ELN post-ceasefire Offensive Suggests Internal Divisions over Peace Process
The ELN launched a national offensive following the end of their ceasefire with the government, attacking security forces and oil industry infrastructure around the country. After a bombing in the city of Barranquilla killed five police, for which the ELN Urban War Front (Frente de Guerra Urbana) claimed responsibility, the government suspended peace talks.
The statement issued by the front suggested the bombing was an attempt to take the guerrillas evident national post-ceasefire strategy of showing they can continue to wage war while they talk peace into the urban areas, where the guerrillas have had little influence for many years. However, other factors hint at a more disruptive strategy in play. The repercussions of such an attack on the peace process was entirely predictable, while comments later made by the ELN’s chief negotiator alias “Pablo Beltran” suggested the pro-peace faction in the guerrilla leadership did not authorize or even have advance knowledge of the attack. This raises the possibility that the attacks’ disastrous impact on the peace process was fully intended, and that the bombings were a statement that may have been targeted as much at the pro-peace factions within the ELN leadership as at the Colombian government.

**Turf wars and leadership woes could signal end of the Urabeños as a national force**

- The Urabeños’ national leadership was further weakened by the surrender of Eduard Luis Vargas Gutiérrez, alias Pipón, the brother of killed Urabeños second-in-command Roberto Vargas Gutiérrez, alias “Gavilan,” and the arrest of alias “Leo,” who is reportedly family to maximum leader Dairo Antonio Úsuga alias ‘Otoniel.

- The Urabeños hold over key drug trafficking territories in Bajo Cauca, Antioquia, and San Jose de Uré, Cordoba is being challenged by local criminal groups that previously operated as semi-autonomous members of the Urabeños franchise.

- There are ever fewer reasons to obey the orders of a distant and weak leadership, and even less to kick up the percentage of local profits they often demand, and these new criminal turf wars could well mark the first violent throes of the disintegration of the Urabeños as a national network united under one command.

**Ex-FARC mafia violence crosses border with attack on Ecuador police**

Authorities in Ecuador and Colombia are working to track down former FARC fighter Walter Patricio Arisala Vernaza, alias “Guacho,” who they blame for
• A car bomb attack against a police station that injured 28 people in the Ecuadorean state of Esmeraldas has been blamed on former FARC fighter Walter Patricio Arisala Vernaza, alias “Guacho,” who reportedly heads an ex-FARC mafia cell of approximately 50 fighters that is seeking control of coca crops, laboratories and trafficking routes through Nariño.

• The attack represents an alarming warning that the threat posed by ex-FARC mafia cells could easily expand into Ecuador, which is a key departure point for cocaine produced in south Colombia and the country of origin for numerous ex-FARC guerrillas in the region.

Are Mexican cartels seeking to take over drug trafficking in Colombia?

• Media reports suggest Mexican organized crime groups are seeking to take control of the Colombian drug trade after their local partners failed to meet their “quotas,” and have established a presence in nine departments across the country.

• It is highly unlikely that the Mexicans are attempting to directly take and control territory as this would come at a high cost and would exponentially increase their exposure to law enforcement. What is more likely is that the increasingly fluid and fragmented nature of the Colombian cocaine trafficking world and the loss of reliable partners from among the demobilized FARC and the increasingly fractured Urabeños has prompted the Mexicans to take on a more hands on role in securing supply chains and coordinating production and trafficking activities in Colombia.

Security Forces Reinforcements Could Spark Trafficking Migration

• The security forces are ramping up their efforts in two of Colombia’s most violence ridden drug trafficking territories, deploying 2,100 more police and military will be deployed in Choco, and bolstering the Joint Task Force Hercules in Tumaco with reinforcements, new leadership and a special forces deployment.

• The territorial trafficking groups in these areas will have little choice but tough out the increased security forces pressure but the growing operating risks and
higher possibility of interdiction of shipments could lead to the international drug traffickers that employ these groups to seek out alternative production zones and trafficking routes.