


[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [COUNTRIES](#) [INVESTIGATIONS](#) [CRIMINAL ACTORS](#) [INDEPTH](#)

InSight Crime

[ABOUT US](#)
[DONATE](#)

[Home](#) > [Investigations](#) > The Evolution of the Ex-FARC Mafia


Tags

[COLOMBIA](#)
[EL PAISA](#)
[EX-FARC MAFIA](#)
[FARC PEACE](#)
[INFOGRAPHICS](#)
[IVÁN MÁRQUEZ](#)
[IVÁN MORDISCO](#)

INVESTIGATION

Chronicle of a Threat Foretold: the ex- FARC Mafia

CHAPTER 1

Is Colombia
Condemned to
Repeat History?

CHAPTER 2

The Evolution of the
Ex-FARC Mafia

CHAPTER 3

The Tipping Point:
Iván Márquez Deserts
the Peace Process

CHAPTER 4

The Criminal Portfolio
of the Ex-FARC Mafia

CHAPTER 5

Ex-FARC Mafia,
Venezuela and the
Current International
Climate

CHAPTER 6

Even before the signing of the 2016 peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government, it was clear that not all of the former guerrillas would welcome and join the process.

By mid-2016, just when the signing of the peace agreement was starting to materialize, a letter arrived for the Secretariat of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC), whose legions were preparing to put down their weapons. The letter expressed discontent with the process and came from Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, [alias "Iván Mordisco,"](#) a guerrilla fighter with more than 20 years of experience who led the 1st Front.



Ex-FARC Mafia

The Ex-FARC mafia is made up of groups of former combatants from the now-defunct FARC, that either did not demobilize or that abandoned the peace process with the government and resumed illegal activities. They maintain, at least superficially and in their political discourse, elements of the FARC's ideology and they try to regain the social control that the FARC previously had in the territories under its control. It is common for the Ex-FARC mafia to summon the local population for meetings, establish restrictions on hours of movement, and even hand out manuals about cohabitation within the communities.



1st Front

LEADERS



**MIGUEL
BOTACHE
SANTILLANA**



**NÉSTOR
GREGORIO
VERA**

PRESENCE BY DEPARTMENT

- Amazonas
- Arauca
- Caquetá
- Guainía
- Guaviare
- Meta
- Putumayo
- Vaupés
- Vichada

CRIMINAL ECONOMIES

- Drug Trafficking
- Illegal Mining
- Extortion
- Contraband

insightcrime.org

Mordisco was the first member of the former group to declare himself a dissident. He had made his name in the FARC as an explosives expert and sniper, as well as a good financial manager, particularly in relation to drug trafficking.



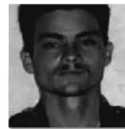
The Future of the Ex-FARC Mafia
HOME NEWS COUNTRIES

INVESTIGATIONS CRIMINAL ACTORS INDEPTH

***This InSight Crime investigation into the ex-FARC mafia was carried out over four years and involved field trips to 140 municipalities under threat across Colombia. Read the full series [here](#).**



Mordisco had risen to the leadership of the [1st Front](#) in the aftermath of the FARC's most humiliating defeat, "Operation Jaque," in July 2008. The guerrillas were tricked into handing over their political hostages to a fake humanitarian commission made up of members of the military. As well as the hostages, the comandante of the 1st Front Gerardo Aguilar, alias "César," delivered himself up and was quickly extradited to the United States. Mordisco replaced the ill-fated César and inherited the 1st Front as well as a deep suspicion of everyone, including the FARC top leadership.



Néstor Gregorio Vera

Alias Iván Mordisco

insightcrime.org

1st Front

Command Level: **High**

Date of Exit from FARC Peace Process:
2016

Background:

He took over as commander of the FARC's First Front, also known as the Armando Ríos Front, in the Guaviare department until 2016. But in June 2016, he became the first FARC commander to denounce the peace process.

