

**PERRY CENTER OCCASIONAL PAPER**

**NOVEMBER 2020**

# **FARC During the Peace Process**

By Mark Wilson



**WILLIAM J. PERRY CENTER  
FOR HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE STUDIES**

*National Defense University*

**Cover photo caption:** FARC leaders Iván Márquez (center) along with Jesús Santrich (wearing sunglasses) announce in August 2019 that they are abandoning the 2016 Peace Accords with the Colombian government and taking up arms again with other dissident factions.

**Photo credit:** Dialogo Magazine, YouTube, and AFP.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not an official policy nor position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense nor the U.S. Government.

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## Introduction

The 2016 Colombian Peace Deal marked the end of FARC's formal military campaign. As a part of the demobilization process, 13,000 former militants surrendered their arms and returned to civilian life either in reintegration camps or among the general public.<sup>1</sup> The organization's leadership were granted immunity from extradition for their conduct during the internal armed conflict and some took the five Senate seats and five House of Representatives seats guaranteed by the peace deal.<sup>2</sup> As an organization, FARC announced its transformation into a political party, the *Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC)*. With strong incentives to comply with the terms of peace, this should have ended FARC's military threat.

However, the development of dissident organizations whose membership is estimated to number nearly 2,500 has cast doubt on the effectiveness of the peace process. The failure of FARC to achieve democratic success and the subsequent defection of many members of FARC's senior leadership have severely undermined the credibility of the FARC party. The academic literature published since the signing of the 2016 Peace Deal neglects FARC's potential backsliding, choosing instead to prioritize emerging armed groups. Nevertheless, FARC's commitment to the peace process and the potential for its members to rejoin violent conflict will be defining issues for Colombia's security landscape.

This paper provides an overview of the activities of FARC and its dissident groups in the period from the signing of the 2016 Peace Deal to August of 2020. The central conclusion of this paper is that FARC poses a continuing threat to the Colombian state both because (1) its dissident factions are growing and are in real danger of reunifying and (2) its legal political organization is behaving at odds with the peace process. This paper is intended to encourage and assist future research on the subject of FARC's ongoing security threat to the Colombian state which is de-prioritized in the existing academic literature.

The primary research question that this paper will answer is: Has FARC fully demobilized or does it and/or its constituent parts continue to pose a security threat to the Colombian state? The answer to

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Diego Posada, "Major Implications of Former FARC Leadership Returning to War," *InSight Crime*, August 29, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/major-implications-of-farc-leadership-returning-to-war/>; Redacción Colombia, "El fin de los espacios de reincorporación, ¿cuál será el futuro de los excombatientes?," *El Espectador*, February 6, 2019. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/el-fin-de-los-espacios-de-reincorporacion-cual-sera-el-futuro-de-los-excombatientes-articulo-857613/>.

<sup>2</sup> Presidencia de la Republic, "Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace," *Especiales Presidencia*, November 11, 2016. Link: <http://especiales.presidencia.gov.co/Documents/20170620-dejacion-armas/acuerdos/acuerdo-final-ingles.pdf>.

this question will be structured into three areas of analysis: First, this paper will examine the democratic failure of FARC's formal leadership. Second, it will analyze the development of dissident organizations, in particular the potential for unification among different dissident factions. Finally, it will look at FARC's former and current financial and economic infrastructure. There is a limitation in fully answering this research question - a great deal of information is either publicly unavailable or only known to a select group of actors. The conclusions presented in this paper are approximations based on the best available evidence.

Methodologically, this paper relies on the journalistic research of publications and NGOs that operate on the ground in Colombia, including *El Espectador*, *Insight Crime*, *El Tiempo*, and *Fundación Ideas de la Paz (FIP)*. Sources are selected from articles published between November of 2016 and August of 2020 based on their relevance to the areas of analysis identified previously. Evidence from major international news sources like the *BBC*, *NPR*, or *Reuters* will supplement and corroborate these local publications.

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, it will review the existing literature on FARC's post-peace deal development, including both sources published before the signing of the deal and afterwards. Second, it will outline its methodology with regards to source selection. Third, it will provide an analysis of FARC's development in three key areas: its formal party organization, its dissident organizations, and its funding sources. Finally, it will offer a summary of the most likely future scenarios and their implications.

## Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the existing literature on FARC's development after the signing of the 2016 Peace Deal. It includes predictive research published before the implementation of the Peace Deal and is designed to focus the scope of this research paper. This literature review will begin with research published prior to 2016 and then move on to research published after the Peace Deal that covers both the outcome of the Peace Deal both generally and with specific reference to FARC.

The largest body of research focusing on the relationship between FARC and the 2016 Peace Deal was published prior to the signing of the deal itself. This literature seeks to evaluate the prospects for peace in advance. Some researchers focus on the potential for external groups to compete for the profits of narco-trafficking and other illicit activities that FARC has left behind, in particular, Maher and Thompson identify paramilitary forces as potential spoilers in the peace process.<sup>3</sup> Others focus on the potential for sub-sections of FARC to either remilitarize or resist demilitarization all together.<sup>4</sup> There is

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<sup>3</sup> David Maher and Andrew Thomson, "A Precarious Peace? The Threat of Paramilitary Violence to the Peace Process in Colombia," *Third World Quarterly*, 39: 2142 – 2172, 2018. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2018.1508992>; Matt Ince, "Filling the FARC-Shaped Void," *Potential Insecurity in Post-Conflict Colombia*, 26-34: 26 - 34, 2013. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2013.847708>.

<sup>4</sup> Ernesto Cardenas, Krisitain Skrede Gleditsch, and Luis Carls Guevara, "Network Structure of Insurgent Groups and the Success of DDR Processes in Colombia," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 29: 754 - 775, 2018. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488416>; Enzo Nussio and Kimberly Howe, "What if the FARC Demobilizes," *Stability Journal*, 1(1): 58 - 67, 2012. Link: <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.aj/>.



**Photo caption:** Thousands of FARC soldiers have surrendered their weapons and demobilized following the 2016 peace accord with the Colombian government.

**Photo credit:** International Crisis Group.

a limited focus on the potential for the main force of FARC to undermine peace. One exception to this is Spencer, who argues using an examination of FARC’s conceptual approach that the leadership may seek to use its democratic participation as a way of achieving its insurgent aims - much like the Bolivian insurgency.<sup>5</sup>

After the signing of the 2016 Peace Deal, there was a trend in the literature to deprioritize the study of FARC itself and instead focus on the effectiveness of the government’s implementation of this deal. A number of papers argue that policies relating to demobilization have been implemented effectively, but that the socio-economic provisions of the Peace Deal have been neglected.<sup>6</sup> Haugaard and Aponte note that this is particularly true of measures designed to support and protect Afro-Colombian and indigenous ‘communities’.<sup>7</sup> There are also a meaningful number of projects that have researched

<sup>5</sup> David Spencer, “FARC’s Transformation: The Combination of All Forms of Struggle,” *A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Divergence*, 2016, London: Hurst Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Haugaard and Andrea Fernández Aponte, “FARC Guerrillas Turn in their Weapons: An End to Fifty Years of War,” *Latin America Working Group*, 2017. Link: <https://www.lawg.org/farc-guerrillas-turn-in-their-weapons-an-end-to-fifty-years-of-war/>; Andrés Eduardo Fernández-Osorio, “La Implementación del Acuerdo de Paz con Las FARC-EP: un Estudio Comparado desde La Experiencia Internacional,” *Análisis Político*, 2019. Link: <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/anpol/article/view/80977>.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Haugaard and Andrea Fernández Aponte, “FARC Guerrillas ...,” 2017.

the implementation disparities across territories<sup>8</sup> Ríos Sierra and Gago Anton conduct a quantitative analysis of violence across six different regions in Colombia and find a disproportionate burden on local governments for combating structural violence. In a similar vein, Mesa Betancur finds that the Peace Deal has failed to improve the institutional capacity of local governments as promised.<sup>9</sup> Other papers have focused on more specific aspects of Peace Deal implementation. Illera and Luiz analyze the role of the civil-military relations as a source of tension that has hindered the full implementation of the Peace Deal (2018). Masse and Le Billion argue that the Peace Deal has failed to prevent illegal mining in Colombia.<sup>10</sup> Although these papers vary in scope and perspective, there is broad agreement that the implementation of the Colombian peace deal has failed to live up to the standards of the deal in a variety of ways.

