

The April 19 Movement (M-19)

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: January 17, 1974

Disbanded: 1989

First Attack: February 1976: The M-19 murdered José Raquel Mercado, a trade unionist who it believed was a member of the CIA. (1 killed, 0 wounded).¹

Last Attack: June 2001: The M-19 Jaime Bateman Cayón Goup kidnapped a Spanish-born psychologist in Calif. He was released a month later. (0 killed, 0 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The April 19 Movement (M-19) was formed in 1974 by Jaime Bateman Cayón, Antonio Navarro Wolff, and Carlos Toledo Plata to fight for democracy in Colombia. The M-19 was most known for its attacks on multinational corporations and embassies. In 1989, the guerrilla group became a legal political party and became the M-19 Democratic Alliance (AD M-19); the AD M-19 quickly achieved political success but after 1997, lost all political influence, and members gradually abandoned the party and joined the Independent Democratic Pole party and the Alternative Democratic Pole party. The Jaime Bateman Cayón Group, a faction of the M-19 that did not demobilize, continued its militant activities until 2001.³

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The April 19 Movement (M-19) was a guerrilla group, formed in 1974, that became a political party in the late 1980s. Jaime Bateman Cayón, Antonio Navarro Wolff, Carlos Toledo Plata and others founded the M-19 to fight for a popular democracy and a more open political system that would be representative of the majority and inclusive of marginalized Colombians.⁴ The April 19, 1970 elections, which many Colombians felt was unjustly stolen from presidential candidate Rojas Pinilla, exposed what M-19 leaders believed was a corrupt electoral system and was the motivation behind the group's establishment and name, the April 19 Movement.⁵ The group's activities started in 1973 with a series of robberies, but the group did not gain national notoriety until January 1974, when M-19 guerrillas stole Simon Bolivar's sword from his former villa.⁶

In the late 1970s, the M-19 kidnapped drug traffickers and their children for ransom to fund its activities. In response, paramilitary groups, such as MAS (Death to Kidnappers) and the AUC (Self Defense Forces of Colombia), attacked the M-19 among other leftist guerrilla groups.⁷ In February 1976, in its first official attack, the M-19 murdered a trade unionist who it suspected was a CIA agent. Within the next two years, from 1976-1978, the M-19 kidnapped at least 400 victims.⁸ During those years, the size of the M-19 increased rapidly and the group strengthened militarily with the assistance of other urban leftist guerrilla groups, including the Argentine Montoneros and Uruguayan Tupamaros.⁹ In 1980, the Colombian Army arrested M-19 leader Jaime Bateman, and in response, members of the M-19 seized the Dominican Republic's Embassy and held 50 people hostage.¹⁰ Throughout the 1980s, the M-19 continued to carry out major attacks on embassies and multinational corporations.

In 1984, following the death of Jaime Bateman Cayón, some of the M-19's members established a truce with President Belisario Betancur, but by 1985, the M-19 returned to combat with a major attack on the Palace of Justice, the headquarters of the Colombian Supreme Court.¹¹ Following the attack, the M-19 was regarded as the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia, behind the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); however, it temporarily scaled back attacks until 1988 when the group kidnapped Conservative party leader Alvaro Gómez Hurtado.¹²

In 1989, the M-19 restarted peace negotiations with the Colombian government. These negotiations resulted in the transformation of M-19 into a legal political party, the M-19 party, in November 1989.¹³

Though the majority of M-19 members demobilized and transitioned to the political sphere by 1990, the Jaime Bateman Cayón Group, a faction of the M-19 previously led by Jaime Bateman until his death in 1983, remained militant.¹⁴ In 1990, the M-19 party united with other political movements including the demobilized Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Revolutionary Workers' Party, and the Quintín Lamé, to become the April 19 Movement Democratic Alliance (AD M-19). In contrast, throughout the 1990s, the Bateman Cayón Group continued to perpetrate several large kidnappings up until June 2001.

Simultaneously, the AD M-19 grew in popularity. By 1991, the AD M-19 was a formidable opponent to the traditional two-party dynamic. However, in 1992, a Colombian judge issued arrest warrants for over 30 AD M-19 leaders for the attack on the Palace of Justice in 1985, effectively thwarting the party's growth. In the 1994, the AD M-19 presidential candidate, Antonio Navarro Wolff, was a frontrunner; however, his loss coupled with the party's dwindling popularity led to the party's end in 1997. Regardless, in 2002, Antonio Navarro Wolff, running with the Alternative Democratic Pole party, won a senate seat.¹⁵

The M-19 is no longer an active militant group and the AD M-19 no longer participates in politics in Colombia. Since the demise of the AD M-19, many former members have joined Independent Democratic Pole party.¹⁶

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Jaime Bateman Cayón (1974-1983): Bateman Cayón, a former FARC member, was a founding member of the M-19. Bateman was the M-19's principle military commander. The Colombian Army arrested Bateman Cayón in 1980 and, in response, the M-19 seized the Dominican Republic's Embassy in Colombia. Bateman died in April 1983 in a plane crash over Panama.¹⁷

Carlos Toledo Plata (1974-1984): Toledo Plata, a former member of the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO), a political party, founded the M-19 with Jaime Bateman Cayón. Toledo Plata was assassinated in 1984 by the military.¹⁸

Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez (1974-1990): Pizarro was a founding member of the M-19 and took leadership of the group following the death of Alvaro Fayad in 1986. Pizarro was the AD M-19's first leader. He served as the party's main ideologue. A paramilitary death squad, allegedly the AUC, assassinated Pizarro just one week after he accepted the AD M-19's nomination of presidential candidate for the 1990 election.

