



## **Siguiendo el conflicto: Facts and Analysis**

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### **The FARC: Operación Jaque, One year later**

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On July 2, 2008 it was confirmed that beyond the official propaganda, neuralgic aspects of the security networks and FARC's communication have been revealed and damaged. In fact, the so called "Checkmate Operation" that brought freedom to 15 hostages under the power of the guerrilla group became a real indication, for all the skeptical individuals, of the recent changes within the confrontation between the State and the FARC.

However, to analyze the FARC guerrilla group a year after the military operation, particularly after the last two months of their military actions increase, it implies to go beyond the views that pretend to reduce the analysis to the appearance of a "new strategy" or re-accommodation<sup>1</sup>, to a "The end of the end"<sup>2</sup> or to a simple "desperate and juncture efforts"<sup>3</sup> of the guerrilla group.

A "cold look" over the FARC within the current context suggests working at least in three directions: first of all, to identify the changes in the military and politics variables after "Checkmate" as a paradigmatic moment, but not necessarily the cause of such changes. Second, to provide alternatives to explain the last actions of the guerrilla group; and third, to look for clues to understand where the FARC are heading to, at least in the medium term. These are the three dimensions this Bulletin pretends to approach.

Just as this analysis will demonstrate, there is still a high level of uncertainty regarding the current status of the FARC, especially after the death of its Chief Commander "Manuel Marulanda", the death of two members of the Secretariat and the emergency of Alonso Cano as the highest commander of this guerrilla. The consolidation of the Defense and Democratic Security Policy (PDSD, Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática)<sup>4</sup> and its corollary, the designated "Strategic Leap" (Salto Estratégico)<sup>5</sup>, will depend on what can be achieved identifying and counterbalancing these transformations in the behavior of the FARC, and how much can be reevaluated regarding the fact that we are not on "The end of the end".

#### **The military confrontation between the State and the FARC after "Checkmate"**

According to the last report from Legal Medicine<sup>6</sup>, during 2008 the armed conflict was the cause of 1,312 homicides, 60% less than a year before. In spite of this change, the FARC continued

being, after common delinquency and Military Forces, the actor that contributed the most in this critical scenario (248 homicides in 2008)

Beyond this general perspective, during the second half of 2008 (July-December), according to a registry of combats and attacks<sup>7</sup>, the denominated "Operation Checkmate" does not seem to have modified significantly the military actions of the FARC regarding the last year. FARC unfolded 40% of its attacks in Cundinamarca and in Valle del Cauca, combining typical "war of guerrillas" with actions of high impact like crime attempts to energy and broadcasting installations (armed strikes, road blocks and attacks to transporters) that took 56% of their efforts. In this same period of time, and also, following their historical pattern, they carried through a 79% of their combats against the Public Forces in rural areas.

However, for the first semester of 2009 (January-July) this confrontation logic changed. In 2009 there has been a bigger presence and activity of the FARC in the southern departments of the country, which has propelled a bigger effort from the Public Forces to offset the guerrilla actions. The operating presence of the FARC has influenced many zones of Nariño, Cauca, Huila and Caquetá departments. The Eastern Block, the Southern Block, the Western Joint Command and the Moving Column "Teófilo Forero" concentrate the biggest amount of attacks and military operations of the FARC, mainly by installing mine fields and harassing the troops and various facilities of the Public Forces<sup>8</sup>.

These changes have also influenced in the military response from the Colombian Government throughout 2009. According to the General Command of the Military Forces (FF.MM.), up to date almost 88% of the combats faced by the Public Forces in the National Territory have been lead against the FARC, and 83% of the deceased militia by operations of security organizations have been guerrilla soldiers from this organization. (215 guerrilla soldiers, from 259 deceased individuals)<sup>9</sup>.

The confrontation between the Public Forces and the FARC reached its peak in the months of March and May. According to the General Command, 119 combats took place against the FARC in May, meaning 82% of the total of combats displayed by the Public Forces during this month. With the increase of combats, the number of knocked down military soldiers has grown in relation with 2008: according to the Ministry of Defense, the number of dead military men was of 174 just between January and April. Only in April there was an increase of 13% in the death of military men

The FARC Blocks	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2002-09
Eastern Block	193	466	383	310	443	561	1050	333	3739
Southern Block	115	226	255	322	352	534	611	206	2621
Western Joint Command	43	151	118	132	234	636	427	146	1887
José María Córdoba Block ('Iván Ríos')	60	216	210	153	198	333	418	164	1752
Central Joint Command	54	153	139	97	160	209	219	107	1138
Caribbean Block ('Martín Caballero')	21	93	144	69	96	110	204	63	800
Magdalena Medio Block	43	71	51	52	75	97	64	34	487
Total of the FARC demobilized guerrilla soldiers: 2002-2009 (Data for June 19, 2009)									12.424

## The FARC: Clues on the recent behavior of some structures

Another way of finding out the current state of the FARC is to focus the attention on some of its structures.

