



COLOMBIA

BY JANICE BURTON



01 Colombian Army Special Forces Soldiers, Fuerzas Especiales, stand in formation prior to a capabilities demonstration at the Colombian Army's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

STORY PHOTOS: U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO



On Feb. 15, 2018 Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, Commander, United States Southern Command addressed the Senate Armed Forces Committee to discuss the command's efforts in Central America, South America and the Caribbean. He outlined the challenges faced by the region, which includes political corruption, unmet development goals, shocking levels of violent crime, the threat of violent extremism and the resulting migration to the U.S. caused by these challenges.

He continued to outline the threats, which included drug traffickers, arms dealers, human smugglers, terrorist supporters and sympathizers, as well as the movement of thousands of illegal immigrants and special interest aliens to the U.S. border.

He noted, "Collectively, these groups create pathways and vulnerabilities that can be exploited by terrorists ... and corrode confidence in the governance of partner nations we rely on to advance regional and global security."

While the picture he painted appeared bleak, there was a constant theme throughout his address: the benefit of having stable partners in the region, and Colombia is one of those partners.

Of Colombia, the Admiral noted, "A NATO partner, anchor for regional stability and major contributor to global security challenges, Colombia remains a staunch friend whose leadership is critical to addressing threat networks ... Colombia remains our indispensable partner in the counter-network fight."

No other force knows that more than the members of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), whom have built lasting friendships with their Colombian partners.



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01 Colombian Army Special Forces Soldiers, *Fuerzas Especiales*, showcase their tactical capabilities at the Colombian Army's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

02 Lt. Col. Scott Morley, the Special Operations Liaison Officer in Colombia, greets Lieutenant Colonel Jorge Andrés Henao García, commander of the Colombian Army Special Forces School, at the Colombian Army's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

03, 04 Lancero candidates participate in a swim test at the *Escuela de Lanceros* located on the Colombian military's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

For more than 60 years, U.S. Special Operations Forces, primarily in the form of Special Forces have played a critical role in the development of their Colombian partners.

"Colombia is the most willing and capable partner in the region," said Lt. Col. Scott Morley, the Special Operations Liaison Officer in Colombia, during the *Special Warfare* visit in the spring of 2018. "They are tremendous to work with, and I don't say that lightly, having worked in other parts of the world. I would go on patrol with these guys and trust them to watch my back." This partnership goes back to the 1950s, when two Ranger lieutenants helped stand up the Lancero School in 1956 after Colombia sent forces to fight with us in Korea under the UN Charter.

"At a tactical level, I would put Colombia up with most countries in the world — they boast a tactical capability that not many other countries can."

As the SOLO, Lt. Col. Morley worked under the Chief of Mission's authority in Colombia and was a permanent member of the U.S. Embassy and the Country Team. In this role he was the Senior SOF Advisor to the U.S. Ambassador, the Senior Defense Official in country and the Colombian Special Operations leadership.

"At any given time, there are more than 100 U.S. SOF members in country. We have been here so long that we know the country inside and out," he said. "We knew Gen. Mejia when he was a young Ranger and now he is the commander of all military forces in Colombia. This is the depth of relationships we have. We have so much access and our partners are open and honest with us."

Morley sees the role of U.S. SOF as providing an information bridge between the U.S. and the Colombian partners to help counter networks as they move toward the U.S. Southern Approach.

Part of that bridge is helping the Colombians move forward. Key to that task was the creation of the Colombian Strategic Plan 2030, which calls for the country to export security regionally and globally in support of NATO missions worldwide, resulting in cost savings for the U.S. and enabling SOF to increase the health of the force by better dwell times.

Morley added that at a tactical level Colombia is on par with a select few countries worldwide. "The long-term success in Colombia is owed to this very real partnership and relationship. We work every day in the same spaces, shoulder to shoulder. And through trust built over decades, the level of sharing is outstanding. They are capable of conducting high-value targeting/interdiction raids at a level not many country's can boast."

He pointed to the work of the special counter-narcotics units as a great success story.

"The guys in this unit are doing a yeoman's work day in and day out on the battlefield, working on coca problems from eradication to raids on labs. They are interdicting powder as it moves to the coastline or on the coast."

As the SOLO, Morley worked to ensure that U.S. forces were engaged at the right time with the right partners, while looking at the way forward. One of the big issues facing the Colombian forces is funding.