Alvaro Delgado Fayad (1974-1986): Álvaro Fayad was the M-19's military leader and the group's commander following the death of Jaime Bateman in 1983. Fayad orchestrated the Palace of Justice attack and was killed by Colombian Special Forces in 1986.¹⁹

Antonio Navarro Wolff (1974-Present): Navarro Wolff was a founding member of the M-19. He then became the leader of the AD M-19 and the party's presidential candidate in 1990 following León-Gómez's assassination. Navarro Wolff was more pragmatic than León-Gómez and focused on expanding the party's size rather than solidifying the party's ideology.²⁰

B. NAME CHANGES

- The April 19 Movement (M-19) (1975-1990): The April 19 Movement was the guerrilla group that engaged in militant activity from 1975 until the peace talks in 1989 with the Colombian government.²¹ In 1989, the M-19, with the exception of one faction, demobilized to become a legal political party.²²
- The April 19 Movement Democratic Alliance (AD M-19) (1990-early 2000s): In 1990, the M-19 party became the AD M-19, a merger of several popular movements including the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Revolutionary Workers' Party, and the Quintín Lamé, to become the AD M-19 (the M-19 Democratic Alliance). The AD M-19's goal was promoting democracy in Colombia.²³

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 1985: 1,500-2,000 (On War)²⁴
- 1987: 1,500 (International Institute for Strategic Studies)²⁵
- 1987: 500 (Barco Vargas Administration)²⁶

D. RESOURCES

From 1972-1974, the years before the group announced its existence, the M-19's illicit activities were limited to frequent small-scale bank robberies for revenue.²⁷ After the group stole Simon Bolívar's sword in January 1974, it continued stealing arms, including taking hundreds of tons of weapons from the XIII Elite Brigade Bogota.²⁸ In addition, the group generated revenue from kidnapping for ransom and extortion. In the 1980s, the M-19 used kidnapping to extort multinational corporations, such as Sears and Texaco, in addition to seizing local ministries and embassies and holding those inside hostage.²⁹ The M-19 also received training and supplies from Nicaragua, Libya, Cuba and Argentine Montoneros and Uruguayan Tupamaros in the 1980s.

E. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

When the M-19 operated as a militant group, they had two fronts: the Southern Front in Putumayo and the Western Front in the Caldas, Cauca, Valle de Cauca, Quinine, and Tolima.³⁰

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Jaime Bateman Cayón, a former FARC member, and Carlos Toledo Plata, a former member of the political party the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO), formed the M-19, a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group, to change what they believed to be a corrupt Colombian electoral system. The M-19 sought to implement a representative democracy in Colombia. Leader Jaime Bateman Cayón believed more change would come from working in the city rather than the countryside; therefore, the group focused its militant activities in Colombian cities.³¹

In 1990, all M-19 factions, with the exception of Jaime Bateman's former faction, negotiated peace with the Colombian government and became a political party, the AD M-19. The party sought to spearhead political reforms promoting democracy within the country, including a more open electoral system.³²

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

In 1984, most M-19 members became a legal political entity through amnesty negotiations with President Belisario Betancur; however, the Bateman Cayón Group did not demobilize and continued launching attacks for the next decade.³³ Demobilized members of the M-19 feared persecution by paramilitary organizations so the M-19 party made an agreement with MAS, a paramilitary organization, guaranteeing their security. In November 1989, the M-19 officially became the M-19 party, then, in 1990, merged with several popular movements, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Revolutionary Workers' Party, and the Quintín Lamé, to become the April 19 Movement Democratic Alliance (AD M-19).

The AD M-19's goal was to promote democracy in Colombia.³⁴ In the 1990 elections, the AD M-19, with support of the indigenous population, was extremely successful and challenged Colombia's traditional two party system. However, paramilitary organizations and death squads assassinated many of those who ran in the elections despite the agreement with MAS, including AD M-19 presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez.³⁵ Nevertheless, the AD M-19 continued to grow and, by 1991, became the third most powerful party in the country.