Other Activities:

- Explosives Expert
- Forced Recruitment
- Organization of Dissident Groups

November 2019

Main Criminal Economies:

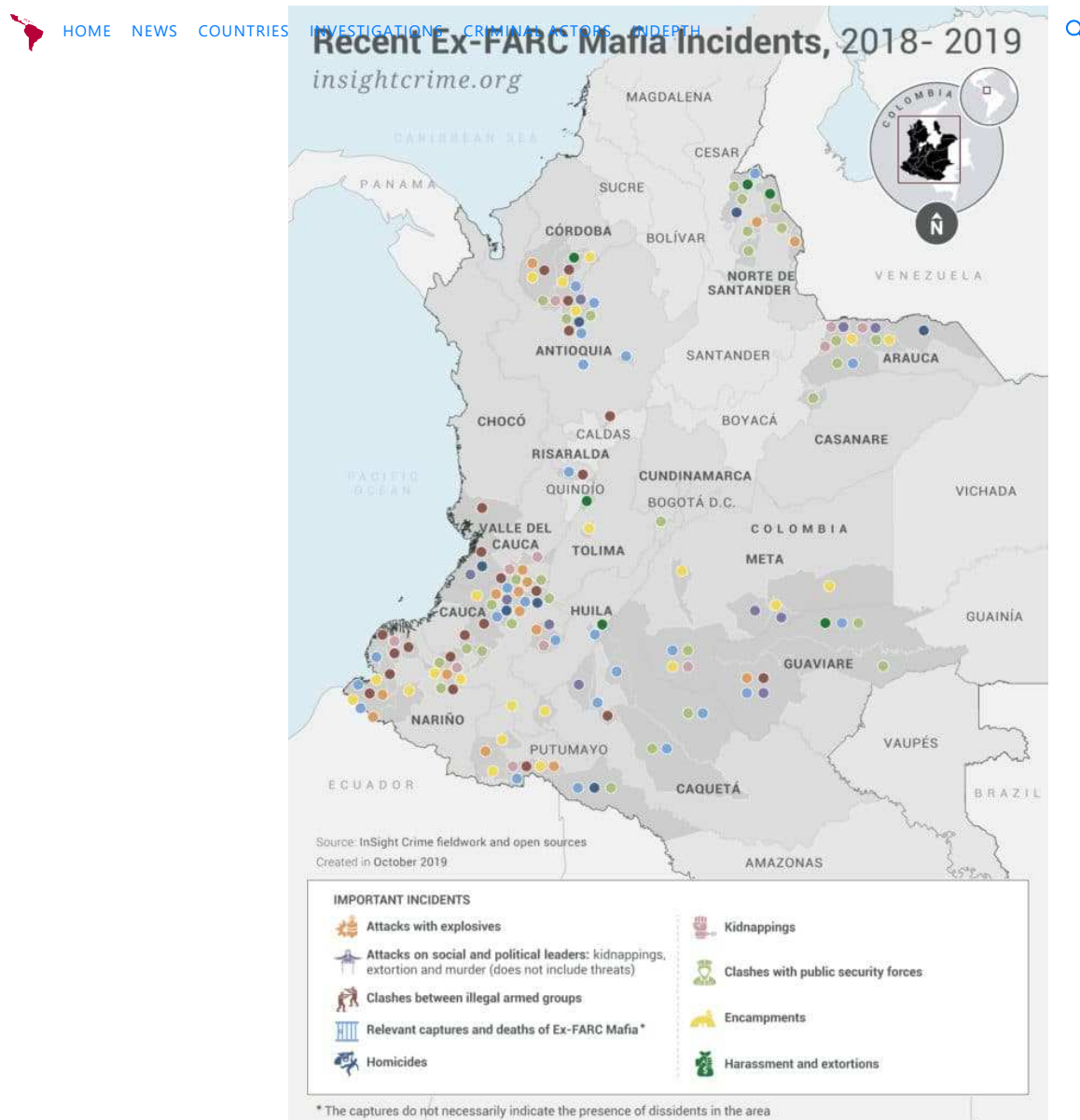
- Drug Trafficking
- Illegal Mining
- Extortion



"The 1st Front voted on the peace issue," a FARC militant told InSight Crime in September 2016. "Only a handful of us voted to remain in the peace process and we found ourselves forced to walk through Guaviare for days until we found another loyal unit."