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“It is a long-term project, but we are working toward SOF-specific budgeting, which makes us consider what a Goldwater-Nichols type reform would look like in Colombia. That kind of change would sustain Colombian SOF without dedicated money from all of the forces.”

Another major area of concern is force design. The Colombians currently have a special operations branch and a Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Branch, but what do those career models look like?

Lt. Col. Morley reached out to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the proponent for Army SOF, for help.

“We brought down subject-matter experts from the school house to talk about those issues as well as lifecycle functions to look at what the force of the future would look like and how to plan for it. We also worked on doctrine. After 52 years of war with the FARC, one of the gaps was doctrine – they were so busy fighting that they didn’t write those lessons down or codify them in doctrine.”

As the headquarters looks to the future, the fight is still going on throughout the country, even though the Peace Accords were signed by the FARC in 2016. There are still other elements like the ELN and the cartels that seek to disrupt the stability of the country.

As the SOLO, Morley works directly with the AOB Southern Cone Andean Ridge. During the *Special Warfare* visit, that role was filled by members of the 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The Commander of the AOB is a major.

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“The AOB is really the largest Department of Defense presence in the embassy,” he explained. “We serve as connective tissue between the interagency, support efforts and work toward the SOCSOUTH commanders intent and objectives.”

The primary mission of the SOCFWD is to assist the Colombians with internal stability and security through a number of different ways. In addition to Special Forces conducting tactical training with the Colombian units, Civil Military Support Elements helps the Colombians develop their civil-military efforts.

“We were surprised at how proficient the Colombian forces are — both tactically and operationally,” the AOB commander said. “We have helped with that development, through the very strong, established relationship.”

“There are many well-established relationships with leadership and other agencies. We were welcomed here in the embassy and with other agencies. What we do here is valued throughout the embassy – which isn’t always the case,” the Commander explained. “It’s a very mature relationship with our partners and the embassy. We are really interacting at a much higher level than in other places we have deployed.”

He noted that it is not uncommon for his NCOs to brief senior leaders in the embassy, “calling it business as usual,” but adding that it is something that is unique to Colombia.

While 7th SFG(A) is the historic partner for the Colombians, the commander said that because Special Forces Soldiers have the same unique skills, his 20th SFG Soldiers are able to step in with little trouble.

“To our Colombian partners, it is transparent. Our language capabilities are good enough. We have



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been very welcomed,” he said. “Being a National Guard element, our guys work in areas of government and bring those skills as well as their MOS skill. It’s helpful when we are conducting training with Colombian police elements because many of our guys are police officers and the Colombians are drawn to that.”

“We don’t only partner with Colombian SOF, which is what most people think, we also work closely with the police. We look to partner where we can have the best effects and where they need us most – working to maintain internal security. Historically, we have had relationships with police and immigration.”



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Most of the U.S. presence in the country resides at the embassy in Bogota. The SOCFWD works and lives with their Colombian partners.

“We provide the Ambassador with ground truth and give him our assessment as well as that of Colombian forces,” he said.

One of the major problems in the country is drug production. In many areas, there is a limited government presence in the country, so it is not unusual for people to trade coca for what they need. That limited presence also allows for the movement of illegal products, as well as people.

“In any country, there are pockets of interesting groups who facilitate the movement of materials or people,” he said. “While the war was ongoing, the FARC was that group. With the FARC’s demobilization, the ongoing conflict is due to the narcotics trade and competing interests trying to fill the void left by the FARC.

“The way we protect the homeland is to understand migration through an 11-country region,” he continued. “I don’t have forces in all of those countries. We understand how individuals/groups may want to cause harm or pushback. The migration streams may be economic, quality of life, etc. If we understand that stream, we can pinpoint those individuals who want to do harm. When we can do that it helps us maintain stability in Colombia and the U.S.”



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U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers from 20th SFG(A) assigned to the Special Operations Command Forward in Colombia conduct weapons training with Colombian Army counterparts at a range in Tolemaida, Colombia.

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Colombian Army Comandos, *Fuerzas Especiales*, showcase their tactical capabilities at the Colombian Army’s National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

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A sign outside the Colombian Army *Escuelade de Fuerzas Especiales* (ESFES by its acronym in Spanish), shows the patch and tab worn by the Colombia Army Special Forces, or Comandos.

Picking up that thread, the G2 for the SOCFWD, a Chief Warrant Officer 3 with numerous deployments to Colombia, continued, “We are responsible for Southern Cone and Andean Region and every country in South America other than the Caribbean and Central America. The biggest threat we have is the networks that facilitate human smuggling, drug trafficking and weapons trafficking. What makes it unique and challenging is the fact that you can’t point your finger at one network and say it does this or that. They are converging; that’s what makes it challenging.”

