

BOWLES'S NEW AND ACCURATE MAP OF THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, laid down from the BEST OBSERVATIONS and NEWEST DISCOVERIES; particularly those of the celebrated CIRCUMNAVIGATORS; Illustrated with a variety of useful PROJECTIONS and GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS: With an easy and familiar Explanation

of the WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, by ANSON, BYRON, WALLIS, BOUJANVILLE, COOK, and REPRESENTATIONS of the HEAVENLY BODIES: the most approved ASTRONOMICAL and of the most curious and interesting Phenomena in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.



FARC Raises its Minimum Recruitment Age

BRENDA FIEGEL

Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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Author Background

Brenda Fiegel is an Intelligence Analyst and the Editor of the Latin American Operational Environment Watch at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. FMSO conducts open-source and foreign collaborative research, focusing on the foreign perspectives of understudied and unconsidered defense and security issues. Her specific research expertise includes “US/Mexico foreign relations,” “US/Mexico border security threats,” “Mexican and Central American violence/extremist groups to include drug cartels” and “Conflict resolution and peacekeeping in Mexico and Central America.” She has lectured on these topics in professional military education settings, at Interagency Security Conferences, at Customs and Border Patrol Facilities, and at academic forums.

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FARC Raises its Minimum Recruitment Age

During decades of operations aimed at combating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombian authorities have seized secret diaries, indoctrination protocols, propaganda flyers, and even information containing specific methods utilized to recruit children. Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* reported that although the FARC has systematically denied claims regarding child recruitment, it has agreed to raise its minimum recruitment age from 15 to 17 as part of peace agreement talks with the Colombian government.ⁱ FARC negotiator Iván Márquez further indicated during follow-on interviews with the Colombian based news media company *Caracol* that any children under the minimum recruitment age would be “discharged from the war” within a short period of time as it is not FARC policy to recruit minors in the first place.ⁱⁱ He also used the moment to promulgate propaganda aimed at discrediting Colombian Military recruitment practices while simultaneously denying any fault by the FARC in this arena.

Rhetoric

In agreeing to raise the minimum recruitment age, Márquez did not miss the chance to denounce State military recruitment as being “forced and favorable to the urban elite who are able to shirk service requirements based on social status.” He further used media attention to condemn the military use of *batidas* which are checkpoints that are set up at random by Soldiers. Traditionally, *batidas* have been used to determine if Colombian males have defined their military status after finishing secondary school or when reaching the age of 18 as required by law. If those stopped by Soldiers cannot provide justification as to why they have not defined their status, they may be immediately ordered to duty.ⁱⁱⁱ

Reality

Márquez accuses the Colombian government of forcing military service when in reality it is invoking its right to mandate military conscription which is an established international practice. Per the Colombian constitution, Article 216 clearly states that all Colombians are required to take up arms when necessary to defend national independence and public institutions. Additional guidelines such as law 48 (approved in 1993) clearly outline service requirements which range from 12-24 months. The Colombian government is also clear about age recruitment minimums. The Army's minimum age for enlistees is 19, while the Navy's is 16. Those enlisting under the age of 20 are required to present proof of permission granted by either their parents or their guardian. ^{iv}

Conversely, multiple cases documented by Colombian and international news media sources outline forced FARC recruitment of minors in some of the poorest areas of the country such as Caquetá, Antioquia, Tolima, Vaupés, Cauca, and Putumayo. In fact, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) reported data indicating that of the 5,075 children demobilized from guerilla groups between 1992 and 2012, 3,000 pertained to the FARC. This is not to say that all demobilized children were forcefully recruited, but it is a known tactic utilized by the FARC. ^v

The Way Forward

As part of peace talk agreements, Márquez has agreed to release any children under the minimum age of service from FARC ranks, but he stated that there are only 13 fighters younger than 15 years of age currently serving in the group. When questioned by news media source *Caracol* about whether these minors were recruited, Márquez stated that the children are likely

offspring of current FARC members or possibly joined the organization after being orphaned. He also added that contrary to institutional propaganda and false claims made by those looking to delegitimize the FARC, under no circumstances does the organization resort to forced recruitment. In fact, he stated that this practice would actually be counterproductive to FARC beliefs and that anyone who joins the group is able to do so consciously and voluntarily between the ages of 15 and 30.^{vi}

Colombian Governmental Response to FARC Age Minimum

If the FARC does indeed keep its promise to release children, the ICBF will play a direct role in helping demobilized children re-integrate into society through what is known as a “disengagement process.” As stated by ICBF Director Marco Zuluaga, this would ideally involve a trained professional who would be placed in the home with the child to help with the transition. Ultimately, the end goal of any reintegration is to avoid the risk of regression and to help the demobilized child soldier become an active part of society.^{vii} Meanwhile, the Colombian government has welcomed the move made by the FARC to raise the minimum recruitment age from 15 to 17, but President Manuel Santos indicated it is not enough and demanded the release of minors currently in the hands of the FARC. He further expressed angst at why they chose 17 as its age minimum when norms for combat participation are 18 in Colombia. Still, any progress in the ongoing two-year negotiation process is a step in the right direction according to the chief government negotiator.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ “Reclutamiento de menores: volver a los 17 (FARC Minimum Recruitment Age Returns to 17).” El Espectador. Accessed from <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/reclutamiento-de-menores-volver-los-17-articulo-543843>

ⁱⁱ ICBF exige a las Farc cesar reclutamiento de menores (ICBF Urges FARC to Cease Child Recruitment).” Caracol. Accessed from <http://www.caracol.com.co/noticias/actualidad/icbf-exige-a-las-farc-cesar-reclutamiento-de-menores/20150212/nota/2629701.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Siguen las batidas ilegales del Ejército (Illegal Military Recruitment Points Remain Operational).” El Tiempo. Accessed from <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/bogota/siguen-batidas-ilegales-del-ejercito-articulo-547310>

^{iv} Ibid

^v ICBF exige a las Farc cesar reclutamiento de menores (ICBF Urges FARC to Cease Child Recruitment).” Caracol. Accessed from <http://www.caracol.com.co/noticias/actualidad/icbf-exige-a-las-farc-cesar-reclutamiento-de-menores/20150212/nota/2629701.aspx>

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} “El 47 % de los integrantes de las FARC fue reclutado en la niñez (47% of the FARC Were Recruited as Children).” La Semana. Accessed from <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-47-de-los-integrantes-de-las-farc-fueron-reclutados-siendo-ninos/407422-3>