for Arauca, further inland.\(^{81}\)\(^{82}\) Once they cross the border, most of these shipments continue on to Central America.\(^{83}\) In southern Colombia, they make their way to Brazil through the department of Vaupés. Here, the dissident 1st Front controls the exit points and many laboratories, known as “crystallizers,” (cristalizaderos) which transform coca paste into cocaine.\(^{84}\) This group also oversees the buying and selling of coca base in the departments of Guaviare and Caquetá, as well as its processing into cocaine and transport by river out of Colombia.\(^{85}\) The 1st Front now sits astride key drug trafficking corridors, beginning in Miraflories, Guaviare, and connecting Vaupés to Brazil.\(^{86}\)

Field research in Amazonas revealed the border crossing of Tarapacá as a choke point,\(^{87}\) where most shipments of cocaine and marijuana from the southern departments of

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\(^{80}\) InSight Crime interviews with local officials, Puerto Rico, Caquetá department, August 2017.
\(^{82}\) InSight Crime interview with former governor of the Venezuelan state of Amazonas, Bogotá. September 23, 2019.
\(^{83}\) El Espectador, Disidencias y narcotráfico, los males de Arauca, May 29, 2019. https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/disidencias-y-narcotrafico-los-males-de-arauca-articulo-863331
\(^{87}\) InSight Crime interview with security forces, Leticia, Amazonas department, June 26, 2019.
Putumayo, Caquetá and Cauca exit Colombia.\textsuperscript{88} Around the triple frontier, drug shipments from Peru and Colombia are usually bound for the city of Manaus in Brazil.

The department of Nariño remains the largest coca grower in Colombia despite a reduction in the hectares reported for 2018. Of 41,903 hectares of coca crops in Nariño, 16,046 are located in the coastal municipality of Tumaco, where several ex-FARC mafia groups battle for control of drug trafficking real estate. The first, the Oliver Sinisterra Front, a group of FARC dissidents who abandoned the peace process in 2017, are battling the United Guerrillas of the Pacific (Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico – GUP) and Los Contadores, a criminal group run by alias ‘Contador,’ once a financial operator for the FARC’s Daniel Aldana Column and 29th Front.\textsuperscript{89,90,91}

These three groups, along with the Estiven González Front, a dissident faction of the FARC 29th Front, are based in municipalities along Nariño’s Pacific coast. From here, they exercise control over coca crops and cocaine processing, as well as transportation of the drug to Ecuador, Central America and the United States.

In rural parts of Nariño, cocaine laboratories are conveniently located near departure points from the Pacific Ocean and Ecuador. With much of the cocaine travelling by river, the laboratories are located along the banks of major rivers in Nariño. Around 2.4 tons of cocaine pass along the department’s waterways every month.\textsuperscript{92,93}

While located right next to Nariño, the department of Putumayo is home to a different set of criminal actors. Dissidents from the 48th Front watch over coca production areas along the border with Ecuador, and laboratories along the Putumayo and San Miguel rivers.\textsuperscript{94}

The 48th Front of the ex-FARC mafia have reached an agreement with a criminal group known as La Constru to divide up drug trafficking in Putumayo. While the FARC dissidents provide security for coca crops and cocaine processing laboratories, La Constru is in charge of international contacts, including with Mexican cartels, as well as handling logistics for drug routes to Europe and Central America.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{88} El Espectador, Los narcos brasileños que vinieron a la Feria de Cali para sacar droga a la Amazonia, February 11, 2019. https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/los-narcos-brasileños-que-vinieron-la-feria-de-cali-para-sacar-droga-la-amazonia-articulo-839193
\textsuperscript{93} InSight Crime interview with local authorities, Tumaco, Nariño. February 7, 2017.
\textsuperscript{94} InSight Crime interview with FARC militia, Lago Agrio, Ecuador. May 1, 2019.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
In northern Cauca, the control of the Naya and Micay rivers is crucial to transporting drug shipments down to the Pacific Ocean. In this region, the Naya river leads to the port of Buenaventura, the biggest Pacific port and one of Colombia’s busiest gateways for drugs.

According to authorities in the area, these groups “move everything by river, down the Naya river.” The armed groups have 200 mules moving the drugs in caravans. They move the coca base with these mules until it arrives at the processing laboratories. Then, the crystalized cocaine goes by river, usually to Buenaventura from where they can send go-fast boats to Central America or through containers in the port.96

Currently, a dissident group allied to the 1st Front, named the Jaime Martínez Column controls drug trafficking in a region of Naya.97 Cauca has the third-largest area of coca crops in Colombia and, similar to Nariño, it sees constant departures of drug submarines98 and go-fast boats from its Pacific coast, principally bound for Central America. A number of these vessels have been seized from ex-FARC mafia groups.99

On the other side of the county, in Norte de Santander department, the former FARC 33rd Front also participates in the drug trade alongside other criminal groups. Based in municipalities such as Tibú, El Tarra, Sardinata and Convención, these ex-FARC mafia elements have agreements with the ELN about how to divide up drug routes.100 They also move cocaine into the Venezuelan states of Táchira and Zulia where they are believed to have relationships with Mexican cartels which buy shipments.101 102 103

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96 InSight Crime interview with security forces in Guapi, Cauca, April 2, 2018
98 Armada de Colombia, Incautados tres semisumergibles que transportarían hasta 7 toneladas de alcaloides, February 12, 2019. https://www.armada.mil.co/es/content/incautados-tres-semisumergibles-que-transportarian-hasta-7-toneladas-alcaloides
99 InSight Crime interview with security forces in Guapi, Cauca, April 2, 2018
Marijuana

Marijuana, particularly the variety known as “cripy,” has become a significant source of income for Colombian organized crime. It now feeds the internal market and is exported to other countries, including Brazil, Chile, Venezuela and into the Caribbean, with InSight Crime field research finding it in Trinidad and Tobago.
Highly profitable, marijuana now funds several ex-FARC groups. Export prices can be three times higher than in Colombia. In Cauca, for example, one kilogram of cripy marijuana costs around $25, but it fetches around $75 as soon as it crosses the border into Brazil.

