

2005

Puerto Rican Revolutionary Organizations

Pedro Caban

University at Albany, State Univeristy of New York, pcaban@albany.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar



Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caban, Pedro, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Organizations" (2005). *Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship*. 21.

http://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar/21

This Encyclopedia Entry is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.

Puerto Rican opposition to U.S. colonial rule has taken many forms. Clandestine armed revolutionary opposition has been one violent form of resistance. Puerto Ricans have often used in their struggle for independence from both Spain and the United States. As long as some Puerto Ricans hold the belief that their country is under illegal armed occupation, armed resistance against the United States will erupt. The federal government is aware of the intensity and durability of these political beliefs and will be vigilant and quick to use its legal and police powers to eliminate the *independentista* challenge to its authority.

See also Lebrón, Lolita; **Puerto Rican Nationalist Uprising and Puerto Rican Revolutionary Organizations.**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fernández, Ronald. *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992.
- Fuentes, Annette. "It's Time to Bring Them Home." *North American Congress on Latin America* (NACLA) 30, no. 3 (November–December 1996): 6–9.
- Galvin, Kevin. "Clinton Gives Clemency to Activists." www.prisonactivist.org/quesalga/clinton-offer.html
- Susler, Jan. "Unreconstructed Revolutionaries." In *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, edited by Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez, pp. 144–152. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

PEDRO CABÁN

PUERTO RICAN REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATIONS. The Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN) and the Boricua-Macheteros Popular Army (Macheteros) are two of the most prominent clandestine revolutionary organizations to have fought for Puerto Rico's political independence. However, they were not the first groups to pursue clandestine armed resistance to U.S. colonial rule. The Nationalist Party, which virtually ceased to function by the late 1950s, was also a revolutionary organization, but its strategy was one of overt confrontation with the colonial authorities.

The Commandos of Armed Liberation (CAL) was the first clandestine organization committed to waging armed revolutionary resistance in Puerto Rico. This highly secretive group was established in 1967 and took responsibility for a series of bombings of U.S. businesses that "exploited Puerto Rican workers" and of hotels in San Juan that catered to the tourist trade (*Arm the Spirit*, interview with Cortes). The Independent Revolutionary Movement in Arms (in Spanish, *Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario Armado* or MIRA), a parallel clandestine organization, was also formed in 1967 and took credit for a number of bombings in New York City. MIRA and CAL merged to form FALN in 1974. FALN and the Macheteros, which was established in 1978 and led by Félix Ojeda

Ríos, may have operated independently of each other until September 1979, when these clandestine organizations joined forces.

FALN and the Macheteros are committed to achieving Puerto Rico's independence through armed revolutionary struggle. FALN called for unifying "all necessary forms of revolutionary struggle . . . to overturn colonialism through a protracted people's war for independence" (*Arm the Spirit*). Clandestine revolutionary movements such as FALN justify the use of violence to combat the violence that they believe the United States inflicts on Puerto Rico through military oppression and economic exploitation. The revolutionary movements draw on United Nations Resolution 1514 to justify their actions. The resolution asserts that the "subjugation of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights" and that "all armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease to enable them to exercise . . . their right to complete independence." These clauses are seen as applicable to Puerto Rico and constitute the legal basis for revolutionary activity to attain sovereignty.

Since FALN and the Macheteros believe that colonialism is a crime against humanity, they repudiate U.S. colonial authority as illegal, and advocate all available means, including armed resistance, to gain independence for Puerto Rico. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recognizes that FALN and the Macheteros characterize their activities as "acts of war" against invading forces and that, when arrested, they consider themselves to be prisoners of war who must be treated as such according to the Geneva Conventions. The vast majority of Puerto Ricans do not support the use of violence to compel the United States to change their nation's political status into either a state of the Union or an independent republic.

The FBI, operating through COINTELPRO and in unison with Puerto Rican police forces, has waged a particularly aggressive campaign to disrupt the activities of legitimate independence organizations. COINTELPRO is the acronym of a domestic counterintelligence program developed by the FBI to infiltrate and disrupt dissident and revolutionary organizations. The FBI has routinely violated the civil rights of Puerto Ricans in its determination to undermine movements and organizations—legal as well as clandestine—that struggle for Puerto Rican independence. The FBI's virtual sole purpose for operating in Puerto Rico appears to have been to hunt down and prosecute nationalists, socialists, and independentistas. Advocates for revolutionary resistance argue that under these conditions open calls for overthrow of U.S. colonial rule are politically suicidal. FALN member Alberto Rodríguez notes that the organization "developed clandestine methods of organization in order to neutralize U.S. government

repression and to further the struggle for Puerto Rican independence and socialism" (*Arm the Spirit*).

Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional

FALN is credited with seventy-two bombings and scores of incendiary attacks, attempted bombings, and bomb threats. Most of FALN's bombings were symbolic—"operations that caused no loss of life but were designed to cause extensive damage and thus attract attention" (Sater, p. 6). Its activities were confined mostly to New York City and Chicago, and the targets were government agencies and financial corporations. In a communiqué dated April 3, 1975, FALN warned that the bombings of "Yanki corporations are the continuation of the offensive aimed at gaining the independence of Puerto Rico and the release of the five political prisoners" (Kihss). The political prisoners were Nationalist Party members jailed for the attempted assassination on November 1, 1950, of President Harry Truman and an attack on the House of Representatives in 1954. However, FALN also conducted retaliatory operations, such as the January 24, 1975, noontime bombing of Fraunces Tavern in the financial district of New York City that killed four people and injured sixty three others. FALN announced that it had carried out the operation in "retaliation for the CIA ordered bomb that murdered Angel Luis Chavonnier and Eddie Ramos," two independence supporters, at the Mayaguez rally on January 11, 1975 (McFadden). In Communiqué No. 3, which New York City police found near the bomb site, FALN claimed that these murders were evidence that "the Yanki government is trying to terrorize and kill our people to intimidate us from seeking our rightful independence from colonialism" (*New York Times* 1975, p. 10). FALN was considerably weakened after fourteen of its members were arrested by Chicago police and the FBI between 1980 and 1983 and convicted of seditious conspiracy and other charges. During their trials, FALN members rejected the authority of the federal courts and declared that they were prisoners of war and should be tried by the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

El Ejercito Popular Boricua-Macheteros

In a written statement before a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on January 28, 1998, FBI Director Louis Freeh testified that the "EPB Macheteros has been the most active and violent of the Puerto Rican-based terrorist groups since it emerged." According to its founder, Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, the Macheteros have pursued Puerto Rican "rights for independence and freedom . . . by attacking the military forces of occupation and oppression that are now established in our land" (Ojeda Ríos, p. 106).

Unlike FALN, which directed its operations against targets in the United States, the Macheteros were primarily engaged in attacking military, corporate, and government-

tal targets in Puerto Rico. Also in contrast, the Macheteros targeted individuals. The Macheteros first came to public attention on August 24, 1978, when they issued a communiqué taking credit for killing a Puerto Rican police officer. Later that year, the Macheteros, in a combined operation with two other clandestine revolutionary organizations, attacked a bus that was transporting U.S. naval personnel, killing two sailors and wounding ten others. The Macheteros claimed that the attack was in retaliation for the police frame-up and murders of Dario Rosado and Carlos Soto Arrivi, two Puerto Rican independentistas, on July 25, 1978. The murders of the youths at Cerro Maravilla by a counterterrorism unit of the Puerto Rican police with the assistance of FBI agents caused a national scandal. The Macheteros also claimed responsibility for destroying nine Puerto Rican National Guard jet fighters at a cost of \$45 million.

The most notorious action taken by the Macheteros was the 1983 "expropriation" of \$7.1 million from a Wells Fargo depot in West Hartford, Connecticut. In August 1985, more than two hundred FBI agents descended on Puerto Rico and arrested eleven individuals suspected of being involved in the robbery. Filiberto Ojeda Ríos was among those arrested and spent three years in preventive detention in West Hartford, Connecticut. He was released on bail, but jumped bond and has been a fugitive since 1989 in Puerto Rico, where he is seen as a popular figure who has successfully eluded the FBI. According to the FBI, Ojeda Ríos "represents a tremendous threat to law enforcement" (Navarro). In 2004, the FBI announced a \$500,000 reward for information leading to his arrest. Victor Manuel Gerena, who is accused of masterminding the Wells Fargo heist, is on the FBI's most-wanted list with a \$1 million bounty and is suspected of being in Cuba.

The Nationalist Party and Anticolonial Struggle

Although the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico was not a clandestine revolutionary organization, it advocated armed resistance to attain independence. The Nationalists rejected U.S. sovereignty over Puerto Rico, and repudiated electoral politics as a device that perpetuated colonial rule. Through its rallies, marches, and newspapers, the Nationalist Party sought to galvanize opposition to U.S. colonial rule. During the 1930s, dozens of Nationalists were killed by the insular police, which had been directed by U.S. military officers since 1898.

On January 15, 1936, the U.S. Attorney in Puerto Rico, A. Cecil Snyder, wrote FBI Director Edgar Hoover an urgent letter requesting that a special agent be sent to Puerto Rico "to make an undercover investigation" of the activities of the Nationalist Party and Pedro Albizu Campos, who was "insulting the United States and its institutions, and endeavoring to incite Puerto Ricans against the

United States" (FBI Freedom of Information). The investigation was conducted, and in July 1936, Albizu Campos and the top leadership of the Nationalists were convicted for seditious conspiracy and incarcerated in federal penitentiaries in the United States.

Pedro Albizu Campos returned to Puerto Rico in 1947 and immediately began to agitate for independence, giving fiery speeches across the island. With an important referendum on Puerto Rico's political status scheduled for the early 1950s, Albizu Campos's effectiveness in attracting world attention to Puerto Rico's colonial status was a source of alarm for the federal government. In April 1950, Secretary of War Louis Johnson arrived in Puerto Rico to meet with U.S. intelligence and military officials, and purportedly instructed Puerto Rico's governor Muñoz Marín to arrest the leadership of the Nationalist Party, and if they resisted not to hesitate in killing them.

Pedro Albizu Campos was informed of the conspiracy planning his imminent arrest or possible assassination. The Nationalists, who had amassed some vintage weapons, attempted to assassinate Muñoz Marín and ordered an island-wide uprising of its membership. The uprising failed, hundreds of Nationalists and independentistas were arrested, and the members of the party leadership who were not killed in the insurrection were convicted—most for violating a local antisedition act designed explicitly to limit freedom of speech of dissidents. J. Edgar Hoover closely monitored the events in Puerto Rico and was concerned that the arrests and evidence obtained by the insular police would not be sufficient for conviction.

The FBI and Communism and Terrorism in Puerto Rico

The FBI and the Puerto Rican government linked the Nationalists to the Communists not only to discredit the former but also to justify the incarceration of the leadership of the Communist Party and further weaken the independence movement. In 1954, J. Edgar Hoover wrote, "like the fanatical Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico, the Communist Party of Puerto Rico has always agitated for the independence of the island commonwealth" (United Press International).

In the 1970s and 1980s, international terrorism had replaced the McCarthy-era fear of communism in the United States and Puerto Rico. The federal government accused FALN and the *Macheteros* of being terrorist organizations. The FBI defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of social or political objectives" (FBI, p. 20). This is precisely the charge that independentistas levy against the United States. The late Antonio Corretjer, one of Puerto Rico's most influential literary figures and independence advocates, said of the *Macheteros*,

They call them terrorists. But terrorists want to terrify a society. These groups have not directed themselves to terrifying people, but to striking blows against the armed forces of the United States. There is an evident intention to show the international community that Puerto Rico is a country occupied militarily by the United States.

(Thomas)

See also Albizu Campos, Pedro; COINTELPRO; Puerto Rican Nationalist Uprising; Puerto Rican Political Prisoners; and Puerto Ricans.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arm The Spirit*, 13 (June–July 1992). Interviews with Edwin Cortes and Alberto Rodríguez. www.etext.org/Politics/Arm.The.Spirit/ATS.Magazines/ats13-July-1992.txt
- Dembart, Lee. "Police Seeking 2 in Tavern Blast." *New York Times*, January 26, 1975, 1.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Freedom of Information Privacy Acts Section. *Pedro Albizu Campos: File Number 105-11898*. February 1, 2005. http://www.pr-secretfiles.net/individuals_case.html?detail=2&file=6&only=32
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). *Terrorism in the United States 1982–1992*. February 1, 2005. www.mipt.org/pdf/TerrorismInUS1992.pdf
- Fernández, Ronald. *Los Macheteros*. Río Piedras: Editorial Edil, 1993.
- Freeh, Louis J. *Threats to U.S. National Security*. Statement for the Record: U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. January 28, 1998.
- Kihss, Peter. "Puerto Rican Terrorists Vow to Press Violence Here." *New York Times*, April 4 1975, 14.
- Lopez, Jose E. ed. *Puerto Rican Nationalism: A Reader*. San Juan, P.R.: Editorial Coqui, 1977.
- McFadden, Robert D. "4 Killed, 44 Injured in Fraunces Tavern Blast." *New York Times*, January 25, 1975, 1.
- Merrill Ramírez, Marie Antoinette. "The Other Side of Colonialism: Cointelpro Activities in Puerto Rico in the 1960s." PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990.
- Navarro, Mireyna. "In Puerto Rico, a Fugitive in Fully Cry." *New York Times*, January 1, 1999, A12.
- Ojeda Ríos, Filiberto. "The Boricua-Macheteros Popular Army." *Latin American Perspectives* 29 (2002): 104–116.
- Revolutionary Worker. "Puerto Rico's Fight for Independence." July 19, 1998. rwor.org/a/v20/960-69/966/prhist.htm
- Sater, William. *Puerto Rican Terrorists: A Possible Threat to U.S. Energy Installations?* Washington, D.C.: The Rand Corporation, October 1981. www.rand.org/publications/N/N1764
- Suarez, Manuel. "F.B.I. Discerns Big Gains on Puerto Rican Terrorists." *New York Times*, September 8, 1985, 38.
- Thomas, Jo. "Armed Puerto Rican Groups Focus Attacks on Military." *New York Times*, January 16, 1981, A13.
- United Press International. "F.B.I. Round-up Nets 10 Puerto Rican Reds." *New York Times*, October 21, 1964, 1.

PEDRO CABÁN

PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE. December 19, 1966, marked the English-language premiere of René Marqués's *The Oxcart (La carreta)* and the development of the most significant and enduring institution of Puerto Rican theater in the United States. Founded and directed by the veteran actress Miriam Colón, el Teatro