

Militancy/Terrorism



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Colombia Alert: Car bomb explodes near police station in El Remolino, Taminango, Narino on June 21; likely executed by EMC-FARC's Francos Benavides front, signals expansion of attacks beyond Cauca, VdC

Current Situation

- On June 21, a vehicle loaded with explosives detonated near the Puerto Remolino police station in El Remolino, in Taminango, Narino at around 18:40 (local time).
- Narino governor, Luis Alfonso Escobar, stated that three individuals, including two civilians and a police officer, were killed in the attack, while nine were injured.
- Separately, President Gustavo Petro and Minister of Defense, Ivan Velasquez, presented 'Mision Cauca' a strategy that seeks to guarantee security in Cauca department. The strategy will reportedly focus on strengthening military and police operations in the department to neutralize organized armed groups, as well as illicit economies associated primarily with drug trafficking, the illicit extraction of minerals and extortion.

Assessments & Forecast

1. Although no group has taken responsibility for the explosion as of writing, the attack can be attributed to the Estado Mayor Central-Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (EMC-FARC)

dissident group, specifically the Franco Benavides front. This faction reportedly has a stronghold along Narino's borders with Cauca, including in Taminango. Besides, the attack aligns with the Ivan Mordisco-led EMC-FARC's intensified offensive against law enforcement personnel in southwest Colombia since May. The May-June escalations were registered after the ceasefire was withdrawn in the departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca (VdC), and Narino on March 17 and after Mordisco announced withdrawal from the Paz Total dialogue on April 16. The proximity of the car bomb to the Puerto Remolino police station further lends credence to the attack being a part of the EMC-FARC's offensives against security forces.

2. Moreover, the incident is notable given that almost all attacks against military and police personnel in southwest Colombia have been reported in [Cauca and Valle del Cauca](#). This illustrates a potential expansion of EMC-FARC attacks into Narino as well. The proximity of Puerto Remolino to Cauca's border, with the nearest major town being Popayan in Cauca, a region consistently beset by EMC-FARC violence, underscores this steady expansion of the group's aggression against the state.
3. **FORECAST:** With EMC-FARC factions demonstrating their intent to expand their attacks into Narino, low-to-medium scale explosions are likely to recur in the department. As seen in Cauca and Valle del Cauca, police stations and military bases will remain the preferred targets, with motorcycle and car bombs as the primary methods of attack. Additionally, the group has also enhanced their armed capabilities by acquiring explosive drones, as seen in June 19 reports indicating that 19 drone attacks were carried out between April and June in Cauca. Given this, similar drone-led explosive attacks in Narino cannot be discounted, given their effectiveness in minimizing direct confrontation.
4. **FORECAST:** Consequently, in the coming weeks, a bolstered security presence can be expected in Puerto Remolino and other rural and semi-urban areas along the border between Narino and Cauca, anticipating a potential recurrence of similar explosive attacks. Increased security measures will likely include patrolling and setting up checkpoints along highways, particularly the section of Panamericana highway connecting Pasto, Narino with Popayan, which passes through El Remolino. Consequently, this will likely lead to an increased likelihood of armed confrontations between security forces and EMC-FARC militants.
5. **FORECAST:** EMC-FARC operatives are likely to use civilians to pressurize security forces to withdraw from the area, given precedent. This is supported by the March 3 attack and subsequent expulsion of Ejercito Nacional (EN) army forces conducting anti-drug trafficking operations in Cumbitara, Narino, which authorities attributed to the Franco Benavidez front. However, the likelihood of such incidents is limited, as these tactics were primarily used to circumvent the now-withdrawn ceasefire. Therefore, EMC-FARC operatives will likely continue to pursue more brazen attacks amid heightened tensions between the group and the government.

Recommendations

1. Avoid non-essential travel to rural and semi-urban areas of Narino, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca, on June 22 and in the coming days given the heightened threat of attacks perpetrated by EMC-FARC.
2. Avoid all travel in the vicinity of military and police establishments in the aforementioned departments due to the elevated threat of retaliatory violence.
3. Those continuing with essential operations in rural and semi-urban areas of the aforementioned departments are advised to enhance their private security teams to protect their facilities and personnel.