The largest-scale cultivation of marijuana takes place in the so-called “Golden Triangle” in the department of Cauca, formed by the municipalities of Miranda, Caloto and Corinto. Up to 60 percent of illegal marijuana from Colombia comes out of the Golden Triangle. According to sources within the local government, Corinto alone has an annual crop of 750 tons of “cripy” marijuana, worth some $50 million abroad.

In these municipalities, the ex-FARC mafia’s 6th Front, also known as the Dagoberto Ramos Column, which fought a battle with dissidents of the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación – EPL) earlier this year for control of the area, keeps marijuana greenhouses under close surveillance to prevent authorities from cutting the power to them.

Much of this marijuana is sent to Brazil in a collaboration with Brazilian gang, Family of the North (Familia do Norte - FDN). Security force sources confirmed to InSight Crime that “rivers are highways which they use not only to move cocaine hydrochloride or cocaine paste, but also to bring across caches of marijuana.”

Tons of marijuana are sent from Cauca to the city of Manaus in Brazil along the Caquetá River in northern Amazonas. Another increasingly popular exit route for marijuana goes through the department of Vichada. It is sent to Puerto Gaitán, Meta, before being loaded onto boats and taken down the River Meta to Vichada. Once it reaches Puerto Carreño, the marijuana then goes out along the Orinoco River through Venezuela, where there are fewer controls.

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105 InSight Crime interview with Rafael Moreno, municipal ombudsman, Leticia, Amazonas department, June 27, 2019.
Illegal Mining

With the global price of gold having risen steadily since 2010, illegal gold mining has grown in tandem. The FARC built up this criminal economy around a system of extortion or “taxes” on extraction. They charged around $7,000 for each dredge or piece of heavy machinery that entered their territory as well as charging the machine owners a tax based on the amount of gold being extracted, usually ranging between $1,000-4,000 a month.\(^{111}\)

The relative ease with which gold can be legalized makes it a criminal economy of choice for armed groups in Colombia. Illegal mining of this precious metal is present in several areas of the country, especially along rivers in rural areas, where authorities have little presence and even less control. The ex-FARC mafia have continued the tax system begun by the rebel army extorting miners and even owning the dredges and mechanical diggers used to extract gold.

An example of this is the dissident 36th Front in Antioquia. Its struggle to control gold mining in Antioquia and the town of Yarumal, through which much of the gold passes, led to the 2018 murder of three geologists from the Canadian multinational, Continental Gold. The crime was reportedly carried out by the 36th Front and allied ELN, which also has criminal interests in the area.\(^{112}\)

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In the Colombian Pacific, illegal mining generates major profits in the areas of Timbiquí, Guapi and López de Micay, in the department of Cauca, and Tumaco, in the department of Nariño, albeit at a high environmental cost.

Tumaco, one of Colombia’s most violent municipalities as well as having one of the highest levels of coca crops in the country, also provides illegal mining income. According to the Ombudsman’s Office, around 587 kilograms of gold were extracted in Tumaco in 2017, generating $1.8 million in extortion for illegal groups, including the Oliver Sinisterra Front and the United Guerrillas of the Pacific.113

Further north in Cauca, dissident groups also exercise control over illegal mining. Under the command of Leider Johani Moscue, alias ‘Mayimbú,’ the Jaime Martínez Column controls a gold mine in the municipality of López de Micay, from which they receive up to 1.5 billion pesos (around $440,000) per year, according to the authorities.114

In Timbiquí, the dissident Estiven González Front regulates the work schedules of illegal miners and gold panners in the area.115 They extort entire communities, “allowing” them to continue with gold extraction under the excuse of providing protection from other criminal groups and the authorities.116 This level of extortion has become so severe that “landowners have nothing left because the highest percentage (of income) is going to the guerrillas and the owner of the machinery.” 117 118

The ex-FARC mafia are also active in illegal gold mining across the Eastern Plains and the Colombian Amazon. Around the Yaigojé Apaporis National Natural Park, these dissident groups maintain control of the Taraira region, bordering Brazil, where they regulate the exploitation of minerals.119 This activity also takes place along the Caquetá River, where 1st Front fighters provide protection to miners and machinery operators in exchange for money or part of the haul of minerals.120 121

115 InSight Crime interview with local official, Timbiquí, Cauca department, April 4, 2018.
120 InSight Crime interviews with security forces in Leticia, Amazonas department, June 26, 2019.
The department of Guainía has been one of the most affected by illegal mining. According to several reports, members of the 1st Front are directly involved in illegal mining between Colombia and Venezuela. Leaders such as Géner García Molina, alias ‘Jhon 40,’ and alias ‘Julián Chollo’ control mines, dredges and essential supplies used to extract gold rural Guainía, especially around Puerto Inírida on the border with Venezuela.122 123

The Guainía River is also an area of special interest for the Acacio Medina Front, which is estimated to bring in around 180 million pesos (around $53,000) per month in profits from illegal mining.124 125 In Meta, this same group controls dredges used in illegal mining in areas such as Mapiripán.126

Across the border in Venezuela, 1st Front dissidents, including the Acacio Medina Front, receive much of their income from illegal gold mining. The state of Amazonas is perhaps the most affected by this criminal economy. According to a recent International Crisis Group report, the Acacio Medina Front controls the illegal Yapacana mines in this state. There have also been reports of this group forcing children and young people to work in the mines through intimidation and threats to their families.127

Under the leadership of Jhon 40, this section of the ex-FARC mafia control between 30 and 40 dredges on the Negro River in Guainía, charging a tax of 10 grams of gold per month for every dredge. The gold is then sent to Colombia along the Guaviare, Guainía and Inírida rivers.128

**Extortion**

Prior to their demobilization, the FARC maintained extensive extortion networks in the territories under their control. Known as “vacunas” (vaccines) or “impuestos de guerra” (war taxes), these payments provided a steady stream of cash for the guerrillas. Many of the ex-FARC mafia groups which have arisen in the last three years have maintained this practice, often charging more than their predecessors. As a public official told InSight Crime in Guaviare, “extortion has worsened. Now the dissidents extort those who were

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128 Ibid.
not extorted before, but right now people also report a little more.”

The dissident 10th Front as well as the ELN are known to charge the “war tax” across the border, in the Venezuelan state of Apure. Additionally, they charge a “toll” for goods being transported by river and charge 4 percent of the value of public works contracts to allow them to go ahead in areas they control. This last modality is also repeated in the municipality of Miraflores, in Guaviare, where the dissidents there charge the same percentage for any contract executed.

