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**Hugo Corrales Compagnucci**

**August 2011**

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*The views expressed in this research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, Department of Defense, US Southern Command or Florida International University.*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armed violence in Paraguay is not a recent phenomenon. During the second half of the XX Century, Paraguay saw the rise of a large number of underground, revolutionary movements that sought the overthrow of the Alfredo Stroessner's (1954-1989) government. From among those movements emerged the *Partido Patria Libre* (or, Free Fatherland, also known for its acronym PPL), made up of a two branches: one legal and the other one, operational. The latter was based on people's power, as represented by "*Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo*" (or, the Paraguayan People's Army, with acronym EPP). After EPP broke with PPL in March 2008, this Marxist-oriented revolutionary project, which was apparently oriented to put an end to the social, political and economic inequalities in Paraguay, began to carry out markedly criminal activities, which included bank robberies, kidnappings, assassinations, terrorist attacks and armed confrontations. Its strategies and modus operandi show some similarities with the strategies and modus operandi utilized by the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Paraguay features a farm sector in a state of crisis, in which cattle-ranchers, peasants and agro-exporting companies live in a constant strife. The Paraguayan Departments that are the most affected by this situation are Concepción, San Pedro, Canindeyú y Caazapá, which also suffer from a weak government presence. This deficiency has made these departments ripe for drug-trafficking activity by Brazilian groups such as *Primer Comando Capital* (i.e., First Capital Command, also PCC and *Comando Vermelho*, (i.e., The Red Command). That is why many peasants, now recruited by EPP, have joined the drug-trafficking business and that, not only as marijuana growers but as "*campanas*" (i.e., early warning sentinels) for the organization. This helps shape

their attitudes for their future involvement in all areas of drug-trafficking.

Paraguayan society is the result of social inequity and inequality, such as those resulting from a lack of opportunity. Although Paraguay has successfully recovered from the last world economic crisis, economic growth, by itself, does not ensure an improvement in the quality of life. As long as such economic and social gaps persist and the government fails to enact the policies that would result in a more just society and toward EPP neutralization or containment, the latter is bound to grow stronger.

In this context, the situation in Paraguay calls for more research into the EPP phenomenon. It would also seem necessary for Paraguay to promote an open national debate that includes all sectors of society in order to raise consciousness and to induce society to take actual steps to eliminate the EPP, as well as any other group that might arise in the immediate future. EPP has strong connections with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with the *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez* in Chile and other armed groups and peasant movements in other countries of this region. Although most governments in the region are aware that the armed struggle is not a solution to current problems, it might be worth it to hold a regional debate about armed or insurgent groups in Latin American to seek common strategies and cooperation on dealing with them since the expansion of these armed groups is a problem for all.

## INTRODUCTION

This essay seeks to explore armed violence in Paraguay, which began in the late 1950s. Specifically, it focuses on the violence generated by the self-proclaimed armed group “*Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo*,” (i.e., The Paraguayan People’s Army, or EPP). It explores its origins, zone of influence, philosophy, military and economic objectives, the sympathies and the antagonism that it evokes in society, the violent actions it has perpetrated, its relationships with other criminal and armed groups operating outside Paraguay, and more. It also looks at exploring the actions carried out by the Paraguayan government to control EPP. Lastly, this essay concludes with an analysis of the possible future of this group, both at the national and regional levels.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST THE STROESSNER DICTATORSHIP

Weapons and violence have always played a role in Paraguay’s history. It was been present since colonial times through the struggle for Independence,<sup>1</sup> the War of the Triple Alliance (against Argentina, Brazil y Uruguay--1865-1870),<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the early history of Paraguay, see: Juan Baurista Rivarola Paoli, *La Colonización del Paraguay, 1537-1680* (Asunción, Paraguay): El Lector, 2010, pp.1-138. Ignacio Telesca, *La Provincia del Paraguay, Revolución y Transformación 1680-1780*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-140; Herib Caballero Campos, *El proceso de la independencia del Paraguay, 1780-1813*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-138. Nidia R. Areces and Beatriz González de Bossio. *El Paraguay durante los Gobiernos de Francia y de los López*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-154.

<sup>2</sup> César Cristaldo Domínguez and Hugo Mendoza. *La guerra contra la Triple Alianza 1ª Parte, 1864-1870*, (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-158. Hugo Mendoza, *La Guerra contra la Triple Alianza 2ª Parte*, (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-141.

when governments were overthrown,<sup>3</sup> the Chaco War (against Bolivia--1932-1935),<sup>4</sup> during the 1936 revolution and in the Civil War of 1947.<sup>5</sup> There is a clear pattern in the use of weapons as a method used by Paraguayans for resolving internal and international conflicts. The most recent case is perhaps that of General Alfredo Stroessner, who took power in 1954 with the support of the National Republican Association (the Colorado Party) and ruled with an iron fist until February 1989, when he was removed by a military coup.<sup>6</sup>

There were several attempts to overthrow Gen. Stroessner. The *14 de Mayo* Movement (M14), for example, was established between 1958 and 1960 and recruited young Liberal Party members and members of the *Partido Revolucionario Febrerista*. In December 1959, five M14 armed columns entered Paraguayan territory through the Itapúa, Amambay and Alto Paraná Departments, with an ambitious plan to overthrow the Stroessner government. The contingents, poorly equipped and with infiltrators in their ranks, were soon detected and persecuted. Their leader, Juan José Rotela, escaped to Argentina and would return later to lead a new initiative.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Rotela came back in April

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<sup>3</sup> Liliana M. Brezzo, *El Paraguay a comienzos del Siglo XX, 1900-1932*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-137.

<sup>4</sup> Luis Verón, *La Guerra del Chaco, 1932-1935*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-165.

<sup>5</sup> José Carlos Rodríguez, *El Paraguay bajo el nacionalismo, 1936-1947*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-121; Alcibíades González Delvalle, *La hegemonía Colorada, 1947-1954*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-132.

<sup>6</sup> Neri Farina, Bernardo, and Alfredo Boccia Paz, *El Paraguay bajo el Stronismo, 1954-1989*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-139.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about these armed groups, see: Bernardo Neri Farina, and Alfredo Boccia Paz, *El Paraguay bajo el Stronismo, 1954-1989*. (Asunción, Paraguay: El Lector), 2010, pp. 1-139; Diana Arellano, "Regreso en Armas: Movimiento 14 de Mayo," *Revista NOVAPOLIS*, Edición Nº 8, Asunción, August 2004.