Part of his job is to understand how the networks touch different countries from Brazil to Colombia.

“We always keep an eye on other threats. One of the biggest networks here in Colombia is the ELN, which is trying to take over space occupied by the



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01 A Navy counterpart helps rig up Army Soldiers in preparation for training on a tower at the Colombian Army's Parachute School. Training in a joint environment helps the different Armed Services in Colombia build interoperability.

PHOTO PAGE Soldiers train at the Colombian Army's *Escuela de Paracaidismo Militar* or Military Parachute School. The impressive school is modeled after the U.S. Army Airborne School and has similar facilities including a variety of platforms, pits, zip lines and towers, as well as a rigging facility.

FARC. All networks are fighting for space the FARC left. They are fighting each other and government. Those undergoverned spaces are going to be governed by someone – whether it is the government or a terrorist network.”

He explained that the Colombian Government is actively seeking to address those areas. In the southwest and northwest the issue is narcotics. The Colombian Government is running operations that focus on these groups. They have different ways they operate. The Colombian Government has established different ways to fight those battles because they don't have the same way of doing business.”

He continued that understanding the networks and how they operate is a priority. Identifying the leader, and how the network is put together, how they facilitate their business is the job of the Colombian Military's Sensitive Site Exploitation teams that are trained by USSOF. “This is a great asset we bring to our partner nation. They have the equipment, and we are able to teach them how to conduct their SSE. That's a skill that is being used a lot more. As the networks and the enemy gets smarter and better — we will have to adjust as well.”

That is something the members of the *Armada Nacional de Colombia* with attached Marine units, who are tasked with patrolling all of the rivers and waterways that can be used to transport people or things, knows too well. To that end, the command set up a Joint Task Force with the police in Tumaco, a port city far removed from the capital. During

the *Special Warfare* visit to Colombia, the staff flew to Tumaco in order to observe the operations of the naval forces.

The former government negotiator in ongoing peace talks with the ELN, Juan Camilo Restepo, referred to areas like Tumaco as “a devil's cauldron where all manner of criminal ingredients are being boiled.”

Not surprisingly most of the problems in the area revolve around the drug trade, which according to the Colombian Attorney General's Office, is now impacted by the Mexican cartels. According to the Attorney General criminal organizations of the Zetas, Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation are operating in at least 10 different regions to ensure that their cocaine supply continues to flow. In Tumaco, where unemployment is at 70 percent, working in the drug trade is the only option.

At a stop at a military base in Tumaco, the sight of cocaine boats impounded by the police was eye opening. All manner of boats from small homemade skiffs, to high power speedboats and even a homemade sub littered the docks at the base. The members of the Task Force had stopped the vessels and the boats and their cargo — cocaine — were impounded. On the day of the *Special Warfare* visit, the task force seized \$27 million worth of cocaine in one seizure.

Efforts in Tumaco are conducted under a joint task force, which includes the police, designed to counter different elements of criminal activity in the area. Tumaco is one of the points where all narco-trafficking starts.





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01 Soldiers keep watch over boats, chemicals and other items seized during counter-drug operations in Tumaco, Colombia.

02 Throughout the city of Tumaco, Colombia military and police impound lots house thousands of boats, boat motors, chemicals and materials used in cocaine production.

03 Maj. Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro Jimenez, commander of the Colombian Joint Special Command, speaks with the *Special Warfare* staff at the Colombian Ministry of Defense in Bogota, Colombia.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY THOMAS K. FITZGERALD

According to the commander of the task force, more than 25,000 hectares of cocaine is growing in the fields in the region. Here you can find the production concentration, development of the product and departure. The brigade is tasked with patrolling all of the rivers and water ways that can be used to transport the cocaine.

The area is home to more than 1,400 miles of water ways and has more than 500 kilometers of rivers that can be accessed by boats and the Pacific Ocean. In a very real way, all of these waters turn into highways for the boats.

The task force concentrates on choke points where they know drug runners will funnel into. They strike hard at the criminals, seizing their weapons and closing down their routes.

“There is a great expectation from the people that we stop this criminal activity,” the commander of the task force explained. “But the narco traffickers are finding different ways and are skirting to different areas.”

Members of the task force come from all over Colombia. The brigade has more than 1,800 men, with three fluvial battalions to control the waterways.