While there has been limited research on FARC itself in the years since the signing of the Peace Deal, there is a sparse body of literature that focuses on the impact of the 2016 Peace Deal on FARC's development. These projects are of particular relevance to this paper but tend to also analyze FARC primarily as a vacuum that is filled by other organizations or by dissident groups. Blahova and Hladka examine the process of demobilization and argue that it has significantly reduced violence, however they argue that there is no strong sponsor to enforce the demobilization of the remaining insurgents - who will be critical to securing peace in the future.<sup>11</sup> Salazar, Wolff, and Camelo analyze a case study analysis of the municipality of Tumaco and conclude that enduring illicit networks encouraged the creation not only of criminal organizations but also of competing dissident groups in the aftermath of demobilization.<sup>12</sup> Two papers argue that FARC is operating in a similar way to the Bolivian insurgency - formal political participation while leaders operate in illegal activities and maintain their insurgent base.<sup>13</sup> Torrijos Rivera and Abella Osorio use a qualitative analysis of FARC's strategic behavior to argue that their current activity is a continuation of their insurgent behavior and that it is unlikely that democratic participation will moderate FARC. This is at odds with Phelan's conclusion that the terms of

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<sup>8</sup> Jerónimo Ríos Sierra and Egotiz Gago Antón, "Realidades y Desafíos de la Paz Territorial en Colombia," *Revista de Sociología*, 2, 2018. Link: <https://www.lawg.org/farc-guerrillas-turn-in-their-weapons-an-end-to-fifty-years-of-war/>; Xamara Mesa Betancur, "Capacidades Institucionales para la Implementación Local del Acuerdo de Paz con las FARC: El Punto Sobre Participación Política en el Municipio de Ituango, Colombia," *Gobernar*, 3(4), 2019. Link: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/gobernar/vol3/iss4/5/>.

<sup>9</sup> Mesa Betancur, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Frédéric Massé and Philippe Le Billion, "Demobilisation of the Colombian Guerillas: FARC-EP and ELN," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 3, 2018. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23802014.2017.1362322>.

<sup>11</sup> Pavlína Bláhová and Malvína Krausz Hladká, "Demobilisation of the Colombian Guerillas: FARC-EP and ELN," *Vojenské Rozhledy*, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Luis Gabriel Salas Salazar, Jonas Wolff, and Fabián Eduardo Camelo, "Towards Violent Peace? Territorial Dynamics of Violence in Tumaco (Colombia) before and after the demobilization of the FARC-EP," *Conflict, Security, and Development*, 19(5): 497 – 520, 2019. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14678802.2019.1661594>.

<sup>13</sup> David Spencer, "Security Challenges of the New Colombian Administration," *PRISM*, 8(1), 2019. Link: <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1767355/security-challenges-of-the-new-colombian-administration/>; Vicente Torrijos and Juan David Abella Osorio, "El Comportamiento de las FARC Tras la Firma de los Acuerdos de La Habana," *Revista Científica General José María Córdova*, 16(24): 31 - 60, 2018. Link: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328473758\\_El\\_comportamiento\\_de\\_las\\_FARC\\_tras\\_la\\_firma\\_de\\_los\\_acuerdos\\_de\\_La\\_Habana](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328473758_El_comportamiento_de_las_FARC_tras_la_firma_de_los_acuerdos_de_La_Habana).

the peace deal provide strong incentives for FARC to pursue its political strategy peacefully.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting the trend away from researching FARC as the primary security threat in Colombia, there are a small number of papers that have focused on the consequence of FARC's "vacuum." A few papers have identified groups that are likely to "take the place" of FARC after its demobilization. There is a particular emphasis on the activities of Clan Del Golfo.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Formal FARC Leadership and Party**

The 2016 Peace Deal began the transition from FARC as a militant organization to a political party. Although the demobilization process has seen a large number of combatants turn in their arms, FARC as a political organization has not seen the success that its members would have hoped for. Dismal results in democratic elections and numerous defections have raised questions about the viability of the current leadership and FARC as a democratic political movement. This section argues that FARC political leaders are losing control of the organization, and that there is reasonable, if inconclusive, evidence of duplicity and continuing criminal activity on the part of FARC's formal political leaders. This section will focus on the issues of political weakness and duplicity, in turn.

The demobilization process seems to have been a success in terms of the number of combatants who returned to civilian life. Exact estimates vary, but the number of demobilized FARC members ranges from 11,000 to 13,000.<sup>16</sup> This includes the roughly 3,400 FARC members who are living in government reintegration camps as of June 2019.<sup>17</sup> Demobilized FARC members have been the targets of violence, with the UN Mission to Colombia verifying a total of 190 killings between 27 December 2019 and 26 March 2020, the majority of which were perpetrated by armed groups.<sup>18</sup> A number of reintegration camps have been abandoned, with combatants claiming the inability or unwillingness of the government to protect them as the reason for their abandonment.<sup>19</sup>

The dismal failure of the FARC party to achieve democratic success has undermined FARC's current leaders and led to division. In its first ever elections, FARC only achieved only 0.21 and 0.34

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<sup>14</sup> Alexandra Phelan, "Engaging Insurgency: The Impact of the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement on FARC's Political Participation," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 42(9): 31 - 60, 2018. Link: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328473758\\_El\\_comportamiento\\_de\\_las\\_FARC\\_tras\\_la\\_firma\\_de\\_los\\_acuerdos\\_de\\_La\\_Habana](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328473758_El_comportamiento_de_las_FARC_tras_la_firma_de_los_acuerdos_de_La_Habana).

<sup>15</sup> James Rochlin, "Re-imagining Colombia's New Security Landscape in the Wake of the FARC Peace Accord," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 31(1): 181-203, 2020. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592318.2020.1672972>; G. Perilla, J. Carlos, and A. Herrera, "Clan del Golfo: Una Amenaza Para Los Procesos Políticos En Colombia," In: *9th Congreso Latinoamericano de Ciencia Política, Lima*.

<sup>16</sup> Juan Diego Posada, "Major Implications of Former FARC Leadership Returning to War," *InSight Crime*, August 29, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/major-implications-of-farc-leadership-returning-to-war/>; El Espectador, "El fin de los espacios....," February 6, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Juan Camilo Pedraza, "Mayoría de ex-FARC Rehacen sus Vidas Espacios Territoriales," *El Tiempo*, June 12, 2019. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/mayoria-de-exguerrilleros-de-las-farc-rehacen-sus-vidas-fuera-de-las-zonas-de-reincorporacion-374848>.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, "Report of the Secretary-General," *United Nations Security Council*, March 26, 2020. Link: [https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/en\\_n2007152.pdf](https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/en_n2007152.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Redacción Colombia, "Los Espacios de Reincorporación de las FARC con más Amenazas," *El Espectador*, July 9, 2020. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/los-espacios-de-reincorporacion-de-las-farc-con-mas-amenazas/>.

percent of the vote in the lower and upper houses respectively.<sup>20</sup> It returned no seats aside from those that were guaranteed by the Peace Deal.<sup>21</sup> The only meaningful electoral success of FARC was the election of three mayors in a more recent election. Most notable is Guillermo Torres, who won his office by a margin of 20%.<sup>22</sup> However, it was reported by the *Christian Science Monitor* that Torres won on the basis of anti-corruption campaigns rather than adherence to FARC's political messaging.