1960 leading a paramilitary organization, named *Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional* (i.e., United Front of National Liberation, or FULNA), whose members were mostly Communists. The FULNA was totally destroyed by Paraguayan Army troops.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1970 and 1974, subversive movements such as the Paraguayan Revolutionary Army (EPR) and the Paraguayan Liberation Movement (MOPAL), made failed attempts at overthrowing the Stroessner government. In the case of the EPR, it made an attempt to assassinate Gen. Stroessner by parking a car loaded with explosives at a corner of fashionable Plaza Uruguay.<sup>9</sup>

Paraguayan students attending college in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in the early seventies were influenced by the armed movements in those countries (Montoneros, Tupamaros and others) and organized the Political and Military Organization (“OPM”), made up of well-educated young men. Their leader was Juan Carlos Da Costa. This group adopted Argentina’s Montoneros structure of creating several strong groups in several of Paraguay’s departments (states). However, a false movement made by one of its member allowed the government to destroy the movement. Another anti-Stroessner resistance group similar OPM, the Independent Movement (“MI”), was also active

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<sup>8</sup> Víctor R. Duré and Silva Agripino, “Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional (1959-1965) Guerra de Guerrillas como Guerra del Pueblo,” *Revista NOVAPOLIS*, August, 2004, <http://novapolis.pyglobal.com/08/resarmadafulna.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Roberto Céspedes and Roberto Paredes, “La resistencia armada al Stronismo: Panorama General,” *Revista NOVAPOLIS*, August, 2004, <http://novapolis.pyglobal.com/08/resarmadapanorama.php>.  
Juan Carlos Bareiro, “La guerrilla busca radicarse en el país desde hace varias décadas.” *Diario La Nación* [Asunción], 25 October, 2009, pp. 5.

during the same period.<sup>10</sup> Former members of the OPM and are now in the current government of Fernando Lugo, among them: Miguel López Perito, Dionisio Borda, Fernando Masi, Melquiades Alonso (all ex OPM), as well as Ricardo Canese, Oscar Rodríguez Campuzano and Adolfo Ferreiro (all ex MI).<sup>11</sup>

Despite the armed attempts to overthrow Gen. Stroessner, there are marked differences between the movements mentioned above and the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP). Alfredo Boccia, a former member of the Political and Military Organization (OPM), explains the difference between the organization that he joined and EPP. Boccia insists that,

*There was a certain revolutionary ethic, which did not permit certain excesses, such as those practiced by today's guerrillas, as, for example, their association with drug-trafficking, kidnappings, extortions, and hurting innocent people, as seen in the case of the policemen hurt by booby traps, who, in the end, are just as poor as the very popular classes that they claim to be representing.... All the EPP and OPM have in common is that both begin with the armed struggle, but their motivations, styles and the weapons they use to force a change a particular situation are totally different.*

Another former OPM member, Guillermina Kannonikof, denounced the EPP criminal actions, by saying that:

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Nickson, "Oposición armada al régimen de Stroessner: Una reseña de diez libros sobre el tema," *Revista NOVAPOLIS*, August, 2004, <http://novapolis.pyglobal.com/08/resarmadaresena.php>.

<sup>11</sup> "Lucha armada en el Paraguay. Lugo buscó a ex miembros de la OPM para puestos claves en su gobierno," *Diario La Nación* [Asunción], 25 October, 2009, pp. 10.

*If EPP still wants the armed struggle, it simply does not understand the current political scenario. It is as though we were still right in the middle of the Cold War.*<sup>12</sup>

She insisted that, unlike OPM, which saw the armed struggle as nothing more than an option, the EPP operation is linked to drug-trafficking.

## **THE PATRIA LIBRE PARTY (“PPL”) AND THE PARAGUAYAN PEOPLE’S ARMY (“EPP”)**

The Paraguayan People’s Army (“EPP”) came out of the *Patria Libre Party* (“PPL”), which began as a branch of the *Movimiento Democrático Popular* (i.e., Popular Democratic Movement, or “MDP”). On February 13, 1990, the PPL split and took up the name “*Corriente Patria Libre*, (The Free Fatherland Current, or “CPL”), thus creating a group that supported a socialist ideology.

During 1992, with the incorporation of new left-wing activists, the CPL becomes the *Movimiento Patria Libre* (i.e., Free Fatherland Movement or MPL). This movement worked with peasant organizations and with the so-called “people without a roof.” Its main activity was the invasion of privately-owned real estate properties and building primitive dwellings on them. This movement adopted the name *Partido Patria Libre* (PPL) in 2002, when it was certified for electoral registration.<sup>13</sup> In 1993, MPL participated in the Paraguayan elections as part of a left-wing nationalist coalition called, “*Movimiento Amplio de Participación Nacional*” (or Broad National Participation Movement). This coalition which only held together during the 1993 elections,

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<sup>12</sup> Juan Carlos Bareiro, “La guerrilla busca radicarse en el país desde hace varias décadas.” *Diario La Nación*, [Asunción], 25 October, 2009, pp. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

included other organizations such as the *Movimiento Independiente de Participación Popular*, *el Movimiento Democrático Antiimperialista*, *los Cristianos de la Teología de la Liberación* and the *Grupos de Apoyos Sociales*.<sup>14</sup>

*Partido Patria Libre* (PPL) was originally divided into two separate sections: a legal branch and the operational branch. The avowed goal of the operational branch of the party was implementing a Marxist-revolutionary project, which would be destined to put an end to social, political and economic inequalities existing in Paraguayan society. In that way, it was argued, a more democratic, sovereign and equalitarian government, in addition to a fairer economic system, will rule Paraguay.<sup>15</sup>

A witness who attended a PPL meetings in Nueva Germania-San Pedro (jointly with Juan Arrom, Anuncio Martí, Osmar Martínez, Víctor Colmán, Gilberto Yamil Setrini, Carmen Villalba, Alcides Oviedo, Lucio Silva, Pedro Maciel, Gustavo Lezcano, Severiano Martínez and Lucio Garay Avalos), explained that the division between a political directorate and the armed branch gave rise to an internal dispute between them and made coexistence very difficult for both groups, leading to their distancing.<sup>16</sup>

On March 1, 2008, the once armed branch of the *Patria Libre Party* (PPL), separated from it and took on the name of Paraguayan Peoples's Army, Germán Aguayo Command

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<sup>14</sup> "Partido Patria Libre (Paraguay)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 22 January, 2011, [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partido\\_Patria\\_Libre\\_\(Paraguay\)](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partido_Patria_Libre_(Paraguay)).

