

Paraguay Cases, 1970-2012

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torg	gname	onset	min	max
T2498	PARAGUAYAN PEOPLE'S ARMY (EPP)		2010	2012

I. PARAGUAYAN PEOPLE'S ARMY (EPP)

Torg ID: 2498

Min. Group Date: 2010

Max. Group Date: 2012

Onset: NA

Aliases: None

Part 1. Bibliography

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Part 2. Basic Coding

Aliases: Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo (Global Security n.d.)

Group Formation: 1990s (Global Security n.d.), 2005 (first attack)

Group End: 2017 (GTD 2018); 2017

Part 3. Narrative

Group Formation

The EPP first emerged from the Free Fatherland Party or PPL in the 1990s. It is disputed whether the group was formed as a splinter of the Free Fatherland Party or PPL in 1992 or whether it formed around 2000-2001 (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011; Martinez 2013; Ellis 2019, Global Security n.d.).

The EPP is Marxist and emerged in response to growing poverty in Paraguay (Global Security n.d., Gutierrez 2013). They are communist and aim to promote the rights of campesinos in the countryside through total revolution (Global Security n.d., Ellis 2019).

Some speculate the EPP originated in 1992, when a group of trainee priests, were kicked out of seminary for radicalism (Martinez 2013; Ellis 2019, Global Security n.d.). Others argue the armed group is comprised of peasants (United States DOS 2014). Some believe the group was founded in 2005 after the 2004 Celia Cubas kidnapping forced the PPL to disband (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018). After the kidnapping resulted in the death of Cuba, the Paraguayan movement cracked down on the PPL. The remaining members fled and reorganized an armed struggle under the auspices of the EPP (Global Security n.d.).

In 2009, the government raided an EPP camp and discovered it was not as strong as initially believed (Global Security n.d.). As part of the raid, they found a target list and a plan to free imprisoned PPL members (Global Security n.d.). In March 2008, the PPL declared the EPP after an incident where the EPP vandalized a ranch (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018). PPL claim the group was created in February 2006 after police attacked campesinos in Puentesquina (Global Security n.d., Perspectivas 2015).

On September 21, 2005, the PPL kidnapped the daughter of Raul Cubas, a former president, and demanded a ransom amount (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018). When the negotiation attempts failed they killed Cecilia Cubas (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018,). It was reported that six FARC members illegally came to Paraguay and were involved in the kidnapping (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018).

Lugo attempted to form a coalition between non-leftist and leftist groups, which the EPP declared was a betrayal (Freedom House 2012, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). The spokeswoman for the EPP, Carmen Villalba, claims the group looks up to Che Guevara and Régis Debray, Mariscal Francisco Solano López, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez and Karl Marx (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). In 1997, Villalba created a group to rob a bank in San Pedro to help fund the EPP (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). The group resorted to ransom money from kidnapping and have had 27 successful abductions as of 2015 (Freedom House 2012, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). Following the kidnapping of Maria Bordon, the group received 350,000 dollars in ransom (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). Police discovered the PLP was involved and arrested Carmen and Oviedo Villaba after finding Bordon (Global Security n.d.). The group fell off the map but continued to recruit and train (Freedom House 2012). During a raid in 2003, the police captured Carmen Villaba (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). Inside the house, they found a mass number of weapons and gear (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). Carmen Villalba escaped prison in 2004 but were caught during a police roadblock check (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). The rebels are known to steal cattle and rob business and traveling salesman (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011).

Geography

On June 6, 2015 in the Manitoba Colony, the EPP conducted an armed assault on a Mennonite farmer (GTD 2018). They warned members of the mennonite community to be more environmental and claimed responsibility (GTD 2018). On August 18, 2016 in Posadas, Argentina, they kidnapped Daniel Wu (GTD 2018). They claimed responsibility and he escaped unharmed the same day (GTD 2018). On September 28, 2016 in the Yay Yau district, EPP set fire to three tractors and there were no casualties (GTD 2018). The EPP did not claim responsibility (GTD 2018). On October 12, 2016 in North

