



## What the FARC Papers Show Us about Latin American Terrorism April 1, 2008

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### **The Case**

On March 1, 2008, the Colombian military carried out a raid on a long-standing camp of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-FARC). The FARC, the oldest insurgent group in the Western hemisphere, has been designated by the United States and the European Union as a terrorist entity, in part because of the group's kidnapping and execution of seven American missionaries in the 1990s. The camp, with electricity and hard structures, was in Ecuadorian territory and had existed for some time. The primary target of the attack across international borders was Raúl Reyes, the FARC's second highest-ranking commander and one of the group's most public faces. Reyes, whose real name was Luis Edgar Devia Silva, and 25 others were killed in an aerial bombardment. Included in the dead were five Mexican citizens and one Ecuadorian citizen living in the camp.<sup>1</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Colombian commandos entered the camp and retrieved documents and computers, including Reyes' personal computer containing communications with other members of the FARC seven-person general secretariat, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, senior Ecuadorian officials, and an outline of the FARC's political and economic strategy. It is the most significant seizure of primary source documents from the FARC in recent decades, and the first time a member of the FARC general secretariat had been killed in combat.

Two days later, a second member of the FARC general secretariat was killed, this time by his own bodyguards, and data from his personal computers was also recovered. The assassination of Iván Ríos (a.k.a. Manuel Muñoz Ortiz) at the hands of his own security detail was widely viewed as a sign of deep internal stress within the FARC. The assassins cut off Ríos' hand and presented it, along with the computer data, to a Colombian military unit.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Top Farc Leader Killed by Troops," BBC News, March 1, 2008, accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7272832.stm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Second Senior Farc Rebel 'Killed,'" BBC News, March 7, 2008, accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7284222.stm>.

The Colombian raid into Ecuadorian territory sparked an international incident that led Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua to break diplomatic relations with Colombia for several days, before the Organization of American States helped broker a *détente*. On national television, Chávez said, “We pay tribute to a true revolutionary, who was Raúl Reyes,” and called him a “good revolutionary.”<sup>3</sup>

This paper will analyze the portion of the FARC documents that have been made public by the Colombian government, as well as provide some context for what the documents show. Most of the documents pertain to those taken from Reyes’ computer, as the data from Rios’ computer has been given much less public exposure. The documents will be discussed largely in chronological order, and referred to by their date and author. The author of this paper translated the documents.

There is a general consensus among the intelligence and law enforcement communities both here and in Europe that the documents are legitimate. The Colombian government has agreed to allow Interpol access to all the hard drives in order to carry out a forensic analysis to show the contents have not been tampered with. A final report from Interpol is scheduled for April. But already there are clear indicators of the authenticity of the documents. Based on information in the computers, authorities in Costa Rica raided a house near the capital of San Jose and found a safe containing \$480,000 in cash.<sup>4</sup> In addition, as analyzed below, a stash of 30 kilos (66 pounds) of depleted uranium, discussed in internal FARC communications, was recovered.

### **Historical Background on the FARC**

To understand the current situation in Colombia and the context of FARC’s relationship to different centers of power in Latin America, it is necessary to understand the context in which the FARC was formed and how it evolved over time. While currently widely viewed as a terrorist organization and a functioning criminal enterprise, such was not always the case.

The FARC grew out of the Liberal Party militias that fought against the Conservative Party in Colombia in the bloody period of the late 1940s and 1950s known as “La Violencia.” The negotiated end to the fighting between the two main political parties brought an unprecedented period of political stability to the capital, but several of the militia groups in more remote regions remained active and in control of autonomous regions. In 1964, the FARC, founded in one of those regions, was officially formed with an ideology that was a combination of Soviet Marxism and nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, the FARC and various other insurgent groups grew in different parts of Colombia. These included the Chinese-backed Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación-EPL), the Cuban-back National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional-ELN), and the M-19 nationalist movement. The EPL and M-19 movements negotiated peace settlements with the government in the early 1990s, while

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<sup>3</sup> “Venezuela Condemns Colombia Over Rebel’s Death,” Associated Press, March 2, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/03/02/america/bogota.php>.

<sup>4</sup> John McPhaul, “Costa Rica Seizes FARC Cash as Interpol Probes,” Reuters, March 17, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSN1762608320080317?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief history of the FARC’s development, see: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/colombia/players\\_farc.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/players_farc.html).

the ELN remains a fighting force but has lost most of its military strength and political following.

The FARC continued to grow throughout most of its life, reaching a peak of about 18,000 combatants in the 2004 period. Unlike most rebel groups, the original founders of the group have lived long lives and retained significant influence over the group. They leaders were more likely to die of old age in the hills than in combat. Jacobo Arenas, the founder of the FARC, died of old age in the hills of Colombia in August 1990. His successor and long-time second-in-command, Manuel Marulanda (a.k.a. "Sure-shot") continues to lead the group today, though he is well over 70 years old.<sup>6</sup>

The survival of the FARC was possible in part because the FARC was not as dependent as other non-state armed groups on external sources of financing, most of which evaporated with the end of the Cold War. Instead, the group established a strong nexus with criminal activity, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion, allowing it to finance itself following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Marxist bloc.

It was also possible in part because the Colombian government exerted relatively little effort to fight the FARC for more than three decades. While active, the group was largely viewed as a nuisance, but not as a threat to the state, and actual efforts to confront the FARC militarily were relatively rare.

