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Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: Colombia

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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Colombia

Overview: Following the 2016 Peace Accord between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government, some FARC dissidents continued to operate in Colombia — although most FARC ex-combatants have laid down their weapons. As of December, roughly 13,000 FARC ex-combatants had participated in the reintegration process based on the 2016 Peace Accord. Challenges to Peace Accord implementation and continued security vacuums created ongoing risk for terrorist activity and attacks on civilians, security forces, and infrastructure in 2020. Open-source reporting suggested membership in the Segunda Marquetalia FARC dissident group and FARC dissidents aligned with Gentil Duarte and Ivan Mordisco numbered around 2,500. Armed members of the ELN also remained an active threat in Colombia and were estimated to number around 2,300.

Colombian-U.S. counterterrorism cooperation remains strong. While Colombia is not a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the nation has openly condemned ISIS and its objectives.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: FARC dissident groups and the ELN continued to commit acts of terrorism throughout the country, including bombings, violence against civilian populations,

kidnappings, attacks against utilities infrastructure, and violent attacks against military and police facilities.

- ◆ ELN called for an “armed strike” over February 14-17, and authorities reported that ELN executed 23 attacks across the country during the strike, killing one soldier and injuring seven police officers.
- ◆ Since the signing of the 2016 Peace Accord, FARC dissident groups aligned with Gentil Duarte and Ivan Mordisco increased narcotrafficking and territorial control in Cauca department, where around one third of all killings of social leaders (community activists defending human, environmental, and land rights) in Colombia in 2020 took place.
- ◆ Ecopetrol, Colombia’s majority state-owned oil company, reported that 31 of its 50 vehicles in the Catatumbo region were stolen in 2020, and its employees were regularly threatened by members of ELN, FARC dissident factions, and other armed groups. Ecopetrol also noted that, because of the violence in the Catatumbo region, employees could not travel to perform maintenance on oil wells, resulting in up to 15 percent of daily potential extraction being lost to unrepaired leaks and seepage in some areas.
- ◆ In September, Colombian authorities captured four Segunda Marquetalia FARC dissidents who organized violence in conjunction with the 2019 national strikes in Bogotá. Authorities stated that Segunda Marquetalia urban cells recruited students and trained them to use violence against police and other authorities, resulting in six deaths, more than 700 injuries, the destruction or damage of 76 of Bogotá’s TransMilenio bus stations, and an estimated \$10.7 million in overall damages. Colombian authorities also noted the coordinated violence against police substations during the September 9-10 protests was strikingly similar to the 2019 protests, suggesting terrorist urban cell planning. The September protests resulted in 11 deaths and 571 injuries, 72 substations and 91 government vehicles vandalized or destroyed, and an estimated \$4.5 million in overall damages.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There were no changes to terrorism-related legislation and investigation procedures in 2020. In January, Colombian and U.S. agencies concluded a memorandum of understanding to exchange terrorism screening information to enhance border security in both countries.

Colombian border security remained vulnerable as military and law enforcement agencies faced the challenge of working in areas with porous borders, difficult topography, illegal

armed groups, and drug trafficking.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Colombia is a member of the GAFILAT, a FATF-style regional body. Colombia's FIU, the Financial Analysis and Information Unit, is a member of the Egmont Group. There were no significant changes in countering the financing of terrorism in 2020.

Countering Violent Extremism: Colombia employed a modern, multi-agency approach to CVE. President Iván Duque signed decrees in April and July, allowing individual demobilization for members of organized armed groups, including FARC dissidents. Colombian regulations in place after the signing of the 2016 Peace Accord did not permit FARC dissidents to legally demobilize without such decrees. The members of armed groups — including ELN, FARC dissidents, Clan del Golfo, Los Pelusos, and Los Caparrapos who demobilized individually in 2020 — numbered 301, including 100 children.

International and Regional Cooperation: Colombia hosted the third Western Hemisphere Counterterrorism Ministerial in January, during which President Duque declared Hizballah a terrorist organization. President Duque also declared every entity on the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization list a terrorist organization, except for FARC, which signed the 2016 Peace Accord and which the Colombian government no longer considers to be a terrorist organization. Colombia and Ecuador cooperated to address terrorism threats along their shared border. Colombia is a member of the OAS-CICTE and the Global Counterterrorism Forum.

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