Farmers in the departments of Arauca, Guaviare and Meta are charged between 10,000-30,000 pesos ($3-9) per head of cattle per year. The transport of goods and passengers along the rivers controlled by the ex-FARC mafia are also subject to extortion. A Miraflores official in Guaviare told InSight Crime that “every vessel passing down the river has to pay.” Another source on the ground stated that dissidents charge 200,000 pesos ($60) for every ton of merchandise moving down the river.

With around 3,000 tons of merchandise moving down the river every month in 2017, this could mean an estimated annual income of 600 million pesos (around $175,000).

Towards the center of the country, in Tolima, the Dagoberto Ramos Column have also demanded payments of 400,000 pesos ($120) from public transport drivers traveling through the area.

Likewise, merchants are also victims of this criminal economy. They are summoned in small groups to rural areas of municipalities to make payments to ex-FARC mafia groups, who intimidate the population into not reporting this to the authorities.

Another form of extortion, used by the ex-FARC mafia in Cauca, is extortion through kidnapping. The authorities have captured several members of the Dagoberto Ramos Column specialized in this criminal economy, and who were responsible for the gathering of intelligence and kidnapping of victims as well as the extortion of family members across Cauca.

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129 InSight Crime interview with local official, San José del Guaviare, Guaviare Department, July 31, 2017
130 InSight Crime interview, Government Secretary, Miraflores, Guaviare department, July 27, 2017
131 InSight Crime interview with community leader, Calamar, Guaviare, July 27 2017
132 InSight Crime interview with Javier Ramírez, Inspector of Police, Puerto Rico, Meta department. August 2, 2017
133 InSight Crime interview with local official, Miraflores, Guaviare Department, July 27, 2017
134 InSight Crime interview with community leader, Calamar, Guaviare, July 27 2017
136 InSight Crime meeting with local community organization, Miraflores, Guaviare department, July 27, 2017
There are several takeaways from all of this. The first is that most ex-FARC mafia units are making significant profits, well beyond what is needed to sustain their current numbers. Second, they are not shy in fighting one another for control of criminal economies. Third, the evidence suggests that most of them are now just about the money, with little evidence of political work being done in their areas of influence. They may profess an ideology, but they are increasingly acting likely purely criminal syndicates.
After 2002, under increasing pressure from security forces, the FARC moved much of their leadership, logistics and funding outside of Colombia, particularly to Venezuela. For the ex-FARC mafia, the same is true, and the fate of the Maduro regime and that of the FARC dissidents may be inextricably linked.

Venezuela: Familiar Territory for FARC Dissidents

Beyond being a place of refuge, the ex-FARC mafia have a perfect operations center in Venezuela. From here the FARC dissidents have a firm grip on the transnational reins of drug trafficking and illegal mining, having seemingly been welcomed by the senior leaders of the Chavista regime.

Hugo Chávez’s arrival to power in 1998 marked a before and after in the evolution of irregular groups in the country. The ideological similarities and open declarations of support received by the members of the now demobilized FARC guerrilla, turned Venezuela into an open-door territory that initially offered the rebel army refuge from Colombian authorities.

This relationship was the source of numerous allegations that pointed to Venezuela as a criminal launching pad, harboring Colombian rebel groups within its territory. The height of these compromising revelations involving the Chavista administration and

FARC occurred in 2008, with the files seized from computers of Luis Devia Silva, alias “Raúl Reyes.” Reyes was the FARC “foreign minister,” killed in an aerial bombardment of a FARC camp in Ecuador. These documents revealed a long-standing relationship between the rebel army and Chávez’s home of the Miraflores Palace.

With the long history of FARC presence in Venezuela, it was inevitable that the ex-FARC mafia would inherit some of this territory and the links with members of the Maduro regime.\textsuperscript{141} The southern Venezuelan state was one such place and it now lies at the heart of the power of the ex-FARC mafia elements led by Miguel Botache Santillana, better known as “Gentil Duarte.”\textsuperscript{142}

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First Outpost: Acacio Medina Front and Jhon 40

The state of Amazonas, as the name suggests, makes up part of the Amazonian basin, dense triple canopy jungle, with rivers the only highways. It borders two Colombian departments, Guainía and Vichada, separated only by the Orinoco River. Dissidents of the Acacio Medina Front, led by Géner García Molina, alias “Jhon 40,” are present in this region.

At first, their position within Venezuelan territory was in response to the former FARC guerrilla’s territorial expansion strategies. After a meeting attended by former leaders of the Eastern Bloc, including Gentil Duarte and Jhon 40, the creation of the Acacio Medina Front was agreed upon, with its objective being to strengthen the border efforts being developed by the 16th Front in this sector.

As former governor of Amazonas, Liborio Guarulla Garrido, explained to InSight Crime, activity by this structure has been reported since 2012 in a town near the San Miguel River in the Venezuelan municipality of Maroa. There, they set up camp along the banks of the river and built airstrips that received and dispatched aircraft loaded with drugs.

Once the demobilization of the former FARC had begun, Jhon 40 convinced his men not to participate in the peace process. According to intelligence sources, the attractive illicit revenues produced by illegal mining and drug trafficking were the main motive for continuing operations.

Since then, the dissident Acacio Medina Front has managed to secure a firm presence along the border, controlling river and land corridors that allow for the constant flow of arms, drugs, minerals and money.

In Apure, a state to the north of Amazonas, the stage has been set with similar characteristics.

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144 Verdad Abierta, El Bloque Oriental marcó el auge y declive de las Farc, October 10, 2013. https://verdadabierta.com/el-bloque-oriental-marco-el-auge-y-declive-de-las-farc/
Apure and the Arauca Border

Across the border from Arauca department is the state of Apure. An alliance operates in this territory between the dissidents of the 1st Front and the 10th Front, whose articulation is a product of the Gentil Duarte’s strategy in eastern Colombia.

Heading these illicit activities, is Noé Suárez Rojas, also known as “Germán Briceño Suárez” or “Grannobles,” who was not on the Colombian government’s list of former combatants of the now-demobilized FARC as there were rumors that he was dead. According to recent information published by Colombia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Grannobles was in charge of financial management and communal meetings on the Colombo-Venezuelan border.

