Senior Executive Intelligence Brief

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AMERICAS

Colombia: FARC Claims To Have Killed Paramilitary Leader

Guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) yesterday told a local radio station that they had killed Carlos Castano—the leader of the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia—and nine others during an attack on Monday. A self-described spokesman for Castano said the paramilitary leader had not been heard from since the attack. Some of Castano's lieutenants claim he is still alive.

— Military authorities have confirmed that a clash took place but say they do not know if Castano was killed.

— If the FARC did kill Castano, his supporters may launch reprisals that would complicate, and perhaps delay, peace talks scheduled to begin next week between the government and the FARC.

Castano has sought to push insurgent groups out of longtime strongholds in northern Colombia and has attacked civilians who support the insurgents. Castano in recent months had launched a public relations campaign to secure a role in the nascent peace process, warning subordinates not to interfere with the demilitarized zone set up to facilitate talks and to remain focused on the paramilitaries' long-term interest—getting a seat at the negotiating table.

— Castano's efforts have incensed insurgent leaders, who dismiss him as a murderer and a tool of the state, according to various reports.