

This article, written by the Regional Security Officer in Bogotá, was reproduced from the January/February 2005 issue of *Update*, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's internal newsletter.

Dynamic and Diverse—Bogotá, Colombia

Colombia is a dynamic and diverse nation, rich in natural resources. Yet for the past four decades, illegal armed groups have evolved into powerful drug trafficking organizations and inflicted widespread violence. The groups include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army, and the United Self Defense Forces, which go by the Spanish acronyms FARC, ELN, and AUC, respectively. The FARC and the ELN have consistently manifested a leftist/communist, anti-American attitude and characterized U.S. Government officials as legitimate targets for kidnappings or assassination. They have kidnapped and killed American citizens in the past. All three groups view narcotics trafficking, kidnappings, and extortion as major sources of revenue.

Over the past several years, however, the Colombian government, with U.S. assistance, has undertaken programs to aggressively fight these groups and protect high-ranking Colombian government officials. One of the most rewarding aspects of serving in the Regional Security Office in Bogotá is our direct role in helping the Colombian government fight these groups.

Anti-Kidnapping Training

The Regional Security Office manages an antikidnapping crisis-response training program through the DS Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program, which received \$25 million to train and equip the Colombian government's military and police antikidnapping units. To date, ATA-trained units have successfully rescued more than 50 kidnapped victims, arresting 206 hostage

takers and killing four. In addition, 14 vehicles were recovered and more than \$7 million in ransom money was seized with only one injury and no deaths to the victims or rescuers.

To conduct the kidnapping training, ATA constructed a state-of-the-art crisis response training facility, which includes a shoot house, breaching area, shooting range, dormitories, gym, and instructor offices. Since August 2003, the program trained seven units and conducted two train-the-trainer programs. In FY 2005, three more units will be trained and two additional train-the-trainer courses will be conducted. By FY 2006, the Colombian government should be able to conduct 95 percent of the training with ATA and security office oversight.

Training for Protective Security Details

Our Regional Security Office also trains and equips Colombian security forces' personal protection details for President Alvaro Uribe, as well as Colombia's Vice President, Minister of Defense, and the mayor of Bogotá. The forces had been under-trained and under-equipped, but since the end of FY 2002, the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, through the embassy's Narcotic Affairs Section, provided more than \$12 million to the security office for this effort. In that time, the security office developed a protective security training and advisory program and hired three additional U.S. advisors to handle the extra training duties. The advisors, personal services contractors, are now assigned to each of

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