Some of them have remained with a certain capability not only to resist and to maintain themselves but to participate in military-political type activities of relevance.

In the Caribbean Block, the 41 front, located in the mountainous region of Perijá and that is leaded by 'Aldemar Altamiranda', keeps being a basic piece that has kept the Block alive. Besides, a great part of the logistic and economic machinery of the block comes from the frontier zone and some of their men and commanders are the ones who have tried to strengthen the work of the 19 and 59<sup>12</sup> fronts, and at the same time serve as the transmission belt to rebuild some of the fronts that were thought to be finished like the 35 and 27 fronts that have influence over Montes María and the South of Bolívar.

Another structure that shows recovery signs are some of the FARC fronts José María Córdoba alias or Ivan Ríos. In Chocó, the 57 front, lead by alias "Calf" retains a huge influence, above all due to the financial power which has been benefited particularly for its closeness to the borderline and for hijacking. This front supports groups like fronts 5 and 34 which were diminished. On the other hand, the front 18 whose main commander is "Román Ruiz" currently counts with a very important operational strength in the Nudo del Paramillo area, former paramilitary fortress.

However a less optimistic situation is being lived by two Blocks, the Eastern and Southern groups, which have carried loads regarding the development of Political defense and Democratic Security open confrontation.

After a decision made right after a meeting called "Pleno Ampliado" held in 1989, the Easter ridge would become the "mid-point of the Strategic Unfolding" base of the development of the so called Strategic Plan, a big part of the FARC plans have had as the main characters the groups of the Eastern Block currently lead by "Mono Jojoy".

This is the reason why during the last years this Block has been one of the most harassed groups by the PDS military strategy. In 2008 they lost key top leaders to hold the financial structure of the group, to name a few examples, "Jhon 40" from the front 43 and "Rodrigo Cadete" from the front 39 who were wounded and they are apparently out of the country, then the death of "Camilo Tabaco" from the Manuela Beltrán Front, alias "Plinio" front 26 commander, alias "Gaitán" chief of the Antonio Nariño front, "Felipe Rincón" member of the major state of the Block, and the death of "Jurga Jurga" who was in the front 10 direction, are some of the lost commanders.

Besides, the Eastern Block has not been able to get over their loss of Cundinamarca and their failed attempts to recover a historical control they had over Sumapaz. A demonstration of this case is the hit received by the Antonio Nariño Front past March where José de Jesús Guzmán, alias "Gaitán", died, being specially

designated by "Mono Jojoy" himself to do the recovery task of the Block.

Regarding the Southern Block, the death of their top leader Raúl Reyes, meant a hard blow to the organization in the high strategic value area which provides the FARC with the higher amount of financial resources and in the other hand, due to its particular topographic conditions and because of its richness in clear water affluent, make it an ideal territory for the troop mobility, the logistic supplies and narco-trafficking management.

As an evidence of the great adaptation capability of the FARC of how they can benefit of the strategic value of the area, they have designed in the last year, a mobility corridor from Western Caquetá to Southeast Cauca and from there to move to the Nariño Pacifica area.

But the Teófilo Forero Moving Column is the group that has shown more life signals. They have shown through urban terrorism that they can still harm and damage in their natural operation area between Caquetá and Huila. It seems that their presence in the urban areas in Huila is awakening a sense of urgency and preoccupation among merchants and the local authorities themselves<sup>13</sup>.

Though the scenario of the different groups is not the same, it is true that the FARC is beginning to raise the volume of their actions, particularly in territories like the Atlantic coast, which everyone thought had been recovered, or at least controlled by the Public Forces. In their historic territories, like the South and East of Colombia everything shows that they have not remained still.

## In Search of a Political and Military relevance in Crisis Times

In the last two months the FARC has sent new signals that try to re-validate their diminished military capacity. Since their attack against the mountainous region of Perijá, where 8 soldiers died, on late April from early June, this guerrilla group proceeded with military actions that provoked the death of members of the Public Forces<sup>14</sup>.

This message can be understood as an ambush or new military campaign, which creates a feeling of FARC coming back, as it was proposed by Alfonso Cano, with the so called "Rebirth Plan"<sup>15</sup>.

However, this pendulum oscillation, between the different points of view that predict either a rebirth or on the contrary "desperate and structural efforts" of the guerrilla group<sup>16</sup>, is a worrying grade of uncertainty and ignorance that is currently being held about the current status of the FARC. This uncertainty cannot be compared to the one we had about 10 years ago. For this reason it is difficult to answer the questions of how the FARC situation is and where they are heading.

