

LATIN AMERICA TERRORIST GROUPS

IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre rounds up the current status of some of the area's biggest threats

The IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre uses open source data to build its global database of terrorist and insurgent events. The database enables users to search by location, target, group (active and dormant), tactics and casualty numbers in order to quickly obtain actionable intelligence and/or data.

FARC

FARC is a Marxist insurgent group based and operating in Colombia, and represents the best equipped, trained, and organised guerrilla organisation in Latin America. The group was officially founded in 1966 by Pedro Antonio Marín as the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party, and engaged in a rural insurgency with the objective of overthrowing the Government and establishing a Marxist system in its place. FARC's insurgency increased in intensity through the eighties and nineties, reaching a zenith by the early noughties.

At its peak, due to the weakness or absence of the Colombian state, FARC maintained effective sovereignty over around a third of Colombia's territory. The group regularly demonstrated its strength through an ability to take over towns in the interior of the country, attack military and police installations, extort regional businesses and individuals, and kidnap large numbers of the civilian population. FARC's involvement in the illicit cocaine trade, through the control of rural coca plantations, refining laboratories and a large portion of refined cocaine shipments has traditionally given it an ample source of revenue to fund training, logistics and arms acquisitions.

FARC came under severe counter-terrorism pressure during the



©Getty Images

noughties and suffered the loss of senior leaders in 2008 and 2010. Nonetheless, the group remained operationally resilient and continued to pose a substantial threat to the state. As the long-running conflict reached a stalemate, peace talks were initiated in late 2012, and while violence continued over the coming years, a peace accord was finally signed in August 2016 and a mutual ceasefire agreed, ahead of the scheduled signing of a formal peace

ELN

The ELN aims to enact a Marxist revolution to expel the Colombian Government, replacing the administration with a socialist system of governance. The goals of the ELN are espoused in its 1965 'Declaration of Principles', which emphasises the necessity of a "democratic and popular Government" capable of liberating Colombia from capitalism. As such, the ELN is particularly opposed to privatisation and foreign investment.

Throughout the armed campaign of the ELN, one of the main aims of the group has also been to achieve political status. Operationally, the group has prioritised attacks against the state, particularly focusing on economic targets,

but it has also targeted infrastructure, including power lines, bridges and dams, roads and oil pipelines.

The ELN's criticism of the Government's peace process with FARC has further undermined hopes of rapid advances in negotiations between the ELN and the Government. Despite agreeing to a framework for talks, which is broadly similar to that governing negotiations with FARC, the ELN now appears increasingly likely to make substantial new demands before agreeing to a unilateral ceasefire or to an eventual demobilisation. With peace talks yielding few results, the group is highly likely to represent an ongoing security threat in its strongholds.



©Getty Images

EPP

The Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo (EPP), or Army of the Paraguayan People, is a small left-wing guerrilla group based and operating in the central San Pedro and Concepción departments of Paraguay. Ostensibly fighting for the rights of Paraguay's impoverished landless farmers, the group was founded in 1992. The EPP pursues a radical socialist political agenda that is broadly in line with the objectives of other left-wing militant groups operating in Latin America, and claims to be influenced by the Marxist revolutionary ideology of Che Guevara and Régis Debray. The EPP is a highly localised phenomenon, and operates primarily in the Northern half of San Pedro department and the Southern half of Concepción – one of the poorer and less densely populated regions in the country.

While the EPP typically operates at a low-level, conducting small-arms ambushes against the security forces, in late August 2016 it conducted its deadliest attack to date, killing eight members of the country's Joint Task Force (Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta, FTC) in the Horqueta area of Concepción. The attack came as the Government's security strategy had been called into question by the political opposition, with the Senate approving the "reformulation" of the national security policy due to a lack of results in the FTC's fight against the EPP. In addition, some elements of the opposition have requested the full dissolution of the FTC, which was created in

2013 with the purpose of eliminating the EPP. Given the increased frequency of armed attacks and a desire to demonstrate strength in response to ramped-up Government efforts against it, security personnel are at higher risk of being targeted, especially in the context of the FTC's perceived ineffectiveness. Attacks are unlikely to expand from rural areas to urban centres.



