

IBUCS 2010

Committee: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

Topic: FARC and Kidnapping

Definition of the Problem -- Kidnapping

Terrorism is the form of kidnapping is a big problem affecting Colombia today. Terrorism can be defined as the use of threatened use of violence for political purposes to extort, intimidate, or coerce others into modifying their behavior. It is perpetuated by private individuals or small groups from the hegemonic strata against members of a particular group and enjoys the tacit approval if not the active participation of members of the security forces. Colombians as well as visitors live with the fear of being kidnapped on a daily basis. Kidnappings occur as a way to capture the country's attention and to remind the government that they have no real control over the security situation of the country. No one is safe when it comes to being kidnapped in Colombia, especially those in a position of power and wealth.

The Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, otherwise simply known as FARC, is a Marxist terrorist organization operating from the jungles of Colombia, with some members living in the cities as well. FARC was established in 1964, meant to represent the Communist Party in Colombia. FARC is governed by a secretariat, led by Manuel Marulanda and six others, including senior military commander Jorge Briceno. FARC is organized along military lines and includes several urban fronts. Some believe that this group became more powerful in the 1990s as a result of some anti-drug policies made by the United States. The United States pressured the Colombian government to fumigate areas with Coca fields, destroying the fields of the FARC's competitors. This gave the FARC full control of the drug market.

FARC then began surprise attacks on Colombian military posts that had been set up in remote areas of the country. FARC killed and kidnapped soldiers and civilians in their way.

One of their most famous and strongest surprise attacks took place on August 31, 1996 resulting in the deaths of at least 54 soldiers and about a dozen or so kidnappings. These attacks symbolized the strength of FARC. The amount of damage and harm that they were able to cause and with the ease that they were able to do it frightened Colombians. By the end of the decade, FARC had consolidated its position as the strongest guerrilla movement in contemporary Latin America, doubling the size of its army to between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers while simultaneously expanding its political and economic power to nearly half of Colombia's territory.

Though kidnapping Colombian members of society is not the only way FARC is able to make money to support itself financially, it is one of their best known money making tactics. Their other best known tactic is drug trafficking in Colombia and throughout Latin America. Together with the National Liberation Army (ELN), FARC is responsible for the majority of kidnappings committed in Colombia. They share the view that they represent the rural poor against Colombia's wealthy classes, they oppose U.S. influence in Colombia, the privatization of natural resources, multinational corporations, and right-winged violence.

Past Action Taken - What are they doing to prevent or remedy the situation?

Originally, the Colombian Armed Forces had a reputation for being too weak to fight FARC and had been embarrassed many times by their unpreparedness. Recently they have been winning more decisive battles and have shown that their new training tactics are working on the battlefield.

Current Issues

The Colombian government realized it is better for their economy to have a peaceful country than one plagued by violence, terrorism, and kidnappings. It is important for them to end this domestic war and move their country forward in peace. Peace seems to them a guaranteed way to attract new business into their country which will eventually boost their economy. Stability in Colombia would provide potential investors with peace of mind knowing that their businesses are safe from any political turmoil.

Further, one of the Foreign Ministers of Colombia, Fernando Araujo, was a victim of kidnappings by FARC. He remembers how difficult it was to survive within the depths of the Colombian jungles where food is scarce and hope runs low. Araujo is one of the lucky few who managed to escape his captors and make it back safely to civilization. His experience caused him to launch operations to diminish the FARC's kidnapping capacity. Since Minister Araujo took on this task, kidnappings are said to have gone down from 3,572 hostages in 2000 to 521 in 2007, an unprecedented change.

The Columbian military military has changed some of their tactics, such as spreading out their forces. The Columbian military cover more territory where FARC before used to roam in freely. Places where FARC would be able to keep large numbers of hostages are no longer safe for them, making it more difficult to kidnap as many people and to travel in large numbers.

Former President Alvaro Uribe was replaced recently by Juan Manuel Santos, who many in the international community are wary of. Critics say that Santos, who previously served as Uribe's foreign defense minister, presided over the "falsos positivos" scandal, a practice in which where members of the military would kill peasants, dress them in fatigues, and present them as FARC soldiers killed in combat. Many fear that Uribe will still have great influence over policymaking. Since Uribe left office, clashes have increased with 50 police officers,

soldiers and others killed in the past months in attacks by FARC. These attacks are widely believed to be an effort to undermine the commitment of the new president.

Bloc Positions

The United States

The United States has taken a great deal of interest in aiding Colombia in its efforts to get rid of FARC. Over the years it has provided Colombia with approximately \$5 billion as well as proper combat training for its Armed Forces. The US State Department has started a successful program in Colombia called the Unified Action Groups for Personal Liberty (GAULA).

GAULA is an anti-terrorism program created by the US to train the Colombian military in rescue tactics.

Colombia

When FARC first became a threat, the government decided to arm the conservative peasants against guerilla fighters. They were also offered help from the National Police. A setback was the fear this brought on to those peasants with liberal ideologies who then felt that they needed to also arm themselves in order to feel safe from both the FARC and now armed conservative peasants.

As a result of better training, the Colombian Armed Forces have been able to push the FARC guerrilla forces further into the jungles and continue to push them out. Colombia is no longer playing blindly against the FARC. They are now better equipped and better trained in high risk situations and are managing to spread this power further into the Colombian jungles

and the countryside, further restricting FARC's movement. The Colombian military is also no longer relying on peasants or untrained fighters to fight their battles for them; instead, the military is taking special training sessions to gain the expertise they need to continue the fight against terrorism in their country. There is renewed hope in Colombia that all of these measures will affect the country in a positive manner.

Venezuela

Following the death of Raul Reyes in March 2008, the Colombian government claimed to have found document on a rebel laptop that indicated Venezuela and Ecuador were providing material support to the FARC. According to these documents, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave the group \$250 million, though the Venezuelan government denies these allegations.

Tensions rose between the two when Venezuela was accused of providing three Swedish-made anti-tank weapons to the FARC. Because of this, Chavez briefly froze diplomatic relations with Colombia in July 2008. Chavez has publicly rejected the U.S. and EU classification of the FARC and ELN as terrorist groups, and has also expressed concern over plans to increase U.S. military presence on Colombian bases, claiming that it would lead to a destabilization of the region.

Mexico

FARC has two ways of operating in Mexico; one relatively visible way involves student groups at the Universidad Autonoma de Mexico and other types of militants. The other is clandestine, with its own operative structure called Milicias Insurgentes Ricardo Flores Magon. Alliances with the feared Tijuana cartel for the purpose of drug trafficking and with left-wing

politicians who gave political and financial support to the FARC were also uncovered. Criminal investigations are ongoing.

Ecuador

The non-aggression pact between the FARC and the Ecuadorian government was brought to light when an email between one of the heads of the organization and an Ecuadorian minister was made public. The Ecuadorian government denied it, however. FARC financial support for political campaigns in Ecuador was also revealed, as were arms sales - especially explosives - to the guerrillas. Ecuadorian territory served as a refuge for guerrillas and their families, and FARC "political activities" were also allowed.

Peru

The same leak also showed a permanent presence of FARC members in Peru. They provided consulting and training to guerrilla factions in that country, such as a splinter group of the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (MRTA) and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). Thanks to the information from the computer that information was leaked off of, the Peruvian police found evidence that the FARC used, for example, the city of Iquitos as a source of recruitment, arms and drug trafficking and as a rehabilitation center.