<sup>15</sup> This paragraph and the preceding are based on Intelligence reports made available to this writer.

<sup>16</sup> "Partido Patria Libre had the support of an armed branch," *Diario ABC Color Digital* [Asunción], 6 August, 2010, <http://www.abc.com.py/nota/163982-el-partido-patria-libre-contaba-como-soporte-un-grupo-armado/>.



(EPP) according to a document that was found on August 4, 2008, during a raid carried out by Paraguayan government forces on a farm that used to belong to peasant leader Alejandro Ramos in the jurisdiction of Ybyraty, Horqueta, Concepción Department, within the zone of influence of that armed group. Alejandro Ramos fled to the surrounding woodlands, together with his wife and joined the EPP, and went on to organize an EPP cell.<sup>17</sup>

Cristóbal Dionisio Olazar, who deserted from the *Patria Libre* armed branch, has direct knowledge of the internal EPP organization and structure because he was once an insider and held an important position in the political organization that gave rise to EPP. Precisely because he is a deserter, he remains targeted for assassination by members of this armed group. He remarks that:

*From the beginning, when 'Patria Libre' was not a political party but only a movement, there was talk about organizing a group to join the armed struggle. For my own part, I was convinced that there was such a need. I am a Marxist-Leninist by training and my understanding was that, under the circumstances, with our countries under the domination of military dictatorships, the only way to get liberated was through the armed struggle. That idea began to take hold in 'Patria Libre', which consisted of a legal political party on the one hand and a clandestine armed organization, on the other. Some of us*

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<sup>17</sup> Osvaldo Cáceres Encina, "Files for the cases of Cecilia, Lindstron and Zavala," *Diario ABC Color*, Semanario Judicial, 22 November, 2010, pp. 2.

*went so far as to undergo guerrilla training. Yes, we carried out maneuvers. That was here, in Paraguay, as well as abroad. However, our concept of the armed struggle at the time was the classical guerrilla war and we had no part in kidnappings and assassinations, the way many terrorists do now.*<sup>18</sup>

With the arrival of the new millennium, Paraguayan society was shaken by a wave of criminal activity not seen earlier: kidnapping of persons for ransom. These crimes were committed by EPP, the armed branch of the *Patria Libre Party*. Well-known persons in Paraguay were kidnapped, including María Estela Martínez Houstin, María Edith Bordón de Debernardi and Cecilia Cubas, among others. The latter, the daughter of a former president, was executed by her kidnappers, although her killers had collected a portion of the ransom money. Later, Paraguayan Police forces were able to discover the killers and arrested and jailed some of them — all *Patria Libre* members. They are currently serving sentences jail sentences of up to 30 years, with no possibility of early releases. Persons who were implicated in these crimes, such as Juan Arrom, Anuncio Martí and Víctor Antonio Colman, fled Paraguay and were granted asylum in Brazil, as political refugees.

The PPL is currently led by José Rodríguez, who serves as the Party's Secretary General and who openly admits that the PPL has kept constant communication with the Colombian FARC for a long time. However, he took pains to make it clear that their communication with FARC does not mean that PPL keeps any sort of “organic” connection to FARC,

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<sup>18</sup> Andrés Colmán Gutiérrez and Justiniano Riveros, "A story that repeats. An Interview with Dionisio Olazar," *Diario Ultima Hora* [Asunción], 22 October, 2009, pp. 2.

although such a contact is not a problem because FARC has UN recognition as a “combatant.”<sup>19</sup>

In the case of EPP, their communiqués give no indication that the group is seeking political recognition. However, the EPP manual does show the need for a “movement” that would provide political support. That movement would take up the name “*Movimiento Francista de Liberación*.” Oddly, the “*Movimiento Nacional Francista*” began on March 11, 2011, proposing a number of reforms that are also coherent with those that are contained in the EPP Manual.<sup>20</sup>

EPP made another attempt at political recognition in November 2009, when the “Humanitarian Volunteers” group offered to mediate between EPP and the Government to “release civil prisoner Fidel Zavala” (sic), who had been kidnapped by EPP. The “Humanitarian Volunteers” consisted of attorney Raquel Talavera—who had a close bond with EPP, as attorney for EPP members facing lawsuits,— Dr. Joel Filártiga, linked to left-wing movements, and Jesuit priest José Valpuesta. It follows that the true intention of “Humanitarian Volunteers” was obtaining recognition for the EPP group as a combatant. If they succeeded, EPP would achieve a change in status, as a first step toward a future political recognition.<sup>21</sup>

## **RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM BY EPP MEMBERS**

The common denominator that forged a unity among the armed group’s founders was the social and political activism

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<sup>19</sup> “We had and still have communication with FARC.” *La Nación* [Asunción] 12 February, 2010, pp. 9-18.

<sup>20</sup> Antonia Del Valle Castillo, “Francistas ask Kugo to deliver on promises,” *Diario ABC Color Digital*, 14 March, 2011, <http://www.abc.com.py/nota/francistas-piden-a-lugo-cumplir-promesa/>.

<sup>21</sup> Roque González Vera, “They seek combatant status for EPP criminals,” *Diario ABC Color Digital*, 29 November, 2009.

born within the Paraguayan Catholic Church. Alcides Oviedo Brítez, who is considered the EPP's "Commander in Chief," (currently serving an irrevocable prison term for the kidnapping of María Edith de Debernardi), joined the Theological College in Encarnación township when he was 12 years old. There, he got along very well with two other peasants, namely, Gilberto Setrini and Pedro Maciel Cardozo. The three of them preached the Bible in peasant settlements, where they also saw first-hand the poverty of those places.

In 1990, Brítez, Setrini y Cardozo transferred to the Asunción Theological College to be ordained as priests. Their social concerns led them to study Marxist ideological texts and participate with social activists, including those from the extreme left-wing, such as Juan Arrom--the *Patria Libre* leader--who was also a student in the Theological Institute of the Theological College.