© Getty Images

ITS

Individualidades Tendiendo a lo Salvaje styles itself as a pan-Latin American militant umbrella group comprising independently operating cells. First emerging in August 2011, the group advocates an openly nihilist, anti-civilisational, 'eco-extremist' ideology, calling for the destruction of property, killings of scientists and individuals supporting any form of what the ITS sees as society's domination over nature, and justifies injury and even the death of innocent bystanders. The group's proclamations and attack methods are partly inspired by Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber.

While originally active only in Mexico, the group has also claimed attacks in Chile and Argentina. Most recently, in early August, a posting on an ITS-affiliated website claimed responsibility for an IED that detonated outside a shopping centre in Brazil's capital, Brasília, shortly before the beginning of the Olympics.

The seeming expansion of ITS operations to Brazil, after extending to Argentina and Chile earlier this year, marked a further increase in the reach of its 'brand', rather than any substantial change in

its capability. As is the case in the other countries where the ITS operates, with the exception of Mexico, its bomb-making skills are very limited, with operations typically resulting in only a few small-scale attacks with IEDs or incendiary devices that often fail to detonate properly, or sometimes consisting simply of hoax bomb threats rather than attempted or viable IEDs.

The existence of the group first became apparent on 9 August 2011 when it claimed responsibility for a parcel bomb attack that wounded two professors at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Mexico State the previous day. In the extensive statement claiming responsibility, which was posted to the Liberación Total blog, the group made specific if disjointed criticisms of nanotechnology research, citing concerns over the possible emergence of "billions of self-replicating nanoparticles... destroying the biosphere and completely eliminating all animal life, plant and human, on this planet". On the same day as the release of the statement, a second parcel bomb was defused by police at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional in the capital Mexico City. The device, which was addressed to a physicist at the institute who was the brother of one of the professors wounded in the 8 August attack, was not claimed by the ITS but was attributed to them by authorities. In addition to these two actions, the statement released by the group claimed responsibility for sending two parcel bombs to a specialist in micro-electro-mechanical systems at the Universidad Politécnica del Valle de México in Tultitlán, Mexico State, in April and May, the second of which exploded and wounded a maintenance worker. The 9 August statement released by the ITS named five other researchers in Mexico and criticised their work. However, as of November 2012 no further attacks have been claimed by or attributed to the group.



© Getty Images

LATIN AMERICAN HOTSPOTS

IHS Country Risk considers the current state of affairs and some of the biggest threats facing countries in the area

IHS Country Risk leverages the company's detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of 204 countries, covering political, economic, legal, tax and security risks.

Venezuela

The main security threat in Venezuela is rising criminality. Domestic gangs operating in shanty towns known as Mega Bandas normally have around 50 members, and have emerged due to poor socio-economic conditions and a weak Government response. This is the consequence of a failed policy of tolerance towards criminal gangs, allowing them the opportunity to increase their size, network, and capabilities. Most gangs operate in shanty towns, but others have

complex networks within prisons. Arsenals available to the Mega Bandas include AR-15, AK-series, FN-FAL, and M4 assault rifles; MP-5 and Ingram submachine guns; 9mm semi-automatic pistols, including Glocks and Brownings; and grenades, mostly obtained through the domestic illegal arms trade, armed robberies, and attacks on police officers. The strengthening of organised crime has consolidated the capital Caracas as one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America. Theft and kidnapping risks are high, but criminal networks are also increasingly targeting trucks loaded with food, medicines and basic products, which are later sold in the black market at a premium taking advantage of the country's product shortages problems. Any improvement is unlikely as Government authorities are not publicly recognising the gravity of the situation; nor are they tackling the source of crime and violence, which includes income inequality, weak institutions, widespread corruption, a lack of law enforcement capacity, a lack of co-ordination between national, regional and municipal police forces. The dire state of the economy and the intensification of shortages of food and basic goods, record high inflation and a further contraction in the economy will only contribute to deteriorate the security situation in the one-year outlook and also lead to rising looting and protests risks nationwide.