Nevertheless, some references or background activities cannot be taken out of sight, neither to overreact nor to minimize the current guerrilla group acting.

In terms of a recent military actions set, there is evidence regarding the combination of two factors that result in not underestimating the military relevance of the FARC in this moment.

In one side there are evidences that the control of the command and the communication have not been torn apart, as some comments assured in 2008. This statement assumed a closed and continuous command control and communication as some significant regular military organizations should have when developing military plans of great importance. With a diluted war scheme and a comeback of the “guerrillas’ war”, framed by the abandonment of grand military operations, the command control and communication they have today is more flexible and discontinuous, and gives a certain degree of independence, which under the current conditions is a key factor to the functionality of their structures.

As an evidence of the statement given above, the FARC have demonstrated within the last months that they were able to unfold simultaneous operations in different territory locations<sup>17</sup>.

On the other hand, a second fact is the use of the war opportunity principle. The FARC have taken advantage of casualties or operational mistakes from the Public Forces, where the appearances of unexpected targets give them the opportunity to strike out hard.

Using minefields or snipers<sup>18</sup> like occurred in Meta the past month, or the recent situation that arose in Timba (Cauca) where, despite they lost at least 25 members, they killed 7 policemen of an EMCAR patrol that was drawing out, probably without taking proper precaution, after attacking a Camp of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas front.

The use of the opportunity principle can also be identified in the structural and tactic alliances they are doing with some rising bands linked to drug trafficking in regions such as Pacific, Urabá, or Lower Cauca. In an effort to keep strength and facing a military harassment, the FARC groups do not have any problem to establish such agreements with these groups, where most of their members come from paramilitary background.

In this fan of possibilities, the traditional celebration of their anniversary in May, along with the death of “Tirofijo”, imprints a degree of distortion to the analysis, that should consider these manifestations as historical ones.

Certainly, in an effort to show themselves as a military and political valid group, an aspect that should be taken into account is their attempts, historical too, to have influence in the pre-voting scenario. In this dimension the strategy has remained classic in some aspects but there are also certain “Innovations”.

Regarding the Humanitarian Agreement and the military actions that “don’t affect” directly the civilian population but that do generate an impact, the FARC want to be a mandatory subject within the discussion agendas of the presidential pre-candidates. A good quota in order to accomplish this goal is, paradoxically, also put by some sectors of the National Government. An example of this situation was the first reaction of President Uribe had when he heard about the kidnapping attempt of some council men of Garzón (Huila). *“What is going on in Garzón? If in there are two Army battalions and there is also the Police Department, Why hadn’t they foreseen a security ring, a communication, a*

*locket plan to avoid that at some point any of them could run away?”*<sup>19</sup>

The “innovations” have come at hand in an attempt to rescue the national public opinion, which is past times was irrelevant for the subversive group. In this sense they have put in work a strategy to search for interlocutors that do not belong to either the Church or the government to try to recover their initiative in subjects such as the Humanitarian Agreement<sup>20</sup>, which can also be sensed in Cano’s Language<sup>21</sup>.

Although the advance in the demobilization subject, particularly in the middle rank guerrilla leaders, is a real achievement of the government, it is key to ask about the existence of a recruiting prevention policy in areas where the presence of the FARC does not generate a vicious cycle against the strategy to incentive the desertion from the guerrilla troops. A question that still needs to be solved.

Finally, the different urban actions of the FARC using their own terrorism resources as another variable that increase the “threat” perceptions but above all validate the ill-fated use of the extortion as a mechanism of survival. The recent statements of one of victims of a terrorist attack not paying extortion in Neiva, shows the perverse logic generated by the FARC where the only possible behavior is to pay the extortion: *“We are going to recover from what just happened. I am sorry my neighbors had suffered because of my fault. I will look for a way to help minimize the damages. I am very thankful with the people of the area that right since we opened our minimarket has given us a warm reception. I hope to re-open as soon as possible the minimarket to continue offering our products.”*<sup>22</sup>

To get over the conflict with the FARC, is an unfinished task. The progress of the Democratic Security and Defense Policy are undeniable, it is also undeniable the adaptation capability of this guerrilla group to demonstrate their political and military validity. In the current state of the Colombian armed conflict, the adaptation of the military strategy to these changes will be fundamental<sup>23</sup>, and to face the possibilities with a down to earth mindedness.