Beginning in the late 1970s and increasingly more frequent in the 1980s, the FARC began to implement what it considered to be legitimate "taxes" on landowners and illicit activities in areas where the group exercised considerable political power. One favorite way of collecting taxes was to kidnap the land owners and hold them for ransom.

This, in turn, led large landholders to pay paramilitary groups to protect their property and themselves from the FARC and other guerrilla organizations. Over time, the paramilitary units, often under the protection of the military, grew into formidable fighting forces, and were responsible for the majority of the human rights abuses committed against civilians in Colombia.

By the early 1980s, the newly-rich leaders of the Medellín cocaine cartel, particularly Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha and Pablo Escobar, began buying vast tracts of land in rural Colombia, particularly in the Magdalena Medio, an area where the FARC was active. In order to protect their illicit investments, the drug traffickers spent heavily on strengthening the paramilitary groups. Several of the largest paramilitary units formed the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia-AUC). By the mid-1980s, the paramilitary units were responsible for most of the abuses of the civilian population, and succeeded in driving the FARC from several important areas of traditional control. The AUC also developed into a formidable drug trafficking organization, reaping the economic benefits that allowed the group to hire foreign mercenaries, upgrade its military equipment, and expand its areas of influence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed look at the evolution of the FARC and the role played by Arenas and Marulanda, see: Alfredo Molano, "The Evolution of the FARC," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, September/October 2000, accessed at: <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/molano.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> For a more complete look at the development of the conflict, its causes and the toll on the civilian population, see: Douglas Farah, "Case Study: Colombia," *Crimes of War: What the Public*

The upsurge in the paramilitary violence coincided with a prolonged negotiation period between the government and the FARC, which led to significant hopes that the FARC could be brought into the political process as a legal party. As a result of the negotiations, the FARC formed a political party called the Patriotic Union (Union Patriótica-UP) and joined the political process.<sup>8</sup> Despite the UP's legal status, the paramilitary forces viewed the organization as a front for the FARC, and the drug traffickers viewed the UP as a threat to its activities. As a result, the narco-paramilitary forces carried out a series of massacres against thousands of UP candidates and leaders, including the assassination of its two most promising presidential candidates. The drug traffickers also used the paramilitary forces to attack any part of the state apparatus that threatened the cocaine trade:

“With Escobar's financing and the army's tolerance, paramilitaries began decimating the leftist UP with impunity. It was during (Virgilio) Barco's subsequent administration (1986-1990) that most of the UP's activists were murdered. The final days of Barco's government were notably violent. Gunmen assassinated four presidential candidates-Carlos Pizarro of the M-19 (who had just turned in their arms); Jaime Pardo Leal of the UP, followed closely by his replacement, Bernardo Jaramillo; and the Liberals' Luis Carlos Galán who would certainly have won the election.”<sup>9</sup>

As the peace process unraveled, the FARC entered a new phase of working with drug traffickers, protecting coca fields and laboratories and collecting “*gramaje*”, or taxes, on the products moving through their territory. With the influx of cash, the FARC was able to expand its recruiting, buy new weapons, and become a far more structured, effective military force. These developments coincided with the killing or extradition of the leaders of the major drug trafficking organizations in Colombia, leaving the once-mighty cartels fractured, less unified, and less able to control who entered the trade.

Gradually, the FARC moved from an ideological force that protected drug trafficking operations to a better structured criminal enterprise that relied more and more on its own drug trafficking structures, kidnappings, and extortion to finance its growth.

As Joaquín Villalobos, the chief strategist of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), one of Latin America's most formidable guerrilla armies that negotiated a peace process in El Salvador in 1991, noted recently:

“The FARC morphed from being the last political guerrilla movement in Latin America to the first irregular army of drug traffickers, finally becoming a threat to the Colombian state...The FARC has no future as a guerrilla army, but it may have as a drug trafficking organization.”<sup>10</sup>

In a change of tactics, the FARC began targeting Americans for kidnappings, particularly evangelical Christian groups that lived and worked in isolated areas. In 1993, the FARC kidnapped three members of the New Tribes Mission, and in 1994, kidnapped

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Should Know, edited by Roy Gutman, David Rieff and Anthony Dworkin, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 110-114.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/colombia/players\\_farc.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/players_farc.html).

<sup>9</sup> Molano, op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Joaquín Villalobos, “Las FARC de Hoy,” El País, Jan.26. 2008, accessed at: [http://www.semana.com/wf\\_InfoArticulo.aspx?idArt=109022](http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?idArt=109022).

two more, as well as a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators. All six were killed while in captivity. These targeted attacks, coupled with increasing evidence that the FARC had emerged as a serious drug trafficking organization, led President Clinton to place the FARC on the State Department list of terrorist organizations in October 1997.<sup>11</sup> The European Union would eventually follow suit, listing the FARC as a terrorist entity in 2005.<sup>12</sup>

Following another round of failed peace talks that lasted from 1999-2002, the FARC increased its kidnappings of prominent Colombian citizens, and strengthened its drug trafficking structures. Among those kidnapped were several senators, relatives of prominent politicians, and a presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Colombian drug trafficking organizations were moving away from cultivating the coca leaf, the precursor for making cocaine, in Bolivia and Peru, as had traditionally been done. Instead, new varieties of the coca leaf, able to grow in more humid climates, were introduced in order to move the cultivation to Colombia, largely in areas where the FARC was the primary political and military force. This shift in the cultivation strategy was one of the factors that greatly increased the FARC's revenue streams.