©Getty Images

Mexico

Since assuming power in late 2012, President Enrique Peña Nieto has sought to end Mexico's high levels of drug-related violence by deploying the army to violent hotspots and arresting/neutralising drug-cartel bosses. These efforts have produced very limited results and insecurity and drug-related violence continue to intensify rapidly. Many criminal organisations are fragmenting into smaller, more violent groups that are more difficult to control and are looking at kidnapping, cargo theft, hydrocarbons theft and extortion as a method of diversifying revenue streams from drug trafficking. Typical extortion targets are likely to continue being local retailers, restaurants, and petrol stations, but international companies operating in the banking, hydrocarbons, manufacturing, and mining sectors have all been victims of violence (extortion, kidnapping or theft) over the past 12 months. There were 17,027 murders reported in 2015, an 8.7 percent increase compared with 2014. The upward homicide trend continues increasing rapidly. During January–June 2016 homicides rose 15 percent, compared with the same period in 2015, to 9,413 victims. There were 2,147 reported murders in August 2016, the highest monthly reported figure since May 2012. The states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Jalisco,

Michoacán, and Tamaulipas concentrate most of the drug-related violence in Mexico. That said, the security situation in other states such as Tabasco and Colima is rapidly deteriorating while states such as Puebla and Guanajuato have become hydrocarbon theft hotspots. In an effort to contain the rising violence, before the 2017 Estado de México gubernatorial elections and the 2018 Presidential elections, the Government is likely to authorise the deployment of additional security forces to battle the cartels.



©Getty Images

Colombia

The four year peace process between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), which concluded with the signing of a six-point peace agreement on 26 September is in jeopardy following its rejection by a small majority of voters in a referendum on whether to approve the agreement on 2 October. President Juan Manuel Santos has said he will listen to opposition demands including more stringent punishment for FARC members accused of serious crimes and bans on political participation for some members – both red lines for the FARC. Santos has said the current bilateral ceasefire will last until 31 October, by which time the Government hopes a solution to the impasse caused by the referendum result will be ready. The FARC's 5,000-6,000 fighters are more militarily exposed than at any stage in the last decade as a result of preparations to demobilise and as a result have been ordered to disperse to safe places as a precaution. The longer it takes to find a new agreement and the more onerous the demands on the FARC, the higher the likelihood that the insurgency will fragment or walk away from the process entirely. The agreement can still be rescued, but there is now a higher possibility of individuals or entire fronts involved in drug trafficking or accused of

serious crimes refusing to demobilise. If the FARC refuse to accept the compromise reached between Government and opposition, we are likely to see a return to a conflict that has lasted 52 years and cost over 250,000 lives.



© Getty Images

Central America

Street gangs, sometimes known as Maras, represent a significant national and individual security threat throughout Central America. The estimated 70,000 individuals are most active in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala where homicide rates were 103, 56, and 30 per 100,000 respectively in 2015. The powerful Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (M-18) dominate among hundreds of individual gang units and organisations. Traditionally locally based entities, some transnational connections appear to be growing between gang factions, especially in the aftermath of El Salvador enhancing anti-gang security operations in mid-2015. These operations pushed some urban gang members to move into rural areas or across borders with Guatemala and Honduras, increasing homicide incidents outside of large metropolitan areas.

Government efforts to implement anti-gang operations are increasingly militarised and frequently result in shootouts with gang members who themselves are increasingly heavily armed with assault rifles including M-16s and AK-47s. A tripartite security strategy to counter gang activities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala has largely focused on deploying security forces to shared borders. Their effectiveness will depend on personnel numbers, skill-set composition and resources. Furthermore, security personnel in the region have limited trust in intelligence-sharing capabilities due to rampant institutional corruption and links to organised crime, limiting the successful implementation of collaborative operations. Gang revenue streams depend on extortion of local retail, transport businesses, and construction, as well as trafficking operations.



© Getty Images