The historic front's loss was a major blow to FARC leadership as they tried to promote the Havana peace accords.

The FARC Secretariat published a statement, that all unit troops should submit to the decision of the majority: "if the commanders and combatants involved desire to throw themselves into an uncertain adventure, they must use a distinct name from the real structures."



The then-president of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos also [sent a message](#) to the 1st Front: "Do not doubt it. Accept this process because it will be your last opportunity [...] so whoever has any doubt, it is better to leave it aside and accept [the process], because it is the last opportunity you have to change your life [...] Because by any other means, you will end up –I promise you– in a grave or in a prison cell."

The government message was [reinforced](#) by then army commander, General Alberto José Mejía, who warned that 240,000 men would be in charge of confronting the illegal armed groups and that the military would attack "with all of its force and capacity."

Mordisco was not a well-known commander, he did not have a renowned military history, let alone status within the wider movement. While he was a competent commander, with a strong track record, and his departure was unfortunate, it was easy enough for the FARC to absorb.

Perhaps more important for the government was the fact that the 1st Front was based in Guaviare, with influence in Vichada and Guainía. As such, the Front was located in the middle of thousands of hectares of coca cultivations and sat astride two principal drug trafficking corridors into Venezuela and Brazil. Additionally, the Front also had [international drug trafficking contacts](#). Money was never going to be a problem for these dissidents.



HOME

NEWS

COUNTRIES

INVESTIGATIONS

CRIMINAL ACTORS

INDEX

The 1st Front quickly went on to build [new drug trafficking routes](#) via the north of the Amazonas department, in the Puerto Córdoba and La Pedrera region, where the Apaporis and Caquetá rivers meet. This fed the increasingly hungry Brazilian demand for cocaine.



A few months later, on September 22, 2016, the FARC's Tenth Conference took place in the Yari region of the department of Meta. There, representatives from the rebel army sat down to discuss, and ultimately approve, the peace agreement negotiated in Havana. Among the leaders who participated was Miguel Botache Santillana, [alias "Gentil Duarte,"](#) who publicly supported the process. With this being their final act as an illegal group, the guerrilla leadership and the National Government met again on November 24, 2016 for the signing of the peace accords.

Days later, just as the implementation of the accords was taking its first shaky steps, Gentil Duarte, who just months prior had sent letters to urge Iván Mordisco against abandoning the peace process, declared himself to be a dissident. The FARC's strategy to snuff out the dissident movement had failed.

Unlike Mordisco, Duarte had status within the FARC and was part of the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central – EMC) one of the rebel army's most important governing bodies, from which the members of the ruling Secretariat were chosen. He was one of the disciples of the former FARC Field Marshal, Víctor Julio Suárez, alias "Mono Jojoy," and the long-time commander of the 7th Front. He had joined the guerilla at 18 years old and gradually rose in prominence in the Eastern Bloc until winning the leadership of the powerful 7th Front with influence across the southwestern part of Meta, one of the guerrilla heartlands, Unlike Mordisco, Duarte was known across the rebel movement and had serious credibility.



Miguel Botache Santillana

Alias Gentil Duarte

insightcrime.org

7th Front

Command Level: High

Date of Exit from FARC Peace Process:
13 December 2016

Background:

Former commander of the FARC's 7th Front, which controlled coca cultivation, extortion and, drug trafficking in the department of Meta. He became part of the FARC's Central High Command in 2015.

Other Activities:

- Forced Recruitment
- Organization of Dissident Groups

November 2019

Main Criminal Economies:

- Drug Trafficking
- Extortion



Duarte overnight became one of the [most wanted criminals](#) in the country, with a bounty of up to 2 billion pesos (about \$601,000) on his head.

During a field investigation in Guaviare during 2017, a government source explained to InSight Crime that the dissident group already was starting to organize itself in the region. "They are leaving a group unmolested here that is experienced, that knows the routes, that already knows how to operate. They are allowing it to grow because they believe that it is in the jungle, in the middle of nowhere, and for this reason, they believe that it is irrelevant," the official commented.