Paraguay, EPP abducted a farmer along with the Mariscal Lopez Army and there was no claim for responsibility (GTD 2018). EPP conducted various attacks throughout Tacauti (GTD 2018). On December 20, 2016, the EPP set fire to construction machinery of a private business and claimed responsibility (GTD 2018). On August 21, 2017, the EPP abducted Franz Wieder, a Mennonite settler and released him following ransom payment (GTD 2018). On October 1, 2017, the EPP set fire to farm equipment and claimed responsibility for the attack (GTD 2018). On October 2, 2017, the EPP set fire to farm equipment and did not claim responsibility for the attack (GTD 2018). The EPP has conducted numerous attacks in Arroyito. On August 27, 2016, the EPP launched multiple explosive devices near an armed forces patrol (GTD 2018). They opened fire on the patrol and 8 soldiers died (GTD 2018). On September 3, 2016, the attackers shot Justo Gonzales Bogado (GTD 2018). He was a security guard working on a ranch (GTD 2018). On April 6, 2017, the EPP abducted a security guard, Fabio Ramon Duarate Candia (GTD 2018). He was killed the same day and video was released 11 days later (GTD 2018). On April 26, 2017, the EPP shot and killed a security guard, Braullio Davalso in Cuero Fresco (GTD 2018). They claimed he was a criminal thug who deserved justice (GTD 2018). EPP also conducted multiple attacks in Santa Rosa, Rio Verde (GTD 2018). On July 5, 2016, there was an attack on irrigation system using firearms and there was no claim of responsibility (GTD 2018). On July 27, 2016, EPP attacked La Yea Ranch and set fire to tractor and cargo truck while holding a farm employee captive for hours (GTD 2018). They also kidnapped a 17 year old boy who was released a year later (GTD 2018). On January 8, 2017, they conducted an armed assault on mennonite farmers (GTD 2018). Two settlers were killed after failed abduction attempt (GTD 2018).

On March 17, 2017, they abducted a Mennonite settler, Gerado Wall Rempel from his farm (GTD 2018). The victim was released unharmed the next day (GTD 2018). On September 1, 2017, the EPP abducted Bernard Blatz Friesse (GTD 2018). He is a Mennonite farmer and was released the following year for ransom payment (GTD 2018). On September 25 (GTD 2018). 2017, the EPP attacked the Santa Marta Ranch (GTD 2018). There were no casualties (GTD 2018). The group claimed responsibility and demanded the owner provide four animals to the indigenous community (GTD 2018). In Azotey, on September 29, 2016, the EPP abducted Clara Viocrira, a ranch laborer (GTD 2018). The hostage was released unharmed the next day (GTD 2018). Also in Azotey, on September 30, 2016, the EPP took three hostages from the same ranch and released them as well (GTD 2018). They operate in the northern part of the Department of San Pedro and the southern part of the Department of Concepcion (Global Security n.d.). The Department of Sand Pedro and Caaguazu are strongly anti government (Global Security n.d.). The border area between Concepcion and San Pedro and the hilly areas of the country are known for these types of attacks and threats (Global Security n.d.).

Organizational Structure

There are disputed reports on the number of followers. Some reports allege up to 300 members at an unknown date (Global Security. n.d.). Others report only twenty to a couple dozen followers (Global Security n.d.; Economist 2010). EPP is led by Osmar Martinez, Carmen Villalba, Osvaldo Villalba, Magna Meza, and Manuel Cristaldo Mieres (Perspectivas 2015). Martinez was sentenced for 35 years in jail following Cubas kidnapping (The Guardian 2015). While Villalba, Meza, and Mieres are wanted for the kidnapping and murder (Insight Crime 2011, The Guardian 2015). The belief that presidential candidate Fernando Lugo had ties to the EPP led to benefits for the Colorado government (New York Times 2013).

Some speculate the EPP originated in 1992, when a group of trainee priests, were kicked out of seminary for radicalism (Martinez 2013; Ellis 2019, Global Security n.d.). Others argue the armed group is comprised of peasants (United States DOS 2014) .

The EPP receives funding through extortion of estate owners for a tax (Global Security n.D). The EPP lacks training and funding for its members (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). It is believed to have 60 armed successful members (Global Security). They receive a majority of their funding through ransom payments (Global Security n.d.). The state responded by deploying 3,300 troops and 300 police officers to the north where the EPP operates following the kidnapping of Lindstrom in 2008 (Freedom House 2012). They started giving rewards to people who had information on the EPP (Ellis 2019). They had a small military budget which resulted in ineffective military action (Ellis 2019).

External Ties

They are tied to the Armed Peasant Association (Insight Crime 2011, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). The government claims the group has strong connections to FARC and has received training from Commander Santiago (Insight Crime 2011, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). There is speculation the group's leaders also received training from the FPMR in Chile (McDermott 2015). The PPL disbanded and its members formed part of the EPP (Insight Crime 2011, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). On September 21, 2005, the PPL kidnapped the daughter of Raul Cubas, a former president, and demanded a ransom amount (United States DOS 2018). When the negotiation attempts failed, they killed Cecilia Cubas (Insight Crime 2011, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). It was reported that six FARC members illegally came to Paraguay and were involved in the kidnapping (Freedom House 2012). The group is believed to have ties to the FARC in Colombia (Ellis 2019).