The task force commander works closely with Special Forces and Navy Seals. They share tactics, techniques and procedures and conduct training as well as give advice on collecting intelligence and technical equipment. “Before, and long after the mission is over, there is a partnership,” he said.

U.S. Special Operations Forces facilitate subject matter expert exchanges to help train the Colombian Naval Special Operators alongside their American counterparts. The exchanges range from Civil Affairs to maritime training.

From the Colombian side, the Colombian Navy Special Operators are experts in the field of riverine operations and they share that expertise with



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their American counterparts. The forces operating in Tumaco are the top tier in the region and hope to take the lessons learned from war and their expertise to countries in the Caribbean and Latin America.

The Task Force Commander said the goal is to synch all of their efforts to export security.

“This is what we want. We still have a lot of challenges to go through – and they are dynamic. We have to adapt to them,” he said. “We realize we still have a lot of work to do in Colombia.” **SW**

ADDITIONAL CONTENT ONLINE AT:
<https://www.soc.mil/swcs/SWmag/archive/SW3103/video.htm>



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Special Warfare had the opportunity to sit down with Maj. Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro Jimenez, current Deputy Commander of the Colombian Army, and the former commander of the *Conjunto de Operaciones Especiales*, about the enduring relationship between the two countries and the way forward.

SW: How has the force developed over time?

MG NAVARRO: In 2012, we found ourselves in the final offensive against the FARC.

It was important that we maintained our capabilities and even improved them. We had made important progress on strengthening our military intelligence, special operations and night operations, which helped weaken the adversary's command and control system. It was important that we maintained the forward progress. For that to happen, the support of the U.S. Army was of vital importance.

In 2012 the process of peace with FARC was already in progress. We knew that the operational environment would change and that we would have to adapt to a new normal of a different operation environment. It was important that we continue the offensive against the adversary, but also look to the future of Colombian Forces. The U.S. Army played a big role, because they helped maintain our capabilities in the offensive, but also gave us advice for the future environment.

Today, we continue to receive training and advice, as well as operations, materiel support and advice on the processes we need to restructure toward our future.

SW: Initially you were working only with Special Forces how did Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations evolve?

MG NAVARRO: There was an important component that was missing – the interagency cooperation, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations. If there

is something the Colombian Army is good at it, it is to develop and fight a war within a civil population in their own country. We are good at working in the population and integrating the population into the Army's operations. With the theme of building the army for the future, it was essential to incorporate these elements into our operations.

SW: What processes do you have in place to professionalize the force?

MG NAVARRO: Our officers are going to the United States and visiting different military installations and getting training on capabilities. When they come back, they bring the information that we need to reach our goals and capabilities.

U.S. Army noncommissioned officers and officers have also supported our transformation efforts. We had to make a strategic decision, and received very good advice from the U.S. Special Operations Command-South to bring all of the special operations units together and consolidate them under one unit.

It wasn't an easy task to bring all of these units together. We had to break the molds that were established from a long time ago. Gen. Alberto Jose Mejia Ferrero (the Commander of all Colombian Military Forces, gave us our lines of effort and we started this great effort of transformation, which included seminars with SOCSOUTH, visits to Fort Bragg for information on recruiting, training, force assignment and doctrine.

SW: Did you develop new doctrine?

MG NAVARRO: We already had some doctrine, but we identified the strengths and weaknesses. We were already good at quick strike, but we were missing the special warfare side of the doctrine. Our officers studied the American doctrine, they learned it and then they implemented it into the Colombian environment. We are sending more and more officers and NCOs to learn how to counter transnational organized threats.

We also set up classes at the Joint Special Operations University and sent soldiers to Germany for training, and in keeping with the theme of Forces Commando, we also did exchanges.

SW: Were you involved in this process?

MG NAVARRO: I received many capabilities briefs and in order to learn, I read a lot. We had advisors and Special Forces Operational Detachments conducted more training and helped us to progress. Through all of this we were able to strengthen all components of Colombian special operations. We formed all of our units around regiments, all with different capabilities, training, equipment and missions.

SW: What are your future plans?

MG NAVARRO: We have a plan to innovate permanently and strengthen these capacities. We will continue the standardization of training, organization and leadership. We will become an interoperable force and we want to grow our capability to deploy and work with multinational forces. Between government accords to be an interoperable force that has the capability to deploy and work with multinational forces.

SW: What is your relationship with your U.S. partners?