HOME

NEWS

COUNTRIES

INVESTIGATIONS

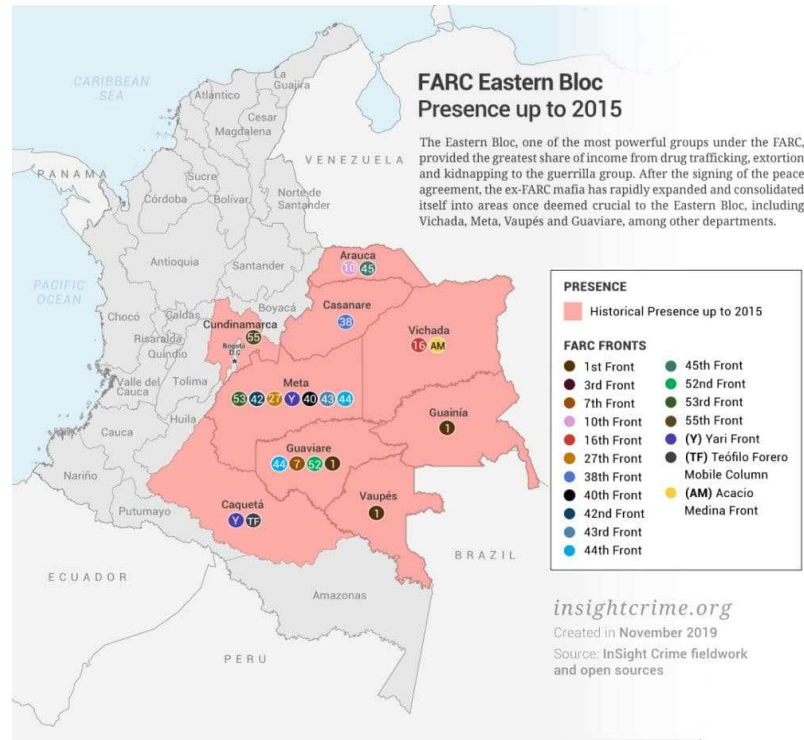
CRIMINAL ACTORS

PRIDE

In December 2016, the FARC political party [expelled](#) Duarte, along with some other commandants that had joined him, including Luis Alfonso Lizcano Gualdrón, alias "Euclides Mora," Géner García Molina, [alias "Jhon 40,"](#) alias "Giovanny Chuspas" and Miguel Díaz Sanmartín, alias "Julián Chollo."



These FARC veterans had several things in common. They were all Eastern Bloc, and all with experience in the lucrative drug trade. Together they had the ability to rebuild a good part of the Eastern Bloc and once again occupy territory across the eastern plains and into the Amazon.



Gentil Duarte's ambitions extended well beyond the former territory of the Eastern Bloc. Once back on his home turf, Duarte [started](#) to strengthen his group, to weave and rebuild alliances at home and abroad. He recruited other mid-ranking commanders like Noé Suárez Rojas, alias "Grannobles" (Mono Jojoy's brother) and alias "Nicolás," the brother of Euclides Mora. He reached out to allies in Venezuela and Brazil, ensuring he had international buyers for the cocaine he was producing on the Eastern Plains.

He also contacted the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional - ELN), to delineate territory and influence, both in Colombia and in Venezuela. Already he had influence in the departments of Guaviare, Guainía and part of Meta, while Julián Chollo and Jhon 40 [pushed](#) into the Venezuelan state of Amazonas, setting up drug trafficking infrastructure and controlling the gold mines in the Yapacana Natural Park.

Duarte and his crew now [dominated](#) key cocaine trafficking routes that reached into Brazil and Venezuela.

In financial and drug trafficking terms, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of Jhon 40. He has become one of Duarte's strongest allies and the financial brains of this dissident faction. He had been the head of the FARC's 16th and 43rd Fronts. During his years in the guerrillas, he worked closely with Tomás Molina Caracas, alias "El Negro Acacio," who was the FARC's drug trafficking czar. In 2006, Jhon 40 was already [considered](#) one of the Meta department's drug kingpins.