In 1992 and, as a result of the radical ideas being propounded by this group of seminarians, eight of them, including Alcides Oviedo Brítez, Gilberto Setrini, Pedro Maciel Cardozo and Raúl Araujo, were expelled from the Theological College for being "communists". Monsignor Obispo Jorge Livieres Bank, who was then an Auxiliary Bishop in the Asunción Archdiocese, recalls:

*They came to tell me that the Theological College was not open to the needs of the people and were talking about implementing the values of Marxism. I think they were no longer faithful to the Church. They became politicized through their contact with Juan Arrom and some of his fellows, who were left-wing*

*militants and used to visit the Theological College.*<sup>22</sup>

The young former seminarians organized the “Monsignor Oscar Romero Movement,” aimed at encouraging a pro-revolutionary consciousness. Two female former female catechists from Concepción joined them: Carmen Villalba and Rosa Villalba, and also became romantically involved with Alcides Oviedo Brítez and Gilberto Setrini, respectively.

The Paraguayan Catholic Church has publicly repudiated this armed group. Monsignor Zacarías Ortiz, the Concepción Diocese Bishop, in an interview he granted to *Diario La Nación* of February 14, 2010, disclosed some details about EPP operations in its zone of influence, by affirming that they terrorize the population and kill those who refuse to join their organization.<sup>23</sup> The Paraguayan Episcopal Conference expressed its opposition to the operations of the armed group and condemned the acts of kidnapping and all other criminal acts committed by EPP.<sup>24</sup>

In 1993, EPP contacted several members of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, FARC and the Chilean Patriotic Front Manuel Rodríguez. The alter undertook to provide the Paraguayan subversives with political indoctrination and military training aimed at executing terrorist and criminal activities such as kidnappings, bank

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<sup>22</sup> Andrés Colmán Gutiérrez, “The EPP history: an armed gang with guerrilla training,” *Ñangapiry News*, 26 January, 2009, <http://colmangutierrez.blogspot.com/2009/01/la-historia-del-epp-1.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Milder Melgarejo Valiente, “EPP already killed 50 bothersome people in Concepción.” *La Nación* [Asunción], 14 February, 2010, pp. 2-14. “Monsignor says EPP would teach catechism and say mass,” *Diario Última Hora* [Asunción], 09 February, 2010, pp. 6.

<sup>24</sup> “Bishops denounce violence and demand cattle breeder to be returned alive.” *Diario La Nación* [Asunción], 18 October, 2009, pp. 6.

robberies, house robberies, the armed invasion of ranches and guerrilla actions.<sup>25</sup>

## THE EPP AND FARC

The strong connection of EPP members with the Colombian FARC has been more than sufficiently demonstrated in the media, mainly through the confiscation FARC files under the custody of Raúl Reyes, the FARC's second in command, by the Colombian Army. Those files fully establish that a FARC-EPP link existed. Emails found in those files make repeated references to Paraguay. One of them mentions that training had been provided to five Paraguayan nationals in Colombian territory. These five Paraguayan trainees are referred to as "joke tellers." One of the e-mails reveals that,

*There are some good spaces to work in Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia. The Western Command began a job on the border.*<sup>26</sup>

It has been demonstrated that EPP carried out two kidnappings in urban areas, apparently influenced by FARC style. In Asunción, it kidnapped María Edith de Debernardi and Cecilia Cubas, and exploded several home made bombs inside the Palace of Justice<sup>27</sup> and in the Carlos Antonio López Park, both located in the Sajonia Borough. Currently,

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<sup>25</sup> "The FARC-EPP Connection, The Secret Proof vs. Arrom," *La Nación* [Asunción] 31 January, 2010, Special Supplement: 6, 7, 10, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Osvaldo Cáceres Encina, "Paraguay, a playground for FARC," *Diario ABC Color* [Asunción] 23 October, 2009, pp. 12. Osvaldo Cáceres Encina, "Even the last Paraguayan is referenced in FARC files," *Diario ABC Color*, 26 September, 2009, pp. 8.

<sup>27</sup> "A bomb explodes in the Palace of Justice building. No victims," *Telesur tv*, 29 April, 2009, <http://www.telesur tv.net/secciones/noticias/48675- NN/estalla-artefacto-en-sede-de-corte-suprema-paraguaya-sin-victimas/>.

its activity is centered in rural areas and, in particular, in the Concepción and San Pedro forests, although, again, they have recently made penetrations near the boundaries of Canindeyú and Caaguazú Departments with the San Pedro Department. There, they have committed crimes such as the execution of individuals suspected of being informers of the Paraguayan National Police, which occurred in Colonia Sidepar, Caaguazú.<sup>28</sup>

Every single action carried out by EPP is a carbon copy of the Colombian FARC procedures. For example, they have dug tunnels to hold their victims in captivity, in ways similar to those used by the FARC in the Colombia jungle to hold their own kidnap victims.<sup>29</sup> Their aim is to use kidnappings as a means to consolidate their power through deeds of terror and to obtain large amounts of money from ransom. The actions carried out by EPP are fully described in the Procedures Manual confiscated by the National Police in the farm of Alejandro Ramos, in Horqueta, Concepción Department.<sup>30</sup>

The Anti-Kidnapping District Attorney Office, in the ongoing trial of several EPP members for the 2004 kidnapping and killing of Cecilia Cubas, used e-mails sent by FARC to prove that the FARC had trained EPP members

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<sup>28</sup> “Four kidnappings: 2 urban and 2 rural,” *Diario La Nación* [Asunción], Pg. 41. Dionisio Cáceres, “Relatives of assassinated teacher leave Sidepar 3000,” *Diario Ultima Hora* [Asunción] 25 September 2010, <http://www.ultimahora.com/notas/362159-Familiares-del-docente-asesinado-por-el-EPP-abandonan-Sidepar-3000->.

<sup>29</sup> Bernardo Agusti, “A Repeating History: The Police blame EPP for the túnel in Germania,” *Diario Ultima Hora Digital*, 03 November 2009, <http://www.ultimahora.com/notas/270449-Polic%C3%ADa-presume-que-el-t%C3%BAnel-de-Nueva-Germania-es-del-EPP>.

<sup>30</sup> *Diario Ultima Hora Digital*, Sucesos, 12 January, 2010.

in Colombia.<sup>31</sup> Another evidence of the FARC-EPP connection appears in an e-mail sent by FARC's "Mono Jojoy" to Raúl Reyes on September 2, 2003:

*Oswaldo, chief of 'Patria Libre' informs us that they are holding US\$300,000 dollars that belong to us for the ransom money they collected for a joint a FARC-PL operation... He claims that Paraguay offers good conditions for joint financial jobs, arms purchases and support networks for FARC...Paraguayan border controls on the Brazilian o Argentine borders are minimal...These (Paraguayan) comrades have an armed group with no experience in the collection of ransom money. They are asking for our help with an experienced command who would work clandestinely. There, one can get Paraguayan documents to stay there as long as necessary.*<sup>32</sup>

Cristóbal Dionisio Olazar – an EPP deserter – said, in the interview he gave to *Ultima Hora* reporters Andrés Colman Gutiérrez and Justiniano Riveros, that he was visited in his home in Concepción Department, by Orley Jurado Palomino, a.k.a. "comandante Santiago," a FARC member, who provided training to current EPP members in the mountains.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "D.A. says Espínola put his FARC training to use," *Diario ABC Color*, 09 September, 2010, pp. 13.