<sup>1</sup> See for example: León Valencia. “Una nueva estrategia”. *El Tiempo* Newsletter, Bogotá, June 14, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Despite it is an official position assigned time ago, it can be seen a reference in: “In The End of The End, the FARC opt for terrorism”. Interview to General Freddy Padilla de León. Minister of Defense (interim). En: *Semana Magazine*, June 14, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Enrique Santos. “Mucho pasado, cero futuro”. *El Tiempo* Newspaper. Bogotá, June 7, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of National Defense: Democratic Security Consolidation Policy. Bogotá, National Print House of Colombia, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Presidential Directive No 01. March 20, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Legal Medicine National Institute and Forensic Sciences. *Forensis* 2008, Data for Life. Bogotá, 2009; pages 33-34

<sup>7</sup> The numbers used for these calculations are based on the data of the Press journal gathered by the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Rights

- Presidential program of the Vice Presidency of the Republic for the term July-December, 2008.
- <sup>8</sup> According to the Nuevo Arco Iris Corporations. 220 minefields were activated against the Public Forces in 2009, while more than 83 harassment cases were done by guerrilla men from the FARC, mainly in Departments as Cauca, Nariño, Caquetá, Arauca and Huila. (See: Nuevo Arco Iris Corporation, "The numbers and perspectives of the armed conflict in 2009" Presentation made by Ariel Ávila. June 11, 2009.
  - <sup>9</sup> General Command of the Military Forces. Operational Results to June 1, 2009.
  - <sup>10</sup> Demobilized Humanitarian Attention Program (PAHD, Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado) - Ministry of Defense.
  - <sup>11</sup> Demobilized Humanitarian Attention Program (PAHD, Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado) - Ministry of Defense.
  - <sup>12</sup> The members of the Front 59 were precisely the ones who, on April 29, 2009, began the escalade of the military actions of the FARC. That day, in Cerro Templado, a mountainous region of Perijá jurisdiction, eight organic soldiers from the cavalry group No. 2 "Coronel Juan José Rondón" died.
  - <sup>13</sup> Interviews with storekeepers and Huila Authorities that request their anonymity. These took place in Neiva, Jun 2, 2009.
  - <sup>14</sup> Press Journal gathered by the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Rights Presidential program of the Vice Presidency of the Republic for the term July-December, 2008.
  - <sup>15</sup> "With the "Rebirth" Plan the FARC are looking for political oxygen". February 17, 2009. Available on the web site.
  - <sup>16</sup> Enrique Santos. "Mucho pasado, cero futuro". *El Tiempo* Newspaper. Bogotá, June 7, 2009.
  - <sup>17</sup> Examples of these operations are: On June 17 on the rural area of the Remedios, (Antioquia) municipality, some guerrilla soldiers of the FARC attacked a patrol from the Special Energy and Road Battalion n°8; on May 29 in Garzón (Huila), guerrilla soldiers of the FARC attacked the Justice Palace facilities; On may 27 in Arauca (Arauca), guerrilla soldiers of the FARC announced a second armed strike in the region; On May 26 in Caloto (Cauca) some guerrilla soldiers of the FARC activated an explosive when a Police patrol was passing through; On May 24 in Neiva (Huila), some guerrilla soldiers of the FARC activated an explosive artifact against the facilities of the Public Enterprises of Neiva, (EPN); On May 21 in several municipalities of Caquetá, some guerrilla soldiers of the front 15 of the FARC decreed an permanent armed strike against the public transportation.
  - <sup>18</sup> On May 16, two Police patrollers were assassinated by snipers of the FARC in Vistahermosa (Meta). On May 29 in La Macarena (Meta), an Official and for professional soldiers were killed by members of the Front 44.
  - <sup>19</sup> Words of the President Álvaro Uribe Vélez in the Promotion Ceremony of 250 Second Lieutenant to the rank of Sub Lieutenant in the National Army. SNE. Bogotá, June 3, 2009.
  - <sup>20</sup> For example, through the Colombians for Peace (Colombianas y Colombianos por la Paz (CPP) Group, an initiative that came in the second semester of 2008 and that under the leadership of the Senator Piedad Córdoba, they congregate a group of politics, activists and academics under the idea of establishing alternative mechanisms to allow contact with the illegal armed groups in search of negotiated Peace. On September 11 they send their first letter to the FARC and they obtain an answer a month later. Then, they have established contact with the ELN and some imprisoned Paramilitary Commanders in United States. Their task has been a key element in the release of hostages from the FARC.
  - <sup>21</sup> "Despite this, we will continue fighting in the spirit and vision of Manuel and Jacobo, to forge encountering spaces with those who like us, are deeply convinced of how transcendent it is to create civilized scenarios of dialogues with foundations laid in mutual respect, in the perspective of a democratic coexistence in our society". (Greetings from Alfonso Cano in the 45th Anniversary of the FARC. June, 2009).
  - <sup>22</sup> "The Commerce will not let the terrorism win". Huila Daily, (Diario del Huila), April 19, 2009.
  - <sup>23</sup> León Valencia. "Una nueva estrategia". *El Tiempo* Newsletter. Bogotá, August 14, 2009.



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