Behind Grannobles’ command is Jorge Eliécer Jiménez, alias “Jerónimo” or “Arturo,” who is believed to be the direct link with the 1st Front dissidents, under the orders of Iván Mordisco. This alliance is responsible for coordinating cocaine shipments by means of the routes and corridors controlled by the ELN on the border between Venezuela and Arauca.

While the nature of the agreement between ex-FARC mafia and the ELN is still not clear, the profits from drug trafficking, contraband and extortion are divided between both illegal groups. Their cooperation could be the product of a non-aggression pact, negotiated during a
meeting between the senior commanders of each organization, that took place in a sector known as Tres Esquinas, in the state of Apure, at the end of 2018. The meeting and any agreements reached is crucial in understanding not only the relationship between the ELN and ex-FARC mafia, but any relationship with the Venezuelan state.  

While this alliance appears to remain under the terms of a criminal fraternity, there is a likelihood of relations breaking down given the fractious history between the FARC and ELN in this area. It might also be relevant in the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander department, where no clashes have been reported so far, where there is also a risk of confrontation between them.  

Territorial Expansion in Venezuela

While FARC presence in the Venezuela border states was established long ago, the ex-FARC mafia seem to be pushing deeper into Venezuela territory. According to field work conducted by InSight Crime in Venezuela, the ex-FARC mafia are now present in a total of eight states. 

Zulia, Táchira, Apure, Bolívar, Guárico, Barinas, Amazonas and Mérida have been identified as states where the dissident groups managed to establish a foothold and are earning money from a combination of illegal mining, drug trafficking, extortion and contraband. Likewise, these regions have served as recruitment camps.

Ecuador

One of the ex-FARC structures with the most transnational influence in the south of Colombia is the Oliver Sinisterra Front (FOS). It has reach into Ecuador, including Mataje and San Lorenzo, in Esmeraldas province. Here former FARC militia and logistics networks are now at the service of the ex-FARC mafia. They provide the same services to the FOS: providing intelligence, moving drugs, chemical precursors and weapons, as well as protection collection and shelter points.

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Sources consulted by InSight Crime in Ecuador confirmed the existence of agreements between the local authorities and the now dead FOS founder, Walter Patricio Arizala, alias “Guacho,” fed by mutual profit from drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade.\textsuperscript{164} There are various rumors of failures on the part of public security forces to uphold their part of these agreements, leading the FOS to an escalation of violence along the border region.\textsuperscript{165} \textsuperscript{166}

One example was the January 2018 attack with explosives on the main police headquarters in San Lorenzo, that left 28 injured. authorities attributed the attack to the FOS.\textsuperscript{167} These forms of harassment have been accompanied by the displacement of several local communities and landmine incidents.\textsuperscript{168} \textsuperscript{169}

The aforementioned situation destroyed the relationship between dissident elements and Ecuadorean authorities on the other side of the border. This led to Guacho being declared public enemy #1 on both sides of the border. The criminal status quo was re-established after his death at the hands of Colombian security forces in December 2018.

The other department bordering Ecuador is Putumayo, once home to the FARC’s 48\textsuperscript{th} Front, and the third-largest producer of coca in Colombia.\textsuperscript{170} Before the 2016 FARC demobilization process, the first dissident elements of the 48th Front formed an alliance with “La Constru,” a feared criminal group in the region. This alliance, known on the ground as “La Mafia,” is in charge of coordinating drug trafficking along the border.\textsuperscript{171}

The dissidents of the 48th Front are responsible for the protection and regulation of coca producing areas and of the drug-producing laboratories located on the banks of the Putumayo and San Miguel Rivers. Meanwhile, La Constru is responsible for ties with Mexican cartels and for the logistics of the drug shipment routes.\textsuperscript{172}

\bibitem{164} InSight Crime interview with Cristian Rivadeneira, Prosecutor (Fiscal) in San Lorenzo, San Lorenzo, Ecuador, April 29, 2019
\bibitem{165} Ibid.
\bibitem{166} InSight Crime interview with community leader, Palma Real, Esmeraldas, Ecuador. April 28, 2019.
\bibitem{169} InSight Crime interview with community leader, Palma Real, Esmeraldas, Ecuador. April 28, 2019.
\bibitem{171} InSight Crime interview with ex-FARC mafia militia, Lago Agrio, Sucumbíos, Ecuador. May 1, 2019.
\bibitem{172} Ibid.
However, they are not the only dissident element in the region. Since the end of 2018, men from the 1st Front established a presence in the municipality of Puerto Leguízamo in order to negotiate with the 48th Front dissidents. No agreement was made, and the two groups are disputing the control of bordering crossings.

Amidst the social and political crisis currently facing Ecuador, the government is not paying much attention to the Colombian border. This is allowing the dissident groups free rein to further strengthen their presence in territory.

**Border with Brazil**

Amid the waterways of the Amazon rainforest, Jhon 40 coordinates drug trafficking operations. One of the region's most important drug corridors has been set up there, which sees tons of cocaine pass through on its way to supply Brazil’s domestic market and the ports that connect with Europe and Africa.

In Vaupés department, men from the 1st Front under Iván Mordisco’s orders have come from Guaviare, along the Guayabero and Apaporis Rivers. In this territory, the ex-FARC mafia controls the region of Taraira, on the border with Brazil, where they regulate the exploitation of minerals and control a drug trafficking corridor. Mordisco’s interest in this territory is to secure the corridor coming from Miraflores, Guaviare, connecting Vaupés with the neighboring country.

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173 Verdad Abierta, Disidencias, el nuevo motor de la violencia de Putumayo, April 30, 2019. https://verdadabierta.com/disidencias-el-nuevo-motor-de-la-violencia-de-putumayo/
179 Ibíd.
Information obtained by InSight Crime in Amazonas department confirmed the arrival of dissident groups at the end of 2017, focusing on the Tarapacá border crossing, intending to secure drug trafficking routes. In this sector, armed men oversee transit along the Putumayo River, whose channel transports shipments of cocaine and marijuana coming from the departments of Putumayo, Caquetá and Cauca, headed towards Brazil.