**Photo caption:** Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos signs a peace accord on behalf of the Colombian government with the head of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on September 26, 2016. To the left of President Santos is the head of the FARC Rodrigo Londono Echeverri, also known as Timochenko.

**Photo credit:** Gobierno de Chile.

FARC's democratic losses are the product of its inability to create a political group that was meaningfully distinct from the militant organization. The party elected to fill its allocated senate seats with former guerrillas.<sup>23</sup> It has also failed to issue a public apology for its participation in violence, which

<sup>20</sup> Luke Taylor, "Colombia: Why did the FARC 'fail' its First Electoral Test?", *Al Jazeera*, March 14, 2018. Link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/180314113957392.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Colombia's 2018 Elections", *Congressional Research Service*, July 12, 2018. Link: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10817.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Megan Janetsky, "Yesterday, He Sang for Guerrillas. Today, He's One Town's Mayor." *Christian Science Monitor*, January 22, 2020. Link: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2020/0122/Yesterday-he-sang-for-guerrillas.-Today-he-s-one-town-s-mayor>; Lia Miranda Batista, "Alcalde de Turbaco dice sí a equipos que ofrece Maduro para detectar el COVID-19", *El Universal*, April 7, 2020. Link: <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/regional/bolivar/alcalde-de-turbaco-dice-si-a-equipos-que-ofrece-maduro-para-detectar-el-covid-19-GB2650901>.

<sup>23</sup> Redacción Colombia, "Estos Son Los Nuevos 10 Congresistas del Partido FARC", *El Espectador*, March 11, 2018. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/politica/estos-son-los-nuevos-10-congresistas-del-partido-farc-articulo-856410>.

undermined its electoral viability.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of dissident groups and the failure of the government to comply fully with the Peace Deal have forced FARC to run a “defensive campaign” focused on questions of its legitimacy that failed to inspire Colombian voters.<sup>25</sup>

The distrust of electoral politics among Colombian leftists is, according to Cepeda-Castro, the product of the organizational memory of the Unión Patriótica (UP), FARC’s previous foray into party politics.<sup>26</sup> The UP operated in tandem with FARC’s militant elements and narco-trafficking operations, and 4,153 UP members, including a presidential candidate, were killed (or disappeared/kidnapped) by cartels and paramilitary organizations.<sup>27</sup> This historical memory is particularly relevant given the violence visited upon demobilized FARC members during the peace process, although the scale of this recent violence is dramatically smaller with 190 verified killings.<sup>28</sup>

FARC’s leaders are weak not only because of electoral losses, but also because of deep divisions in the party over the peace process. FARC was divided on the peace process from its inception, and Iván Márquez, the second most influential FARC leader before his defection from the peace process, had publicly criticised the leadership.<sup>29</sup> Some FARC leaders, including Timochenko, Pablo Catatumbo, Pastor Alape, and Carlos Antonio Lozado have cooperated with Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) hearings,<sup>30</sup> while Márquez, Jesus Sántrich, and other significant leaders have failed to appear for these hearings. These fractures have been worsened in recent years by public divisions over the state’s failure or unwillingness to fully implement the terms of peace, legal violations by senior leaders in the party, and the loss of democratic elections.<sup>31</sup>

Márquez and his supporters have since rearmed, but divisions persist within the democratic party. In addition to the rearming of many within FARC’s senior leadership, there have been significant resignations of notable FARC rank and file members - for example, Martín Batalla and Dutch FARC guerrilla Tanja Nijmeijer.<sup>32</sup> A foiled assassination attempt on “Timochenko’s” life, allegedly ordered by FARC dissidents, further demonstrates the intensity of this split.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the exact details of this incident are unclear, and the claim that “dissidents” carried out the attack is largely based on re-

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<sup>24</sup> Luke Taylor, “Colombia: Why ...”, March 14, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Luke Taylor, “Colombia: Why ...”, March 14, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Iván Cepeda Castro, “Genocidio Político: El Caso de la Unión Patriótica en Colombia”, *Revista Cejil*, 2006, 1(2): 101 - 112. Link: <https://mronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/r24797.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremy McDermott, “The Future of the Ex-FARC Mafia”, *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/future-ex-farc-mafia/>; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, “Todo Pasó Frente A Nuestros Ojos: El Genocidio de la Unión Patriótica 1984 - 2002”, *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, 2018. Link: [http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/INFORME\\_UP\\_completo.pdf](http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/INFORME_UP_completo.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, “Report of ...”, March 26, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Tristan Clavel, “Is the FARC Political Experiment Dead in the Water?,” *InSight Crime*, September 4, 2018. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/farc-political-experiment-dead/>.

<sup>30</sup> *El Espectador*, “Por que el Partido FARC no Despega,” *El Espectador*, March 13, 2019. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-2020/debate/por-que-el-partido-farc-no-despega/>.

<sup>31</sup> *El Espectador*, March 13, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> *El Espectador*, “Por que se.....”, January 22, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> BBC, “Colombia Foils Attempt to Assassinate ex-FARC Leader Timochenko,” *BBC*, January 12, 2020. Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-51086526>.

ports from the police. This assassination attempt is the only overt example of violence against FARC by FARC dissidents, which may be an indication that this division is not irreparable.

In addition to the weakness of their political position, there is also some evidence that FARC's formal leaders continue to behave in at least a legal grey area, if not criminally. While he was a designated FARC senator, Jesús Sántrich was accused by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) of coordinating a drug deal with members of the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>34</sup> FARC senator and vice president of the Senate of the Republic, Sandra Ramírez, stated that narco-trafficking was present in FARC's ranks, drawing a comparison to narco-trafficking in the Colombian army.<sup>35</sup> She specifically named Gentil Duarte and John 40, FARC dissidents who have rearmed, but her observation likely applies to the formal FARC structure as well. It is naive to assume that the former leaders of a narco-trafficking organization have all left their lives of crime behind them.

Another distinct possibility is that FARC's apparent division is, in fact, an attempt by members of the FARC leadership to maintain insurgent and democratic operations simultaneously.<sup>36</sup> This strategy would be consistent with the historic example of the Unión Patriótica (UP) and FARC's strategic co-existence during the 1980s until the UP was violent suppressed.<sup>37</sup> As an approach, it has many regional precedents in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Suriname.<sup>38</sup> At least two of FARC's most important advisors have pursued this strategy, namely, the Farabundo Martí Communist Party Front (FMLN) in El Salvador and the Ortega Wing of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua.<sup>39</sup> The strategic purpose of this approach could, in the future, include significant political unrest supported by insurgent groups for the benefit of political groups and the funding of democratic politics by criminal means.

Based on the evidence presented in this section, it is possible to make two conclusions about FARC's formal leadership. First, they are in a politically weak position in which it is difficult for them to credibly claim to represent FARC as an organization. This, in turn, makes it difficult for them to hold FARC members to the terms of the peace process and to negotiate on behalf of FARC with the Colombian government. Second, it is a plausible possibility that they are themselves involved in criminal activities that violate the terms of peace and are in communication with dissident forces.