MG NAVARRO: I can say with knowledge of the more difficult moment of the war in Colombia, that we always had a 7th Special Forces Group Soldier with us. When I was in Iraq in 2002-2003, I had a Special Forces Soldier with me. In the main effort against the FARC, we established Joint Task Force Omega, which I commanded and later a rapid deployment force and there were 7th Special Forces Group Soldiers there. When I took over the Sequoias, they were there. When I need advice on training and equipment, the most important thing was to have those friends say, 'Let's go, you can do it. We are here with you the whole time.' And that was the Special Forces Soldiers. **SW**



PROTECTING THE SOUTHERN APPROACHES

Whole-Of-SOF Application to a Strategic Chokepoint.

BY MAJOR JASON MARTINEZ

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CAPTAIN LUCAS WANIEWSKI,
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 LEHMANUEL LARRIUEX,
AND MASTER SERGEANT ROBERT LISTAU

Protecting the southern approaches of the United States is one of the primary concerns for the U.S. Southern Command and by default the Special Operations Command South. Special Operations Forces have maintained a persistent presence in Central and South America for decades with a great deal of focus on Colombia as the partner of choice. Colombia finds itself in very precarious times as the Colombian Government treks through a post-conflict political landscape that is arguably viewed by some as more of a conflict in evolution as previously viewed threats to the state are now seeking participation in governance. Additionally, migration to the country from neighboring countries is stretching resources of all types, including the security infrastructure.

Colombia, a strategic chokepoint, currently faces a great deal of uncertainty and threats to its sovereignty that could destabilize the region. With competing global requirements for U.S. military resources, the Department of Defense is limited on what it can dedicate to an area that is historically not a high priority. This leaves SOF, with the ability to operate in



forces called *autodefensas*. In 1997, these local defense groups formed a right wing para-military group called the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC, to counter the FARC and ELN threat on local communities. Initially, Colombian elites, drug traffickers, and to some extent, the Colombian Government supported the AUC. Between 1997 and 1999, the AUC killed more than 19,000 people in areas with suspected guerrilla sympathizers. In 2000 alone, they were responsible for 804 assassinations, 203 kidnappings and 507 murders.⁰⁵ Shortly thereafter, the AUC began to dissolve into the coca trade as it tapped into extensive resources to fund their operations. The FARC and ELN followed suit creating a coca trade that rivals or surpasses most Fortune 500 companies today.⁰⁶

In addition to these threats, Colombia is geographically located in a critical strategic chokepoint in the Western Hemisphere. The flow of migrants and commodities north from South America is funneled through Colombia prior to entering the land bridge of Central America or the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. The country is riddled with an arterial network of 10 primary rivers totaling more than 13,500 miles running throughout the country with hundreds of ancillary waterways spanning the entirety of the country.⁰⁷ These riverine systems facilitate near seamless movement along water routes to both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. The rivers,

small elements, in a whole-of-SOF concept in support of the greater DoD effort, to be the connective tissue that binds U.S. government efforts and support.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, Colombia has experienced more than half a century of conflict with illegally armed groups, including Marxist guerrillas and transnational criminal organizations.⁰² The evolution of threats to Colombian sovereignty have shaped the nature of U.S. relations with the Government of Colombia, especially in regards to military engagements between DoD and the Colombian Ministry of Defense. History of mil-to-mil engagements in Colombia date back to the 1950s with the establishment of the Colombian Lancero School, which was based on the methodology of the U.S. Army Ranger School. Since then, the relationship has evolved with the evolution of existing threats. In 1964, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a leftist insurgent group, began a campaign of guerrilla warfare and terrorism engaging in political kidnappings and attacks on security forces that resulted in hundreds of thousands of lives lost with many more displaced.⁰³ Around the same time frame, another Marxist-Leninist organization sprouted from the decade-long bloody, sectarian struggle known as La Violencia, the National Liberation Army or ELN.⁰⁴ In response to these threats, and the inability of the Colombian Government to defend the populace beyond the reach of its capabilities, land owners formed their own security



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Drug boats and submarines seized during military and police operations sit in a boat graveyard housed on a Colombian military base in Tumaco, Colombia. This area produces more than half of the cocaine manufactured in Colombia and much of it ends up in the U.S. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

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750 kilograms of cocaine with a street value of \$17 million U.S. dollars is destroyed after being seized by the Colombian military. U.S. ARMY PHOTO COURTESY OF 7TH SFG(A)



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in conjunction with the considerable fertility of the soil, facilitate an agricultural capability rivaled by few countries, especially concerning the farming of cocaine.