<sup>32</sup> "Colombia confirms FARC plans to carry out kidnappings in Paraguay," *Diario ABC Color* [Asunción], 24 September, 2010, pp. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Andrés Colmán Gutiérrez and Justiniano Riveros, "A repeating story. An interview with Dionisio Olazar," *Diario Ultima Hora* [Asunción], 22 October, 2009, pp. 2



Political analysts have repeatedly referred to the EPP's participation in organized crime in Paraguay. In an editorial published on September 27, 2010, daily *Diario ABC Color* argued that:

*The worst risk currently facing the State these day is that the combination of all those factors may yet generate conditions similar to what Colombia has been going through during the recent past, leading to threatening social disintegration and the transformation of Paraguay into a nation without a future, left at the mercy of the evil forces of crime. Thus, it is a matter of serious concern the gradual but steady infiltration of marginal groups in the several power structures. By utilizing the very tools provided by a representative democracy society, and by availing themselves of major economic and financial resources obtained through their crimes, many mafia lords — either in person or through their godchildren and protégés — are currently infiltrating several institutions at the local and department levels and even at the national level, seeking to promote the defense of their evil interests. Paraguay still has time to avoid its “Colombianization.” The time is now to remove the ominous EPP activity at the root and, and prevent it from strengthening its bonds with other groups that operate outside the law, which would otherwise enable them to potentiate*

*their unfortunate influence in Northern Paraguay...*<sup>34</sup>

## **EPP CAPABILITIES**

Criminal EPP actions leave no room for improvisation. Such are calculated to the last detail, including the surveying of possible targets, the follow-up, the minute planning of the operation, practice runs before the operation and the filming of the operation for purposes of later analysis. All these particular actions indicate that one is facing a very dangerous group, a group that is willing and ready to kill and to die.

EPP members are well-armed. They carry M16, HK.308 assault rifles, 9 mm pistols, .38 and .357 revolvers, 12-gauge guns and hand grenades. They are also experts in the use of explosives, which they put to use in preparing booby traps and home-made bombs ready to be set off, as they did in Horqueta, Concepción Department, where four policemen were wounded and a police patrol car was destroyed.

The information gathered by the Anti-Kidnapping District Attorney Office, which was found in the personal computers confiscated during raids of EPP camps, shows that the EPP guerrillas were in the process of buying heavy-duty equipment such as AK-47, M4, M16 and Galil rifles. These raids also yielded photographs and catalogues of other heavy-duty firearms, including machine guns, high-precision sniper rifles and even surface-to-air rifles.<sup>35</sup>

There was nothing coincidental in that EPP made its home in Northern Paraguay, in the Concepción and San Pedro

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<sup>34</sup> *Diario ABC Color* [Asunción], Editorial, September 27, 2010, pp. 14.

<sup>35</sup> "EPP sought to enhance its firepower, according to photos," *Diario ABC Color Digital*, 28 December, 2010, <http://www.abc.com.py/nota/el-epp-buscaba-potenciar-su-artilleria-segun-fotos/>.

Departments. This choice was born out of the sheer need to survive, as correctly pointed out by former EPP guerrilla Dionisio Olazar:

*They (EPP) have picked our area, here in Concepción, and also in San Pedro, because in those places, they find ideological as well as methodological affinity. In our department (Concepción) they settle in the wooded areas to stay. It is not the case that they enter into a jungle that is unknown to them. They are in the forests in which they have chosen to stay. The area they choose must meet certain requirements. One such requirement is for a strategic exit. If attacked by government forces, they want to be near a community that offers them support, in addition to certain organizations, which are in charge of providing the rebels with logistics while out in the woods.*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Why their base is up North,” *Diario ABC Color Digital* [Asunción], 11 January, 2010, <http://www.abc.com.py/nota/65599-por-que-la-base-esta-en-el-norte/>.

## TIMELINE OF NOTABLE EPP-RELATED ACTIONS

Notable actions carried out by EPP, in a chronological order, are as follows:

Month/Year	Timeline of EPP Crimes
<b>07/1997</b>	The storming and robbery of <i>Banco Nacional de Fomento</i> (“BNF”) in Choré, San Pedro Department.
<b>05/2001</b>	The Paraguayan Police discovers a plan to assassinate several political leaders, a kidnappings manual and a list of authorities and entrepreneurs – possible crime targets.
<b>06/2001</b>	The Molotov bomb or Meisozo case. On June 11, the Paraguayan Police faced members of an armed group in a clash near the Olimpia Soccer Team stadium. Five subversives were disguised as Asunción Municipal Traffic Policemen (“PMT”) and were able to escape. While fleeing, they wounded a policeman and left three vehicles behind; two Molotov bombs were found in one of the vehicles, in addition to a home-made bomb consisting of dynamite and steel pellets. An investigation by the National Police led to the arrest of Rafael Meizoso — an Argentine national — who was shown to keep a relationship with Juan Arrom y Anuncio Martí, both PPL members. This character admitted to having a relationship with Chile’s <i>Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez</i> .
<b>11/2001</b>	The kidnapping of Maria Edith de Debernardi, who is released after 43 days in captivity and payment of ransom.
<b>03/2003</b>	During a raid, the National Police finds and confiscates a cache of firearms, munitions, hand-grenades, explosives, telecommunications equipment, cellular phones, Army and Police uniforms, automotive license plates, documents and false ID documents, all being kept by EPP in