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<sup>34</sup> JEP, "JEP Decreta Pruebas en el Case de Seuxis Pausias Hernandez Solarte," *Jurisdiccion Especial de Paz*, October 25, 2018. [link: <https://www.jep.gov.co/Sala-de-Prensa/Paginas/JEP-decreta-pruebas-en-el-caso-de--Seuxis-Pausias-Hern%C3%A1ndez-Solarte.aspx>]; InSight Crime, "Seuxis Pausias Hernandez, alias 'Jesus Santrich'," *InSight Crime*, August 18, 2020. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/seuxis-pausias-hernandez-alias-jesus-santrich/>.

<sup>35</sup> El Tiempo, "Por 'Jesus Santrich', Sandra Ramirez Suma Otra Polemica," *El Tiempo*, July 27, 2020. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/congreso/sandra-ramirez-no-hay-pruebas-que-vinculen-jesus-santrich-con-narco-trafico-522670>.

<sup>36</sup> David Spencer, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> David Spencer, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Vicente Torrijos and Juan David Abella Osorio, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Vicente Torrijos and Juan David Abella Osorio, 2018.



**Photo caption:** Some FARC dissident groups have moved across the Colombian border into neighboring Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. These former FARC guerrillas were arrested in Putamayo, Peru.

**Photo credit:** Ministerio de Defensa del Perú.

### **FARC's Dissident Factions**

Throughout the peace process, dissident factions of FARC have emerged, which continue its illicit and, on occasion, political activities. While some fronts have common allegiances, others operate as fragmented criminal networks. For the purpose of analysis, this paper will discuss FARC dissidents in three broad groups: primarily criminal groups, fronts affiliated with “Gentil Duarte”, and the “Segunda Marquetalia” - the dissenting senior FARC leadership allied with Iván Márquez. The core conclusion of this section is that FARC dissidents are more than just criminal actors and have a reasonable chance of reunifying to a significant extent.

The majority of demobilized FARC members have not rearmed yet. FARC dissidents are a numerically significant minority whose numbers are growing. There is a lot of conflicting information about the exact number of active FARC dissidents. One intelligence report from December of 2018 places the number at 1,749<sup>40</sup> while a different report released two months prior places the number between 2,500 and 3,000.<sup>41</sup> *InSight Crime* estimated their number to be 2,500 in May 2018 and 3,000 in October

<sup>40</sup> El Tiempo, “Los ejércitos ilegales que enfrentará la nueva cúpula militar,” *El Tiempo*, December 21, 2018. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/los-ejercitos-ilegales-que-enfrentara-la-nueva-cupula-militar-305714>.

<sup>41</sup> Noticias Caracol, “Disidencia de las FARC estarían en más de 10 departamentos, según informe de inteligencia militar,” *Noticias Caracol*, October 12, 2018. Link: <https://noticias.caracoltv.com/colombia/disidencia-de-las-farc-estarian-en-mas-de-10-departamentos-segun-informe-de-inteligencia-militar>.

2019.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that FARC dissidents are a fraction of the 13,000 demobilized FARC members, but that they likely rival the ELN's estimated 2,500 membership.<sup>43</sup> These data points also suggest that their numbers are growing.



**Graph caption:** FARC dissidents are reportedly operating in the border areas of Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela presenting Colombia with sovereignty issues with neighboring countries.

**Graph credit:** Instituto Geografica Agustin Codazzi (IGAC)

<sup>42</sup> InSight Crime, “Colombia and Venezuela: Criminal Siamese Twins,” *InSight Crime*, May 21, 2018. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/colombia-venezuela-criminal-siamese-twins/>; InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia,” *InSight Crime*, October 27, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/evolution-ex-farc-mafia/>.

<sup>43</sup> InSight Crime, “ELN,” *InSight Crime*, May 4, 2020. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/eln-profile/>.

Some FARC dissident groups, especially those operating along the Ecuador-Colombian border and in the Pacific region, have become narco-trafficking organizations with limited political interests. The former 48<sup>th</sup> Front contests territory in Putumayo with the former 1<sup>st</sup> Front, and operates criminal networks into Ecuador with limited political affiliation with other FARC groups.<sup>44</sup> The United Guerrillas of the Pacific also operates in this region, and is characterized by an *El Espectador* investigation as “pure narco-trafficking.”<sup>45</sup> The most notable group in this region is the Oliver Sinisterra Front (FOS) led by the now deceased Walther Arizala, also known as “Guacho”. There is some economic integration between the FOS and other, more politically motivated, dissident groups with the FOS providing intelligence, drug trafficking logistics, and chemical precursors to the fronts affiliated with Gentil Duarte.<sup>46</sup> There is little evidence to indicate that this relationship is anything other than economically expedient. Furthermore, the defection of “Guacho” from the peace process in 2017 was largely motivated by territorial control - namely, the incursion of the GUP in the Alto Mira y Frontera area.<sup>47</sup> It appears unlikely that the FOS or other dissident groups in the region are motivated by more than an attempt to control lucrative trafficking networks. They pose significant problems for the Colombian state, but are unlikely to reignite civil conflict.

As a result of this activity, the Ecuadorian border has experienced a significant surge in violence since the Peace Deal. This violence is typified by the kidnap and murder of two journalists in the Esmeraldas province town of San Lorenzo on April 13, which drew international attention.<sup>48</sup> FOS has been key in the growing instability of the Ecuadorian border, as the collapse of agreements between local Ecuadorian authorities and “Guacho” is believed by some sources to have been the catalyst for the recent violence.<sup>49</sup> These dissident groups are undoubtedly a dangerous, destabilizing force, but they lack the political potential of the fronts discussed in this section from this point onwards.

Over the past few years, a loose confederation of fronts under the influence of Gentil Duarte and his allies has developed. Duarte is joined by two other major dissidents - Iván Mordisco and Jhon 40 - and the dissident factions that they represent. The “Gentil Duarte” dissidents operate along the Venezuelan-Colombian border, with territory divided among the leaders.<sup>50</sup> Iván Mordisco commands 400

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<sup>44</sup> El Tiempo, “El narcotráfico enciende la guerra entre las disidencias en Putumayo,” *El Tiempo*, February 16, 2020. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/disidencias-se-disputan-el-control-del-narcotrafico-en-putumayo-462814>.

<sup>45</sup> El Espectador, “Entre Disidentes de al Paz y Reincidentes de la Guerra,” *El Espectador*, August 1, 2019. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/entre-disidentes-de-la-paz-y-reincidentes-de-la-guerra-articulo-878787/>.

<sup>46</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela and the Current International Climate,” *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/ex-farc-mafia-venezuela-international-climate/>.

<sup>47</sup> El Espectador, “Los Encadenados de “Guacho” y el Acuerdo de Paz con las FARC,” *El Espectador*, April 15, 2018. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/opinion/los-encadenados-de-guacho-y-el-acuerdo-de-paz-con-las-farc-columna-858731>.

<sup>48</sup> El Universal, “Campaña de solidaridad sin precedentes en Ecuador por secuestro de periodistas,” *El Universal*, April 12, 2018. Link: <https://www.eluniversal.com/internacional/4703/campana-solidaridad-precedentes-ecuador-secuestro-periodistas>.