The business deals with Brazilian drug traffickers controlled by former FARC drug czar, Tomas Molina Caracas, alias “Negro Acacio,” (killed in 2007) were inherited by Jhon 40. Acacio’s partner, captured in Colombia in 2001 was Red Command (Comando Vermelho - CV) leader, Luiz Fernando da Costa, better known as “Fernandinho.” He was arrested in the jungles of Guainía department, as a result of an ambitious Colombian military operation dubbed “Operation Black Cat” (“Operation Gato Negro”). This operation uncovered an agreement whereby the Brazilian mafia boss provided the FARC with weapons in exchange for drug shipments supplied from the Eastern Bloc. There were close to 5,000 soldiers in charge of destroying and laboratories and tons of drugs, dealing a powerful blow to FARC finances.

Brazilian mafias currently associated with the dissidents include:

- the Familia do Norte (FDN), that maintains business operations with the FARC’s 1st Front dissidence in the Amazonas department, where they control drug outputs headed to the city of Manaos;
- the Red Command (Comando Vermelho – CV)
- and the First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC), where Jhon 40 and Gentil Duarte serve as the main links.

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The Colombo-Brazilian border is key to the ex-FARC’s international business structure. The geographic configuration of this territory offers a wide range of air, sea, and land routes. The ex-FARC’s dominance lies in its direct access to one of the largest domestic cocaine markets in the world, that of Brazil, second only to the United States.

**The Case of the Mexican Cartels**

There has been growing evidence of the presence of Mexican criminal groups in Colombia. The Colombian Attorney General’s Office has warned of the presence of Mexican envoys within the country, looking to purchase large quantities of high purity cocaine.

The Mexican presence is led by the Sinaloa Cartel and its closest rival, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación - CJNG). These Mexican criminal syndicates have woven together a series of alliances with the dissident groups that control the drug trafficking business in regions like the Pacific, Catatumbo and the southernmost part of the country.¹⁹⁰¹⁹¹¹⁹²

The alliance that has proved the most fruitful exists between the 1st Front and the Sinaloa Cartel, for the drug shipments coming out of the departments of Meta, Guaviare and Caquetá towards the border corridors with Venezuela.¹⁹³¹⁹⁴

In Norte de Santander, the dissident 33rd Front also has agreements with Mexican mafias regarding the shipment of drugs headed towards Venezuela.¹⁹⁵¹⁹⁶ However, sources in the region explained to the InSight Crime team that Jhon 40 arrived to this territory with Brazilian negotiators, which was not to the liking of the Mexicans. This caused tensions in the relations and led to Jhon 40’s departure from the region.

¹⁹⁰ La Silla Vacía, Sin las Farc, el narcotráfico tiene más acento mexicano, January 9, 2019, link: https://lasillavacia.com/sin-las-farc-el-narcotrafico-tiene-mas-acento-mexicano-69402
¹⁹² Noticias Caracol, Hay mexicanos haciendo negocios de narcotráfico con disidencias de las FARC, dice Ejército, August 31, 2019. https://noticias.caracoltv.com/colombia/hay-mexicanos-haciendo-negocios-de-narcotrafico-con-disidencias-de-las-farc-dice-ejercito
A Transnational Criminal

Footholds in Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador are crucial to certain factions of the ex-FARC mafia and ensure the dissident groups get access to greater earnings from the drug trade, by taxing and selling cocaine and marijuana beyond Colombia’s borders.

However, the importance of Venezuela is hard to underestimate, especially for the dissident factions commanded by Gentil Duarte and those linked to Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez.”

Duarte’s business manager, Jhon 40, is based out of the Venezuelan state of Amazonas and is estimated to be earning millions of dollars from gold mining and cocaine trafficking. Márquez is also believed to be based in Venezuela. He has strong ties to senior members of the Chavista regime and will likely run his dissident groups from within Venezuela, certainly with the tolerance, if not active support, of the Maduro regime. Out of reach of Colombian security forces and increasingly recruiting Venezuelans to swell their ranks, Venezuela provides the perfect operating base for the ex-FARC mafia to grow and plot their expansion.

As long as a Chavista regime is in power in Venezuela, the total defeat of the ex-FARC mafia is a remote prospect.
Colombia is at a crossroads. Several paths lay before it. One sees the ex-FARC mafia consigned to the dustbin of history in a short period of time. However, there are other, less appetizing scenarios.

Here are three possible future paths for Colombia and the rebel dissidents:

6. The Future of the ex-FARC Mafia

1. The Best Case Scenario: The Ex-FARC Mafia Gradually Disappear

1.1 - Peace Process: While damage has been done to the peace process, the vast majority of former rebels appear committed to peace and have no desire to return to a life of violence and crime. The government can reassure those still in the process, step up funding and implementation in the 170 municipalities laid out in the Development Plans with Territorial Approach (Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial - PDET) and to strengthen the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz - JEP). Under these conditions, further desertion from the peace process will be minimal and the government will be able to gradually consolidate state presence in areas formerly under FARC influence.

1.2 - Criminal Actors: The ex-FARC mafia are unable to unite and indeed end up fighting one another for control of illegal rents, be they drug trafficking, gold mining or extortion. This is already happening in some parts of the country, for example Nariño, where the Oliver Sinisterra Front has been fighting the Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico (United Guerrillas of the Pacific – GUP) for control of the cocaine trade. In this scenario, the former guerrillas do not show any ideological commitment and simply become small players on an increasingly fragmented criminal stage.
**1.3 - Criminal Economies:** The government, through its eradication program and security policy, is able to strangle the ex-FARC mafia economically, systematically attacking its sources of funding. At the heart of government policy at the moment is the eradication of drug crops and ambitious goals have been set at 80,000 hectares of coca for 2019. According to data from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), coca crops, after years of explosive growth, leveled off in 2018. The government is now poised to start significantly reducing drug plantations.

In this scenario, the government would have a serious impact on illegal mining, another big earner for the ex-FARC, using tools such as the Deployment Force against Transnational Threats (Fuerza de Despliegue contra las Amenazas Transnacionales - FUDAT). Thanks to investigations by the Information and Financial Analysis Unit (Unidad de Información y Análisis Financiero – UIAF) and the effective use of asset seizure laws by the Society of Special Assets (Sociedad de Activos Especiales - SAE), the earnings and assets of the ex-FARC mafia would be systematically attacked and undermined.