	<p>Sanguina Cué, San Pedro Department. There, they arrest Carmen Villaba – the wife of Alcides Oviedo Brítez. The latter manages to escapes, as does Gilberto Setrini. During the clash, Germán Aguayo is killed, an EPP member. Later, in 2008 and, in honor of the first group fallen in combat, the name Paraguayan People Army’s Germán Aguayo Command is adopted. Later, Lorenzo Alcides Oviedo Brítez and Aldo Meza are captured. Their capture yields an abundant documentation related to the plans and execution of the kidnapping of Maria Edith de Debernardi.</p>
<b>09/2004</b>	<p>Cecilia Cubas, daughter of a former president, is kidnapped and killed, in spite of the fact that a portion of the ransom money had been paid.</p>
<b>08/2005</b>	<p>EPP lays an ambush on members of the National Police in the New Durango Jurisdiction, San Pedro Department. Non-com Police Official Andrés Ceferino Brítez is killed and Non-com Police Official Rodolfo Acuña is wounded.</p>
<b>11/2005</b>	<p>Clash between the National Police and the armed group inside the Agüero Cué Farm, in Concepcion Department.</p>
<b>02/2006</b>	<p>The National Police arrests several <i>Patria Libre</i> members and also, members of <i>Organización Campesina del Norte</i> (“OCN”) and confiscates weapons, munitions, explosives, magnetic compasses, batteries, foodstuffs and documents on their way to EPP in Colonia José Félix López (Puentesíño), Concepción Department.</p>
<b>02/2006</b>	<p>Some EPP members set up an ambush and kill National Police Non-Com Official Oscar Noceda in Puentesíño, Concepcion Department. This killing occurs the day following the arrest of members of this subversive group and the confiscation of weapons, munitions, explosives and foodstuffs on their way to the group. This police member was the first to lead an operation against EPP.</p>

<b>04/2006</b>	EPP attacks a police station in Jorge Sebastián Miranda, in an area known as Jhuguá Ñandú, Concepción Department. Non-com Official Leonardo Cabrera was wounded during the attack.
<b>02/2008</b>	Clash in Colonia “Jaguareté Forest”, ex Cardús Cué, on the property of Ulises Teixeira. Two policemen are wounded and a great number of firearms, munitions and handwritten documents are confiscated.
<b>03/2008</b>	Attack and burning of farm equipment in the Santa Herminia Farm in the area known as Curuzú de Hierro, in Concepción Department. This farm is the property of Brazilian national Navor Boht. The subversives leave behind a communiqué that bears this text: <i>Paraguayan People’s Army, Germán Agüero Command. Land for Paraguayan peasants. Those killing the people with toxic agro-chemicals shall pay in this way</i> . <sup>37</sup>
<b>06/2008</b>	Cattle rancher Luis Lindstrom is kidnapped in Tacuatí, San Pedro Department, who is Released after 43 days in captivity and after ransom was paid.
<b>11/2008</b>	An EPP communiqué to announce violent operations, mass land occupations, which they will enter, fully armed, in order to force into being an EPP-suitable rural reform. <sup>38</sup>
<b>12/2008</b>	Attack and burning of an Army post and theft of firearms in Tacuatín San Pedro Department. They leave behind a communiqué, in which they claim:  <i>“We have said that we will respond to State violence against the Popular Movement. We are responding. We call on workers, peasants, the dispossessed, intellectuals and Indians to join EPP. We call on all who feel that the time has</i>

<sup>37</sup> EPP Communiqué, published in *Diario ABC Color*, political section, “They set fire to tractors and warehouse,” 14 March, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> “EPP Communiqué,” *Portal Paraguayo de Noticias*, 04 January 2009, <http://www.ppn.com.py/>.

*come to meet violence with violence, those who see the need to rescue our country, which has been sequestered by the oligarchy and the North American empire, or all who want a life of dignity for our people, who are becoming hungrier and hungrier by the day; we call on all those who desire to see a smile on the faces of poor children and to feel the happiness of fighting for the happiness of the people. JOIN THE EPP. WE ARE WAITING FOR YOU. LONG LIVE THE PARAGUAYAN PEOPLE'S ARMY!*<sup>39</sup>

**04/2009**

A bomb explodes in the Palace of Justice in Asunción, producing minor damages. A communiqué is left behind: “Revolutionary idealism above all.” The communiqué mocks State forces for having been caught off-guard. They threaten Paraguayan authorities and, in the last part of their statement, they mention:

*“Let us keep constructing the EPP Lopista Militias and continue to fight for the one objective worth fighting for, which is the happiness and welfare of the hunger-driven Paraguayan people. LONG LIVE THE GLORIOUS EPP! WE SWEAR THAT WE SHALL OVERCOME AND NOT EVER SURRENDER! FATHERLAND, SOCIALISM OF DEATH! WE SHALL OVERCOME!”*<sup>40</sup>

**10/2009**

Cattle rancher Fidel Zavala is kidnapped on his property, Ranch Z., Concepción Department. He is liberated after 91 days of captivity for an unknown ransom. He was also forced to pledge a supply of beef to marginal sectors in Asunción and Concepción Department. In this action, after kidnapping Zavala, they leave behind a booby-trapped pickup truck, which he owned, causing two policemen to be seriously hurt. One of them remains in a vegetative state.

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<sup>39</sup> “EPP Communiqué,” *Diario ABC Color*, 09 January, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> “Revolutionary idealism above all,” *Centro de Documentación de los Movimientos Armados*, 29 April, 2009, <http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=3256>.

<b>04/2010</b>	An ambush and the killing of a policeman in the Santa Adela Far, in Arroyito, Concepción Department. EPP kills a policeman and wounds three farm employees.
<b>04/2010</b>	Clash in the area of Agua Dulce – Alto Paraguay/Chaco Paraguayo – between Severiano Martínez, an EPP asset and National Police officers. Three people are wounded. Later, the National Police kills Severiano Martínez in July.
<b>08/2010</b>	EPP kills Florencio Núñez in front of his family; a peasant is killed, who had reported EPP and was under a death threat. These crimes occurred in Curuzú de Hierro, Azotey District, and Concepción Department.
<b>09/2010</b>	EPP kills teacher Hugo Julian Ortiz, in Colonia Sidepar, Canindeyú Department. He was under a death threat as a police informant.
<b>09/2010</b>	The National Police kills Gabriel Zárate Cardozo in a clash. He was EPP third in command, in Colonia Sidepar, Canindeyú Department. His backpack contained munitions and explosives. An M16 assault rifle was recovered, which had been stolen during an assault on an Army post in Tacuatí.
<b>09/2010</b>	During a clash, the National Police kills Nimio Zárate Cardozo, another important EPP leader. This action occurred in Jhuguá Ñandú, Concepción Department.
<b>01/2011</b>	A bomb explodes against a wall in Channel 9 TV Cerro Corá. Located in the Carlos Antonio López Park, producing small damages. Later, on the same day, the Police Bomb Squad finds another bomb in a garbage dump in the same park, which is set off by the Bomb Squad. The National Police identifies members of an EPP urban cell



<b>01/2011</b>	EPP sets off a bomb in front of a moving police car, in the same automotive exit of the Police Station in Horqueta, Concepción Department. The police car is damaged, and so are the Police Station building and some nearby buildings. Four policemen are wounded, two of them seriously. <sup>41</sup>
<b>03/2011</b>	EPP kills José del Rosario Cabrera Carísimo, a member o the EPP logistic apparatus, for having used EPP funds for his own benefit. This killing occurred in Kusrú de Hierro, Concepción Department, as the victim was coming out of his home.