<sup>49</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias de ‘Gentil Duarte’ e ‘Ivan Mordisco’,” *El Espectador*, April 15, 2018. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/territorio/las-disidencias-de-gentil-duarte-e-ivan-mordisco-articulo-856534/>.

dissidents in the regions of Guaviare and Vaupés.<sup>51</sup> Jhon 40 leads the “Acacio Medina Front”, which operates in the Colombian region of Guainía and which has established bases in the neighboring Venezuelan region of Amazonas.<sup>52</sup> Gentil Duarte himself operates in the Colombian departments of Gavaire, Meta, Vichada, and Guainía, as well as in the Venezuelan region of Apure.<sup>53</sup> In a dossier presented to the United Nations by President Duque, the Colombian government highlighted the significance of dissident training facilities in Venezuela which are overseen primarily by Jhon 40.<sup>54</sup>

This confederation of dissidents appears to have the political objective of furthering unifying FARC’s dissident factions. To accomplish this goal, it is seeking to revive the Venezuelan and Eastern Bloc criminal links that FARC operated prior to demobilization. Duarte and his allies have expanded their territorial control rapidly by forming links with former combatants operating in regions like Caquetá, Nariño, and Cauca.<sup>55</sup> Iván Mordisco, with control over the first front, has been leading unification efforts in Northern Colombia.<sup>56</sup> Jhon 40 has been tasked by Gentil Duarte with directing the 33rd Front and recovering drug trafficking routes to Venezuela.<sup>57</sup>

Despite this apparent coordination, the FIP stresses in its report that Iván Mordisco and Jhon 40 are behaving a much more territorially towards other FARC dissident groups than Gentil Duarte.<sup>58</sup> They conclude based on this behavior that Mordisco and Jhon 40 are less politically motivated by Duarte, although this information is now two years old. A large amount of criminal infrastructure has been created with the intention of supporting the efforts of the 16th Front. Gentil Duarte, Jhon 40 and other former Eastern Bloc leaders established the Acacio Medina front for this purpose.<sup>59</sup> The Gentil Duarte dissidents have mobilized along the Guaviare River, an area strategically located between Meta and Guaviare for the purpose of coordinating with the 16th Front.<sup>60</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that the “Gentil Duarte” dissidents are coordinating with FARC’s formal leaders. In 2017, FIP concluded that Gentil Duarte’s struggle remained a “plan B” for FARC should the peace process fail. This was based on his unusually sudden desertion from the peace process and his status as a very senior figure and ideologue within FARC.<sup>61</sup> In their 2018 report, however, they

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<sup>51</sup> InSight Crime, “Nestor Gregorio Vera Fernandez, alias ‘Ivan Mordisco’,” *InSight Crime*, October 27, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela.....,” November 11, 2019; *InSight Crime*, “Colombia and Venezuela...,” May 21, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela.....,” November 11, 2019; Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias...,” April 15, 2018; *InSight Crime*, “Colombia and Venezuela...,” May 21, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> *Semana*, “Duque en Naciones Unidas: Las Pruebas de la Alianza entre Venezuela, el ELN y las Disidencias,” September 26, 2019. Link: <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/las-pruebas-de-la-alianza-entre-venezuela-el-eln-y-las-disidencias/633469>.

<sup>55</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> InSight Crime, “Miguel Botache Santillana, alias ‘Gentil Duarte’,” *InSight Crime*, October 27, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/miguel-botache-santillana-alias-gentil-duarte/>.

<sup>57</sup> InSight Crime, “Miguel Botache...,” October 27, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Fundacion Ideas para la Paz, “Trayectorias y Dinamicas Territoriales de Las Disidencias de las FARC,” *Fundacion Ideas para la Paz*, April 2018. Link: [http://ideaspaz.org/media/website/FIP\\_Disidencias\\_Final.pdf](http://ideaspaz.org/media/website/FIP_Disidencias_Final.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias...,” April 15, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Fundación Ideas para la Paz, “Trayectorias y Dinamicas.....,” *Fundacion Ideas para la Paz*, April 2018.

found no evidence to suggest that the Duarte faction is an armed rearguard of the formal FARC party.<sup>62</sup> Yet, there are still significant links between the members of the various FARC dissident factions as well as the demobilized membership because the membership of these groups have overlapping familial and social networks.<sup>63</sup> Critically, six people with links to the “Gentil Duarte” dissidents who had recruited young people to carry out vandalism during the 2019 National Strike, suggesting a high degree of political motivation and possible coordination with FARC.<sup>64</sup>

The Gentil Duarte dissidents have been successful in building their criminal network partly because of their credibility as former members of the FARC leadership. Gentil Duarte was a member of the FARC Central General Staff<sup>65</sup> and Iván Mordisco spent 25 years in the guerrilla movement and commanded the First front.<sup>66</sup> In particular, Jhon 40 managed all of the finances for the Eastern Bloc and led the 43<sup>rd</sup> front, which operated in the territory that the Gentil Duarte dissidents now control.<sup>67</sup> As a result, he is uniquely well suited to developing this group’s connections with Venezuela and Brazilian drug gangs.

These dissident groups have a strategic alliance with the ELN. The ELN also operates within Venezuelan territory, with roughly 1,000 militants - or around half its full force - and 50 facilities across the border.<sup>68</sup> Twenty of these facilities are in the regions of Apure, Bolivar and Amazonas, in which the Gentil Duarte dissidents also operate. The ELN and the Gentil Duarte dissidents are dividing profits from drug trafficking, contraband and extortion.<sup>69</sup> It is clear that this cooperation is at least economic, it is also possible that the ELN shares political objectives with Gentil Duarte and his allies. The combination of ambition, credibility, and key strategic allies makes the “Gentil Duarte” dissidents the most likely route to a resurgent, militarily active FARC.

The third group of dissidents are the recently dissenting senior members of the FARC leadership, who have been branded the “Segunda Marquetalia”. Iván Márquez, El Paisa, and Jesús Sántrich are attempting to frame themselves as the legitimate leadership of FARC, and appeared in a public video in which they announced a new stage in the armed conflict.<sup>70</sup> The leaders made reference to Marquetalia, the historic home of FARC and included a number of FARC symbols such as a FARC flag and photos

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> El Espectador, “A la cárcel, los seis acusados de infiltrar las marchas en Bogotá,” *El Espectador*, February 7, 2020. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/bogota/la-carcel-los-seis-acusados-de-infiltrar-las-marchas-en-bogota-articulo-903454/>.

<sup>65</sup> InSight Crime, “The Evolution of the Ex-FARC Mafia,” *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/evolution-ex-farc-mafia/>.

<sup>66</sup> InSight Crime, “The Evolution...,” November 11, 2019; Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias...,” April 15, 2018.

<sup>67</sup> El Tiempo, “Qué hay en dossier de pruebas que Duque presentó en ONU contra Maduro,” *El Tiempo*, September 25, 2019. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/pruebas-de-nexos-de-nicolas-maduro-con-eln-y-disidencias-presentadas-en-oea-411262>; InSight Crime, “Colombia and Venezuela...,” May 21, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> El Tiempo, “Qué hay en...,” September 25, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> InSight Crime, “Ex-FARC Mafia, Venezuela...,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Santiago Torrado, “El disidente de las FARC Iván Márquez anuncia que retoma las armas en Colombia,” *El Pais*, August 29, 2019. Link: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/08/29/actualidad/1567065255\\_850419.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/08/29/actualidad/1567065255_850419.html).

of FARC heroes and martyrs.<sup>71</sup> Márquez stated in his public video that he would like to join Duarte and Mordisco as well as the ELN.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the public statements of Márquez and his allies, they are not in control of the FARC dissidents. The “Gentil Duarte” faction has grown in power and any attempt at unification would require significant compromises from both groups. Márquez’s allies likely have influence over some active fronts - the 18<sup>th</sup> Front, the Teofil Mobil that owes loyalty to El Paisa and some members of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Front who are loyal to Enrique Munoz - but they are smaller in number than the fronts under Duarte’s control.<sup>73</sup> According to an FIP report, the dissident leadership has been in contact with representatives from a number of different FARC dissident factions, which the FIP argues could lay the groundwork for building a common structure.<sup>74</sup> The Colombian Foreign Ministry documented two meetings between the representatives of the “Segunda Marquetalia”, the ELN, and the Venezuelan government in a presentation to the UN. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, Márquez and another leader, “Romaña”, met with members of the Venezuela Military Directorate and “Pablito”, the primary military leader of the ELN.<sup>75</sup> Given the cooperative relationship between Gentil Duarte and both Venezuela and the ELN, it is possible that these common contacts could serve as a medium for communication.