**1.4 - Security Policy:** through an integrated and cohesive strategy, as laid out in the government security doctrine, the Policy of Defense and Security (Política de Defensa y Seguridad), the state would target the ex-FARC mafia, gradually reducing their territorial reach, killing or capturing their leadership and isolating them from the civilian population. They would be gradually dismantled. There have already been some notable victories, like the killings of Walter Patricio Arizala, alias “Guacho,” in December 2018, and that of Edgar Mesías Salgado Aragón, alias “Rodrigo Cadete,” in February 2019. Here, the government would be able to establish a dependable state presence in remote areas where the dissidents currently operate, providing basic services and protecting the rights of inhabitants.

**1.5 - Political Environment:** The Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común – FARC) political party begins to get traction, not only in the rural areas formerly under FARC influence, but among urban voters. The threats against FARC political activity are minimized and former combatants see that there are real democratic opportunities for them, and that there is fair and open competition for political posts at municipal, departmental and national level.

**1.6 - Venezuela:** President Nicolás Maduro is removed from power, elections are held and Colombia once again has a trustworthy and willing partner in a democratic government in Caracas. This new government will fight ex-FARC mafia elements on Venezuela soil.

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and work in a coordinated fashion with Colombia to secure the border between the two nations.

1.7 - International Panorama: Neighbors like Panama, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador all work together in the fight against the presence of ex-FARC mafia elements operating on their soil. Regional cooperation in the fight against transnational organized crime is strengthened. The United States steps up aid to help Colombia fight to strengthen the rule of law, respect of human rights and the struggle against corruption and transnational organized crime. The international community lines up against the ex-FARC mafia.

1.8 - Conclusion: This would be a continuation of the gradual improvement that Colombia has seen since the mid-1990s, when there were fears that the FARC could actually take power and the country would become a narco-state. There will always be hiccups on the way, but the long-term pattern has been one of gradual improvement in terms of homicide reduction, respect for human rights, economic development and improvements in state presence across the country. Under this scenario, the Duque government finds slightly firmer footing than shown to date and is able to implement many of the policies outlined in the Plan of Security and Defense announced by the president in February 2019. While the ex-FARC mafia would not be eradicated during the Duque administration, they would be continually weakened and become more and more irrelevant over time.

2. The Worst Case Scenario: the Rebirth of a Nationwide Insurgent Army
**2.1 - Peace Process:** Trust in the peace process is permanently damaged, both among former rebels and the communities that once lived under FARC influence. Former combatants continue to desert the process and strengthen the dissidents, while local communities once again support these criminal elements and work with them in the interests of protecting illegal economies. The killing of a former rebel inside the reintegration camp in Mesetas, Meta, shows that no-one is safe, not even in a specially protected zone. Faith in the idea that real change is possible in the remoter coca-growing areas of the country is shattered and locals come to believe that no real alternatives exist. The ELN sees the failure of the FARC peace process and simply hardens its belief that the only real way forward is through armed struggle. The government continues to undermine the terms of the peace agreement, starves funding to the JEP, the coca substitution program and the PDETs.

**2.2 - Criminal Actors:** The currently disparate elements of the ex-FARC mafia unify under new leadership. This leadership is able to impose discipline, ideology and cohesion on the different groups. A new Marxist-Leninist insurgent force is born, picking up where the FARC left off before they demobilized. Strengthened by hundreds more veteran FARC fighters who desert the peace process, and thanks to a concerted recruitment strategy, the ex-FARC mafia grow their numbers from around 3,000 today, to 4,000 in 2020 and continue to expand, projecting themselves nationally. A real alliance is forged with the ELN, not just ensuring delineation of territory and cooperation in terms of illegal economies and earnings, but coordination in insurgent strategy and attacks on the state. The ex-FARC mafia is able to forge agreements with other criminal groups ensuring its efforts are not divided by fighting other non-state actors, but rather concentrated on the government and security forces.

**2.3 - Criminal Economies:** The Duque administration is unable to contain, let alone reduce, cocaine production in the country, which along with illegal gold mining and other illicit activities like human smuggling, human trafficking, marijuana, heroin and extortion, provide the ex-FARC mafia with plenty of money to fund their expansion. Evidence suggests that so far under this government, criminal economies have continued to grow, rather than shrink. Apart from increasing eradication efforts there is no evidence of any innovative strategy to undermine the criminal economies, suggesting that criminal rents will continue to grow and offer plenty of opportunities to the ex-FARC mafia to strengthen themselves in many parts of the country.

**2.4 - Security Policy:** despite the drawing up of a national security strategy document, the Duque administration shows remarkably little innovation in its approach to security policy, following tried and failed strategies of the past. The security situation in terms of homicides, displacements, targeting of former FARC fighters, community leaders and land restitution activists, gets worse. The extreme focus on crop eradication, under US

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201 El Tiempo, Los homicidios de ex-Farc, una problemática en aumento, November 5, 2019. https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/estudio-sobre-homicidios-de-ex-farc-en-colombia-430406?hootPostID=88665e96f9cd69e892db8a1662d0ba9d
pressure, sucks up resources while further alienating rural communities, something that is likely to increase if aerial spraying restarts. Leadership in the Defense Ministry continues to flounder, with the shadow of the false positives (the scandal where civilians were killed by elements in the military to show results) and actions like aerial bombardments killing children, continuing. These actions undermine state legitimacy and strengthen local support for non-state actors, particularly the ex-FARC mafia.

2.5 - Political Environment: One former senior FARC commander said on condition of anonymity that “the rose (the symbol of the FARC political party) had withered and died.” The weak showing of the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force during the November regional elections revealed that the former rebels have not been able to turn territorial control and influence over local communities as a rebel army, into votes. The pursuit of the political road to power was the justification for ending the armed struggle. It is clear that, in certain parts of the country, FARC political activists are being targeted and that political participation is from being a level playing field. The killing of former members of the FARC reminds many of the campaign against the Patriotic Union (UP), the last rebel attempt to enter the legal political arena. Thousands of UP members, including a presidential candidate, were assassinated and this convinced many on the hard left that the only way to achieve political power was through military action. Many may be thinking that the political route is doomed and the armed struggle is still the only way forward.

