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What Did the FARC Truce Tell Us?

Written by [Jeremy McDermott](#) | Friday, 17 January 2014



Results of a FARC attack in Cauca, before the ceasefire

calendar month and that since December 15 the rebels had refrained from any aggressive actions. And while Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzon, true to form, declared the "terrorist groups was not able to keep its word," the reality is that there were between four and twelve ceasefire violations during the month, depending on who you believe.

This is an impressive feat when one remembers that the armed forces not only continued their offensives, but in some places, like Arauca, actually stepped them up.

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Even the harsher critics of the FARC among the NGOs, like the Bogota-based Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC) admitted there was a "precipitous drop" in rebel actions, with the FARC responsible for just two deaths over the month. CERAC registered 12 FARC actions over the month that constituted violations of the truce. CERAC believes however that this number of violations reveals that the FARC leadership "does not have complete control over its forces on the ground."

It is naive to think that any military organization could guarantee total obedience from its troops, let alone a dispersed guerrilla army which has many members with little training. One can look at some of the best trained armies in the world, like those currently deployed in Afghanistan, and see that disciplinary violations often occur and result in the loss of lives. That the rebels, in the face of attacks by the security forces throughout the month, only committed up to 12 identified violations is a testimony to their discipline and cohesion.

However there was one front, in Antioquia, which blatantly violated the truce, as it did in 2012, but more on this later.

InSight Crime Analysis

The FARC had, for the second year running, called a unilateral ceasefire. At the end of 2012 the ceasefire was called for two months. This time it was just a month. The guerrilla aim behind the unilateral ceasefire was the same, to prompt the government into turning it into a bilateral ceasefire.

The guerrillas desperately need this, for a variety of reasons:

1. To re-establish command and control over some of the more remote fronts that have not seen a senior FARC commander, let alone a member of the ruling seven man Secretariat, for over a decade.
2. To rotate some of the commanders that have not performed, or are not of proven loyalty.
3. To ensure that money is pushed up into the Secretariat's coffers. Many front commanders, unsure of what is going on in Havana, and waiting to see which way the wind blows, have been hanging onto their money, and not delivering the expected quotas up to the bloc commanders and then onto the

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Secretariat.

4. To tell local guerrilla commanders about what is happening in Havana, what the prospects for peace are, and what they can expect should any agreement be signed. The fear, not just of the government, but of the rebel high command, is that even should an agreement be signed, the commander-in-chief Rodrigo Londoño Echeverry, alias "Timochoenko," will be unable to sell it to many members of the guerrilla rank-and-file.

Indeed, to give the FARC a bilateral ceasefire would allow the rebels to repair much of the damage done over the last decade to their command and control system, something the military is well aware of. In the past the FARC have used ceasefires to strengthen themselves militarily and there is little reason to believe the same would not happen again. And for this reason, as well as the constant political attack on the process launched by former president Alvaro Uribe, President Juan Manuel Santos has little room for maneuver on the issue of a bilateral ceasefire.

Highly placed sources within the military told InSight Crime that while an order had been received to explore the possibilities of a ceasefire, President Santos has managed to keep the generals on side by promising them no bilateral ceasefire until the peace process has reached a point of no return.

To return to that FARC unit in Antioquia. The 36th Front under the command of Ovidio Antonio Mesa Ospina, alias "Anderson," engaged in a blatant violation of the ceasefire in 2012. [There were three violations this time](#). The first was the targeting of a police helicopter in Briceño, Antioquia, on December 23, 2013, just over a week into the latest ceasefire, leaving two police officers injured. The same rebels might have also been responsible for the shooting down of another helicopter in the neighboring municipality of Anori on the 11th of January 2014, [in which five soldiers were killed](#).

SEE ALSO: [FARC, Peace and Possible Criminalization](#)

Anderson is the perfect candidate for any fragmentation of the FARC. [His 36th Front earns](#) up to \$9 million a month from drug trafficking, gold mining and extortion, way more than it needs to operate. It also works with the [Urabeños](#), a new generation drug trafficking group born from the rebels' sworn enemies, the paramilitary United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which demobilized in 2006. There are also investigations underway by Colombian police into evidence that the 36th Front has direct contact with international drug trafficking organizations and is exporting cocaine, perhaps via the nearby 57th Front, which controls the jungle border with Panama and has access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The FARC did manage to enforce a credible ceasefire, but it is clear that leaders such as Anderson are prepared to violate the orders of their superiors if it threatens their business interests.

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