The government claims the group has strong connections to FARC and has received training from Commander Santiago (The Guardian 2015). They are also supported by peasant groups, drug traffickers, large landholders, and corrupt authorities (Global Security n.d.). There have been links to the First Catarinense Group, a Brazilian transnational romanize group, and it is believed that the leaders of the group and EPP met in prison (Global Security n.d.).

Oviedo Villalba is the center of the EPP and they are the leaders (Global Security n.d.).

In

the field, Osvaldo Villalba took charge of the high profile kidnappings. The second and third in command were Mieres and Magna Meza (Perspectivas 2015). They operate in close relations with the Northern Peasant Organization (Perspectivas 2015). The group is believed to have split in August 2014 when there was infighting in the group (United States DOS 2018). The splinter group was formed called the Armed Peasant Association which has a suspected 13 members (United States DOS 2018). They do not have the same power the EPP once did (United States DOS 2018).

Group Outcome

In 2008, rancher Luis Lindsron was captured and released upon a ransom payment (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). People claiming EPP attacked a small military outpost in December 31, 2008 (Global Security n.d., Gutierrez 2013). The next day, the government responded with roadblocks and the Joint Rapid Response Unit doing immediate searches (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). People were sent to Tacuati to search for the EPP members (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011).

President Lugo in 2009 identified the EPP as an intimidation group rather than a security threat (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). In October 15, 2009, fourteen members of the group attacked the ranch of Fidel Zacala and kidnapped him (Global Security n.d.). They demanded a ransom and released him upon receiving it (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 201). As kidnappings and attacks continued, the criticism of the government increased (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2014). The government created the Joint Task Force in response to the EPP (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). The EPP was involved in a series of kidnappings in April 2014, July 2014, and January 2015 (Global Security n.d.). In December 2015, an FTC member apparently killed an EPP member, Julian Espinola (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). In August 2015, EPP kidnapped Abraham Ferr, a national farmer (Global Security n.d.). They also captured his employees and released them (Global Security n.d., Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011).

He was a Mennonite settler and his location is unknown (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). On July 5th 2014, the EPP kidnapped a police officer, Edelio Moringio (Global Security). He disappeared while hunting and was offered in return for imprisoned EPP leaders (Global Security n.d.). It is the longest kidnapping in the

country's history (Global Security). (Global Security n.d.). It is estimated that before 2015, the EPP had killed more than 50 people, more than half who were civilians (Global Security n.d.). The EPP does not often have attacks reported because of a distrust between the government and civilians (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). Civilians believe the development of the FTC was for the monetary benefit of the President who has not adequately dealt with the group (Global Security n.d., New York Times 2013). It is believed that the government participates in drug trafficking that the EPP says they're involved in (Global Security n.d., New York Times 2013). People believe that President Lugo's religious history has made him ineffective in dealing with the EPP (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). However, he has released 2,000 troops to deal with the EPP (Global Security n.d., The Guardian 2015). It is unknown if the group has ties to First Capital Command or Red command, two major Brazilian drug trafficking organizations (Global Security, Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2011). EPP has escalated from their operations in 2010 to 2011 (Global Security n.d., The Guardian 2015). During this time, they conducted many bombings that had five or six casualties throughout Paraguay (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). In August 27, 2016, an attack on military patrol left 8 soldiers dead (Global Security n.d., The Guardian 2015). The attackers stole US rifles, body armor, and personal belongings (Global Security n.d., Insight Crime 2011). President moved to Horqueta to help the Joint Task Force fight the EPP (Global Security, United States DOS 2018). With him was the Minister of the Interior, commander of the Armed Forces, and commander of National Police (Global Security, Insight Crime 2011). He committed himself to fighting the rebels who are communist (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018). The administration identifies the EPP as terrorists (Global Security n.d., United States DOS 2018). The last known attack by the group was in 2017 (GTD 2018).

Notes for Iris:

- disputed origin story might be reconcilable. The original idea seemed likely formed in 1992 and they conducted attacks in the early 2000s but the leaders didn't state the group exist until 2008 (the PPL claimed responsibility for the attacks)
- what are the main differences between the EPP and the PPL? The PPL had more limited political aims and was falling apart. EPP had similar core attributes and leadership.
- state's initial response not that good. The president discounted the group over and over despite military clashes.
- the joint task force to deal with the group was not taken as a serious response because the president was just trying to score political points. Some suggest he then turns from underexaggerating to overexaggerating the nature of the threat and deploying a disproportionate force (3000 soldiers to 20 fighters?)
- paraguay military is very weak and ineffective if they're not able to combat 20 people