2.6 - Venezuela: In this scenario, Maduro not only stays in power, but actually starts helping the ex-FARC mafia with weapons as well as sanctuary and logistics. A potential game changer here could be the dissidents getting their hands on the SA-24 Man-Portable Air-Defense System (MANPADS) missiles, also known as the Igla-S, used by the Venezuelan military. With this weapon, the ex-FARC mafia could neutralize the state’s principal strategic advantage, air power. This could noticeable change the balance in any civil conflict. Another variation of this scenario might be that a civil conflict emerges in Venezuela after the forcible removal of Maduro. This situation might suit the ex-FARC mafia, which could present itself as an international insurgent force and fortify is presence and legitimacy in Venezuela, facilitating recruitment and territorial control in the neighboring country. The Acacio Medina Front and the 10th Front already have a deep and permanent presence in Venezuela, in the states of Amazonas and Apure respectively. Maduro has already openly supported dissident leaders, announcing in June that “Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich are welcome in Venezuela and at the Foro de Sao Paulo whenever they want to come, the two are leaders of peace…”

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2.7 - International Panorama: The importance of US aid in the strategic defeat of the 
FARC in the 2000s is hard to underestimate. However, President Trump has proven 
himself a fickle ally to the Duque government, criticizing the Colombian president and 
the fight against drugs, and denying Colombia pleas for more aid.

“More drugs are coming out of Colombia right now than before he was president, so he 
has done nothing for us,” Trump stated in March this year, referring to Duque.205

Combined with lethargy from the White House, in this scenario, the regional response 
also sees no help coming from Latin partners. The presidents of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and 
Chile are engaged in fighting scandals or social unrest in their own countries, distracting 
them from the fight against transnational organized crime and elements of the ex-
FARC mafia on their territory. Colombia stands alone to contain the dissidents and the 
transnational criminal economies that fund their growth.

2.8 - Conclusion: Under this scenario, Colombia takes a quantum leap back in security, 
and the ex-FARC mafia are able to re-establish themselves as a nation-wide insurgent 
force, perhaps in alliance with the ELN, with firm ties to, and presence in, Venezuela. The 
Duque administration continues to undermine the peace deal, pushing more former rebels 
into the dissidents, while unable to produce innovative security responses or undermine 
the illegal economies.

205 Miami Herald, Trump blasts Colombia, a key ally on Venezuela, while mul ling Mexic an 
icle228591129.html
3. A Criminal Federation

3.1 - Peace Process: While confidence in the peace process is badly shaken, it is unlikely that the Duque administration will do any more to undermine the agreement or further weaken implementation. On the contrary, the desertion of Iván Márquez rang enough alarm bells to send Duque into the reintegration zone in San Vicente del Caguán in Caquetá, to make reassuring noises. And Emilio Archila, presidential adviser for stabilization and consolidation, went on a media blitz to highlight the implementation work being carried out.206

While there will continue to be some isolated desertions of former FARC, there will not be any larger mass exodus. Those who felt the situation was desperate have already left. However, the ending of government subsidies and the temptations of real money will ensure more rebels return to criminality, although not necessarily join the dissidents. The peace process as such will not fail, even if the ex-FARC mafia continues to grow, as most of those who demobilized remain within the legal world and the FARC political party is a reality.

206 Semana, A cerrar la brecha de la Colombia rural con la urbana, November 2, 2019. https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/planes-de-desarrollo-con-enfoque-territorial-pdet-cerraran-brecha-entre-colombia-rural-y-urbana/638849
3.2 - Criminal Actors: As has already become clear, Iván Márquez has not been accepted as the undisputed leader of the different dissident factions. Nor will he be. There is a broad spectrum of different groups within the ex-FARC mafia. Most want to cling onto their heritage in a criminal landscape where reputation and credibility are all-important, but few are prepared to accept the hierarchical structure of the former rebel army. Even fewer want to share the spoils from the criminal economies.

Most likely is that different ex-FARC elements will not fight each other on a large scale, and some may even work together, mainly in the interest of money. However, these relations will not imply subordination, but rather mutual benefit. Where there is no mutual benefit, each group will act autonomously. The ex-FARC mafia will become a loose criminal federation.

As far as relations with the ELN are concerned, Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo Quinchía, alias “Pablito,” a member of the ruling Central Command (COCE) has long shown himself to be pragmatic and will make agreements with ex-FARC elements so long as they serve his purpose. But a nationwide, working alliance between the ex-FARC mafia and the ELN is not likely. There is already evidence that Pablito has relationships with both Iván Marquez and Gentil Duarte, the two main leaders seeking to reunite disparate FARC groups.

There are agreements with the ELN in other places, such as Antioquia, where elements of the former 18th and 36th Fronts are working with the ELN’s Darío Ramírez Front. It is in the ELN’s interest for the FARC to be back on the scene, not least to distract the attention of security forces, which has been firmly focused on the ELN since the January car bomb at the General Santander National Police Academy in Bogotá, which claimed 21 lives. There is further evidence of agreements between ex-FARC mafia and other criminal organizations like the Caparrapos. These agreements will be even more uncertain and volatile.

3.3 - Criminal Economies: The government eradication campaign is likely to bring about a fall in the coverage of coca crops under cultivation in 2019, but the reduction in actual cocaine production will be smaller. Also, due to the fact that there is an overproduction of cocaine at the moment, and that criminal syndicates have large stores of the drug within Colombia, any reduction in production is unlikely to be felt for at least a year. This means that earnings from cocaine will not drop dramatically before the end of the Duque administration in 2022. For the next 18-24 months, the criminal bonanza from...
the record levels of cocaine production will be able to underpin ex-FARC mafia finances and will easily be able to fund expansion plans. Earnings from marijuana are feeding the ex-FARC mafia elements in Cauca, and driving up violence there. Gold is another major earner for dissident groups, particularly those in Antioquia, Bolívar, Chocó, Cordoba and Nariño. Rural extortion is also common in areas of former FARC influence and while it is not as lucrative as the drug trade, these earnings are sufficient to maintain logistics and militia networks in certain parts of the country. All this means is that the money is there to fund aggressive expansion plans, large-scale recruitment and the purchase of weapons.