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<sup>41</sup> The preceding timeline is based on Paraguayan intelligence reports made available to this writer. See also, Diario ABC Color of date 08 November, 2009, pp. 2-3.

Sign that appeared following an EPP attack at Paso Barreto, Concepción on July 2011.



Source: *ABC Digital*, 15 July 2011.

***“No more destroying of nature. Whoever continues with that practice, will be surely punished. Long live the E.P.P. Long live the Armed Struggle!”***

## **THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE EPP PROBLEM**

Why does an armed group such as the EPP emerge and survive in XXI Century Paraguay? What is the future for this group? How does Paraguayan society perceive the EPP? What is the government doing to eliminate the EPP? These are questions that demand a response.

The answer to the first question is three-dimensional: social, political and economic. The political dimension shows us a country that has just ended a right-center government, led by

the Colorado Party (1947-2008) during which, a lack of opportunity only made social inequalities worse. The anxiously awaited political changeover sought by a vast sector of Paraguayan society came in 2008. A veritable mosaic of political movements and parties appeared on the scene, cutting short the Colorado Party possibility of remaining in power. The so called “Patriotic Alliance for Change” and carried former Catholic Bishop Fernando Lugo Méndez to power. The alliance included the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PL), the the *Partido País Solidario* (PPS); the *Partido Democrático Progresista* (PDP); the *Partido Tekojojá*; the *Partido Febrerista* (PF); the *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (PDC), the *Partido Encuentro Nacional* (PEN); the *Partido de Movimiento al Socialismo* (PMAS); the *Bloque Social y Popular* (BSyP); the *Movimiento de Participación Ciudadana, Avancemos* and *Poder Ciudadano de Asunción*.

The expectations arising for change and, in particular, the leader’s promises of change were great. However, after more than two years of the new government expectations have been vanishing in the daily rhetoric and, today, some of the sectors that voted for change are now among the most vocal critics of the current Paraguayan government. President Fernando Lugo now finds himself trapped by his own electoral promises. Yet, the coalition that took him to power does not have a majority in the National Congress, which in turn constantly and perniciously blocks all government initiatives. There are also exhausting political discrepancies with the Paraguayan Vice President (coming from the Liberal Party) and the absence of a strong party that could negotiate a national strategy that would enable the government to present a propose real reforms and, in that way, deliver a major portion of its electoral promises.

From a social dimension, Paraguay is the result of social inequities and inequalities that are becoming more and more atomized and manifested in actions, such as the closing of roadways, mass demonstrations, strikes by labor unions and the invasion of private property. Paraguayan population is living in a constant state of social instability due to the lacks the opportunity to access real jobs, unemployment, drug-trafficking, the rise of destructive mafia groups on the country's borders, a rapid growth of common crime, the very high degree of corruption that has not only invaded government sectors but also whole layers of society, a poor education offering for young people, inefficient healthcare services, as well as the struggle for land ownership and one's own housing, among others.

From an economic viewpoint, Paraguay has rapidly recovered from the last world crisis. In 2010, a record agricultural and cattle-raising production resulted in inflows of foreign currency, which enabled the Central Bank of Paraguay to reach a historical record of US\$4.3 billion in reserves Projections for 2011 are equal or better. This bonanza owes much to large landowners and to intensive mechanized agriculture. However, the benefits of this super-production do not quite reach the population to the extent necessary to quench the above-mentioned social claims.

Economic growth is not everything. It does not guarantee the best living conditions for a population that suffers from high degrees of inequality in the distribution of wealth. The State, through the implementation of the right policies, is responsible for narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, by heavily investing in the most vulnerable sectors of society. The struggle for land ownership is the biggest problem facing the government: peasants clamoring for spaces are invading productive properties and, most of the

time, producing irrecoverable damages, while clashing with landowners and the armed forces.

Against this background, the EPP operates in the most dispossessed areas of Concepción and San Pedro Departments, both in Northern Paraguay. There is evidence that they are now also operating in Eastern Paraguay (Canindeyú and Alto Paraná Departments); Central Paraguay (Caaguazú Department); and Southern Paraguay (Caazapá Department).

Researcher Fabricio Vázquez calls this region “the peasant region in crisis,” and adds:

*The endemic weakness of the peasant system has its origins in the model of territorial implementation itself, implemented by the State, mainly during the 70s, 80s and the early 90s...The productive activities of peasants who had been placed by the State in agricultural colonies, did not generate the profits necessary to ensure sustainability and satisfaction of basic needs, forcing them to abandon or sold their holdings in search for other lands on which to raise their crops.*<sup>42</sup>

He goes on to add:

*This region, on which a strong peasant presence was established during the last decades of the XX Century suffer from a deficient agricultural production, growing poverty and constant migratory displacements. Moreover, the current*

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<sup>42</sup> Fabricio Vázquez, *Territorio y población: nuevas dinámicas regionales en el Paraguay*. GTZ/UNFPA, 2007, pp.93-94.

*problems center on the expansion of the agricultural exporting region, the accompanying loss of productive space and peasant life, in addition to illegal marihuana cultivation.*<sup>43</sup>

This geographical area covers Southern Concepción Department, San Pedro, Canindeyú and Caazapá Departments. It is characterized primarily by subsistence agriculture. The peasants in this region are subjected to the struggle for survival and pressures from the State and cattle ranchers. State presence is weak and goes unnoticed and the region suffers from social decomposition and lack of land ownership for poor families.<sup>44</sup>

Cattle ranchers and peasants are in constant struggle. Peasants seek spaces by illegally occupying the properties of cattle ranchers. They deforest the land and then build primitive houses. Once they become strong in a given area, they begin growing marihuana. This has been common in the San Pedro, Amambay and Canindeyú Departments. The crops are concealed in mountain areas and camouflaged within sesame plantings. In January 2011, peasants in San Pedro Department threatened the government with closing roadways and seek EPP support, if the government were to continue with the “*Ko’é Pyahú*” operation by security forces, which had destroyed the marihuana plantations, burned several tons of the harvested crop and arrested some of the peasants.<sup>45</sup> The police *Ko’é Pyahú* operation destroyed 300 hectares de marihuana in San Pedro and 358 hectares in

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 125.