The immediate significance of the defection of Márquez and his allies is that it will undermine the credibility of the formal FARC party. These were important leaders of the demobilized FARC, with Iván Márquez and Jesus Sántrich being designated FARC senators.<sup>76</sup> El Paisa commanded the elite Teófilo Forer Mobile Column, which was tasked with protecting the “despeje” (safe areas) granted to FARC during the peace negotiations.<sup>77</sup> Rodrigo Londoño, “Timochenko”, publicly denounced these leaders and stressed that FARC continues to exist as a peaceful movement despite the remilitarization of some of its leaders.<sup>78</sup> However, the operating FARC dissident groups make it clear that there is a military presence composed of its former members and claiming to inherit its mantle.

Venezuela is a key actor in the operations of both the Gentil Duarte dissidents and in the politi-

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<sup>71</sup> Santiago Torrado, “El disidente de ....,” August 29, 2019; InSight Crime, “The Tipping Point: Ivan Marquez Deserts the Peace Process,” *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/ex-farc-mafia-marquez-deserts-peace-process/>.

<sup>72</sup> Santiago Torrado, “El disidente de ....,” August 29, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> InSight Crime, “The Tipping Point.....,” November 11, 2019; Javier Alexander Marcias, “Disidentes del Frente 18 Aceptan a Marquez Como Su Jefe,” *El Colombiano*, September 26, 2019. Link: <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/paz-y-derechos-humanos/disidentes-del-frente-18-aceptan-a-ivan-marquez-como-su-comandante-GA11664929>; Juan Carlos Garzon Vergara, Angela Maria Silva Aparicio, Lorena Zarate Martinez, Paula Andrea Tobo, and Angie Duran Guerrero, “El anuncio de Iván Márquez y las “nuevas” FARC: implicaciones y posibles impactos,” Fundación Ideas de la Paz, August 29, 2019. Link: <http://www.ideaspaz.org/publications/posts/1782>.

<sup>74</sup> Juan Carlos Garzon Vergara, Angela Maria Silva Aparicio, Lorena Zarate Martinez, Paula Andrea Tobo, and Angie Duran Guerrero, “El anuncio de....,” August 29, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> El Tiempo, “Qué hay en.....,” September 25, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> InSight Crime, “The Tipping Point.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> InSight Crime, “The Tipping Point.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> El Espectador, “La ‘Nueva Guerrilla’ de ‘Ivan Marquez’, un Anuncio que era ‘Inminente’, Segun Expertos,” *El Espectador*, August 29, 2019. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/la-nueva-guerrilla-de-ivan-marquez-un-anuncio-que-era-inminente-segun-expertos/>.

cal associations of the dissident FARC leadership. Some political leaders, especially Sántrich, are believed to be living in Venezuela. The Colombian Foreign Minister Trujillo has publicly stated, that both Márquez and Sántrich are being sheltered by the Venezuelan government.<sup>79</sup> Márquez is known to have connections in Venezuela and was famously photographed in the country in 2013.<sup>80</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice has linked these dissident FARC leaders with the Venezuelan government since 1999, as stated in a New York court indictment.<sup>81</sup> Sántrich lived along the border with Venezuela and served as a key negotiator for FARC with the Chavez regime in 2007.<sup>82</sup> In addition to its evidence that Sántrich is currently based in Venezuela, *InSight Crime* reports that he has maintained contact with Gentil Duarte and Jhon 40.<sup>83</sup>

Sántrich's connections to both Duarte and Venezuela are likely to shape the formation of this dissident senior leadership and of FARC dissidents overall. The Colombian Government has long argued that both FARC dissidents and the ELN receive logistical, training, and weapons support from the Maduro government. According to a *Semana* investigation, FARC dissidents are also sharing intelligence efforts with the Venezuelan government, including the identification of potential Colombian military targets.<sup>84</sup> The common relationship with Venezuela and the ELN could serve as a potential channel of communication between the Gentil Duarte dissidents and the dissident senior leadership. As both of these factions are interested in consolidating power and potentially reunifying, the question that remains is whether both groups are able to navigate their political differences well enough to accomplish their goal.

### **Funding Sources and Criminal Activity**

FARC has a long history of criminal activity. Since the demobilization of the majority of FARC militants, dissident groups and other criminal organizations have sought to take over the illicit networks operated by FARC. The demobilized FARC has also been plagued by financial controversy, especially over the accounting of its surrendered assets and the alleged drug trafficking activity of a number of its members. Two key conclusions can be made based on the available financial information: 1) FARC is concealing a significant number of their assets and a meaningful number of its members are engaged in criminal activities and 2) dissident groups are expanding their criminal operations in a way which both increases their power and suggests a significant profit motive.

Prior to demobilization, FARC produced an annual revenue of \$580 million, roughly \$300 million of which was actually retained as income by the organization - the rest was likely stolen by various

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<sup>79</sup> El Tiempo, "Qué hay en.....," September 25, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> El Espectador, "La 'Nueva Guerrilla'....," August 29, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> El Tiempo, "¿Por qué Márquez y Santrich aparecen en proceso contra Nicolás Maduro?," *El Tiempo*, March 26, 2020. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/unidad-investigativa/marquez-y-santrich-aparecen-en-proceso-contra-nicolas-maduro-477450>.

<sup>82</sup> InSight Crime, "Seuxis Pausias....," August 18, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> InSight Crime, "Seuxis Pausias....," August 18, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> *Semana*, "Las Pruebas de la Alianza entre Venezuela, el ELN y las Disidencias," *Semana*, September 26, 2019. Link: <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/las-pruebas-de-la-alianza-entre-venezuela-el-eln-y-las-disidencias/633469>.

members.<sup>85</sup> Of the \$580 million, approximately \$267 million came from narcotrafficking and “*impuestos*” on narcotrafficking organizations.<sup>86</sup> The remainder came from a combination of kidnapping, extortion, and illegal mining.

In 2017 and as a part of the peace process, FARC surrendered a list of assets valued at more than \$300 million to the Colombian State to aid with victim reparation.<sup>87</sup> Given an annual income of \$580 million USD, it would be surprising if the total FARC assets really numbered only \$300 million, even assuming very high operating costs. FARC claims that the value of these assets exceeded \$1.1 billion USD, but several government officials, including Colombian chief prosecutor Martinez, have accused FARC of inflating their value by surrendering useless assets.<sup>88</sup>

Since all assets were supposedly surrendered, Colombian authorities have made numerous seizures of assets illegally held by FARC members. Colombian authorities seized \$234 million in FARC assets, including five companies, 60 supermarkets, 70 bank accounts in a single operation that took place in February 2018, after the demobilization.<sup>89</sup> The Prosecutor’s office also froze \$3 million in real estate belonging to a former member of the Teofilo Front Unit - which the former guerrilla claimed had fallen from an airplane. In another incident, Colombia’s prosecutor claims that it seized roughly \$6.4 million USD worth of assets from “El Negro Antonio”, the former commander of the 42 Front.<sup>90</sup> It is unclear if, in these cases, personal assets had been reported to the FARC leadership or if they were personally concealed. Critically, FARC Commanders were robbing the organization and retaining a portion of the organization’s income as private wealth throughout its history.<sup>91</sup> Either way, the FARC leadership is either guilty of concealing assets illegally or of significant negligence regarding the honesty of their membership.