It became increasingly evident the FARC was using the ceasefire with the government during the peace talks to expand its cocaine trafficking networks, as well as to acquire new weapons. At the same time, the paramilitary AUC was using the lull in hostilities to greatly increase its drug trafficking activities as well, and its forces were the primary suspects in large-scale massacres of civilians. This development led the Bush administration to designate the AUC as a terrorist organization, and re-designate the FARC.<sup>14</sup>

Other factors were changing the nature of the political and drug-related violence in Colombia. Beginning in 1999, the Clinton administration launched Plan Colombia, a multi-year, multi-billion dollar program to tackle drug-related issues in the region. For the first time, significant amounts of aid could be given directly to the Colombian military, whose human rights record was widely recognized as being abysmal, to fight the FARC. The years of carefully trying to segregate counter-drug aid, which had largely been given to the National Police from the small amounts of counterinsurgency aid given to the military, were over.

The Clinton administration granted the Colombian government a human rights waiver based on the promise of improved human rights performance by the military and an end to the ties between military commanders and the paramilitary units of the AUC

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<sup>11</sup> "FARC Terrorist Indicted for 2003 Grenade Attack on Americans in Colombia," Department of Justice Press Release, September 7, 2004. accessed at: [http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2004/September/04\\_crm\\_599.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2004/September/04_crm_599.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Official Journal of the European Union, Council Decision of Dec. 21, 2005, accessed at: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l\\_340/l\\_34020051223en00640066.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_340/l_34020051223en00640066.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> The sequence and consequences of the kidnapping of Betancourt are discussed at: Douglas Farah, "Chávez's Favorite Pariahs," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 26, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/25/AR2008012502765.html>.

<sup>14</sup> "Designation of the AUC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization," U.S. Department of State, September 10, 2001, accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/4852.htm>.

and others.<sup>15</sup> This evolution, coupled with the increased emphasis on aerial spraying of coca fields, would dramatically alter the intertwined conflicts in Colombia. Plan Colombia, as we shall see, has increasingly allowed the military to push the FARC to more remote areas and carry out more sophisticated attacks against the rebel group, including the March 1 strike on Reyes in Ecuador. Since 2000, the United States has given Colombia \$4.45 billion, making it the largest recipient of U.S. aid outside of Israel and Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

While there are serious human rights issues that need to be addressed on an ongoing basis, under president Alvaro Uribe some 10,000 paramilitary members have been disarmed and overall violence in the country has dropped sharply.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Regional Context**

The FARC historically did not maintain a large external support network outside of Colombia, and even other Marxist-inspired guerrilla movements had little affection for the isolated and criminalized group. As the Latin American insurgencies negotiated ends to their respective conflicts as the Cold War ended (the FMLN in El Salvador, the Contra rebels in Nicaragua, the M-19 and EPL in Colombia) or suffered sharp military defeats (the Tupac Amaru and Shining Path groups in Peru), the FARC remained steadfastly intransigent.

What changed most in relation to the FARC was the sudden shift in the Latin American political landscape. The first was the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela, who shot to popularity in 1992 when he led a failed coup attempt against the corrupt government of Carlos Andrés Pérez, with the promise of founding a transnational “Bolivarian revolution” to address the region’s poverty and corruption.<sup>18</sup>

By the time of his election, Chávez was already well acquainted with the FARC. According to a February 9, 2008 summary of a conversation between senior FARC leaders and Chávez, Chávez “expressed his appreciation for the solidarity articulated by the FARC’s donation of 100 million pesos when he was a prisoner.”<sup>19</sup> General Oscar Naranjo, the head of the Colombian National Police, said the statement referred to the

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<sup>15</sup> “Plan Colombia: Is the U.S. Addicted to Military Fixes?”, CNN, accessed at: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia.noframes/story/essays/clark/>.

<sup>16</sup> The counter-drug and counter-insurgency aid figures come from the Center for International Policy, and its studies of Plan Colombia, accessed here: <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aidtable.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Several prominent members of president Uribe’s cabinet, as well as member of congress, have been accused of unlawful association with paramilitary groups, highlighting the close ties some of the groups had with senior political and military leaders. For a look at the ongoing criticism of the emphasis Plan Colombia places on military aid, and paramilitary ties to the government, see: Marcela Sanches, “Rethinking ‘Plan Colombia,’” *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2007, accessed at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/15/AR2007031501555.html>.

<sup>18</sup> “Profile: Hugo Chavez,” *BBC News*, December 5, 2002, accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1925236.stm>.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Manuel Marulanda from Iván Rios, dated Feb.9, 2008.

money (about \$ 150,000) the FARC leadership had sent to Chávez in prison following Chávez's failed 1992 coup attempt.<sup>20</sup>

This establishes a clear relationship between Chávez and the FARC long before Chávez assumed the presidency in 1998, and may help explain his fondness for the rebel group. Chávez's regional situation has been enhanced by his willingness to share his oil wealth with like-minded politicians around the region, including those from Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Argentina.<sup>21</sup>

However, it is clear from the documents that the relationship with the FARC changed from a cordial but somewhat distant relationship to much closer ties beginning in 2007. It is not entirely clear what sparked the warming trend, but it is clear that FARC leaders were not entirely sure of Chávez's motives in helping them, nor was the Venezuelan government entirely sure it could trust the FARC. Over the course of 2007 and into 2008, the doubts on both sides seem to have dissipated considerably, to the point where the FARC leadership was regularly meeting with senior Chávez advisers to discuss political, military, and financial matters.