3.4 - Security Policy: While the Duque administration was elected on the back of security promises, and even with the publication of a new national security blueprint, there have been few major innovations so far. Indeed, several indicators, especially homicides and displacement, show the situation is getting worse.

The main focus of Colombia’s security policy now seems to be concentrated on eradication efforts, with rumors that aerial spraying of drug crops will restart in 2020. Even if coca crops do fall, as happened to a limited extent in 2018, the improvements in yield per hectare and efficiency in laboratories meant that cocaine production rose. Replanting rates in eradicated fields, even by government measurement, are between 50 and 67 percent. Add to that new plantations and the government appears to be caught on a stationary bicycle, pedaling furiously but making little lasting progress. Even if aerial spraying is able to make a significant dent, we will see a return to smaller, more atomized coca plantations, spread over more departments, with large amounts planted amid other crops or under jungle canopy. This will make estimating drug production harder and may over time neutralize any gains made against production thanks to spraying. It is not like this is a new strategy. There were not any fatal blows dealt to the cocaine trade before 2015, when aerial spraying was still in effect.

While the killings of Guacho and Cadete revealed that the security forces have the ability to track and eliminate senior ex-FARC mafia commanders, the fact that many are now resident in Venezuela limits the impact this strategy can have in dismantling dissident leadership.

However, what really limits the room for maneuver of the Duque administration is lack of funds. There simply is not the money for new large scale operations and any focus on the ex-FARC mafia. This would mean taking resources away from campaigns against the ELN and Urabeños, also serious national security threats.

3.5 - Political Environment: FARC politics does seem to be in trouble, under threat in certain parts of the country, undermined by the growing dissident movement, fraught with internal divisions and simply unable to connect with voters, even in rural areas of influence. However, this was always going to take time and thanks to the peace agreement, the presence in congress is intact and will remain in place for enough time to perhaps allow the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force to build up a real support base and political machinery. It is hard to be optimistic here, but there is still hope. The government must protect FARC politicians and create the conditions in remoter parts of the country for trust in the democratic system to grow. Community leaders and land restitution activists must be protected as well, as all of this is linked to the peace process.

3.6 - Venezuela: The long-prophesied fall of Maduro has simply not come to pass. And information from InSight Crime staff based in Venezuela reveals some signs of improvement, although the situation is still catastrophic. The informal dollarization of the economy has provided some small stability amid hyperinflation. Protests have reduced, and help from Russia and other allies seems to have mitigated some of the effect of US sanctions, although the government remains in dire financial straits.

Colombia is seen, correctly, as actively working to bring about the fall of the Chavista regime. Maduro therefore would like to see nothing more than the reconstitution of the FARC, a friendly, anti-US force with shared ideology. However, he will not want to be seen as actively arming and supporting the ex-FARC mafia or the ELN. Being designated a sponsor of terrorism would further complicate Venezuela’s already bleak international reputation and limit the regime’s diplomatic tools to rehabilitate itself on the world stage in the future.

Venezuela is already of huge importance to the ex-FARC mafia as a sanctuary, a base for the exploitation of criminal economies (main cocaine and mining) and as an ideological reference point. Maduro will not provide surface-to-air missiles to the ex-FARC mafia, as they would be too easily traced back to him. However, one cannot underestimate corruption in the Venezuelan military and some of these weapons ending up in dissident hands.

The threat of civil conflict cannot be ruled out in Venezuela, especially if there is US military intervention, a border conflict with Colombia, or the assassination of Maduro. This might favor the ex-FARC mafia as well as the ELN, allowing them to present themselves as defenders of the Bolivarian Revolution and the Chávez legacy.

3.7 - International Panorama: While there is continuing US interest in Colombia, it is mainly in connection to Venezuela and the eradication of drug crops, not in supporting security policy dedicated to containing the ex-FARC mafia. It is hard to predict what President Trump will do and the abandonment of Kurd allies in Syria shows that no relationship is totally safe, even though Colombia has been a steadfast US ally for decades. While relations between Duque and neighboring governments are good, the Brazilian and Ecuadorean presidents are busy fighting scandals and unrest at home and have little
bandwidth to focus on issues linked to ex-FARC mafia and transnational organized crime operating in their territory. Therefore, a cash-strapped administration can expect little specific US aid, or much international cooperation, at least for the moment.

3.8 - Conclusion: Hamstrung by a lack of funds, battered by the Venezuela crisis and unable to get major new funding from the United States, the options open to the Duque administration are limited.

The ex-FARC mafia is going to grow over the next couple of years. Using booming criminal economies and a safe haven in Venezuela, the dissidents have far more room for maneuver than the government.

However, the FARC is not being reborn. There will not be a new unified insurgent movement under Iván Márquez. The best that he can hope for is a criminal federation that pays lip service to former FARC ideology and discipline, while its members cooperate with each other. Conflict within the ex-FARC mafia is likely, just as there was fighting between different factions of the paramilitary AUC. Agreements with elements of the ELN are already in place and will continue, but a fully-fledged, working alliance with the ELN is very unlikely.

The future of the ex-FARC mafia lies firmly in the hands of the Duque administration. And the grip of the government since 2018 has not been the firmest. It has faced a series of defeats in congress, in the Constitutional Court, and during the recent regional elections, at the hands of the electorate. It needs to find firmer footing and dedicate a great deal of thought, and a portion of scant resources, into containing the threat posed by the ex-FARC mafia. If it is able to do this, then the dissidents will be restricted to more remote areas of the country, mainly along the borders. If they cannot unite, a government with a cohesive strategy can start to pick off the renegade units and their leadership, one by one. Venezuela is certainly a wild card, but there is not much more that Colombia can do except to ensure that no radical military options or clumsy tactics are deployed to unseat Maduro. These might spark civil conflict and create an even greater long-term challenge to Colombia than its current crisis. Colombia is bearing the brunt of the Venezuela collapse, and shouldering much of the burden alone. The future of the ex-FARC mafia and Venezuela are bound together. Patience, caution and cunning are required by Colombia to manage this crisis and ensure it does not get worse.
The InSight Crime Foundation

InSight Crime is a foundation dedicated to the study of the principal threat to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime.

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