Many of FARC’s former assets have fallen into the hands of dissident or criminal groups as they were located in areas not effectively controlled by the Colombian state. This is an especially pernicious problem across the eastern plains, a large territory now controlled by the Gentil Duarte dissidents.<sup>92</sup> In a

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<sup>85</sup> Jeremy McDermott, “The Future of.....,” November 11, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremy McDermott, “The FARC’s Riches: Up to \$580 Million in Annual Income,” *InSight Crime*, September 6, 2017. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/farc-riches-yearly-income-up-to-580-million/>.

<sup>87</sup> El Espectador, “Los Bienes de las FARC: Una Listado Irrisorio?,” *El Espectador*, August 24, 2017. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/los-bienes-de-las-farc-un-listado-irrisorio/>.

<sup>88</sup> El Espectador, “La Pelea por los Bienes de las FARC,” *El Espectador*, August 17, 2017. Link: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/la-pelea-por-los-bienes-de-las-farc-articulo-855681/>.

<sup>89</sup> Parker Asmann, “Colombia Asset Seizures Raise Doubts About FARC Peace Deal Compliance,” *InSight Crime*, February 20, 2018. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/colombia-asset-seizures-raise-doubts-farc-peace-deal-compliance/>; Fiscalia de La Nacion, “Caen Testaferros de la Antigua Guerrilla de las FARC, con Red de 60 Supermercados y Otros Bienes,” *Fiscalia de La Nacion, Colombia*, February 19, 2018. Link: <https://www.fiscalia.gov.co/colombia/extincion-dominio/caen-testaferros-de-la-antigua-guerrilla-de-las-farc-con-red-de-60-supermercados-y-otros-bienes/>.

<sup>90</sup> El Tiempo, “Incautan bienes por \$ 20 mil millones que Farc no declararon,” *El Tiempo*, April 7, 2019. Link: <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/incautados-bienes-a-testaferros-de-alias-el-negro-antonio-exjefe-del-frente-42-de-las-farc-346796>.

<sup>91</sup> InSight Crime, “The FARC’s Riches: Millions Apparently Lost to Dissidents,” *InSight Crime*, September 4, 2017. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/the-farc-riches-millions-apparently-lost-dissidents/>.

<sup>92</sup> InSight Crime, “Colombia Seizes First Assets Linked to Ex-FARC Mafia,” *InSight Crime*, October 1, 2018. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/colombia-seize-first-assets-linked-ex-farc-mafia/>.

specific case in the town of Paz de Ariporo, Casanare department, the government seized a supermarket and other commercial properties belonging to the 28th Front of dissidents.<sup>93</sup>

Dissident groups are not only seizing former FARC assets, they are also building criminal networks that extend beyond Colombia's borders. The Gentil Duarte dissidents have developed criminal networks along the border between Colombia and Venezuela. This border is particularly profitable because the environment is highly suited to the production of coca, and gasoline, another important component of cocaine production, is very cheap due to Venezuelan subsidies.<sup>94</sup> Dissident groups operating in this region include the 10th Front, the 1st Front, the Acacio Medina Front, and the 33rd Front. The 1<sup>st</sup> front in particular has developed new trafficking routes through the north of the department of Amazonas, in the area of Puerto Córdoba and La Pedrera, where the Apaporis and Caquetá rivers meet.<sup>95</sup> Particularly key to the trafficking of drugs across the Venezuelan border is the relationship between the various dissident fronts and the ELN, which also cooperates in Venezuela on the illegal mining of gold and coltan.<sup>96</sup> The same routes are also used by dissidents for the trafficking of other goods, including rubber and precious metals.<sup>97</sup>

Ecuador's border with Colombia has also become a critical location for illicit networks. Specifically, the department of Nariño is a key area of contention among criminal gangs due to its status as the largest producer of coca in Colombia; the FOS is competing with the United Guerrillas of the Pacific and Los Contadores, which was formerly a financial operator for FARC.<sup>98</sup> The FOS cooperates with a dissident faction of the 29th Front along the Ecuadorian border.<sup>99</sup> Dissidents from the 48th Front also operate in this region, and have an agreement with the paramilitary organization La Constru to share drug trafficking in Putumayo.<sup>100</sup>

Although narco-trafficking comprises a significant source of revenue for dissident groups, it is important to note that these organizations also operate diverse portfolios of criminal activities that includes illegal mining, kidnapping, and extortion, among other activities. The 36th Front gains revenue from illegal mining in Antioquia. In Cauca, the Jaime Martinez Front manages illegal gold mining along with other dissident groups.<sup>101</sup> “*Impuestos*” (taxes) or “*vacunas*” (vaccines) are a common funding strategy for both FARC prior to demobilization, and dissident groups operating currently. These were most commonly applied to drug production on trafficking operations in territory controlled by FARC. Dissidents are also applying “*impuestos*” to other industries: the 10th Front in Apure, Venezuela (alongside the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Venezuela Investigative Unit, “Colombia and Venezuela....,” May 21, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> InSight Crime, “The Criminal Portfolio of the Ex-FARC Mafia”, *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. [link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/criminal-portfolio-ex-farc-mafia/>]; Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias....”, April 15, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Venezuela Investigative Unit, “Colombia and Venezuela....,” May 21, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias....”, April 15, 2018.

<sup>98</sup> InSight Crime, “The Criminal Portfolio of the Ex-FARC Mafia”, *InSight Crime*, November 11, 2019. Link: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/criminal-portfolio-ex-farc-mafia/>.

<sup>99</sup> InSight Crime, “The Criminal Portfolio...” November 11, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> InSight Crime, “The Criminal Portfolio...” November 11, 2019.

<sup>101</sup> InSight Crime, “The Criminal Portfolio...” November 11, 2019.

ELN) charges a toll on all river transportation and on public works that generates about \$175,000 in revenue.<sup>102</sup>

Current FARC dissidents are operating criminal trafficking networks that generate substantial profit. In the opinion of *InSight Crime*, more revenue than would be necessary to achieve their political aims and cover operational costs. This is based on an accounting of the dissidents' various revenue sources and on evidence that many of these groups are fighting against each other to control over these revenue sources.<sup>103</sup> It suggests that profit is a significant motivating factor for dissident organizations. In some cases, it may be an objective that overshadows political objectives to a significant degree.

### **Possible Future Developments**

The previous sections of this paper have outlined FARC's development from the signing of the 2016 Peace Deal to the present. This section identifies possible future scenarios based on this analysis and highlights their implications. Despite historical precedents, the future structure of FARC as an organization is far from predetermined and there are certainly more than three possible outcomes.

*Scenario 1: FARC Dissidents splinter into criminal organizations;  
FARC Party stays its democratic course.*

In this scenario, efforts at unification among FARC dissidents fail. Some form of militant activity is likely to continue, but the primary objective of these groups would be criminal profit.