This warming coincided with the election, in several countries, of politicians echoing Chávez's pan-Bolivarian, anti-American vision of creating an "anti-imperialist" bloc on the continent. Each election represented a setback for pro-U.S. politicians who had exercised power over the previous decade. In 2005, Evo Morales was elected in Bolivia; Rafael Correa in Ecuador in 2006; and Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader who served as president from 1979-1990, in Nicaragua in 2006. These leaders all play a significant role in the FARC papers.

This rapid realignment of the political forces in Latin America presented an opening for two concurrent strategic thrusts: Chávez increased his support for the FARC out of both ideological conviction and attempts to weaken Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, a staunch U.S. ally who has prosecuted the war against the FARC more successfully than any other Colombian leader; and the opportunity for the FARC, suffering an increasingly harsh stream of criticism in Europe and Latin America for its unwillingness to free its hostages, to try to create a regional alliance that would gain the group enhanced international stature and use the hostages as leverage to begin negotiations aimed at acquiring a quota of political power.

It is against this backdrop that most of the documents can be understood. The constant desire to involve Correa, Morales, and Ortega in the diplomatic strategy that is largely defined by the FARC general secretariat and carried out by Chávez has its roots in this deep alliance.

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<sup>20</sup> "Dead Rebel's Laptop Shows Chávez is Funding Rebels, Colombian Police Say," Associated Press, March 3, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/03/03/america/LA-GEN-Colombia-Chavez-FARC.php>.

<sup>21</sup> For a look at Chávez's alleged attempt to illegally give \$800,000 to the successful presidential campaign of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, see: Alexi Barrionuevo, "Venezuelans Tried to Bribe Miami Man, U.S. Says," The New York Times, Dec. 18, 2007, accessed at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/americas/18argentina.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/americas/18argentina.html?_r=1&oref=slogin).

## **What the Documents Show - Summary**

The documents show several alarming developments that have gone largely undetected by U.S. intelligence services and diplomats in recent years. They will be developed in the chronological order of the available documents.

The first is that the long-cordial relationship between the FARC and Chávez has grown from one of friendship to one of allies and business partners. It is clear that that FARC received a large sum of money from Chávez in 2007, although it is unclear if the money is a loan or a gift. There are several references to “300” as an amount the FARC receives, and Colombian authorities have stated unequivocally that the number refers to \$300 million given by Chávez to the FARC.

However, it is not clear from the primary documents what the 300 refers to, or if it refers to \$300 million. The amount seems unlikely to be realistic in the context of the region. However, it is clear that Chávez provided the FARC with an emergency cash infusion near the end of 2007, which appears to have been a gift rather than loan.

The second is the FARC’s extraordinary reach into regional politics, particularly in Ecuador, where the government appears to be willing to change senior military commanders along the border (the area where Reyes was killed) in order to curry favor with the FARC.

The third is the FARC’s apparent willingness to engage in trafficking of material (uranium) that could be used for a low-grade nuclear bomb. The type and grade of uranium in question indicate the FARC had been the victim of a scam or was planning on perpetrating a scam on an unsuspecting third party.

The fourth major theme is the desire to exchange their hostages for captured FARC leaders, using an international stage that will gain the FARC increased legitimacy. This plan, called the Humanitarian Accord, is a strategy explicitly copied from the strategy used by the FMLIN and other insurgent groups in Central America in the 1980s. That process, initiated on Contadora Island off the coast of Panama, would be substituted for a similar process of negotiations on Isla Margarita, off the coast of Venezuela. Among the primary topics for negotiation are the release of Ingrid Betancourt and the three American contractors. The FARC position, reiterated several times, is that the Americans will not be released until two senior FARC leaders who were extradited, tried, and sentenced in the United States, are freed as well.<sup>22</sup>

The fifth major point is the FARC’s overt discussion of its involvement in drug trafficking and the need to move cocaine and money associated with the trade in which they have long claimed not to be involved.

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<sup>22</sup> On Jan. 28, 2008, a federal judge in Washington, D.C. sentenced FARC leaders Ricardo Palmera, a.k.a. Simon Trinidad, to 60 years in prison. The charges stemmed from the FARC kidnapping of three American contractors, Keith Stanseli, Marc Gonsalves and Tom Howe, in February 2003. The three were U.S. government contract personal carrying out a surveillance flight over FARC territory when the FARC downed the aircraft. Another FARC member, Anayibe Rojas, a.k.a. Sonia, is also serving time in a Texas prison for drug trafficking. For an overview of the history of the kidnappings and the Trinidad case, see: “60-Year Sentence for Colombian Rebel Likely to Complicate Efforts to Free US Hostages,” Associated Press, Jan. 29, 2008.

The sixth point is that the FARC has engaged in a deliberate campaign to hide its involvement in some of the worst atrocities, including the assassination of members of Congress in 2006.

