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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Colombia

Overview: Colombia experienced a modest increase in terrorist activity, largely because of persistent security challenges in areas vacated by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as part of the November 2016 peace accord. As of December, roughly 13,500 ex-combatants, including former rank-and-file guerrillas and militia, continued to participate in the reintegration process. While nationwide security indices have improved dramatically over the past decade, some indicators worsened compared with 2017. Ongoing challenges to peace accord implementation and continued security vacuums created increased risk for terrorist activity and attacks on civilians, security forces, and infrastructure in some areas. A troubling number of FARC dissidents, estimated to total 1,000 to 1,700 individuals who never demobilized or who left the peace process, continued terrorist and other criminal activities, particularly in border regions and areas previously controlled by the FARC.

Peace talks between the Colombian government and the other major terrorist organization active in the country, the National Liberation Army (ELN), continued until August. After the election and inauguration of President Iván Duque on August 7, his administration paused the talks indefinitely, effective August 7, until the ELN releases all kidnapping victims and ceases criminal activity.

Overall, the number of FARC dissidents and ELN individuals who were killed or captured decreased compared with 2017. Colombian-U.S. counterterrorism cooperation remained strong.

2018 Terrorist Incidents: Colombian government statistics showed an 11.5 percent increase in terrorist incidents from 2017. This figure excludes incidents related to organized criminal groups without a political motivation. ELN and FARC dissidents conducted attacks on security forces and civilians.[1] Several of these attacks were notable for their severity or press coverage:

- On January 28, three separate ELN attacks in northern Colombia killed eight Colombian National Police officers and left dozens wounded.
- In late March, a group led by FARC dissidents' leader, Walter Arizala Vernaza, also known as Guacho, kidnapped and killed three members of a news team from Ecuador. In July, the same group killed three investigators in Tumaco, Nariño.
- ELN continued to kidnap civilians and members of security services. Most notably, in August, ELN kidnapped three police officers, a soldier, and two civilian

contractors in Chocó, and three soldiers in Arauca, all of whom were released in September.

- Armed groups continued to conduct frequent attacks on infrastructure, including the Caño-Limón-Convenas oil pipeline and the Tumaco electrical grid.

[1] *The FARC remains a Foreign Terrorist Organization under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act. The Colombian government, however, classifies FARC dissidents as criminals. While the ideological motivations of such groups and ongoing connections with demobilized FARC are unclear, we have included acts of violence by FARC dissidents in this report.*

The Department of Justice at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota continued to coordinate with Colombian judicial authorities on the upcoming plea of Raúl Gutiérrez Sánchez, a Cuban national charged in Colombia with conspiracy to carry out terrorism by bombing U.S. diplomats in Bogotá in March. The United States and Colombia investigated the case bilaterally and the U.S. Embassy coordinated with the Colombian Attorney General to charge the defendant in Colombia. At the end of 2018, Gutiérrez was expected to plead guilty to “conspiracy to carry out terrorism” and receive an eight-year sentence.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There were no changes to counterterrorism legislation and investigative procedures in 2018. Colombian authorities continued to operate joint police-military task forces to enhance coordination in countering terrorism.

The Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs supported the U.S. Department of Justice, International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), to continue work with the Colombian Attorney General and other agencies to improve standards for investigators, forensic experts, and criminal analysts. ICITAP trained 154 wire communication analysts in 2018.

Colombian border security remained an area of vulnerability as law enforcement officers continued to face challenges posed by porous borders, difficult topography, and the presence of illegal armed groups and drug trafficking. Biometric and biographic screening was conducted systematically at international airports but only on a rotating basis at several other official border crossings. The Colombian government uses API but does not collect PNR data in an automated system.

There were incremental changes in cooperation on border security, evidence sharing, and joint law enforcement operations with neighboring countries. Colombia used API data to identify threats. Law enforcement cooperation between Colombia and the United States remained strong.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Colombia is a member of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (GAFILAT), a FATF-style regional body, which assessed Colombia in November 2018. GAFILAT noted that Colombia’s main terrorism financing threat came from the proceeds of criminal activities and found a disparity between an understanding of terrorism financing risks between law enforcement agencies and

supervisory authorities. Colombia’s FIU, the Unit of Information and Financial Analysis, is a member of the Egmont Group. There were no significant changes to Colombia’s AML/CFT regime in 2018.

For additional information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (<https://www.state.gov/2019-international-narcotics-control-strategy-report/>).

Countering Violent Extremism: Roughly 13,500 FARC ex-combatants and former militia members who demobilized under the 2016 peace accord participated in social and economic reincorporation activities. Nevertheless, delays in implementing the program continued to increase the risk that some ex-combatants would return to engaging in criminal activities, including terrorism.

Colombia continued to employ a modern, multi-agency approach to CVE, with an emphasis on encouraging individual guerrillas (primarily from the ELN) to demobilize. In 2018, the number of ex-combatants successfully graduating from the government’s long-running and successful individual reintegration program (separate from those who demobilized as a result of the peace accord with the FARC) reached more than 20,490. The number of members of FARC and ELN members who demobilized individually declined from 827 in 2017 to 635 through October 2018.

International and Regional Cooperation: Colombia is a member of the GCTF and continued to lead in providing security training and assistance to other countries in the region. In 2018, Colombia conducted more than 400 security trainings for thousands of non-Colombian individuals on citizen security, crime prevention and monitoring, military and police capacity building, anti-kidnapping, anti-extortion, hostage negotiation, and cyber-security.

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Austrian Red CrossAustrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589info@ecoi.net

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