[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [COUNTRIES](#) [INVESTIGATIONS](#) [CRIMINAL ACTORS](#) [INDEPTH](#)


Jhon 40 currently leads the dissident Acacio Medina Front, much of it based in Venezuelan territory, with close to 300 men under his command. This Front has penetrated the Atabapo River region and the control of the gold deposits located in the soil of the Yapacana National Park in Venezuela. He is [in charge](#) of bringing cocaine shipments from eastern Colombia to buyers in Venezuela, as well as providing financial support to the other dissidents led by Duarte. He also coordinates relationships with drug buyers on Colombia's borders with Brazil and Venezuela.



Gener García Molina

Alias Jhon 40

[insightcrime.org](#)

Acacio Medina Front

Command Level: High

Date of Exit from FARC Peace process:
2016

Background:

The former commander of the FARC's 43rd Front who operated in the department of Meta and financial head of the FARC's Eastern Bloc. Heir to the drug business managed by Tomás Medina Caracas, alias "Negro Acacio," in eastern and southern Colombia.

November 2019

Main Criminal Economies:



Drug Trafficking



Illegal Mining



Following the ousting of the five dissident commanders, the Defense Minister under the Santos administration, Luis Carlos Villegas, [declared them](#) to be high-value targets, stating that they could be neutralized by the military forces via aerial attacks. It seemed that the danger posed by the FARC dissidents was starting to grow, but, according to sources from the Defense Ministry, the orders were to play down the threat they presented, so as to not undermine the peace process.

At the beginning of 2017, soon after FARC combatants concentrated at the various transition camps around the country, Walter Arizala, [alias "Guacho,"](#) abandoned the peace process. Initially, he had presented himself at the zone in El Playón, in the municipality of Tumaco, in Nariño. Returning to the fray, Guacho recruited former members of the Daniel Aldana Mobile Column and created a new group which he called the Oliver Sinisterra Front (FOS). He had no serious profile within the FARC, but he took up arms again in the cocaine capital of Colombia.

The [importance of Tumaco](#) in drug trafficking terms is impossible to overstate. There are more coca crops in this municipality alone than in all of Bolivia. Tumaco has it all for the drug trade: coca crops, cocaine laboratories, departure points into Ecuador and the Pacific Coast, as well as the town of Llorente, a center for negotiating cocaine shipments, the type of cocaine stock exchange.

However, it was the [murder](#) of three Ecuadorian journalists from El Comercio, in April 2018, that [turned Guacho](#) into public enemy #1 on both sides of the border and into the FARC's most visible dissident. However, he was not as powerful as the government claimed, and according to some analysts, Guacho [was more](#) "fame than force."

While Guacho never formally joined the dissident group of Gentil Duarte, the ex-FARC mafia leaders [exchanged some letters](#). In one of them, Guacho thanked Gentil for "having understood that we are not outlaws, that the staff and I in charge of the FOS are revolutionaries looking for changes in equality in regards to social justice."


[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [COUNTRIES](#) [INVESTIGATIONS](#) [CRIMINAL ACTORS](#) [INDEPTH](#)


While the letters reveal ideological pretensions, this did not translate into actions, which were focused on obtaining drug trafficking routes and moving shipments of cocaine. The actions of the FOS were not framed in the subversive struggle, but rather based around the protection of their business: drug trafficking. The FOS used the FARC name, the former FARC drug trafficking business and international contacts to set up a powerful drug trafficking organization. Intelligence agents in Colombia [described](#) Guacho as “a drug trafficker with an armed structure.” His principal client was the Sinaloa Cartel, which was prepared to buy every kilo of cocaine Guacho could produce.

With several financiers within the area and the infrastructure to ship drugs abroad, the FOS was simply a criminal structure, which we call FARCRIM. This is to draw parallels with the dissident groups that were born out of the AUC demobilization, which the government described as BACRIM (from the Spanish “bandas criminales”).

