

**MAY 2018**

# **The Naya: the disputed drug trafficking route**

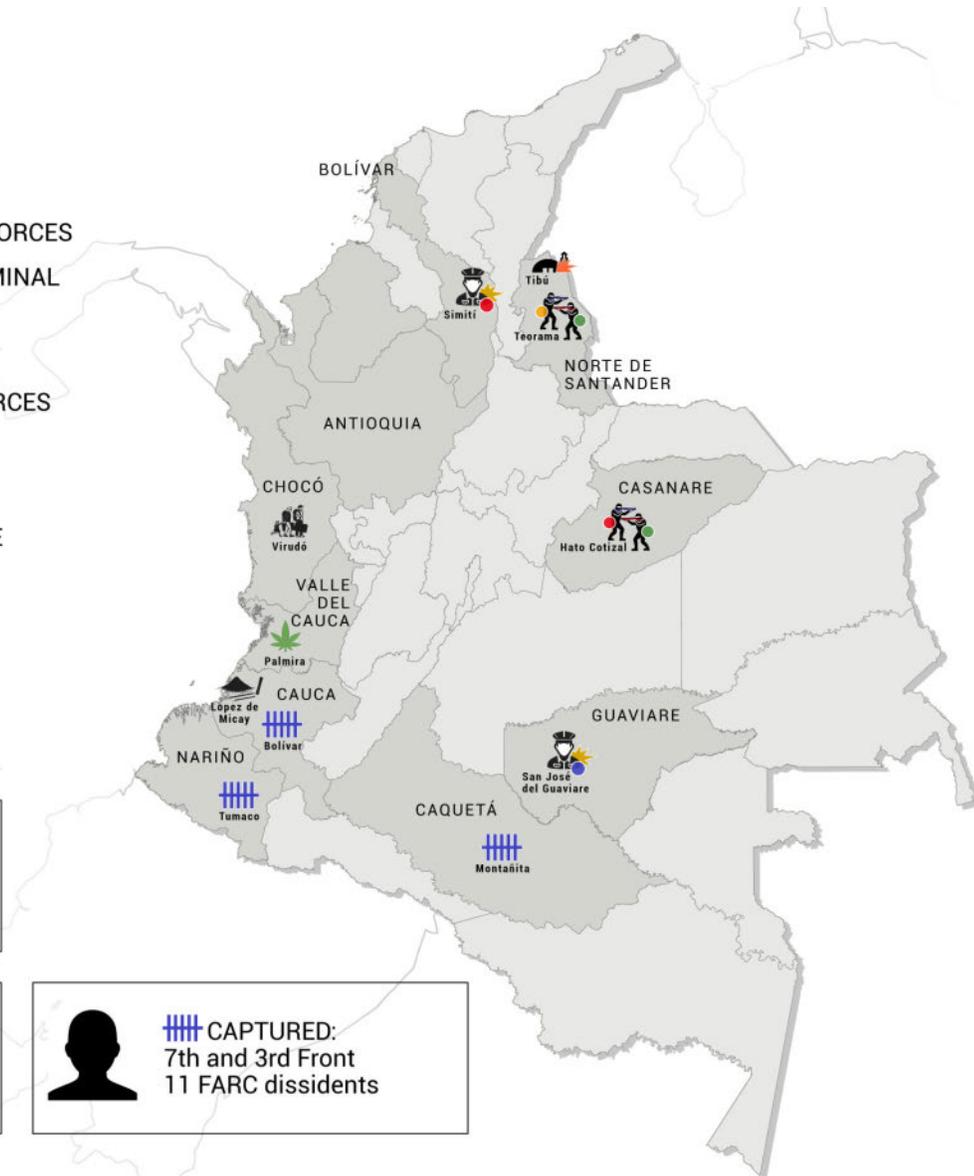


The Naya is a rural sub-region between the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca that is home to coca crops, cocaine production laboratories, and an international drug trafficking route. Due to its strategic importance, dissident groups of the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN) violently compete for control of the territory.

### Events in May 2018

- ELN
- EX-FARC
- URABEÑOS
- EPL
- SECURITY FORCES
- OTHER CRIMINAL ACTORS

-  ATTACK AGAINST SECURITY FORCES
-  COCAINE SEIZURE
-  DESTRUCTION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING INFRASTRUCTURE
-  MASSIVE DISPLACEMENT
-  MARIJUANA SEIZURE
-  COMBAT





**|||| CAPTURED:**  
Edier Cortés, alias "Mi Grande" of "Gente del Orden"



**|||| CAPTURED:**  
alleged dissident leader of the 6th Front, Samuel Javier Yotengo Yafue, alias Mordisco.



**|||| CAPTURED:**  
7th and 3rd Front  
11 FARC dissidents

The Naya and Micay rivers intertwine, connecting the Western Andes in the municipality of Suárez, Cauca, with the pacific coast port of Buenaventura in Valle del Cauca. This connection is known as The Naya Route.

Suárez, as one of the top marijuana producing regions in the country and one of the principle coca producing municipalities in Cauca, marks the beginning of the Naya drug trafficking route. The path of this river enables drug traffickers to move cocaine through every phase of the trafficking economy: production, processing, collection, and international export to Central America via the Pacific coast.