This combination yields a turnaround of two-to-six harvests of cocaine annually, department-dependent, with higher yields of the crop occurring in the lower altitudes and especially after the rainy season in March.⁰⁸ This is further enhanced with genetically altered coca plants which grow faster when coupled with these ideal growing conditions.⁰⁹ The richness and availability of these factors certainly contributes to other viable exports including coffee (Colombia serves as the fourth largest exporter in the world), bananas and rice.¹⁰ However, the return on investment both physically (“garrote or carrot”) and monetarily to cultivate other crops does not serve as motivators for Colombian farmers. Furthermore, while the few aforementioned agricultural exports of Colombia average one-to-two harvests per year, the yield produces a product at a fraction of the price paid to farmers, and a higher probability of threat from illegal armed groups who work fervently to “influence” farmers in remote areas free from



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a COLMIL security presence.¹¹ This dynamic contributes to a complex dilemma that poses a real threat to Colombia and more importantly, to the security of U.S. interests in the region.

In the 1980s, USSOF support became focused on developing highly specialized units to conduct counterinsurgency operations. These units took some time to establish and develop to the point where they could project force into ungoverned spaces occupied by armed dissident groups. Through persistent engagement over three decades, SOF continued to prepare, build and influence COLMIL and COLSOF with the intent of creating a formidable capability that could protect its sovereignty and our interests in the region.

This brings us to 2018. These elements are prepared to export security and are going through a significant transformation. COLSOF specifically is now prepared to evolve from the current U.S. Colombia Action Plan deployment construct to a more self-funded, self-supported and enduring deployment presence to alleviate pressure and decrease the USSOF footprint in Central and South America. DoD assets in Colombia are currently negotiating at the ministerial level to make this a reality. Additionally, they are transforming the COLMIL to a joint construct. A prime example is the Joint Special Operations Command (*Comando Conjunto de Operaciones Especiales*), which is transforming as a part of



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larger joint force. The COLGOV and COLMOD are exploring future legislation similar to Goldwater-Nichols and Nunn-Cohen to create a joint environment as well as a SOCOM-like entity similar to the U.S. As part of the greater transformation, Colombia is also adapting a more whole-of-government approach to deal with their internal problems and persistent threats. An example of this adaptation is Campaign Atlas taking place in the highly contested area of Tumaco, Nariño Department, that produces more than half of the cocaine produced in Colombia. This campaign is in response to an incident that occurred the Oct. 5, 2017 that resulted in the death of eight civilians. The former President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos pledged four things:

1. He assigned new security forces to existing ones in Tumaco area and restructured them under a Joint Task Force.
2. Increased the presence of civilian agencies.
3. Forced coordination between agencies and efforts.
4. Increased government investments in rural communities.¹²

U.S. GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES AND THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Despite the great strides over decades of support, there is still a disconnect amongst



location where illicit pathways that feed illicit networks merge. Whether it is the legal or illegal migration of people emanating from nations that may be of interest, or the flow of legal or illegal commodities. A large percentage of “things” moving north along the land bridge of Central America or east to west from the Pacific to the Caribbean (or vice-versa) funnel through or near Colombia. This situation presents U.S. agencies with an opportunity to contend with current USG challenges. SOF and other agencies currently support counter-drug, counter-terrorism, counter-transnational organized crime efforts that all fall under different permissions and authorities as well as funding lines of accounting. The geography that forces migratory routes, illicit pathways and networks to merge is the same geography that forces the convergence of U.S. efforts in time and space. This dynamic has permitted DoD, SOF and other U.S. agencies to merge authorities, permissions and resources on one geographic location. SOF assets on the ground are currently task organized and placed to maximize both SOF and other U.S. agencies’ authorities, permissions and resources with the common purpose of safeguarding U.S. interests and protecting the southern approaches.

SOF METHODOLOGY AND THE WHOLE-OF-SOF CONCEPT

The foundation of the SOF methodology recently utilized in Colombia is based on the principles of optimization, synchronization and integration. Optimization of the current force structure to properly align the SOF capabilities according to access to the partner force and information, geographic placement and proximity to persistent threats or pathways. Synchronization of DoD, SOF and interagency equities and interests in time, space and purpose, and ultimately, the integration of all of U.S. capabilities and information for a common goal. This is how SOF strengthens U.S. networks to better support the partner-nation, the populace and to counter illicit activities. The whole-of-SOF concept is accomplished by overlaying SOF capabilities that include

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A guard stands outside headquarters of Naval Special Operations Center in Tumaco, Colombia.