On December 21, 2018, during “Operation David,” Guacho was killed in the rural area of Llorente. The new administration of President Iván Duque it was quick to claim the killing as a victory against the FARC dissidents

Guacho’s death did not spell the end of the FOS. While weakened, the FOS’s support network and the trafficking infrastructure remain in place and continue operations both in Tumaco and across the border in the Ecuadorean province of Esmeraldas.

While most of the attention was focused on Guacho and the Ecuadorean border, Duarte and his crew were keeping busy. They managed to entice another senior commander into their ranks. Edgar Mesías Salgado, [alias “Rodrigo Cadete,”](#) deserted from the reintegration zone in Icononzo, Tolima, in later 2017.



“Cadete” wearing a t-shirt showing FARC founder Pedro Marín, alias “Manuel Marulanda,” and “Mono Jojoy”

Cadete was another of Mono Jojoy’s disciples and a guerrilla fighter with more than 35 years of experience with the FARC. He served as commander of the 39th Front for many years, and he stood out for his military skills, despite his Front losing territory to the AUC paramilitaries in Meta.

Once united with Duarte, Cadete was sent to Putumayo on an [assignment](#) in order to re-absorb and reunify some dissidents there and to try to forge an alliance with Pedro Oberman Goyes Cortes, alias “Sinaloa,” another dissident commander in charge of elements of the former 48th Front. The alliance did not work out, however, but Cadete’s role became key to coordinating ex-FARC mafia in the south, under Duarte’s direction.

Faced with the growing ex-FARC mafia phenomenon, the Defense Ministry issued a directive in October 2017 framing them as a Residual Organized Armed Groups (Grupos Armados Organizados - GAO Residual), creating a new legal framework allowing the military to carry out aerial bombardments against the ex-FARC mafia.

[HOME](#)[NEWS](#)[COUNTRIES](#)[INVESTIGATIONS](#)[CRIMINAL ACTORS](#)[IN-DEPTH](#)

One month before firming this directive, the military [had their first result](#): in the middle of the jungles of Guaviare, the encampment of Euclides Mora had been localized and he was killed. One of Duarte's right-hand man, who had been the head of security for Mono Jojoy and leaders of several fronts, had fallen.

It would take five months for the military to claim [another scalp](#) from the Duarte faction. On February 2, 2019, Cadete [was killed](#) during Operation Zeus in Caquetá. The piece that Duarte had been using to unify the ex-FARC mafia in the southern part of the country was no longer on the criminal chessboard.

With the implementation of the peace accords still at a very fragile stage, Santos handed the presidency over to Duque on August 7, 2018. The incoming president described the country as "in turmoil" in his inauguration speech and although he never mentioned the dissidents, he [promised](#) to combat these structures and revise the accords.

Additionally, Duque mentioned that "promises have been made and compromise (reached) with social organizations without determining the source of funding," making it clear that the outgoing government had not left the money to implement the peace process.

Duque's arrival increased uncertainty among former combatants, amid fears that the peace agreement was going to be modified. The transition from a government that had signed the peace agreement and started implementation, to one that openly questioned the peace process, generated discord among the ranks of the former combatants. Other FARC commanders began to leave the concentration zones and disappear.

By September 2018, several mid-level commanders [had left](#) the FARC camps: José Manuel Sierra Sabogal, alias "el Zarco Aldinever," Alberto Cruz, alias "Enrique Marulanda," Elmer Caviedes, alias "Albeiro Córdoba," and Nelson Díaz, alias "Iván Alí."

A year into his administration, the president [admitted](#) that "the peace process is fragile but we are advancing, the government will be forceful with those that return to commit crimes after agreeing to the peace accords."

Duque sought to reassure the former FARC combatants that implementation was going ahead.

"When my administration began, only two collective productive projects had been developed during the 20 months of implementation by the former government (...) in ten months of this administration, I can say that we already have 25 that encompass more than 1,200 people," he said.

Nevertheless, the ex-FARC mafia was growing. By the middle of 2019, they already had a presence in 18 of Colombia's 32 departments, in around 117 municipalities, as well as footholds in Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador. At this moment, they numbered around up to 2,500 combatants.