In 1994, AD M-19 candidate Navarro Wolff placed third in the presidential elections, but shortly following the election, the party's popularity began to wane. By 1997, the AD M-19 had almost disappeared entirely.³⁶ The AD M-19 tapered out of the political system but leader Navarro Wolff won a senate seat with the Alternative Democratic Pole party in 2002.³⁷

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

The M-19's primary tactic was kidnapping employees of multinational companies for ransom. In 1977, the M-19 started directly attacking petroleum production facilities and began an economic sabotage campaign.³⁸ As part of the campaign, the M-19 attacked police stations and government offices. The M-19 also attacked many embassies in the mid-1980s. In the late 1980s, the majority of M-19 members started the demobilization process, received pardons and became M-19 political party, and transformed into a political party, the AD M-19.³⁹

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

February 1976: The M-19 murdered José Raquel Mercado, a trade unionist who the it believed was a member of the CIA. (1 killed, 0 wounded).⁴⁰

May 1978: In solidarity with the Sandinista cause in Nicaragua, the M-19 kidnapped Baquero Montiel, the Nicaraguan Ambassador. The Ambassador was released a few hours later. (0 killed, 0 wounded)⁴¹

February 1980: the M-19 attacked the Dominican Republic Embassy in Colombia and captured 15 diplomats, including U.S. ambassador Diego Ascencio, and between 16 to 30 other hostages. The M-19 held them for 61 days and received \$1 million ransom and safe passage to Cuba upon the hostages' release. (0 killed, unknown wounded)⁴²

April 1983: The M-19 bombed the Honduran embassy in Colombia; several members of the Honduran Consul were wounded. (unknown killed, unknown wounded)⁴³

November 6, 1985: Twenty-four to forty-one M-19 members seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and held approximately 50 hostages. Colombian security forces attacked the building killing all of the M-19 guerrillas and almost all others inside, including about half of the Supreme Court judges. (100+ killed, unknown wounded).⁴⁴

March 23, 1988: The M-19 shot a rocket at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá. Damage to the Embassy was minimal and there were no injuries. (0 killed, 0 wounded).⁴⁵

May 1988: The M-19 kidnapped Álvaro Gomez Hurtado, a former Conservative party presidential candidate. Gomez Hurtado was released after two months. (0 killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁶

August 1994: The U.S. Department of State reported that the Bateman Cayón Group, the M-19 Faction that did not demobilized, kidnapped a British diplomat and his Colombian colleague; the Bateman Cayón Group held them for ransom. There are no reports on their release. (unknown killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁷

December 1997: The M-19 kidnapped William Parra, President Ernesto Samper's press secretary, and Radio journalist Luis Eduardo Maldonado. They were released a month after their capture. (0 killed, 0 wounded)⁴⁸

1998: The Bateman Faction was responsible for a string of ATM bombings in Bogotá. (unknown killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁹

June 2001: The Jaime Bateman Cayón Group kidnapped a Spanish-born psychologist in Calí. He was released a month later. (0 killed, 0 wounded).⁵⁰

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

This group has not been designated as a terrorist organization by any major national government or international body.

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the M-19 faced staunch opposition from paramilitary organizations, representatives of the elite, and large landowners.⁵¹ In 1985, the failure of government peace talks made the M-19 unpopular within Colombia; furthermore, the group's decision to return to combat following the failed negotiations decreased the group's popularity further.⁵² In the 1990s, the M-19 party, and subsequent AD M-19 was well liked within the country. In 1991, the AD M-19 was considered a strong opponent to Colombia's two main political parties. In 1994, AD M-19 candidate Navarro Wolff placed third in the presidential elections. In the next few years, as the party's popularity waned, the party's presence dissipated. However, in 2002, Navarro Wolff won a senate seat with the highest second highest number of votes cast.⁵³

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

M-19 founder Jaime Bateman Cayón was a member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) before establishing the M-19 alongside Carlos Toledo Plata, a former National Popular Alliance (ANAPO) member. The M-19 guerrilla group was a member of the Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordination Board (CGSB), an umbrella organization to unify leftist guerrilla movements including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), The Quintin Lame Movement, and the Workers Revolutionary Party.⁵⁴

In 1986 the M-19 sought to create a common guerrilla front with Peru's Shining Path and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement and Ecuador's Alvaro Lives Damn It! (Alvaro Vive, Carajo!) Movement. The M-19 reportedly attempted to unite the Alvaro Vive, Shining Path, and Tupac Amaru militants into a common guerrilla front.⁵⁵

When the AD M-19 was created, the party included all of the Popular Liberation Army's (EPL) demobilized guerrillas.⁵⁶

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

In the 1980s, 300 M-19 members were trained in and received logistical support from Cuba; the M-19 also received weapons from Cuba and Nicaragua in the 1980s.⁵⁷ M-19 reportedly received assistance from Libya but the form of assistance is unclear. Additionally, South American leftist groups, including Argentinian Montoneros and Uruguayan Tupamaros, also trained M-19 members.⁵⁸

MAPS

- Colombia

¹ "M-19 – The April 19 Movement." *Idaho State University*. N.p. N.d. Web. 13 August 2015. <http://www.isu.edu/~andesean/M19.htm>

² "Colombia: Information on the Former Guerrilla Group M-19" *Refworld*. N.p. 25 March 2003. Web. 13 August 2015. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/414eee264.html>

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