## **Chávez and the FARC**

### **A letter from Manuel Marulanda to the Secretariat dated January 11, 2007:**

Marulanda, the FARC's top leader, proposes a clandestine meeting between FARC leadership and Chávez. The meeting should be clandestine to "avoid a great campaign by the *gringos* against Chávez." In a statement that shows that the relationship with Chávez is still not fully cemented, Marulanda says the FARC must "make him understand, through dialogue and the exchange of opinions, that we are strategic allies for them. They have money and we do not. What they are offering is valuable, but it is not enough, the same as the loan. When someone loans money it is because his friend is trusted, and we do not know if we enjoy that trust." The communication also makes it clear the FARC still views itself as a socialist vanguard out to defeat capitalism.

Marulanda says that the Venezuelans doubt that the FARC can take power militarily given the high level of U.S. support the Uribe government receives: "We must make them understand that we must create a great revolutionary army with mass support to overthrow the capitalist system and install socialism. Because of that, even though they see us as a small force, we have a great future and they must believe us because we are not isolated and alone."

### **A letter from Marulanda to the Secretariat dated September 22, 2007:**

Marulanda circulates the draft of an official letter to Chávez, asking for comments. He stresses the need for the Humanitarian Accord, centered on the exchange of prisoners. He suggests that the FARC and Chávez approach the governments of Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and perhaps France, Switzerland, and Spain, to help move the process forward.

The proposal, which is consistent with the FARC's position throughout, states that the FARC should be recognized as a "belligerent force," and be removed from the list of terrorist organizations by both the United States and Europe. The FARC would then turn over its hostages to one of the countries, at the same time the Colombian government turned over senior FARC leaders in prison, to a third party.

In an interesting aside, given Reyes' death a few months later, Marulanda says he is "only going to use the radio for short transmissions from now on, in order to avoid a massacre. We were six hours on the radio while the aircraft located us and our messages are longer all the time." Did he say locate or located?

Attached to the note is the draft of the letter to Chávez, where the FARC leader says that what is most important is to "establish, between your government and the FARC, friendly political relations, for the good of both countries and the dream of the liberator Simón Bolívar will become reality, thanks to the process led by your government and FARC in Colombia."

### **A letter from a member of the Secretariat to Marulanda dated October 4, 2007:**

The letter summarizes conversations between FARC leaders and Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, Venezuela's interior and justice minister and close friend of Chávez.

Chacín has played an important role on behalf of Chávez in maintaining contact with the FARC leadership.

The letter said Chávez will press for a summit meeting with FARC commanders inside Colombian territory, a move that they believe would embarrass Uribe and enhance the prestige of the FARC: “If this happens, Chávez would be accompanied by presidents Ortega (Nicaragua), Evo (Morales, Bolivia), and Correa (Ecuador), who are ‘fatherland or death’ with Chávez.” The author assures Marulanda he would have a private meeting with Chávez during the summit.

The letter discusses elaborate security arrangements for moving the FARC leadership, undertaken by the Venezuelan government. The letter says the movement would be a secret mission and only Chávez and his emissary would know what was happening: “At all times we would be accompanied by Rodriguez Chacín, an expert in this type of security. The pilots, who are trustworthy, won’t know where they are going or for what purpose. The Venezuelan government will be responsible for transportation, and it will be in an armored helicopter. If we agree they will add another helicopter as an escort. Included in the security detail would be units that we trust completely, commanded by Timo and Iván. The refueling site would be secured by the government.”

**A letter from Marulanda to the Secretariat dated November 20, 2007:**

Marulanda discussed the need to build long-term, solid relations with the “friendly neighbor.”

It is clear that by this time some money has arrived. Marulanda writes that the FARC was able to fulfill its strategic and economic goals “thanks to the support of the 300. It is not yet established if that is a loan or given in solidarity, but it solves a serious strategic problem of the aggression of the *gringos*. At first glance it seems the man (Chávez) is interested in supporting the Bolivarian cause of the FARC in order to strengthen his geopolitical strategy in various countries.”

**A letter from Iván Rios to the Secretariat dated December 23, 2007:**

The note is a report on two days of meetings with Rodriguez Chacín, a sitting minister in Chávez’s cabinet: “With relation to the 300, which we will call the ‘dossier’ from here forward, there are already efforts underway, on orders of the boss of the cripple. I will comment on this in a separate note. We will call the boss ‘Angel,’ and the cripple ‘Ernesto.’”

**A letter from Jorge Briseño, a member of the Secretariat, to other members of the Secretariat, dated January 14, 2008:**

The letter was written four days after the FARC freed two high profile hostages, turning them over Chávez. While the move was greeted as positive, the FARC suffered a significant setback when it could not locate the child of one of the hostages, who had been born in captivity. It turned out the child had been turned over to Colombian social service workers several years before. The snafu clearly upset Chávez. However, following the release, Chávez followed through on his part of the deal by publicly calling for the

FARC to be removed from the list of terrorist organizations and be accorded recognition as a belligerent force because it is an “insurgent force with a political project.”<sup>23</sup>

“The recognition of the FARC as a belligerent force by the Venezuelan president and his invitation to the rest of the world to remove us from the terrorism list means we must be much more careful in our dealings with him, especially at the level of the Secretariat. Those who can best carry on relations are Timo and Iván, who are on the border.”

