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## Leftist Insurgent Movements in Colombia: How Moral is Moral Suasion?

Editor

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Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article explores moral suasion as a tool of insurgency and the morality of such suasion.

One feature of leftist insurgencies in the twentieth century is the use of moral suasion to behaviorally activate individuals, various population segments, and even populations masses in support of political objectives of the insurgent leaders. Behavioral activation can take many forms: paramilitary and military operations; intelligence activities including espionage, analysis, counterintelligence, and nonmilitary covert operations; various support functions for the above; and even proclivities to not actively or passively impede insurgent activities and their attaining of political objectives.

The content of moral suasion is often based on legitimate moral issues and moral prescriptions and proscriptions. These include a conflation of the existence of inalienable human and civil rights, the need to right the wrong of human and civil rights violations, the guilt of various governmental and business entities through the commission of violations or the omission of legitimate attempts to right the wrong of violations, the ascription to the insurgent group as the legitimate moral actor in moral struggle to right wrong, and a further ascription to the insurgent group as the apotheosis of moral action.

However, too often a Kantian ethical turn leads to a moral corruption. The people who are the target of moral suasion are viewed as means as opposed to a positive change within these people and their environment being the ends. Meanwhile, the original ends professed by insurgents become transformed either into some abstract, unreachable utopia or a raw move to seize and zealously guard power. Often the two variants of transformed ends are conflated as well. Not only does the original crusade against injustice become unjust as people become means, but the crusade becomes one away from one kind of injustice and towards another: the exploitation of the people by yet another exploiter.

Colombian insurgents such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) present such a case of moral corruption wherein people become means and the ends of insurgency are corrupted. Moral suasion is largely effected through political terror and bald-faced contingent reward. Here moral suasion begets the barest façade of legitimacy as power is obtained and maintained largely via the money gained through kidnapping, drug trafficking, and extortion. Is this just another in a series of erosions of an initial moral stance? Or is the initial moral stance but a façade that erodes into the basic human morality of power through force and its threat? (See Elbedour, S., Baker, A.M., & Charlesworth, W.R. (1997). The impact of political violence on moral reasoning in children. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 21, 1053-1066; Ferguson, N., & Cairns, E. (1996). Political violence and moral maturity in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology*, 17, 713-725; Prilleltensky, I. (1996). Human, moral, and political values for an emancipatory psychology. *Humanistic Psychologist*, 24, 307-324; Rohter, L. (November 7, 1999). By millions, Colombians take to streets against war. *The New York Times*, p. 11; Teske, N. (1997). Beyond altruism: Identity-construction as moral motive in political explanation. *Political Psychology*, 18, 71-91.) (Keywords: Colombia, Insurgency, Morality.)