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Security forces stand at the ready on the airfield in Tumaco, Colombia. In response to a 2017 incident that resulted in the death of eight civilians, the President of Colombia pledged to increase the presence of security forces in the area.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

U.S. entities. There is an array of interests, equities and even metrics for success in Colombia from the U.S. perspective. Each agency defines success and justifies their efforts differently. One can argue that it is a struggle for U.S. agencies to have a unified vision of what needs to be accomplished when at times one agency’s interest may be contradictory to another. Each U.S. agency is limited individually, by resources, authorities, permissions and many times by access and placement. Realistically, Colombia is not a high enough priority to dedicate what is necessary to contend with the challenges that are threatening our national interests. This leads to an imbalance in the application of soft power and hard power leaving the underlying reasons that foster instability and threaten U.S. interests intact. For example, throughout the country major road infrastructure is lacking or nonexistent, and much of the in-country travel is done by air or a multi-day drive. This prohibits security presence and enforcement in rural farming areas. Despite this significant gap, there are measures in place to address road construction, though in recent years, funding and construction priority have dwindled.¹³ Additionally, promising to establish infrastructure for farmers would facilitate security presence in the rural areas to maintain the checks and balances of the growing of other crops. What has happened instead is COLMIL/COLGOV representatives will advise against coca cultivation, or destroy whole coca crops and never return to the rural location again.¹⁴

This environment leaves large swaths of the population further disillusioned with any type of outside assistance or support, which includes that from the Colombian Government. From the U.S. perspective, we remain in a quandary of short-term operational results versus longer term post-conflict development. So, the question remains, how do U.S. stakeholders align equities, interests and resources in time, space and purpose to achieve the varied end states?

The U.S. has invested a great deal in Colombia over a long period of time. Why? From a strategic perspective, Colombia is a geographic



PROTECTING THE SOUTHERN APPROACHES

Special Forces operators, SEAL operators (geographically dependent), Civil Military Support Elements (CMSE or Civil Affairs), Military Information Support Teams and other SOF operators. This is not a new concept, but one that must be revisited depending on the environment and level of experience of the teams operating in the area of responsibility. In Central and South America, these cross-functional teams are called Operational Support Teams. They are fully tailorable and flexible to any specific situation or environment. It is at the discretion of the commander and dependent on the given location to determine the specific composition of the OST.

The primary focus in implementing the SOF methodology and the whole-of-SOF concept is to strengthen U.S. collaboration and coordination and ensure a common narrative prior to engaging with the partner nation. This approach becomes the foundation of a whole-of-government integration especially within the U.S. Embassy. The critical integration at the U.S. Embassy represents the horizontal collaboration and coordination that synchronizes our collective efforts. The coordination and synchronization of USG efforts, resources, authorities and permissions better postures us to facilitate and enable our host-nation partners. Through this process, it allows USG entities to do four things:

- Elevate the relationship beyond material support.
- Create opportunities for future engagements.
- Provide support to current operations, and most importantly,
- Protect the southern approaches.

Through persistent engagement over the last three decades, the U.S. Colombian relationship has been elevated beyond just material support to one of shared vision and end state. The shared vision and end state has created opportunities for future engagements that ensure our access and placement remains constant over time. This becomes critical as competitor states, not from the Western Hemisphere, begin to challenge U.S. interests and undermine our influence along the southern approaches. The access and placement optimally postures SOF and the USG as a whole to support current operations that empower the local population and weakens existing threats. This support also has the residual effect of providing U.S. elements access and placement to contested areas that may provide us what we may want along other lines of effort. Enabling the partner nation through horizontal collaboration and coordination creates opportunities for future engagements.

A whole-of-SOF and whole-of-government methodology also postures the U.S. to more appropriately protect the southern approaches by integrating the interagency, defense attaches, SOF and other SOF activities. This integration across multiple entities has greatly augmented the collection and targeting capabilities of the USG and the partner nation. The collaboration of information, synchronization of resources and the leverage of SOF access and placement with the partner nation has allowed the rapid and successful implementation of a finishing effect in the environment. Below is a vignette of how the SOF methodology translates into tactical action in reality and the full integration of USG entities can achieve regional and sometimes global effects.