“The handing over of the two prisoners, so as not to use the word hostages, to president Chávez, received worldwide coverage. We should not feel defeated by our own naiveté and lack of capabilities, and those of Hugo (Chávez), which made us look bad. Now our struggle is with those that remain...we know now we have a treasure, and that is why they are searching for it in the jungle, the rivers, the mountains and the plains.” This seems to be a reference to Ingrid Betancourt, and her value to the FARC.

In the same letter, the author states that the “dossier,” as they call the mysterious “300”, belongs to “the collective leadership, requiring tact, a cool head, skill and responsibility” to handle properly.

**A letter from commanders Iván and Ricardo to the Secretariat dated February 8, 2008:**

The letter refers back to the person dubbed Angel in the December 23, 2007 communications regarding the business to be undertaken with the “300” or “dossier.” The business proposals appear to be ranked from the riskiest and potentially most profitable to the least risky but least profitable. Angel, it is noted, received the letter from Marulanda, the FARC’s most senior commander, and seemed pleased with it. It is unlikely Marulanda would write a letter if the business was not of utmost importance to the FARC.

“He (Angel) offered us a business opportunity in which we would receive an allotment of oil to sell outside the country, which would give us a juicy profit. Another offer is the sale of gasoline in Venezuela or Colombia. Using the ‘dossier,’ we set up a profitable company in Venezuela, with the possibility of obtaining government contracts...Angel designated Ernesto to coordinate this.”

It seems highly unlikely that the FARC could undertake the establishment of a business in Venezuela that could obtain government contracts, without the permission and knowledge of president Chávez.

The letter says that president Chávez is requesting certain actions from Manuel (Marulanda) and proceeds to review the plans for the FARC to turn over to Chávez 47 hostages, while the Colombian government turned over 500 FARC prisoners to be held separately in Venezuela. The three Americans would only be included in the group if the two FARC prisoners in the United States were freed.

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<sup>23</sup> Christopher Toothaker, “Chávez Praises Rebels in Colombian Conflict as Being ‘True Armies,’” The Washington Post, Jan. 12, 2008, p. A11, accessed at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/11/AR2008011101287.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/11/AR2008011101287.htm).

“He (Chávez) is planning to create something similar to the ‘Contadora Group,’ which would be called the Bolivar Group or the Isla Margarita Group. This group would work for the recognition of the FARC as a belligerent force, and would push hard for a peace process in Colombia. The group would be composed of Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, and Nicaragua. We could also invite France, Switzerland, and Spain. Of course the FARC would be present at all the meetings. It would be a *de facto* recognition of the belligerent status of the FARC...Chávez asks that when the group is formally installed, we turn over Ingrid (Betancourt). He said he requests this, but will respect whatever decision we make.”

**The final document is a letter from Manuel Marulanda to Chávez, dated February 2008, In the Mountains of Colombia:**

The letter is a general exposition of the FARC’s view of the war, the U.S. involvement in the war, and seems to be an attempt to assuage any misgiving Chávez may still harbor about the group, going to some length to show that both Chávez and the FARC have the same overarching goals. The letter also goes to great lengths to flatter Chávez, thanking him particularly for his efforts to achieve international recognition for the FARC as a belligerent force and for his “true, wise and responsible” leadership.

**The FARC and Drug Trafficking and the Possible Purchase of Uranium**

There are numerous direct references to the FARC’s drug trafficking activities in the correspondence, including in Marulanda’s letter to Chávez. This directly contradicts the long-held FARC position that they do not engage in cocaine trafficking. While the position has long been discredited, this is the first time primary source, FARC documents debunk the party line.

The case of the uranium, while attracting initial attention, has been shown to have been depleted uranium, of no use commercially or in the manufacturing of weapons. Whether the FARC was the scammer or the scammed is not yet clear.

**A letter from Marulanda to the Secretariat dated November 23, 2006:**

“With regard to the proposal of the drug traffickers, we have to investigate whether they are of the old generation, or if they are from the new generation that has replaced them. Raul (Reyes) says they are seeking protection and in exchange offer economic support. Realistically, we can examine the proposal and how to centralize control in the hands of a member of our high command, so that it is run correctly. This way, 5, 10 or 20 *narcos* can agree to raise the \$230 million for the strategic plan, and we can avoid being cheated by only receiving crumbs, as we have before, while getting all the blame.”

**A letter from Jorge Briseño to Raul Reyes dated March 22, 2007:**

Briseño reports that he has part of the money that belonged to Jorge Asprilla Perea, a drug trafficker extradited to the United States, convicted in New York, and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

“Comrade Raul, the money is part of what I was guarding for Asprilla, the black guy they extradited to the United States. That means we will not return his money, and it now belongs to the FARC. Most of those we have agreements with try to hurt us. I send you a warm embrace.”

**A letter from FARC leader Edgar Tovar to Paul Reyes dated July 13, 2007:**

“Comrade, this coming Tuesday I have to deliver 700 kilos of crystal (refined cocaine), but Saturday or Sunday I have to collect the money in Quito (Ecuador). It is \$1.5 million. The person delivering it is Marcos from Tumaco. I propose sending Camila to receive the money and organize getting it to us. It will take three trips or we can bury it, with Camila guarding it, while we work out delivery.”