The Duque administration seemed incapable of containing the growth of the ex-FARC mafia and the perception, true or false, that the government did not intend to honor all aspects of the peace agreement, continued to push some former combatants into the arms of the dissidents. The government seemed to lack a clear strategy to contain the ex-FARC mafia and, and least publicly, played down the threat and evolution of this group.

A series of red flags should have alerted the government to a potential crisis on the horizon.

[HOME](#)[NEWS](#)[COUNTRIES](#)[INVESTIGATIONS](#)[CRIMINAL ACTORS](#)[INDEPTH](#)

The first was the case of Seuxis Pausías Hernández Solarte, [alias "Jesús Santrich."](#) Arrested on drug trafficking charges in April 2018, and threatened with extradition, this case had become a rallying call for the FARC and a test case for the fragile peace process. It also drew one of the top FARC commanders, Luciano Marín Arango, [alias "Iván Márquez."](#)

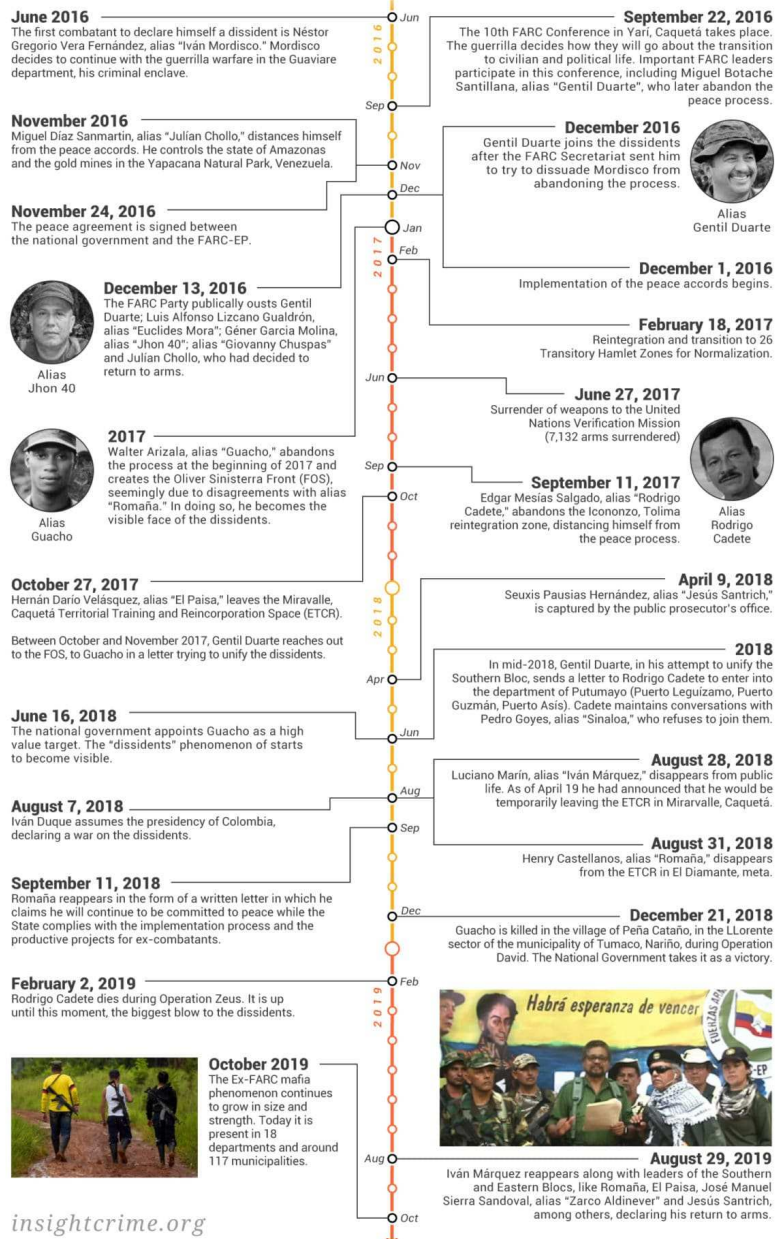
Following Santrich's capture, Márquez decided to abandon his seat in Congress and temporarily move to the Miravalle concentration zone in Caquetá, where he linked up with another top guerrilla leader, Hernán Darío Velásquez, better known as ["El Paisa."](#)