<sup>45</sup> Omar Acosta, “Peasants threaten to join EPP,” *Diario ABC Color*, 25 January, 2011, pp.17.

Alberto Núñez, “Santa Rosa del Aguaray Peasants threaten with asking help from EPP unless their demands are met,” *Diario La Nación* [Asunción], 25 January, 2011, pp. 46.

Canindeyú, in addition to confiscating 14,700 kilos of cut marihuana and 1808 kilos de pressed marihuana in both departments. According to San Pedro neighbors, marihuana cultivation in these settlements has increased during the last three years. The factors that give drug-traffickers an edge is the lack of the means of survival, the absolute lack of technical assistance by the State and a peasantry that has become ideological, all of which are used by drug-traffickers to recruit people from these settlements.<sup>46</sup>

The EPP is most active and has its main base of operations in Concepción, San Pedro and Canindeyú Departments. There, people feel ambivalent about the presence of this armed group. Many show their sympathy and provide the subversives with the necessary help to evade police actions, while others are very afraid and will not talk for fear of reprisals. These conditions are only made worse by a high degree of corruption in the National Police, which has been infiltrated by EPP supporters, in addition to corrupt policemen who protect drug-traffickers in that region.

The EPP influence in San Pedro and Concepción Departments brings with it serious problems for the region. Many cattle breeders have abandoned their properties out of fear. A foreign agro-industrial company withdrew the investment it had planned to grow crops for ethanol production, in view of the lack of security. The reluctance that people have to point to EPP soldiers and supporters is based on a fear of reprisals by that armed group. Dwellers of that region have commented on the ease of movement that the group enjoys, which travels from one point to another

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<sup>46</sup> Marcos Velázquez, “Settlements are filled with marihuana cultivation,” *Diario ABC Color*, 06 March, 2011, pp. 30, 31.

within its area of influence without being challenged by the police.<sup>47</sup>

Drug-trafficking is controlled by two Brazilian criminal organizations, which are based in Amambay Department (on the Brazilian border). Those two are *Primer Comando Capital* (“PCC”), which is headquartered in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and the *Comando Vermelho*, headquartered in Río de Janeiro, Brazil. These two compete mainly for leadership in marihuana traffic, which leads to clashes and casualties.<sup>48</sup> In mid-2011, a special police operation in San Pedro Department had to be cancelled due to pressures by marihuana-growing peasants. In the course of this operation, more than one member of the National Police was arrested while transporting drugs or protecting drug shipments. It seems like a paradox that a group of peasants came out defending marihuana crops by threatening the government with blocking roadways and other deeds of violence, unless the government suspended the operation.<sup>49</sup>

## WHAT NEXT FOR THE EPP?

The EPP has released comunicués calling on peasants to massively occupy the properties of cattle breeders and agroindustrial exporters, whom they call “the corrupt oligarchy that starves the people of Paraguay” (sic). Many peasant leaders are active EPP members and indoctrinate their followers in the group’s ideology and methodology. That is the case with Casildo López, the leader of *Organización Campesina del Norte* (“OCN”), who

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<sup>47</sup> David González y Alberto Núñez, “EPP power generates serious....” *Diario La Nación*, 07 December 2010, pp. 40.

<sup>48</sup> “Primeiro Comando da Capital,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 05 February, 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primeiro\\_Comando\\_da\\_Capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primeiro_Comando_da_Capital).

<sup>49</sup> Omar Acosta, “They bring pressure to bear and prevent marihuana crops from destruction,” *Diario ABC Color*, 06 February, 2011, pp. 14.



mobilized his people to invade properties and block international roadways. López was wanted for several crimes and is currently serving a jail term. Another case in point is that of Alejandro Ramos, a peasant leader in the Horqueta region and EPP militant, who is currently a fugitive. EPP's procedure manual and US\$28,000 were found in his property. This money is alleged to have been part of the ransom money collected for the kidnapping of cattle breeder Luis Lindstron. Ramos is accused by the National Police of being the actual killer of Hugo Ortiz in Colonia Sidepar, Caaguazú Department, a teacher targeted by EPP as an informer to the security forces.

Also, intelligence reports appearing in the local media suggest that the EPP has begun to be involved in drug-trafficking, but only as guardians as of now. The official hypothesis is that it will eventually be involved in the complete drug cycle. Some analysts believe that it would not be too difficult for EPP to take on all aspects of the business because many marihuana growers are currently operating as early warning sentinels of the organization, putting the EPP on notice of any operation being carried out by security forces. This new EPP activity also follows the FARC model.<sup>50</sup>

A significant number of EPP members have been trained by FARC. EPP holds on to the concept of the timeless struggle. Its members have rejected the principles, values and traditions of Paraguayan society. They capitalize on the contradictions that arise in a society that is hugely unjust, as is the case with Paraguayan society, and use them as their

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<sup>50</sup> Luis Bareiro, "EPP purchases Real Estate in Paraguay and works with drug-trafficking," *Diario Digital Última Hora*, 25 January, 2010, <http://www.ultimahora.com/notas/292063-EPP-compra-inmuebles-en-el-pa%C3%ADs-y-opera-con-el-narcotr%C3%A1fico>.

rallying point; although, in reality, their objectives are only their own interests.

No matter who lives in the EPP operating zones, part of that population sympathizes with the armed group and another part fears the group. If one were to judge by appearances, Paraguayan society would seem indifferent to the actions of armed group. Most Paraguayans appear not to believe in the existence, let alone the capabilities of EPP. And, those who accept its existence perceive the group as far from their own reality where it cannot affect its own livelihood, primarily because EPP only attacks the rich and the authorities who oppose EPP. EPP could grow substantially in the immediate future, precisely due to that social indolence and also, due to the lack of stronger, more definitive actions by the government to eliminate this group.

The future of EPP will depend mostly on the actions taken by the Paraguayan government. Such actions would entail not only repressive actions against the armed group, but also actions that aim in the direction of creating a more just society, one that provides opportunities for all and that include the restoration of the real values of Paraguayan society, which are being irremediably lost.

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