**A letter from Jorge Briseño, a member of the Secretariat, to other members of the Secretariat dated January 14, 2008:**

1. Who, where, when and how will receive the dollars and where will keep them?
2. Need to decide what material we need, the amounts, prices, transport, routes, loading and unloading areas, sellers, buyers, how the business will be carried out and technical matters.
3. If they give us merchandise that is useful and adequate to the needs of an irregular, guerrilla force, we could clarify what it is, so we can give our opinion. But we will continue to politely insist on what was promised.”

**A letter from Edgar Tovar to Raul Reyes dated February 16, 2008:**

“In the area of finances, we have been unable to do a big deal, we have only done some small things, and the situation is difficult because of the eradication and fumigation (aerial spraying of coca fields by U.S.-backed counter-narcotics police). We have asked Marcos for collaborate with us if he is selling at a good price. He agreed, and we are doing some small things in Mexico, our profits are \$5,000 per deal, and we only sent him four. I am sending you \$20,000, and we will continue to work to try to get more resources.”

“Another item is uranium. There is someone who supplies me with materials for making explosives, his name is Belisario and he lives in Bogotá...he sent me a sample and the specifications and proposes selling it at \$2.5 million per kilogram. They will deliver it and we will see who we can sell it to. It would best to sell to a government so we can sell a lot. They have 50 kilos ready and can sell much more as they have a direct contact with those that produce it.”

On March 26, 2008, Colombian police announced they had found a stash of 30 kilos (66 pounds) of depleted uranium at a FARC hideout near a highway on the outskirts of Bogotá. The material was virtually unusable, but appeared to confirm that the FARC, despite its public denials, had acquired at least a significant portion of the uranium written about above.<sup>24</sup> It is unclear at this time if the FARC paid for the uranium believing it could be resold, or whether they were hoping to pull off a sale to an unsuspecting party.

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<sup>24</sup> Frances Robles, “Colombia Says it Found Uranium Lined to the FARC,” The Miami Herald, March 26, 2008., accessed at: <http://www.miamiherald.com/854/story/471631.html>. El Tiempo, Colombia’s leading newspaper, was allowed to film the search for the uranium, and a video of the find is available here: [http://www.eltiempo.com/multimedia/video/judicial/VIDEO-WEB-PLANTILLA\\_VIDEOS-4038669.html?pub=judicial](http://www.eltiempo.com/multimedia/video/judicial/VIDEO-WEB-PLANTILLA_VIDEOS-4038669.html?pub=judicial).

**Letter from Manuel Marulanda to Chávez, dated February 2008, In the Mountains of Colombia:**

“In order to slander the revolutionary leaders of our movement (FARC), and not satisfied with all they have done to us, they say we are drug traffickers. They do not know that the FARC, as a matter of principle, and according to our statutes approved by the entire high command, prohibits the use, sale or traffic of drugs of any kind. In our case, we do collect a tax on the drug traffickers because they produce drugs in rural areas where the peasants are organized by us and depend on this for survival.”

**The FARC and Ecuador**

Rafael Correa, who ran on a strong anti-American platform, won the presidency of Ecuador in November 2006. During the campaign he had promised to close down a U.S. operated counter-narcotics base in Manta, Ecuador, and was known to be close to Chávez.<sup>25</sup>

There are indications from the FARC documents that the Colombian group donated heavily to Correa’s campaign. It is also clear that he developed a close relationship with the FARC in the first 15 months of his presidency. This included meetings between Correa’s personal envoys and cabinet ministers that touched on changing military and police commanders in the border zone where the FARC was most active, in order to help the FARC.

**A letter from Raul Reyes to Manuel Marulanda dated September 17, 2006:**

“In a note sent to the Secretariat I explain the help given to the campaign of Rafael Correa, per your instructions. The colonel said he would visit me again next week to explain the electoral results and the strategy for the second round (of elections.)”

Failing to win a majority in the first round of voting, Correa was forced into a runoff election, which he won. It is interesting to see that Reyes, who was operating a camp inside Ecuador, was the one that seems to be in charge of contacts with Ecuador.

**A letter from Marulanda to Reyes dated October 12, 2006:**

“The Secretariat is in agreement of giving help to the friends in Ecuador. My proposal was \$20,000, Jorge (Briseño) proposes \$100,000 and offers to put up \$50,000. He authorized me to get it from Joaquín and get it to you. Comrade Alfonso is also in agreement...If you can get the money on loan from another front while we get the money together to reimburse you, so much the better. You can tell our friends immediately and before it is too late, the amount of the help, and based on this they can begin to work on getting a loan that we will be able to pay.”

**A letter from Raul Reyes to Secretariat dated January 18, 2008:**

“We met with the minister of national security of Ecuador, Gustavo Larrea, who we will call ‘Juan’ from now on. On behalf of president Correa he brought greetings for comrade Manuel and the Secretariat. He said the following:

1. The president is interested in formalizing relations with the FARC, carried out by ‘Juan.’

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<sup>25</sup> “Profile: Hugo Chavez,” BBC News, December 5, 2002, accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1925236.stm>.

2. They are willing to coordinate social activities with the people who live on the border and exchange information to control paramilitary delinquency in their national territory.
3. They are willing to change the commanders of the military and police to get rid of those hostile to the communities and civilians there, and ask that we help them by providing information.
4. They reiterate their decision not get involved in Colombia's internal conflict by supporting the government of (Alvaro) Uribe. They believe the FARC is an insurgent organization of the people with political and social programs they can understand.
5. They ask if politically we are interested in being recognized as a belligerent force. They share the same idea as Chávez on this.
6. They will sue the state and government of Colombia before the International Court for the damages the aerial spraying has caused.
7. Next year they will cancel the gringo license to operate the Manta base.
8. They propose strengthening their commercial and political ties with Asia, particularly China, Vietnam, and North Korea."

