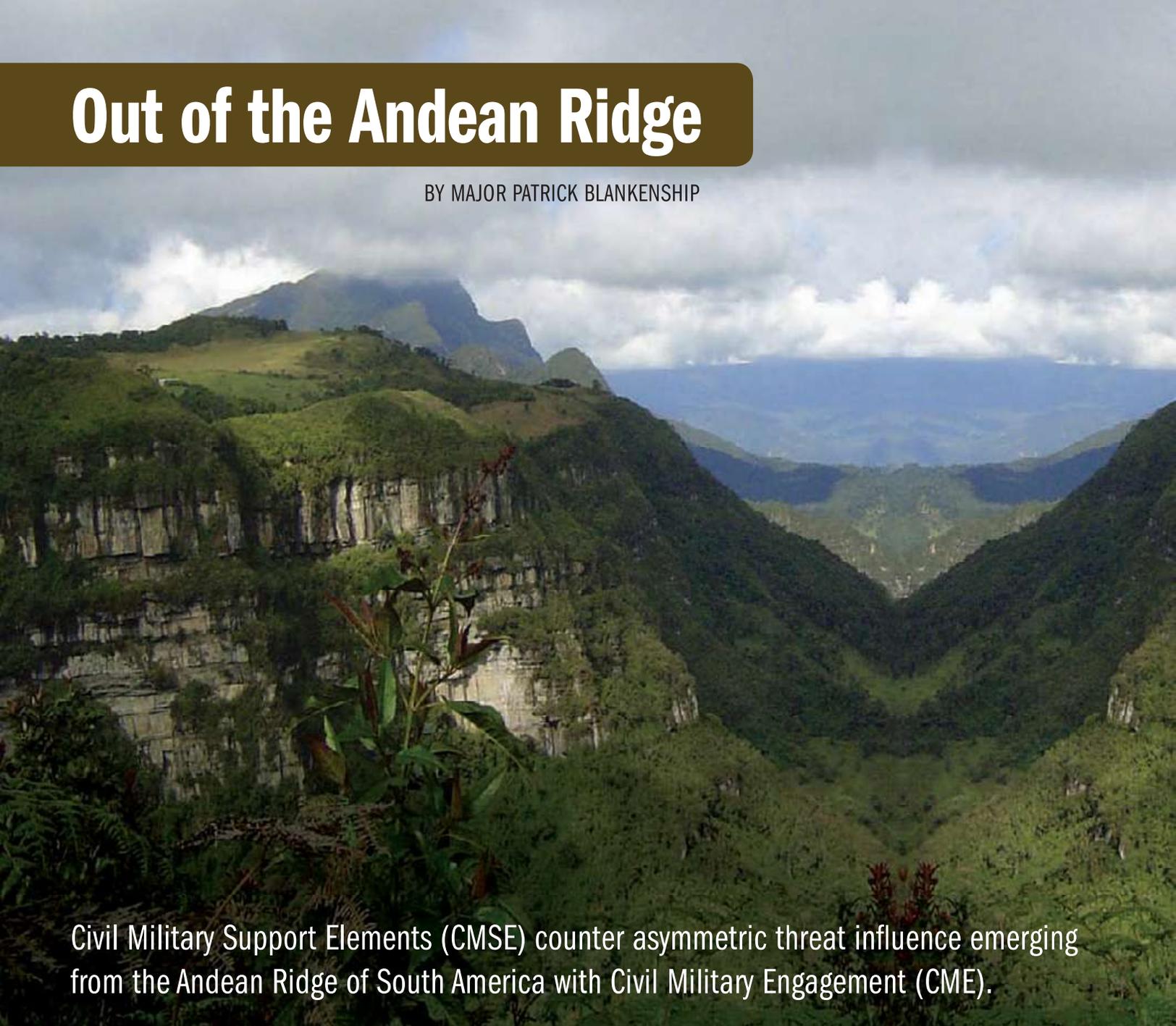


Out of the Andean Ridge

BY MAJOR PATRICK BLANKENSHIP



Civil Military Support Elements (CMSE) counter asymmetric threat influence emerging from the Andean Ridge of South America with Civil Military Engagement (CME).

To produce effects in support of U.S. national-security interests through the conduct of civil-military engagement¹ a U.S. Special Operations Command program of record, Civil Affairs professionals must first understand the intricacies of threat systems that CMSEs are designed to counter, and describe how those systems leverage the human dimension of the operations environment to achieve their threat end states. This article illustrates how CMSEs contribute to the disruption of threat influence in Latin America through the conduct of CME.

The Civil Affairs Framework for Engagement (CAFÉ):² Operational Design for CME

CMSEs contribute to the disruption of threat systems by analyzing the inputs that threat systems require to survive and how threat systems exploit civil vulnerabilities of people in specific geographic areas, to gain a competitive advantage over the state. Using the deliverables of an asset/gap-based system analysis, CMSEs design a series of actions (to be conducted persistently over a period of time) in a specific micro-node to first counter and then ultimately disrupt threat influence. The CMSE plan of actions over time in the micro-node are synchronized with other SOF elements under the command and

control of the theater special-operations command, coordinated with the Civil Affairs command responsible for the joint-operations area and executed in collaboration with the embassy and the partner-nation government.

The headwaters of a threat stream

To begin an analysis of the threat system in Latin America, it is useful to follow the flow of drugs and money, a critical input for the threat system, back to their points of origin.

The Andean Ridge of South America, comprised of the countries of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, is the largest cocaine-producing region of the world and a critical source of revenue



for both profit-motivated transnational organized crime and ideologically inspired violent-extremist organizations. According to the UN World Drug Report of 2010 an estimated 480 metric tons of cocaine from the Andean Ridge was sold on world markets generating \$88 billion in illicit revenues for threat systems.³

Cocaine

The primary source of funding, the lifeblood for TOC in the western hemisphere, is a product of rural agriculture and the coca bush. The coca bush is a small, hearty plant, native to the Andes, that grows best on moist slopes between the elevations of 4,500-6,000 feet. Coca leaves from the

bush are picked by rural farmers three to four times a year making it a reliable crop and subsequently a reliable source of income. The harvested leaves from the coca bush are then processed into coca paste, and then into cocaine, utilizing low-tech procedures and instructions openly available on the Internet.⁴

The finished product, kilogram blocks of cocaine, are then moved forward as efficiently as possible toward the world consumer markets of greatest demand. North America, led by the United States, is the largest buyer of cocaine with more than 6.2 million users consuming 40 percent of the world cocaine supply annually. The money generated through the trafficking of cocaine into North America is estimated to total \$38 billion in revenue for TOC.

Lucrative business

The most basic and fundamental way TOC, and specifically the illicit trafficking system affects the human dimension of the operations environment is through the generation of employment. The jobs created as part of the production and illicit trafficking of cocaine are many and require a robust personnel structure to support a black-market economy of scale. In many Latin American countries, where the formal economy cannot support the demand for income-producing jobs to meet the basic needs of families and to thwart a persistent cycle of poverty, many people are lured into the illicit economy to survive. The jobs created for the production of cocaine include rural farmers who plant and harvest coca leaves as well as semi-skilled laborers who refine coca leaves into coca paste and then into cocaine in jungle laboratories. Business is also generated through the import and transport of precursor chemicals coming from large suppliers like China.

CMSEs analyze the exploited civil vulnerabilities of the people who form the worker base of TOC in key micro-nodes and conduct CA activities in those same areas to disrupt threat influence. These activities are designed to serve as a complement to other long term, large-investment development activities undertaken by the PN government or development organizations such as U.S. Agency for International Development.

Transportation

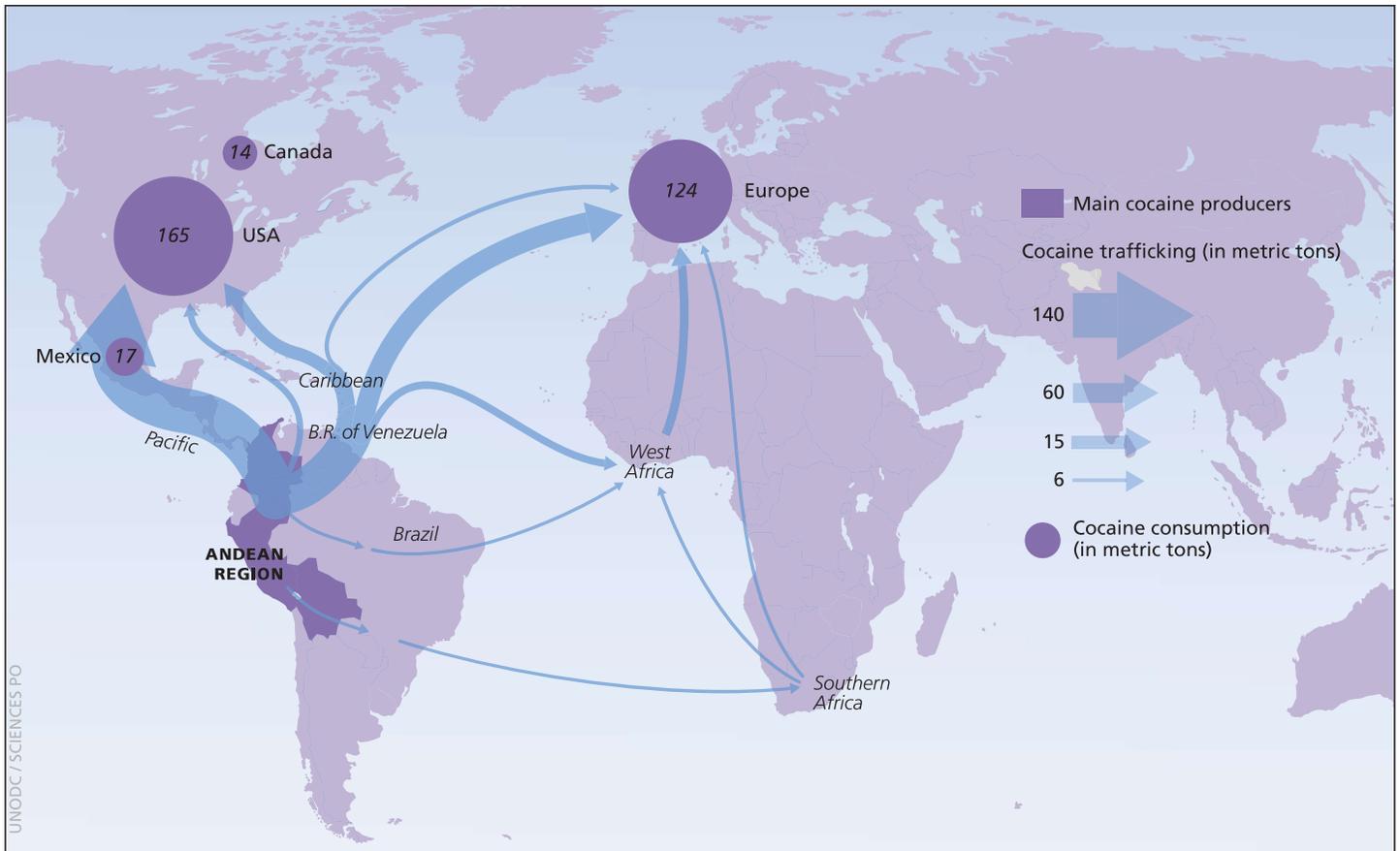
One of the more robust parts of the illicit trafficking system is the transportation network that moves product through a series of nodes utilizing the transportation modes of land, sea and air. Modal transportation techniques vary depending on the node and the line of communication linking node to node. Modal transportation techniques can be as low tech as a teenage boy with a school backpack and a cell phone carrying a couple kilos of cocaine along mountain paths from one village to the next or as high tech as million dollar fast boats, submarines and airplanes equipped with the latest GPS and communications technology moving 500 or more kilos at a time from country to country.

Civil Affairs professionals prove value added to the SOF community through the management and analysis of civil information available in the Civil Affairs Operating System. Covering everything from key leaders to landing strips, leveraging information contained in a historical database of civil information provides useful information about how the threat system will likely try to move illicit goods through an area and who they will likely try to leverage to accomplish it.

Security

The private security network needed to safeguard the functions of an illicit trafficking system is significant and employs a substantial number of personnel. Security personnel range from the simple and low tech, such as the unarmed teenager standing on the street corner with a cell phone acting as a look out, to the more sophisticated and influential. A mid-level TOC leader, armed with large amounts of money and specific guidance to pay off key government leaders, security-force officials and community group leaders in critical nodes constitutes a formidable opponent to the rule-of-law by the state. Corruption is most often the term used to describe the effects of this extremely successful, and difficult to counter, TOC strategy. Perhaps the most visible and dangerous aspect of TOC security is the ability to arm, operate and sustain private security forces to protect the illicit trafficking networks, attack rival networks, government forces and private citizens as necessary.

CMSEs interact with PN security forces, service providers and relevant populations to weave together networks of purpose to detect and resist non-state forces. These social networks link the government to the people and raise the level of participation or collective action of all involved. Close relationships between PN security providers and the populace generally increase the exchange of information on threat activity, and therefore the effectiveness of the PN security forces.



IN DEMAND Main global cocaine flows for 2008, from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Drug Report 2010. UNODC graphic

Filling the sovereignty gap

Given the size and scope of TOC, with revenues from cocaine alone that exceed the gross domestic product of the five northernmost countries in Central America combined, many governments in Latin America simply do not have the capacity to confront the threat and provide adequate security in all of their territory, to all of their citizens, all of the time. Similarly, a gap in the provision of, or access to basic services, such as water, sanitation, hygiene, food, clothing, shelter/land, healthcare and education to all citizens, in all areas of the country, all of the time, creates opportunities for TOC or VEOs to exploit the civil vulnerabilities of people in micro-nodes that are deemed critical to the threat system. In micro-nodes known to be under the threat-system control, non-state/counter-state actors have leveraged gaps in state capacity to become the primary service providers and supplanted the functions of governance with the local population. Lack of capacity in the legal economy to provide employment and income for the sustainment of basic family needs, as the result of

slow or stagnant economic development, provides a perfect opportunity for TOC and/or VEO to rival the ability of states to adequately govern their territories.

CMSEs, after conducting an analysis of assets available and gaps in the provision of security and services, weave together a series of actions over time in micro-nodes to have a disruptive effect on threat activity. In the most vulnerable of areas, where the provision of basic medical services is not met by the state, the medical civic-action project is a proven catalyst for a whole-of-government application by the PN. The idea behind the MEDCAP is not only to facilitate the PN government to provide badly needed medical care to vulnerable populations in under-governed areas, but moreover, to reintroduce the relationship of governance between the people and their government in a non-threatening, more informal environment. The resultant change in attitudes by the people toward their government after the MEDCAP is a prerequisite for building collective action and resistance to threat influence.

An emerging threat

The multi-billion dollar cocaine-financed threat stream in Latin America has facilitated a hybrid threat to stability and development in the Western Hemisphere. TOC and VEOs depend upon illicit trafficking revenues and the exploitation of civil vulnerabilities for their survival. Some experts have attempted to define this nexus of threat activity as criminal insurgency, while others prefer the term narcoterrorism. Regardless of the name, the complexity, diversity and adaptability of this threat system has eluded the narrow categories used to define it, being neither purely VEO nor exclusively TOC. Organizations, like the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia in Colombia and Sendero Luminoso in Peru, have formed relationships of convenience with TOC and diversified to combine their ideologically motivated insurgencies with the sustaining revenues made available from illicit trafficking.

The population-centric approaches used by CMSEs to disrupt both TOC and VEO have more similarities than differences as both threat groups depend on the exploitation of civil vulnerabilities to achieve their

end states. The use of CMSEs as part of an integrated SOF application to disrupt threat influence is essential to achieve sustainable effects over time.

In these areas throughout Latin America, deemed critical to the threat system, CMSEs from the 98th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne) counter threat influence and control of populations through the conduct of civil-military engagement, a subset of CAO in support of the CMO Plan for Special Operations Command South.

The Colombian example

In the case of Colombia, the two major threats to stability for the state are the FARC (a 50 year-old insurgent movement classified as a VEP) and BACRIM (various transnational organized criminal organizations). Beginning with the Uribe administration in 2002, the Colombian government began to make serious progress against attacking and dismantling the FARC, progress that was fundamental to the continued success of the

that without an integrated, indirect and population-centric approach, any direct-action gains against FARC leadership will be unsustainable and the sovereignty gap will remain a vulnerability for the state.

The initial analysis of a FARC strategic shift was proposed during the Monterey (Naval Post Graduate School-hosted) FARC Systems Analysis Conference in August 2011. During the conference, a hasty center-of-gravity analysis was conducted on the current state of the FARC. For the purposes of application of CME as a tool to counter threat influence, we will look at the critical vulnerabilities of the FARC system inputs.

Threat Centers of Gravity

Conducting a simplified analysis of three COGs provides insights into how basic threat systems function and survive and also provides opportunities to target system vulnerabilities using the available SOF tools.

The COG of Land. This COG consists of those critical land nodes and lines of com-

ing for CA professionals and reveals what the FARC is doing to control and recruit vulnerable populations. The FARC needs to control vulnerable populations in areas that are important to it for its survival as a system. Many of these populations also serve as critical nodes and/or junctures of FARC lines of communication. One of the critical inputs of the FARC's personnel system is the need to recruit youth, ideally between the ages of 8-15-years-old. The recruitment of youth depends on a base of support that replenishes the FARC personnel system. One of the tools that the FARC utilizes for recruiting is FARC public companies. These are organized plain-clothe militias that facilitate and conduct civic outreach to targeted populations, provide salaries for recruited youth and other services such as health and education to their families.

FARC militias, very much like their counterparts in Sendero Luminoso, have primary responsibilities to influence, control and recruit people in areas that are deemed

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Santos administration beginning in 2010. As a result of the success of the Colombian government attacking and dismantling FARC leadership, the FARC has shifted strategy and downgraded their operations from positional warfare to guerrilla warfare and a larger reliance on plain-clothes militias to control and recruit vulnerable populations. Colombian military leaders have stated as recently as January 2012, that they are seeing a shift in the ideologically motivated FARC toward the profit-oriented BACRIM, or in the words of the Colombian military leadership during the *Comite de Revision Estrategica y Innovacion*, the FARC is becoming less FARC and more “FARC-RIM.”

Since 2007, CMSEs have played a vital role working with the Colombian military to build capacity to conduct CMO. In 2012 after years of direct-action success, these efforts intensified with the Colombian Ministry of Defense initiating a two-year plan to substantially build its own CA forces in an effort to consolidate gains against the FARC. The Colombian government believes

communication that connect and reveal that the FARC needs to either control or maintain open access for the present and future survival of their system. PN security forces trained by U.S. Special Forces have capabilities to attack and seize terrain nodes and control lines of communication to target the enemy system.

The COG Money. This includes all the financial needs of the threat system and these inputs come from a variety of sources, which include kidnapping, extortion, illegal mining and drug trafficking. Interagency partners with the capability to conduct investigations and build cases for criminal prosecution play a large role with PN security forces in tracking and attacking the Money COG. The U.S. Treasury also plays a role here leveraging Kingpin authorities to seize property and cash associated with drug traffickers and to use such cash to offer rewards for captured TOC leadership.

The COG of People. This includes all of the threat system needs for personnel. This is where the threat analysis gets interest-

critical to the operations of the FARC as a system. SL, which is now divided into two main factions in Peru, has mastered the art of recruiting youth into its ranks by providing education and opportunities for children at very young ages, ideally between 6-8-years-old 5.

SL, an organization with roots in Marxist/Leninist ideology reached its height and also met its downfall in 1992 with the capture of their leftist intellectual leader, Abimael Guzman in Lima, Peru.

Since that time, the remnant of Sendero Luminoso has reevaluated its strategy, learned from its organizational mistakes of concentrating too much power into one leader and changed tactics away from terrorist-like attacks against civilians and non-uniformed government workers. Today, its strategy is to target only uniformed government personnel. The strategic change in tactics to protect civilians and those government officials who are rendering aid has provided a boost in support by the population for the new SL.



GOING DOWN A fully-operational submarine built for the primary purpose of transporting multi-ton quantities of cocaine located near a tributary close to the Ecuador/Colombia border that was seized by the Ecuador Anti-Narcotics Police Forces and Ecuador Military authorities with the assistance of the DEA. *DEA photo*

Using ideology to recruit and civic outreach to provide education and health services to sustain support in certain population nodes, SL has publicly touted its successes and shows clearly how these base activities support its tactical capability to attack government forces at will. According to the Peruvian government, an estimated 300 SL fighters control portions of the Valles de los Rios Apurimac y Ene and the Upper Huallaga Valley. To maintain its personnel strength, SL aggressively recruits from local communities leveraging a strong ideological narrative mixed with actions of civic outreach that address education and health vulnerabilities of indigenous people in nodes deemed critical to the threat system. In the VRAE, an SL leader known as Comrade Jose has stated that SL works hand-in-hand with drug traffickers, but also states that he does not consider that the farmers who cultivate the coca are acting illegally. By redefining the role of the farmers, the people who work in the micro labs to refine the coca leaf into cocaine and the transporters who carry the cocaine out of the VRAE as “workers” instead of “narcotraffickers” the SL is embracing the Marxist/Leninist ideological underpinning, which is shared by other like-minded insurgents, such as the Paraguayan People’s Army. Comrade Joe states that the relationship of SL to the narco-traffickers is characterized by providing protection for transportation, which Jose calls an “Impuesto de Guerra,” or war tax. The relationship of VEOs working collaboratively as part of a wider TOC system appears to be the trend in the case of both the FARC and SL and can be expected to evolve along similar lines in other locations, with other groups such as the EPP in Paraguay. Exploitation of civil vulnerabilities gives threat groups an advantage in areas where the state influence and control is the weakest. In these areas, CMSEs working in conjunction with PN security and service providers to provide specialized capabilities to counter threat influence through the conduct of CA activities, which are conducted over time to produce measurable effects.

Conclusion

CMSEs counter asymmetric threat influence emerging from the Andean Ridge of South America with CME. Assisting PN security and service providers to confront hybrid threats to security through population-centric approaches is where CMSE conducting CME forms part of the whole-of-SOF application. **SW**



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NOTES

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