For this reason, several criminal groups maintain a presence in the Naya region. The first group to appear in the area was the United Force of the Pacific (Fuerzas Unidas del Pacific - FUP), made up of dissident elements of the FARC's 30th Front that did not participate in the peace process. Upon arrival, the group forged alliances with drug traffickers in the region to guarantee the free flow of cocaine.

This changed with the arrival of a second dissident group. Calling itself the Defenders of the Pacific (Defensores del Pacifico), the group arrived from López de Micay around the end of May. Although there is little clarity as to the group's identity, it appears to be composed of around 200 fighters.

Meanwhile, in the south of Valle del Cauca, reports surfaced alleging that 80 EPL guerrillas had arrived in the area to fight for control of the coveted route.

This dynamic has generated a grave security crisis. In May, four people were reportedly kidnapped in Alto Naya, another three members of an indigenous reservation were murdered, and multiple families were displaced from rural areas due to armed incursions.

## **1. Iván Márquez implicated in drug trafficking investigations**

- The DEA is investigating Iván Márquez along with Jesús Santrich and his nephew Marlon Marín as part of case involving a conspiracy to traffic 10 tons of drugs into the United States, the Wall Street Journal reported.
- Just a few days before The Wall Street Journal report was made public, Iván Márquez left Bogotá for the Training and Reincorporation Space (Espacio Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación – ETCR) in Miravalle, Caquetá. Márquez claimed his departure was the result of persecution against him, Jesús Santrich, and his confidant, alias “El Paisa”.
- From the ETCR, Márquez has demanded Santrich, who is currently imprisoned, be liberated and has called for judicial protection and the accelerated implementation of economic programs for former FARC members. He has also renounced his seat in Congress.
- Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich, both fierce critics of the peace process, have used the Colombian government’s shortcoming to justify their actions.
- The fact that a leader as important as Iván Márquez, widely supported by the former FARC rank-and-file, is an outspoken critic of the peace process heightens the risk that those close to him might defect to the dissidence. Márquez has even warned that if the government does not keep its end of the bargain, the peace process could fail.

## **2. Assassinations of ex-FARC combatants**

- The number of ex -FARC members assassinated in the first four months of 2018 has risen to 22, demonstrating the high risk that this population faces.
- The primary groups responsible for these attacks have been the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN), the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación – EPL), and the Urabeños.

The most concerning areas are the departments of Antioquía, Nariño, Bolívar, Cauca, and Arauca.

- There are three major risks associated with these assassinations. 1) Members of the FARC political party play an important role in the implementation of the peace process and the related economic programs. 2) The assassinations, sometimes within the ETCRs themselves, promote a perception of insecurity among demobilized combatants. 3) This perception of insecurity and fear can lead former FARC fighters to abandon the peace process and bolster the ranks of the dissidence.
- If the government fails to protect demobilized combatants it will send a grave message, not only to former FARC fighters, but also to illegal groups like the ELN that are currently engaged in peace talks.

### **3. The ELN and EPL's war for Catatumbo continues unabated**

- The war between the ELN and the EPL for control over Norte de Santander's strategic Catatumbo region is concentrated in the municipalities of Tibú, El Tarra, Teorama, Convención, San Calixto, Ocaña, Playa de Belén, Ábrego and Hacarí.
- Between March 14 and April 30, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations (Oficina para la Coordinación de Asuntos Humanitarios de la ONU – OCHA) reported that the conflict has affected 154,000 people in 11 municipalities, leaving 120,000 with limited mobility and restricted access to basic necessities.
- Violent confrontations between both groups and members of the National Army are a constant. Still, none of the illegal groups appear to have suffered significant force reductions, which could be partially due to their ability to move between Norte de Santander and neighboring Venezuela.
- Colombia's Defense Minister has denounced the presence of ELN camps in the Venezuelan states of Apure and Zulia.

- With the FARC's departure from Catatumbo, the region presents a host of security challenges from the implementation of crop substitutions programs to the fight against international drug trafficking.

## 4. Gang Crisis in Medellín's Comuna 13

- Around the end of April, a spate of violent clashes broke out between gangs in Medellín's notorious Comuna 13 neighborhood. The violence began shortly after authorities captured Cristian Camilo Mazo Castañeda, alias "Sombra" or "Cabo", leader of the drug trafficking gang Robledo.
- The rising insecurity in Comuna 13 seems to be the result of a criminal reorganization between gangs known as "combos" linked to the Oficina de Envigado. The capture of key figures in the Oficina de Envigado leadership like alias "Tom" and "Juancito" are at the root of the various disputes.
- The possible participation of the Urabeños in the dispute over Comuna 13 is likely to exacerbate insecurity. Comuna 13 is strategically important given its geographic connection with Urabá, a subregion of Antioquía through which cocaine is shipped to Central America.
- Rising violence throughout Medellín has left more than 200 dead so far this month, and Comuna 13, the main focus of this violence, has become militarized.

---

*We encourage readers to copy and distribute our work for non-commercial purposes, provided that it is attributed to InSight Crime in the byline, with a link to the original at both the top and bottom of the article. Check the [Creative Commons](#) website for more details of how to share our work, and please send us an email if you use an article.*