The letter goes on to discuss ways to cooperate between the FARC and Correa on the Humanitarian Exchange, and the fact that Uribe, "representing the interests of the White House," is a threat to the region. Correa's emissary also offered "documents and protection" to a FARC representative in order to establish better relations in Ecuador.

"We established methods of communication and left open the possibility of meeting again in a month or two to follow up and further discuss these issues."

This meeting appears to have taken place relatively quickly.

**A letter from Paul Reyes to the Secretariat dated February 28, 2008:**

"I will summarize the recent conversation with the emissary of president Correa:

1. He asks to speak personally with the Secretariat in Quito. He offers safety guarantees and transportation for the border to the meeting site.
2. He would like an answer in the shortest possible time, including a date.
3. He asks if we would prefer (the security) be handled by the military or his ministry for state security.
4. He wants to discuss with the FARC the Humanitarian Accord, the policy on borders, a political solution, Ingrid (Betancourt), and the role of Chávez. He wants to coordinate with us on border issues.
5. He wants to explain the purpose of Plan Ecuador, with which he hopes to mitigate the harmful effects of Plan Colombia (the U.S.-backed effort) on the border region.
6. For Plan Ecuador he asks us for training courses on how to organize the masses along the border, who would then be placed by the government in a position to coordinate with the FARC on the border. Some of these people are part of our clandestine party or (our group) led by the 48<sup>th</sup> Front (of the FARC)."

The document says the FARC leaders explained that any decision would have to be made collectively and would take time, but that "we made clear our interest in contributing to the ties of brotherhood along the border" in keeping with the FARC's thinking. Reyes also notes that, "per our conversations with the emissary, the relationship

Chávez-Correa is not at its best. In addition, Uribe is constantly calling Correa to get help in working out his difficulties with Chávez.”

Reyes then adds a cautionary note: “I am still worried about a strike against us if we accept the invitation (to visit Correa), given the high concentration of intelligence services and the corruption of that country, where the government remains very weak.”

Two days later, Reyes was dead.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear from the documents that the FARC, despite a well-earned reputation for criminal activity and human rights abuses, had made great strides in the past 18 months in breaking its long-standing international isolation. Despite its now-amply documented participation in the cocaine trade, hostage taking, other criminal activities, and designation as a terrorist entity, the FARC established warm and intimate relations with the governments of Ecuador and Venezuela. The relationship is close enough that senior FARC leaders have direct access to the inner circles of the intelligence and military establishments in each country.

While both Chávez and Correa argue that their involvement with the FARC was solely to further the humanitarian mission of seeking the release of FARC-held hostages (and Chávez can claim some success in this), the documents make clear that these parties were jointly engaged in developing a common strategy that is aimed at crippling U.S.-led counter-drug and counter-insurgency efforts in Colombia. The three sides were also engaged in joint economic activity that enabled a terrorist group to fund its activities and further its criminal enterprise.

The depth of the relationship between Chávez and the FARC is highlighted by the constant meetings between FARC commanders, cabinet ministers, and senior members of the intelligence services. There is little doubt that each side was using the other to advance a particular agenda, but the commercial relationship between a state and a group in a neighboring country whose avowed aim is to overthrow the elected government raises numerous issues of international law.

The relationship between Correa and the FARC is more recent than the group’s relationship with Chávez, but equally troubling. That a sovereign state would engage with a terrorist group to control an international border, the same border where the terrorist groups has long-standing camps and rear-guard supply lines, is an abdication of the government’s primary responsibility. Correa’s willingness to give the FARC a say in who is appointed to military and police commands on the border raises the same issues of the abdication of government responsibility for border protection.

Perhaps the overarching danger of these contacts and business relationships between states and a criminal/terrorist group is lost when each piece is looked at individually. But the totality of the relationship, coupled with the deep ties developing between the Chávez and Correa governments with Iran under the leadership of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, pose a direct threat to U.S. national security interests. Ahmadinejad, in turn, is the leader of a state sponsor of terrorism and has direct operational ties to Hezbollah.

The FARC is now dealing directly with drug trafficking organizations in Mexico and Central America. These criminal groups, in turn, have direct access to U.S. border, which their operatives cross with impunity multiple times every day.

These now-interconnected groups sharing both criminal and ideological ties (deep-seated hatred for the United States and its policies) is causing growing concern in the United States. It is a danger best summed up recently by the head of the U.S. Southern Command, Admiral James Stavridis, whose command is responsible for Latin America:

“I fear greatly that the connectivity between narcoterrorism and Islamic radical terrorism could be disastrous in this region. What I worry about in this region with outside actors coming into it is the potential for those streams to cross, if you will, for the fuel of narcoterrorism to become engaged in Islamic radicalism here in the Americas, here in our home.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “US Fears ‘Disastrous’ Link in Latin America With Islamic Militants,” Agence France Press, Jan. 16, 2008, accessed at: [http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5g6xRvjzR48I925rsOt\\_r4mM\\_JJ2Q](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5g6xRvjzR48I925rsOt_r4mM_JJ2Q).