There are clearly actors who wish to see the FARC dissidents united, namely the "Gentil Duarte" faction and the "Segunda Marquetalia".<sup>104</sup> However, even among these actors, there is significant disagreement over what the leadership and structure of a united dissident front should look like; these differences could prove impossible to overcome.<sup>105</sup> There are also many FARC factions with no apparent motivation to reunify and an even greater number which would likely prioritize economic gains over shared political objectives.<sup>106</sup>

If FARC dissidents fail to unify, then the prospects for democratic success for the FARC Party - not good in any scenario - are marginally better. It would be much easier to claim that the dissident movement is separate from the FARC Party and would make it hard for dissident leaders to further undermine "Timochenko" and the FARC Party. This outcome would pose security problems for the Colombian state but is unlikely to represent the kind of existential threat that a nationally coordinated insurgency could. In this scenario, Venezuela likely continues to play its current role of providing legis-

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<sup>102</sup> InSight Crime, "The Criminal Portfolio..." November 11, 2019.

<sup>103</sup> InSight Crime, "The Criminal Portfolio..." November 11, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Santiago Torrado, "El Disidente de las FARC.....," August 29, 2019; InSight Crime, "Miguel Botache....," October 27, 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid; InSight Crime, "The Criminal Portfolio..." November 11, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> InSight Crime, "The Criminal Portfolio..." November 11, 2019.



**Photo caption:** Ivan Marquez and Gentil Duarte are two of the highest ranking former members of the FARC who have abandoned the peace accords of 2016 and returned to illicit activities.

**Photo credit:** La Semana news.

tical and intelligence support to Dissident organizations.<sup>107</sup>

### *Scenario 2: FARC dissidents organize independently of the FARC Party*

In scenario two, FARC dissidents are able to form a coherent political and criminal movement under a relatively centralized leadership structure. This could either be under the leadership of Iván Márquez and his allies, under Gentil Duarte’s control, or with some combination of the two. They would continue to operate separately from the FARC Party, but the rebirth of armed struggle would severely undermine the FARC Party.

The key catalyst for this outcome would be some form of agreement between the two primary leadership structures of the dissident groups - Gentil Duarte and Iván Márquez. This would require concessions. Most likely, Iván Márquez, Santrich, and El Paisa who would need to acknowledge the de facto power - evidenced by the number of fronts under their influence - of their former subordinates in exchange for a role in Duarte’s movement. Venezuelan communication and support for both groups offers the best opportunity for this to happen.<sup>108</sup>

Due to its role as a middleman and source of support, the Venezuelan regime would wield a high level of influence in an organized FARC dissident group. Much of the logistical and criminal networks

<sup>107</sup> El Espectador, “La ‘Nueva Guerrilla’ . . . .,” August 29, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> El Tiempo, “Que Hay en . . . .,” September 25, 2019.

under the control of Gentil Duarte operate along Venezuela’s porous border.<sup>109</sup> Venezuela may even be motivated in this scenario to provide backing for a dissident group as an attempt to destabilize their neighbor; the support of a foreign, bordering nation would make it very difficult for the Colombian military to conclusively defeat this force.<sup>110</sup> For similar reasons, the ELN would probably have an increased role in the development of an autonomous dissident faction.<sup>111</sup>

If FARC dissidents unify independently of the FARC Party, it will severely undermine the formal leadership of FARC. The likely perception would be that they have lost control of their own political party and cannot make credible guarantees of security to the Colombian government. The willingness of the Colombian government to offer concessions to FARC’s leadership in the past was predicated on the belief that they could credibly end FARC’s violent campaigns.<sup>112</sup> If they cannot secure this, then the Colombian government is unlikely to feel an obligation to uphold their commitments to the FARC lead-



**Photo caption:** Colombian Army soldiers on patrol during operations against FARC dissidents and other organized armed groups.

**Photo credit:** Dialogo Magazine.

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<sup>109</sup> Natalia Herrera Duran, “Las Disidencias...”, April 15, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Bruce J. Reider, “External Support to Insurgencies,” *Small Wars Journal*, 2014. Link: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/external-support-to-insurgencies>.

<sup>111</sup> El Tiempo, “Qué hay en.....”, September 25, 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, November 29, 2019. Link: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43813.pdf>.

ership.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, if they lack credibility among their own guerrilla base and as a peaceful alternative to the broader Colombian population, it is unclear how they will ever secure democratic success.

### *Scenario 3: FARC dissidents organize and coordinate with the FARC Party*

In the third scenario, FARC dissidents are able to organize into a coherent political group either in coordination with the formal FARC leadership or at its direction. Although less supported by publicly available evidence than the previous two possible outcomes, this outcome has historical precedents in the region and is far from impossible. If realized, it would pose a dramatic security threat to the Colombian state and must therefore be considered carefully.

The differences between the FARC dissidents and their former counterparts are clear, but they are not irreconcilable. Aside from a potential attempt on “Timochenko’s” life, FARC dissidents have not perpetrated violence against the formal FARC organization.<sup>114</sup> Instead, they have primarily aired frustrations with the failure of democratic politics and perceived failures to implement the peace deal.<sup>115</sup> If the party does not gain ground in elections and/or its members are threatened with prosecution from the Colombian state, then the formal party may reach the same decision as the dissenting senior leadership. It is also not impossible that there is some existing coordination between the FARC leadership and the dissident groups in the style of both the Bolivian insurgency and the Unión Patriótica.

This scenario would mean the complete end of the peace process and would present a significant threat to Colombian national security. The key question within this scenario is whether FARC’s political party remains formally separate from the FARC dissidents and continues to participate in elections. If it does, then the actions of FARC dissidents either through demonstrations or intimidation may be designed to strengthen the party’s election prospects.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of the peace process, FARC has transitioned from a coherent paramilitary structure into a dispersed organization with many centers of power. The majority of FARC’s armed members have demobilized and are currently living as civilians in one form or another. The formal FARC leadership maintained centralized control over the FARC political party. Partially as a result of the democratic failures of the FARC Party, many splinter dissident groups have emerged that continue militant activity and claim to be the legitimate leadership of FARC. The most notable among these are those dissident factions allied to Gentil Duarte and the dissenting senior leadership, led by Iván Márquez and others, who have left the FARC party. Both groups of dissidents are attempting to unify various dissident factions.

The primary conclusion of this paper is that FARC represents a significant continuing threat to the Colombian state. Its dissident factions are growing in number, power, and organization. They have

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<sup>113</sup> El Tiempo, February 3, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> BBC, “Colombia Foils Attempt . . . .,” January 12, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> Santiago Torrado, “El Disidente de . . . .,” August 29, 2019.

varying levels of political motivation that operate in tandem with their often more immediate economic motivations. If reunification occurs - either with or without the support of FARC's formal leadership - it will represent a significant threat to the security and stability of the Colombian state.

Secondly, it is unclear that FARC's formal political leaders are either innocent or distinct from the threat posed by dissident groups the boundaries between dissident factions and the formal FARC party appear to be blurred. Illicit financial activities are conducted by both dissident groups and potentially by individual members of the FARC political party. Additionally, the examples of Iván Márquez, El Paisa, and Jesús Santrich demonstrate that it is conceivable for even high-level actors to switch allegiances between the various FARC factions.

Due to a lack of evidence, it is difficult to accurately evaluate the exact level of communication between various FARC dissidents and the formal FARC leadership. Venezuela and the ELN are common contacts among the various FARC dissident factions, and it is likely that both actors will be involved in efforts at reunification.

Above all else, this paper concludes that more research into FARC's post-peace deal development is merited. The academic literature has primarily moved on to focus on other security questions both within Colombia and without. The abundance of unanswered questions about FARC's current condition and the significance of those questions for Colombia's security landscape justify academic attention.

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