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COM 312 Communication Networks in Social Media

Cigar Anyone?

Terrorists, insurgents or violent nonstate actors such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) requires one to question the validity of their ideology. Why the FARC came to be in 1948 and survived as long as it has could be compared to the formation and existence of the Mafia in the 9th century when Arab forces ruled Sicily. Both the FARC and the Mafia were in disagreement with the majority rule of their countries. Their methods of violent actions of protest are motivated by threatened values that are in contradiction to how they believe their society should practice. Their actions present in response to the strain imposed by military actions, external influences, and other challenges to their ideology (Thaler, 2013). While this may appear as a defense of their actions one has to recognize that the brutal actions of resistance, while repugnant is *their* method of defending what they believe to be true. Though the original reasons for the FARC were to fight the state, it had gone beyond the ideology. Their involvement in the drug trade helped finance their operations that may also have contributed to their violent means. These same approaches are taken on by terrorists of all kinds, including those currently in the news. Terrorists seem always to fail at what they are after, all the while providing strength and determination to those they oppose.

An analysis of “Un Millón de Voces Contra las FARC” (UMVCF) and the social movement it implemented, suggests it aligns best with *Structural-Strain Theory*¹. The Columbian citizens were experiencing *structural conduciveness* – they believed their society had problems caused by more than forty years of confrontational persecution by the FARC. They also were undergoing *structural strain* by being deprived of their ability to live in peace. They

were in constant fear of kidnappings and murders. After decades of fear and no reasonable solution to their differences the people needed an alternative *solution* to the problems they were experiencing. Rather than continue to wait for the government to effect change, they chose to act on their own. Moreover, once an alternative solution was devised they needed a method to *spread the solution to others* in their nation in a swift and efficient manner. The *precipitating factor* in accelerating the people's discontent and desire to eliminate the FARC came about after a series of failed exchange on a humanitarian level between President Chavez of Venezuela, the Columbian Government, and the FARC. When duplicity exists in a negotiation, it can never result in a valid agreement. This was the case with the FARC; they had promised to deliver something they did not have--hostages. Moreover, while the negotiations failed, it did offer an indication that the FARC was open to potential change. Their botched means of negotiating indicated a weakness in their ideology, exposing chinks in their armor, and providing an opportunity for a different kind of opposition to crush them.

Rosinrance in an exchange with Hamlet is heard saying, "many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills" (Shakespeare, 1600). A modern day translation reveals that the keyboard is more powerful than the shoulder mounted grenade launcher. Oscar Morales embraces this non-violent opposition to the FARC in launching the UMVCF. The *One Million Voices Against the FARC*, on Facebook and declares "We DON'T want more FARC." His message resonated with the people, and they joined in and helped mobilize the movement. By repeating the message, and providing a forum for people to share their experiences and express their opposition the UMVCF grew rapidly to over a quarter million people within Columbia and 40 other countries. Because neither the FARC nor the Columbian government could control the social media outlet, the voice of the people, quickly and powerfully mobilized others to action. There were some who still

feared the FARC. The numbers of Columbians who would now view the FARC as criminals instead of a political organization was significant enough to weaken the already deteriorating FARC organization. By utilizing social media, the UMVCF mobilized a physical protest march on February 4th, 2008 that “was one of the biggest civil events in Columbian history,” (Corman, Trethewey, & Justus, 2008).

Five months later the UMVCF organized another march coinciding with Columbia’s National Day where the people demanded the FARC release all hostages they had in captivity. By this time the FARC had lost power and constituents and the people had regained their society and were no longer deprived of their ability to live without fear. This social movement brought together people who were connected through a shared interest for peace and utilized social media to affect social change.

The actions engaged by the FARC, the UMVCF, and the people of Columbia and around the world support that their actions best fit well within the *Structural-Strain Theory*. Today the FARC has less than 20,000 members, is still a funded terrorist group in Columbia and continues to entertain negotiations with the Columbian government for the exchange of kidnapped victims. During the week of September 25, 2015, Columbia’s President Juan Manuel Santos met with FARC rebel leader, Rodrigo Londono in Cuba for a negotiation. Santos said, “I have learned to believe in the sincerity of what the FARC wants,” adding that he believed that, “they want to lay down their arms and continue their struggle through peaceful means” (Neuman, 2015). Is it coincidental that while the United States is negotiating normalization with Cuba, Columbia is negotiating with FARC in Havana? Four groups are attempting to solve half a century of differences in the same town. Hopefully something good will come of it.

References

- Corman, S., Trethewey, A., & Justus, Z. (2008). Self-Organization in the 2008 anti-FARC Marches: How a Facebook Page Self- Organized a Worldwide Protest Involving Millions.
- Neuman, W. (2015, September 25). Colombia President Says Peace Talks Overcame Late Surprise. Retrieved November 18, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/americas/colombias-president-says-peace-talks-overcame-late-surprise.html?ref=topics&_r=0
- Thaler, D. E., Arroyo Center, Books24x7, I., Rand Corporation, & United States. Army. (2013). *Improving the U.S. military's understanding of unstable environments vulnerable to violent extremist groups: Insights from social science*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

ⁱ *Structural-Strain Theory* proposes six factors that encourage social movement development.

1. structural conduciveness - people come to believe their society has problems
2. structural strain - people experience deprivation
3. growth and spread of a solution - a solution to the problems people are experiencing is proposed and spreads
4. precipitating factors - discontent usually requires a catalyst (often a specific event) to turn it into a social movement
5. lack of social control - the entity that is to be changed must be at least somewhat open to the change; if the social movement is quickly and powerfully repressed, it may never materialize
6. mobilization - this is the actual organizing and active component of the movement; people do what needs to be done

This theory is also subject to circular reasoning as it incorporates, at least in part, deprivation theory and relies upon it, and social/structural strain for the underlying motivation of social movement activism. However, social movement activism is, like in the case of deprivation theory, often the only indication that there was strain or deprivation.