Then the two men disappeared amid rumors of meetings with ELN rebels and elements of the ex-FARC mafia. One meeting was [supposed](#) to have taken place in April 2019, in Elorza, in the Venezuelan state of Apure and the second a month later also in Apure. The first allegedly involved Iván Márquez and the ELN leaders Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias "Pablito," alias "Lenin" and Adelmo Aguirre, alias "Bateman," while at the second it seems Márquez, El Paisa and Jhon 40 got together.

The nature of the ex-FARC mafia and the threat it presents to Colombia was about to change.


[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [COUNTRIES](#) [INVESTIGATIONS](#) [CRIMINAL ACTORS](#) [INDEPTH](#)


Ex-FARC Mafia Timeline



insightcrime.org

Created in October 2019

Source: Open Sources and Insight Crime

***This InSight Crime investigation into the ex-FARC mafia was carried out over four years and involved field trips to 140 municipalities under threat across Colombia. Read the full series [here](#).**

Photo Credit: AP

[COLOMBIA](#) [EL PAISA](#) [EX-FARC MAFIA](#) [FARC PEACE](#) [INFOGRAPHICS](#) [IVÁN MÁRQUEZ](#)
[IVÁN MORDISCO](#)

share



What are your thoughts? [Click here](#) to send InSight Crime your comments.


[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [COUNTRIES](#) [INVESTIGATIONS](#) [CRIMINAL ACTORS](#) [IN-DEPTH](#)

We encourage readers to copy and distribute our work for non-commercial purposes, with attribution to InSight Crime in the byline and links to the original at both the top and bottom of the article. Check the [Creative Commons](#) website for more details of how to share our work, and please send us an email if you use an article.



Latest News

Murder, Drugs, God and Crypto - The Downfall of Brazil's Pharaoh of Bitcoins

[NEWS](#) / 22 NOV 2021

InSight Crime Names Two Members

[THE ORGANIZATION](#) / 19 NOV 2021

Related Content

[SEE MORE](#)



Colombia Dismantles Child Sex Ring Allegedly Tied to Beauty Queen

[COLOMBIA](#) / 15 OCT 2014

Authorities in Colombia have dismantled three child prostitution rings -- including one allegedly involving a beauty queen -- highlighting a...



Colombia Arrests Police Colonel Allegedly Tied to 7 Tn Cocaine Haul

[COLOMBIA](#) / 4 NOV 2014

The arrest of a police colonel in Colombia who allegedly directed a criminal network involved in large-scale international drug trafficking...



Overview of Violence Against Social Leaders in Colombia

[ARMS TRAFFICKING](#) / 18 FEB 2020

Social leaders across Colombia were murdered at an almost unprecedented rate in 2019, and for a wide range of causes.

#SupportFreePress



Support Our Work

Investigating organized crime is an expensive and often risky enterprise. Reaching primary sources and getting the real story involve extensive fieldwork. Please donate. Every dollar supports our mission.

[DONATE NOW](#)

Stay Informed with Weekly InSight

Get fresh updates on organized crime from across the region delivered to your inbox.

We go into the field to interview, report and investigate. We then verify, write and edit, providing the tools to generate real impact.

Our work is costly and high risk. Please support our mission investigating organized crime.

-->

 **DONATE**

[ABOUT US](#)

[OUR MISSION](#)

[WHAT MAKES US
DIFFERENT](#)

[DIRECTORS AND
TEAM](#)

[SITEMAP](#)

[HOME](#)

[NEWS](#)

[COUNTRIES](#)

[INVESTIGATIONS](#)

[CRIMINAL ACTORS](#)

[INDEPTH](#)

[INFORMATION PROCESSING POLICIES](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[REFUND POLICY](#)

[CONTACT US](#)



[Creative Commons Attribution
Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License](#)

Sponsored by:



Suécia
Sverige

Member of:

