



The FARC's International Relations: A Network of Deception September 22, 2008

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[In 1990, on contract with The Washington Post, Douglas Farah moved to Bogota, Colombia, to cover the exploding drug war in the Andean region. Working in Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia, he chronicled the rise and fall of the Medellin cartel, and its leader, Pablo Escobar. He also wrote extensively about the rise of the Cali cartel, the move by Colombian drug traffickers into heroin, and the growing alliance between Colombian and Mexican drug mafias. He now works as a Senior Investigator for the NEFA Foundation.]

Introduction:

This paper is a follow-up to two previous NEFA Foundation reports on the state of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-FARC), Latin America's oldest and largest insurgency. The FARC was designated a terrorist organization by the United States in 1997¹ and by the European Union in 2005.² The purpose of this paper is to examine the FARC's little-known international support network, which spans Latin America and Europe. This network is comprised of an unusual mixture of state actors (Venezuela and Nicaragua, particularly) and non-state actors, often under the guise of non-governmental organizations.

The information in this report is derived from documents found on the computer of Raúl Reyes, the FARC's deputy commander, killed in a guerrilla camp in Ecuador by Colombian commandos on March 1, 2008.³ The report also draws on author interviews with senior Colombian police, military and political leaders carried out in Bogotá the week of August 17-23, 2008, which included a review and analysis of many of the pertinent documents. Because the previous two papers have extensively detailed the

¹ http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2004/September/04_crm_599.htm.

² Official Journal of the European Union, Council Decision of Dec. 21, 2005, accessed at: http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_340/l_34020051223en00640066.pdf.

³ Douglas Farah, "What the FARC Papers Show Us About Latin American Terrorism," The NEFA Foundation, April 1, 2008, accessible at: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefarc0408.pdf>. The paper examines not only the documents captured from the FARC, but also the history of the FARC's involvement in the drug trade, the war with right-wing paramilitary groups, and the prominent support role for the FARC played by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. The second paper, "The FARC in Transition: The Fatal Weakening of the Hemisphere's Oldest Guerrilla Movement," accessible at: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefarc0708.pdf>, examines some of the factors behind the recent military setbacks suffered by the FARC.

role of the Venezuelan government, headed by president Hugo Chavez, who works in tandem with senior Venezuelan intelligence officials in supporting the FARC, that relationship is not the focal point of this report.

This relationship, however, remains of primary importance to the FARC and its support groups, particularly in Latin America. The U.S. Treasury Department emphasized this relationship in its September 12, 2008 designation of two sitting senior Venezuelan intelligence service directors and a former Venezuelan cabinet minister who has a close relationship with Chávez.

The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said the three—Hugo Armando Carvajál, director of Venezuelan Military Intelligence; Henry de Jesus Rangél, director of the Venezuelan Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services; and Ramón Emilio Rodríguez Chacín, former minister of justice and former minister of interior—were responsible for "materially supporting the FARC, a narco-terrorist organization." It specifically accused Carvajál and Rangél of protecting FARC cocaine shipments moving through Venezuela, and said Rodríguez Chacín, who resigned his government position just a few days before the designations, was the "Venezuelan government's main weapons contact for the FARC."⁴

The three Venezuelan officials, as shown in the OFAC chart below, allegedly maintained direct contacts with numerous FARC leaders already individually designated as terrorists. The relationships of Carvajál, Rangél, and Rodríguez Chacín with senior leaders of the FARC were greatly illuminated by the FARC documents from Reyes' computer. The documents clearly show that, for several years, and increasing dramatically in 2006, the FARC general secretariat was in regular contact with all three, as described in previous NEFA Foundation papers. The three were also instrumental in setting up meetings between FARC commanders and president Chávez, as well as for sponsoring the network of political front groups in the region that the FARC has created.

⁴ "Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Support of the FARC," U.S. Treasury Department Office of Public Affairs, Set. 12, 2008. The designations came on the heels of the decision by the Bolivian government of Evo Morales to expel the U.S. ambassador, allegedly for supporting armed movements against the Morales government. In solidarity, Chavez then expelled the U.S. ambassador to Venezuela. In addition to the designations of the Venezuelan officials, the United States also expelled the Venezuelan and Bolivian ambassadors to Washington.

September 2008



FARC Designated by the President as a
Significant Foreign Narcotics Trafficker on May 29, 2003



 <p>Rodrigo Granda Escobar FARC International Representative Designated by OFAC on September 28, 2006</p>	 <p>Luciano Marin Arango (a.k.a. Ivan Marquez) Secretariat Member FARC Commander Designated by OFAC in February 2004</p>	 <p>Rodrigo Londono Echeverry (a.k.a. Timochenko) Secretariat Member FARC Commander Designated by OFAC in February 2004</p>	 <p>Noe Suarez Rojas (a.k.a. Grannobles) Secretariat Member FARC Commander Designated by OFAC in February 2004</p>
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 <p>Hugo Armando CARVAJAL BARRIOS DOB 01 Apr 1960 Director Venezuelan Military Intelligence Directorate (DGIM)</p>	 <p>Henry de Jesus RANGEL SILVA CC 5764952 Director Venezuelan Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (DISIP)</p>	 <p>Ramon Emilio RODRIGUEZ CHACIN CC 3169119 (Venezuela) Former Venezuelan Minister of Interior and Justice</p>
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This paper examines:

- The FARC's long-standing ties to Latin American countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua,
- The information-sharing with other terrorist groups, particularly the Provisional IRA of Ireland and the ETA Basque separatists of Spain, and the role this collaboration played in allowing the FARC to develop weapons that primarily targeted the civilian population,
- The FARC's role in founding and directing the Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana (CCB), an umbrella group active in much of Latin America.
- The FARC's European network,
- The FARC's attempts to acquire weapons, including surface-to-air missiles, from a variety of countries and intermediaries of different nationalities.

The Case:

Although the FARC has been at war against the Colombian state for 44 years, it is only in the last five years that the military and police have developed a significant understanding of how the rebel group operates, its sources of income, and its internal structure. A concerted intelligence effort, built on rewarding commanders who captured and debriefed rebels—rather than simply executing them—and the complete revamping of intelligence gathering and analysis, yielded a series of successes in recent years.⁵

The most prominent blow to the FARC was the March 1, 2008 killing of Raúl Reyes in a cross-border raid into Ecuador, and the capture of several hard drives and memory sticks that contained over 600 gigabytes of FARC documents. Reyes' death was closely followed by the death of another senior FARC commander at the hands of his own troops, and the death, from natural causes of Manuel Marulanda, the leader of the FARC and one of its founders.⁶ These documents for the first time allowed the Colombian intelligence services access to primary source information on the FARC structure, its internal communications, and its strong international ties.

"We were shocked by the size of the FARC's support network," said General Oscar Naranjo, the commander of the Colombian National Police. "Despite being a rural movement, the FARC had an international network that was composed of serious groups in Venezuela, Ecuador and Europe. In Europe, the main strength is in Spain, because of the ties with ETA, but also Switzerland, France, Australia and Sweden. It showed us the strength of the FARC. The computer information was more important to us than the actual killing of Reyes because of what we learned."⁷

⁵ Author interviews with current and retired military and police intelligence officials, who described the change in approach to a series of FARC military victories in 1997-2000, when the rebel group gained control of about 50 percent of the national territory. At that point, for the first time in the war, the FARC seemed poised to achieve military victory, or at least enter negotiations from a position of significant strength. The United States, through Plan Colombia, provided significant intelligence training and technical support. U.S. Congressional conditions on aid to the army, tied to improvement in human rights performance, forced the military into far-reaching reforms. One of the key elements of the intelligence reform was disbanding the notorious Brigada 20 intelligence brigade, which at times coordinated the activities of right-wing paramilitary groups, the army and drug traffickers.

⁶ For details on this chain of events, please see previous NEFA papers, which detail the circumstances and impact of the loss of the senior FARC leadership.

⁷ Author interview, Aug. 22, 2008.

The second severe blow to the FARC was the dramatic July 2, 2008 army rescue operation that freed 15 of the FARC's highest value hostages. These included former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three American contractors.⁸ The holding of the hostages had been of great political and psychological value to the rebels. Not only did it prove the group could capture and hold senior political figures and U.S. citizens, the negotiations for the freedom of these hostages had given the FARC new opportunities to establish contacts with a host of governments, and a pretext for maintaining a political infrastructure in Venezuela. This growing network, under the pretext of negotiating a "humanitarian accord" that would lead to a prisoner exchange between the Colombian government and the FARC, allowed the FARC to build a significant, new international network, both in Latin America and elsewhere.

The deaths of key leadership and the rescue of the hostages, taken together, have significantly weakened the FARC military and lowered morale within the organization. As evidence, intelligence analysts and officials point to two main indicators: the increasing desertions of senior-level FARC commanders who have been in the rebel movement for years, and the growing complaints in intercepted FARC communications about the lack of basic necessities among the rank and file troops, including food, boots and clothes.

According to official records, in the first six months of 2008, 1,501 members of the FARC deserted, compared to 2,500 for all of 2007 and 1,450 in 2006. The most important part, however, is not the numbers, but the fact that more than a third of the deserters had been in the FARC longer than 5 years.⁹

Thus, the quality of the information on the internal workings of different FARC fronts is of a higher caliber than in the past. Further, the FARC is losing important mid-level field commanders, who are vital for combat operations. "It was like a snow ball," said Juan Manuel Santos, minister of defense. "In the beginning, most of those who demobilized were young and scared. They had joined for maybe a year or two. But we worked with the information they gave us, and what we got from our informants. The more information we got, the more deserters came in, providing better intelligence. The key was convincing the FARC that they would be safe if they surrendered."¹⁰

The evidence for the assertion that FARC has been crippled logistically is largely anecdotal, but repeated often by combatants who desert. They talk of lacking food, being unable to replace old boots, and lacking money to pay peasants for coca, the raw material in making cocaine. Instead of paying the peasant farmers with cash, as has always been the custom, the FARC is often paying the coca growers with paper chits promising future payment. As the practice grows, intelligence officials said, more and more peasants are opting to sell their coca crop to drug traffickers unaffiliated with the FARC, further reducing the FARC's income.

⁸ Chris Kraul, "15 Hostages Freed as FARC is Fooled in Cunning Operation," Los Angeles Times, July 3, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-hostages3-2008jul03,0,3051652.story>.

⁹ "Un Año Para la Historia," Informe Anual del Ministerio de Defensa, Julio 2007-Julio 2008, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional. For details of the most important desertions, including that of Comander Karina, the FARC's highest-ranking female commander, who deserted after 24 years, see: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefafarc0708.pdf>.

¹⁰ Author interview, Aug. 21, 2008.

While there is compelling evidence that the FARC is weaker than it has been at any time in the past two decades, it maintains an active international support network that may allow it to survive. The network is composed of governments in the region (primarily Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Ecuador,); non-state regional actors largely grouped in the Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana (CCB); and European groups, including designated terrorist organizations such as the ETA in Spain and the P-IRA in Ireland. The support from other terrorist groups is particularly dangerous because it has led to technology transfers that have greatly enhanced the FARC's capacity to carry out attacks.

This international support, particularly the state support, could give the FARC the political and military space it needs to survive the current crisis. There is evidence that several of the remaining senior leaders of the FARC now operate along the Colombia-Venezuela border, seeking safe haven in Venezuela when necessary to escape attacks by the Colombian military. Colombian intelligence officials say that, while Venezuela plays a crucial political role, despite Chávez's public statements to the contrary, Ecuador is providing vital rearguard areas for the FARC to rest and recuperate on a military level.

"Ecuador in some ways is more important than Venezuela, it is the military rearguard, and their safe haven," said a senior Colombian intelligence official. "We get absolutely no information on the movement of FARC troops, the movement of drug trafficking, anything, from Ecuador."¹¹

The Central American Network:

One of the FARC's staunchest supporters for more than 20 years has been Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega. The alliance was first formed in the 1970s, when Ortega led the Sandinista revolution that succeeded in taking power in Nicaragua in 1979. Throughout his first presidency (1979-1990), Ortega was at the center of the revolutionary movements active throughout Latin America, in part because Nicaragua was the one state in the hemisphere besides Cuba where a violent, Marxist revolution triumphed. As a result, Ortega maintained close ties with revolutionary regimes and movements across the globe, including the FARC, when he was re-elected president in 2006.

Of interest in the current discussion are the ties among the FARC, Libya, the Red Brigades, and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front-FMLN) in El Salvador. When Ortega suffered an unexpected electoral defeat in 1990, among his last acts in office was to grant citizenship to 990 foreign nationals, including dozens of wanted Spanish ETA terrorists and Italian Red Brigade terrorists.¹²

There is also compelling evidence that, in addition to the formal, cordial ties the

¹¹ Author interview.

¹² Among the more comprehensive articles on Ortega's ties to foreign terrorist groups see: Tracy Wilkinson, "Nicaragua Pulls Up Red Carpet: Leftists, Idealists and Fugitives Flocked to Sandinista-led Nation in the 1980s," *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1994, p. A01; Douglas Farah, "Managua Blast Rips Lid Off Secret Salvadoran Rebel Cache," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1993, p. A01. Among the terrorists granted citizenship was Alessio Casimirri, who ran a popular Italian restaurant, *Magica Roma*, in Managua, despite being tied to the 1978 murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro. Several members of the Spanish ETA organization were deported, but most of those granted citizenship remain there.

Sandinista government maintained with the revolutionary government of Iran and the regime of Mommar Gaddafi in Libya, it also maintained ties with radical non-state Islamist groups. This included issuing passports for a suspect arrested in New York in connection with the February 26, 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. When U.S. authorities arrested Ibrahim Elgabrownny in Brooklyn in early March 1993, U.S. authorities found five Nicaraguan passports, five Nicaraguan birth certificates, and two driver's licenses. The passports contained photographs of El Sayyid Nosair, his wife, and children. Nosair is in prison in New York, convicted of a weapons charge after being acquitted of the 1990 murder of Rabbi Meir Kahane.¹³

This is relevant because Ortega has never broken the ties to the various groups, including the FARC. In 1998, Ortega, then the leader of the opposition in Nicaragua awarded the Augusto Sandino medal, his party's highest honor, to Manuel Marulanda (a.k.a. Tirofijo or Sure Shot), the FARC's supreme commander. In 2000, Ortega attended an international convention in Libya, organized by Gaddafi for "political parties, revolutionary movements, liberation movements and progressive forces."¹⁴

This meeting was significant because senior leaders of the FARC were also in attendance. The timing is important because it was at a time when the FARC was seriously beginning to look to purchase surface-to-air missiles to have more effective defenses against the U.S.-supplied helicopters that were beginning to arrive in Colombia for the police and military as part of Plan Colombia.¹⁵

A September 4, 2000 e-mail from Reyes' computer, addressed to Gaddafi and signed by Reyes, offered a bold alliance and laid out the strategy:

Comrade Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, Great Leader of the World Mathaba, receive our revolutionary and Bolivarian greeting. We want to express our gratitude for the invitation that you gave us to visit your country and the hospitality you showed our delegation during the recent Summit of Heads of State, Governments, Parties and Organizations of the World Mathaba. We want to let you know that the FARC continues its struggle for the conquest of political power to govern Colombia...As a member of the (FARC) high command I have been asked by the commander in chief to request from you a loan of 100 million dollar, repayable in five years. Our strategic objectives and circumstances of our war oblige us to seek weapons with greater range to resist our enemy's advances. One of our primary needs is the purchase of surface-to-air missiles to repel and shoot down the combat aircraft. Our strategy is to take power through the revolutionary armed struggle. (emphasis

¹³ Farah, op cit. The documents were discovered after an explosion ripped apart an underground bunker holding not only thousands of weapons, but hundreds of Nicaraguan passport and identification cards for Marxist groups around the hemisphere, from the MIR in Chile to the Tupac Amaro group in Peru. The garage belonged to a wanted Basque terrorist, who disappeared after the explosion.

¹⁴ José de Córdoba, "Ortega's Old Friendships are Liabilities as Election Nears," The Wall Street Journal, Oct. 19, 2001.

¹⁵ Plan Colombia is a multi-billion dollar program through which the United States has funded the expansion, retraining and arming of the Colombian national police and military. Begun in 1999,, at the end of the Clinton administration, it has continued with bipartisan Congressional support, through the Bush years.

added)¹⁶

Apparently Gaddafi was not immediately responsive to the request, and so the FARC tried to follow up on the request, this time through Daniel Ortega. In a February 22, 2003 note "From the Mountains of Colombia" that was hand-delivered to Ortega, Reyes requested help:

Dear compañero Daniel, this is to send you my warm and effusive revolutionary greeting, and that of commander Manuel Marulanda. We also are writing to see if you have any information on the request we made to our Libyan comrades, which was made in writing in the name of the secretariat of the FARC, and which I signed. The Libyans said they would answer us, but we have not yet received any information... While we were in Libya they explained to us that the political responsibility for carrying out Libya's policies in the region were in the hands of Daniel Ortega. For that reason, we are approaching you, in hopes of obtaining an answer.

I also want to reaffirm to you that the primary priority of the FARC, in order to achieve greater success in its military operations against enemy troops, in order to take political power in Colombia, is acquiring anti-aircraft capabilities, in order to counteract the efficiency of the Colombian and U.S. aircraft against our troops.¹⁷

It is not clear what the result of the discussions were, but relations between the FARC AND? remained cordial. According to documents obtained by La Prensa, Nicaragua's most important newspaper, the key envoy between Ortega and the FARC is Luis Cabrera, the Nicaraguan ambassador in Cuba. Cabrera is a nationalized Argentine who has maintained a long friendship with Ortega, dating back to the Sandinista revolution.

Citing other documents from Reyes' computer, the newspaper said FARC leaders had met numerous times with Cabrera, who promised the rebels any help within Nicaragua's ability. He even offered to let the FARC establish a link on the Sandinista website in order to make it easier for people to get in touch with the organization. Reyes wrote to the FARC representatives in Havana not to forget to "visit the Nicaraguan ambassador with great frequency. Take him documents and express our appreciation for the stimulating statements of *comandante* Ortega."¹⁸

¹⁶ Letter to Gaddafi, in possession of NEFA Foundation. It can also be seen here: Octavio Enriquez, "Ortega, Puente Entre Gaddafi y las FARC," La Prensa, June 27, 2008.

¹⁷ Letter to Daniel Ortega, in possession of the NEFA Foundation. It can also be seen here: Octavio Enriquez, "Ortega, Puente Entre Gaddafi y las FARC," La Prensa, June 27, 2008.

¹⁸ Octavio Enriquez, "Contacto Está en La Habana," La Prensa, June 28, 2008 viewed at: http://laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2008/junio/28/noticias/nacionales/268624_print.shtml. In addition to this support, La Prensa reported that a well-known Nicaraguan painter, Genaro Lugo, helped a senior FARC official identified as Alberto Bermudez, obtain Nicaraguan identity papers, something Luga admitted to doing. This is interesting because the incident was described in Reyes papers. See: http://www.laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2008/junio/29/noticias/nacionales/268787_print.shtml.

The Reyes documents also show that the FARC maintained significant contacts with members of another former ally in El Salvador. A key player in supplying weapons to the FARC appears to be Hugo Luis Merino, a senior figure in the Communist Party, one of the five parties that made up the FMLN in El Salvador during that nation's 11-year civil war. During that time, the FMLN was also closely aligned with the Sandinistas, led by Ortega, in Nicaragua. Merino used the alias "Ramiro Vásquez" during the conflicts, and is still known by his *nom de guerre*, as are many former rebels who adopted other identities during the war.

The FMLN formally demobilized in 1991 and became a legal political party, and is currently poised to win the presidential elections scheduled for 2009.

The Communist Party is a small but influential group within the FMLN coalition because it controls the international resources, including those funds provided by Chávez for the current electoral campaign, now underway. Communist Party members, including Merino (who is currently serving as a Salvadoran delegate to the Central American Parliament), are widely suspected of retaining a clandestine, armed wing after the rest of the FMLN had officially demobilized. This armed wing is suspected of carrying out several high-profile kidnappings in El Salvador, including the 1995 abduction of 14-year-old Saul Suster, the son of a prominent businessman and politician. Suster was kept in a tiny underground water tank for almost a year before being freed in exchange for \$150,000.¹⁹

Merino, using his old alias "Ramiro," had been an important logistics officer for the Communist Party during the Salvadoran war, and seems to have maintained significant contacts abroad in the weapons-buying world.

A September 6, 2007 e-mail from Iván Rios, a member of the FARC secretariat, to other secretariat members, lays out the multiple negotiations under way for new FARC weapons, including the highly coveted surface-to-air missiles:

1) Yesterday I met two Australians who were brought here by Tino, thanks to the contact made by Ramiro (Salvador). We have been talking to them (the Australians) since last year.

2) They offer very favorable prices for everything we need: rifles, PKM machine guns, Russian Dragunovs with scopes for snipers, multiple grenade launchers, different munitions...RPGs (rocket propelled grenades), .50 machine guns, and the missiles. All are made in Russia and China.

3) For transportation, they have a ship, with all its documents in order, and the cargo comes in containers. The crew is Philipino and does not know the contents, with the exception of the captain and first mate. They only need a secure port to land at.

¹⁹ For a more complete look at Merino and the role of the Communist party, both with the FARC and with criminal activities, see: Jose de Cordoba, "Chavez Ally May Have Aided Colombian Guerrillas: Emails Seem to Tie El Salvador Figure to a Weapons Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 28, 2008, p. A9.

4) They gave us a list of prices from last month, including transportation. They offer refurbished Chinese AKs (Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles-DF) that come as used, but in reality are new, and were not distributed to the Chinese army, which developed a new line of weapons, for \$175. AK 101 and 102, completely new, for \$350. Dragunovs, new with scopes, \$1,200. RPG launchers for \$3,000 y grenades for \$80. They say they have a thermo baric grenade that destroys everything in closed spaces (like the bombs the gringos use against Al Qaeda (sic) hideouts) for \$800. Chinese missiles (which they say are the most up-to-date at this time) with a 97 percent effective rate, \$93,000, and 15,000 for the launchers. They say it is very easy to use, and they guarantee the training. If one of these missiles were identified inside Colombia it would cause them a lot of problems, but if, on the side they include old Russian SA-7 (shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles-DF) it would serve to confuse, mislead or at least give the impression that the guerrillas have weapons of different types, no just Chinese. The ammunition for AKs is 21 cents a round, but if we buy more than 3 million rounds, the price drops to 9 cents a unit.

4) (sic) They promised to give us an exact price on other material. Two months ago they sent me a price list (very favorable, for example, a used .50 machine gun for \$400, new for \$3,000), but I didn't take the list to the meeting place.

5) They do the purchasing without the need of a down payment, but when the merchandise is on the ship, they want 50 percent. When it is delivered they collect the other 50 percent. The money moves through a bank in the Pacific, in an independent country where they can move money without any questions being asked. Once the cargo is shipped it can take one month, or a month and a half to arrive in Venezuela. They said we could have a representative, it doesn't matter what nationality, on board the ship while it sails to its final destination.

The memorandum goes on to describe the potential purchase of different types of radio equipment, and the protocol for future contact, which would only be done in face-to-face meetings. There is an agreement to meet again on November 23, 2007, to review an up-to-date price list and to test some radios on the ground. Iván finishes by reiterating that the Australians "are friends of Ramiro," and can therefore be trusted.²⁰

On November 12, 2007, Iván sent another missive outlining developments on several fronts. He noted that Rodríguez Chacín, at the time minister of interior and one of Chávez's closest advisers, was involved in the transaction and added, "he has already suggested mechanism for receiving the Australians in Orinoco."²¹

That mechanism was apparently put to use, because a subsequent e-mail from November 23, the day of the agreed-upon follow-up meeting, Iván wrote that "we are waiting for the Australians, in order to reach an agreement on the items mentioned before. El Cojo (the Cripple) is responsible for the first quota and the logistics."²² This

²⁰ E-mail provided by Colombian authorities, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²¹ E-mail provided by Colombian authorities, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²² E-mail provided by Colombian authorities, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

seems to indicate that Australians were arriving via Venezuela, as El Cojo is the nickname of an unidentified senior Venezuelan official who, according to other documents, is close to Chávez and with whom the FARC has developed "an excellent relationship that is constantly growing closer."²³ The first quota seems to refer to the payment, and placing him in charge of logistics would be logical, as he is credited with coordinating other logistical efforts for the guerrillas.

The Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana:

While the bilateral and individual relationships are of tremendous importance to the FARC, the group was also anxious to break out of its broader international isolation. The mechanism devised for this was the Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana (The Bolivarian Continental Coordinator-CCB). The concept was to build a broad-based Bolivarian movement across the continent that would appear to be a coalition of progressive forces, when in fact, it would be driven and controlled by the FARC.

According to documents on the Reyes computer, the CCB was born in August 2003, and by December, had an anthem, a flag, a newspaper called "Bolivarian Mail," letterhead stationery, and a logo. "The CCB is work of the FARC, the Bolivarian Movement composed of the José Maria Córdoba and Caribbean blocs, a December 7, 2003 internal document said. The document said "Comrade Alfonso," referring to Alfonso Cano, who is now the FARC's commander-in-chief, had been informed of each of the steps taken, and that the first executive meeting had been held "in one of our camps" to "lay out the specific tasks and responsibilities for the activities that are currently underway. Among our tasks is the creation of a Bolivarian movement, the establishment of the CCB in each country, etc. This organization has already led protests in Ecuador and Panama."²⁴

The CCB soon established a significant presence across Latin America, attracting the sympathy of numerous leftist political organizations and NGOs, many committed to non-violence. According to a March 11, 2005 report on the CCB's activities in 2004, there were already active groups in Mexico, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Chile. International brigades from the Basque region of Spain, along with the Italians, French, and Danish were also operational. Work was underway in Argentina, Guatemala, and Brazil. The number of organizations that were being actively coordinated by the CCB was listed at 63, and there were "political relations" with 45 groups and 25 institutions. The CCB database contained 500 e-mails.²⁵

The CCB leadership went out of its way to hide its FARC affiliation to all but the more select inner circle. "The CCB runs the whole gamut, from respectable groups to useful idiots to terrorist," said one Colombian official studying the CCB. "There is the public face of the CCB, which seems benign, but the inner workings are all FARC, allied with other terrorist organizations that, frankly, we thought had disappeared." This is borne out in numerous internal documents. In an April 1, 2006 letter from Reyes to "Aleyda," identified by Colombia authorities as Mariana López de la Vega of the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionaria-MIR) of Chile, the

²³ Dec. 23, 2007, e-mail from Iván to the FARC high command, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²⁴ Documents provided by Colombian officials, in possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²⁵ March 11, 2005 e-mail from Iván Ríos to Raúl Reyes, provided by Colombia officials, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

FARC leader states, "the CCB is part of movement of masses of the FARC, and as such receives all of our support. However, we are not deluded or confused, and understand that the CCB is broader than just our cells, as the CCB has a broad roof, which allows us, if we are politically agile, to reach other sectors of society and create more Communist militants."²⁶

A December 31, 2006 letter from Iván Ríos to Raul Reyes, (whom Ríos address as "Dear Foreign Minister") says the FARC support group in Chile "ask for instructions relating to CCB. It seems they are waiting precise orders from you regarding the activity in Santiago."²⁷

The European Connections:

One of the functions of the CCB was clearly to establish friendly relationships on behalf of the FARC in Europe. But the FARC already had long-standing ties to different terrorist groups in Europe, particularly the ETA Basque separatist movement in Spain and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (P-IRA) in Ireland. The Reyes documents show that the FARC also was in contact with the PKK of Turkey.

The purpose of the historical contacts was to acquire technical proficiency in areas where the FARC was weak. This included, but was not limited to, the use of explosives and homemade mortars. While the smaller National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional-ELN) in Colombia had mastered the use of sophisticated explosives, primarily to blow up oil pipelines as part of their insurgent strategy, the FARC, until the late 1990s, had very little knowledge of, and made little use of, high-powered explosive devices.

However, that changed dramatically when the FARC suddenly began to use heavy mortars, primarily made of gas cylinders, to attack army barracks and civilian outposts. The weapons, often called "flying car bombs," were fundamental in allowing the FARC to inflict several important defeats on the Colombian military and police.²⁸

In August 2001, Colombian police arrested three Irish individuals in Bogotá who were traveling on false passports. The three were returning from spending several weeks with the FARC in an area where peace talks between the FARC and the government were being held. The three were identified as Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley, and James Monaghan, members of the P-IRA. Subsequent investigations found that the P-IRA individuals had come into contact with the FARC through ETA terrorists in Spain, with whom the IRA had a long-standing relationship. The training in Colombia began in 1997, and focused not just on explosives training, but also on urban warfare. By the time the three were arrested, an estimated 15 other trainers had worked with the FARC, including some from Iran, Spain, and Cuba.²⁹

²⁶ April 1, 2006 e-mail from Raúl Reyes to Aleyda, provided by Colombia officials, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²⁷ Jan. 3, 2007 e-mail to Iván Ríos, provided by Colombia officials, in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

²⁸ Author interviews with senior Colombian intelligence and military officials.

²⁹ Author interviews with senior Colombia police officials. The three initially claimed to be eco-tourists. They were eventually convicted and sentenced to 17 years in prison each. However, they had been granted bail and fled the country before serving any time. The mortars used by the FARC beginning in the late 1990s were exact replicas of the IRA's Mark 15 and more sophisticated Mark 18 bunker buster mortars.

By early 2001, the full effects of the training were visible. From the middle of 1998 to early 2001, the FARC killed some 400 soldiers, using car bombs, homemade mortars and other new explosive devices. The FARC, which had traditionally had little presence or capacity to carry out attacks in urban areas, exploded a car bomb in February 2003 in front of the El Nogal country club in Bogotá, killing 36 people. The FARC also successfully used radio-controlled improvised mortars, "a technological capability that only the P-IRA and ETA had previously demonstrated." The FARC used a sophisticated, remote-controlled "barracks buster" mortar in an August 2002 assassination attempt against Colombia president Alvaro Uribe. The attack killed 20 civilians and wounded 60. It also had a second element that set it apart from previous FARC operations: two sets of mortar attacks, the first to distract the security forces, while the second was aimed at the presidential palace. Colombian officials said this was a "technological leap" for the FARC.³⁰

Despite the arrest of the three Irishmen, contacts continued between the FARC and European allies. Here is a sampling of what the Reyes documents show about these contacts.

According to Reyes documents obtained by Der Spiegel, the respected German magazine, Reyes' son, Ariel Robespierre Devia, made a secret trip to Berlin in January 2005. There, using the name "Roberto," he met with Wolfgang Gehrcke. At the time Gehrcke was member of the Party of Democratic Socialism, the successor to East German Communist Party. According to "Roberto," Gehrcke suggested his party would back a bid, sponsored by the FARC, to be removed from the European Union designated terrorist list. "Roberto" reported the meeting was "very positive," and a few months later Gehrcke introduced an unsuccessful proposal to remove the FARC from the terrorist list. During the visit, "Roberto" reportedly met with representatives from the German Communist Party and the Junge Welt newspaper, which reportedly offered to "assist the FARC publication *Resistencia*."³¹

The FARC also went to great lengths to court the Swiss, whom the rebels viewed as favorable to the FARC. The emissary between the FARC and the Swiss government was Professor Jean-Pierre Gontard, who visited Reyes twice, in 2004 and 2007, in the jungle, in order to come up with a joint strategy for Switzerland's role in negotiating an end to the hostage crisis of Ingrid Betancourt. According to Swiss accounts of Gontard's role, he went far beyond a neutral observer and negotiator, and instead became an adviser to Reyes on how to handle the kidnappings. He was also reportedly instrumental in getting permission for the FARC to set up a small office in Geneva from which to carry out their diplomatic efforts in Europe, and he hand carried money from Reyes to FARC members in Europe. While the FARC was initially very pleased with the access to Gontard, they eventually tired of his constant demands for attention and his insistence on trying to monopolize the negotiations. In 2007, Gontard and the Swiss were replaced by Hugo Chávez as the official mediator in the conflict.³²

³⁰ Kim Cragin, Peter Chalk, Sara A. Daly and Brian A. Jackson, "Sharing the Dragon's Teeth: Terrorist Groups and the Exchange of New Technologies," Rand Corporation, 2007, p. 72.

³¹ "German Left Wing May Have Ties to Colombian Extremists," Spiegel Online, May 24, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,druck-555176,00.html>.

³² Von Alex Baur, "Helping the Hostage-Takers: Switzerland and the Reyes Computer Files," Die Weltwoche, Aug. 29, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.weltwoche.ch/artikel1/?AssetID=20369&CategoryID=100>.

On July 26, 2008, Spanish police arrested María Remedios García Albert on the outskirts of Madrid. She was charged with acting as the chief FARC representative in Europe. The 57-year-old Spaniard, who reportedly used the name "Irene," was identified from the Reyes computer, in part because she had traveled to Colombia in 2007 to meet with Reyes and other members of the FARC secretariat. Spanish authorities said García used her position at a small NGO, the Organization of Solidarity for Asia, Africa and Latin America, to secretly work for the FARC. "This arrest is the start of a series of arrests which will take place in Europe, especially of people linked to the FARC," said General Naranjo, commander of the Colombian police. García's computer reportedly contained a wealth of information on the FARC structures in Europe, and indicated that García had money that she was distributing to different FARC operatives in Europe.³³

In fact, the arrest of García, who has been freed on bail, led to the identification of several other FARC operatives, including four other Spaniards, a Dane, and two Italians. The Dane has been a key player in keeping the FARC's on-line presence viable, and running a news service called Anncol, to distribute FARC statements and propaganda. In addition to García, the international outreach group in Europe was led by Ómar Arturo Zabala Padilla, who uses the name "Lucas Gualdrón." Zabala Padilla, who was granted permission to live in Switzerland, was responsible for collecting and distributing money, organizing the FARC presence at various international forums, and lobbying governments, international organizations, and NGOs on behalf of the FARC.³⁴ The most intriguing reference to contacts on the continent are contained in a January 18, 2006 e-mail from Iván Ríos to Reyes. It is not extensive, but shows how far abroad the FARC was searching for allies.

I spoke to the Turks. They are militants of the TKP (Turkish Communist Party). They have a guerrilla force (15,000). They have spoken to Lucas and Héctor (Orlando) in Switzerland. They are allies of the Kurds and Chechens. In Turkey there are 40 nationalities. We spoke of their struggle, the current role of the empire (the United States-DF) and the EU on the Turkish peninsula. Their idea is to have a plan to exchange knowledge and experiences. Regarding missiles and other equipment they are standing by and are going to check. They seem serious and like good guys.³⁵

Conclusions:

It is clear from internal FARC communications and subsequent intelligence acquired by Colombian officials that the FARC, in recent years, has placed a high premium on creating an international network. The network consists of both solidarity groups to raise funds and generally support the FARC agenda and actual support for combat operations.

³³ "Spanish Police Arrest Spain's FARC Commander," France 24, July 26, 2008, accessed at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20080726-spanish-police-arrest-sp>.

³⁴ Author interviews with senior Colombia intelligence officials, and reported by El Tiempo newspaper on Aug. 2, 2008: Unidad Investigativa, "Cuatro Españoles, un danés, dos italianos y un australiano, fichas de las FARC en el exterior, El Tiempo, Aug. 2, 2008.

³⁵ Jan. 18, 2006 e-mail from Iván Ríos to Raúl Reyes, provided by Colombian authorities and in the possession of the NEFA Foundation.

While the role of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has received a great deal of scrutiny, a close examination of the available documents show that Daniel Ortega, the president of Nicaragua with a long and checkered history in Latin America's revolutionary left, also plays an extremely important role. Ortega has served as a key facilitator for the FARC with Moammar Gaddafi of Libya, and provided FARC leaders with protection and travel documents, and political cover. Another key player is Hugo Luis Merino, a member of the Communist Party of El Salvador, and currently a deputy in the Central American Parliament. Merino has been a key player in the FARC's hard-charging efforts to acquire surface-to-air missiles.

The CCB is a key political instrument of the FARC, and internal FARC documents clearly show that, while the group is an umbrella organization that covers many groups, it is funded and directed by the FARC. The CCB's primary purpose is to further the political aims of the FARC. It is also used as a recruitment tool for the rebels.

The FARC has, over the past decade, maintained symbiotic relationships with terrorist organizations in Europe, primarily ETA and the P-IRA. In both cases, the FARC acquired knowledge and expertise that allowed its forces to greatly increase its military capabilities, both in the field of explosives and in urban warfare. The expertise acquired from these groups, possibly in exchange for cash payments, was used not only in military campaigns, but caused significant civilian casualties.

The FARC maintains a small but significant presence in Europe, despite the EU's designation of the FARC as a terrorist entity. This presence allows the FARC to raise funds, create the appearance of a legitimate political force, and present the FARC agenda at different formal and informal gatherings of sympathetic leftist groups. The ability to advance the FARC agenda significantly in Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy shows how effective this strategy has been.

By their own admission, leaders of the Colombian intelligence structure greatly underestimated and undervalued the FARC's international structure. Long after it had ceased to be true, the FARC was viewed as an isolated, primarily rural movement with little ability to move in the international arena. The Reyes computer documents have done much to dispel this notion for two reasons. The first is the existence of the computer files, which showed the FARC had moved into the Internet age years ago, and carried out most of their important communications via e-mail and satellite telephones. The second is the wealth of information that Reyes kept in his computer, which served as a virtual warehouse of the FARC's most sensitive documents.

Colombian officials, in recent interviews, were unanimous in saying that, while the FARC had been badly hurt in recent years and was considerably weakened, the group had not been defeated. The primary asset the FARC has in its struggle to survive is its international support network, particularly from state actors such as Chávez in Venezuela, Ortega in Nicaragua, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and the Castro brothers in Cuba. As the military pressure mounts on the FARC inside Colombia, the leadership can only survive if it can establish safe rearguard areas where the leadership and troops can hide, rest, recuperate, and establish secure supply lines. Colombian and U.S. intelligence officials view Venezuela and Ecuador, because of their physical proximity to Colombia, as the primary areas the FARC is currently using as rearguard areas, and that protection is likely to increase as the FARC comes under more military pressure inside Colombia. The international political cost Colombia paid for its cross-border raid into Ecuador to kill

Reyes is believed to have been so high the Colombian military is unlikely to carry out further trans-border attacks.

Ortega, in Nicaragua, offers a different type of support, but one equally vital. This is particularly true given Ortega's friendship with Merino and other hard line members of FMLN, a party that is likely to assume the presidency in El Salvador. While the FMLN as an entity is not involved, Merino's small but influential group exercises a disproportionate influence by controlling campaign funds donated by Chávez.

Military victory over the FARC will not be possible as long as the group retains the international support network that allows it to continue to exist despite a series of setbacks that have made the rebel group a shadow of its former self. As long as Chávez, Ortega, and Correa offer state support, the CCB is able to offer international support and legitimacy, and other terrorist groups can continue to transfer knowledge and experience to the FARC, the rebels will remain a military force to be reckoned with.