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Soldiers keep watch over a containment area for chemicals collected by security forces in Tumaco, Colombia. The chemicals, including white gasoline, are used in the production of cocaine.

02
A U.S. Army Special Forces Officer discusses operations with a partner force commander in Tumaco, Colombia.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

THROUGH PERSISTENT ENGAGEMENT OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES, THE U.S. COLOMBIAN RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN ELEVATED BEYOND JUST MATERIAL SUPPORT TO ONE OF SHARED VISION AND END STATE.



in Turbo is but one example of SOF supported interagency operations with the partner force. Campaign Atlas with Joint Task Force Hercules, though still in its beginning phases, is another example of the SOF methodology being applied to achieve the whole-of-government approach in support of the partner nation. Over the past year, Colombia had three major operations in the country, all with SOF support embedded with the partner nation, which provided the U.S. Embassy real-time information and feedback on ongoing initiatives. Furthermore, these partnerships continue to keep us near geographic proximity to critical locations of interests to the USG. The established relationships are paying dividends in the access and placement the U.S. is permitted. More importantly, it is allowing SOF and the U.S. as a whole the opportunity to provide the provisions necessary to support the stability and security of a very capable and reliable partner as they contend with internal threats and facilitate our fight against threats to our national interests. Colombia, with its strategic geographic positioning, will continue to remain a critical point in protecting the southern approaches. SOF, with the ability to operate in small elements as a whole-of-SOF concept in support of the greater whole-of-government effort, should continue to be the connective tissue that binds the U.S. Government efforts and support. **SW**

APPLICATION OF THE SOF METHODOLOGY

From October 2017, SOF elements have operated under very limiting authorities and permissions that do not allow any direct building of partner capacity. Additionally, funding had been cut from many U.S. agencies in Colombia at the start of the fiscal year. The Special Operations Command Forward shifted focus to mapping the various illicit pathways and networks that operated through Colombia. This is not a new occurrence in the area of responsibility, but, the shift consisted more so in including the level of detail of specific stopping points along routes that included pictures and locations to gain a greater granularity of the environment.

The key point became the process of information sharing that was distributed across the U.S. Embassy, relationships within the U.S. Embassy had existed for many years. But many relationships were linear and very point-to-point with a lack of trust. The shift consisted of forcing a collaboration across multiple agencies to achieve a shared understanding of what information was pertinent to what agency, the process in which that information was processed into decisions and what resources and permissions each agency had to leverage. The relationships and collaboration that the SOCFWD had fostered came to a head at the inception of a new campaign in which the SOCFWD played a pivotal role in drafting and coordinating the whole-of-government concept of support at the request to the U.S. Ambassador of Colombia. Recently, the SOCFWD has fostered relationships and carried the collaboration further with successful joint interagency operations in conjunction with the partner nation.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges faced by the U.S. operating in Colombia, opportunities exist to contend with challenges through persistent engagement and the application of SOF methodology. The operation

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01

-STRATEGIC- PARTNERSHIP

Building a Strategic Special Operations Partnership: U.S. SOF in Colombia.

BY COLONEL (RETIRED) ROBERT GADDIS

Colombia and the United States have long maintained a strategic bilateral defense partnership. The formal relationship dates from the founding of the Organization of American States in 1948 and the mutual defense assistance language in the OAS charter. Following Colombia's 1951-54 deployment of military forces to defend South Korea, which were attached to U.S. forces operating under the auspices of the United Nations Command, the strategic relationship with the U.S. grew and matured rapidly.⁰¹

After the end of the Korean War, U.S. Rangers and Special Forces provided valuable training, advice and assistance to the Colombian Army which further deepened the military bonds between the two nations. Nevertheless, a variety of factors combined to imperil this partnership by the late 1990s. Poor governance, widespread institutional weaknesses, the corrosive effects of narcotics cartels/drug trafficking, and the rise of armed groups battling for control of the country, caused the U.S. to question the viability of the defense relationship.

The armed groups, primarily the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army grew in strength and competency and inflicted serious defeats on Colombian military and police forces. At the height of their power and influence, the Colombian government had effectively lost control of more than half of the nation's territory.⁰² Furthermore, the FARC was able to influence, through bribery and intimidation, more than 57 percent of Colombian mayors.⁰³

In 1996, the FARC launched a massive, coordinated offensive across the nation striking 26 concurrent objectives, including the overrunning of the Colombian military base at Las Delicias in Putumayo Department. By 1998, many analysts concluded that, "Colombia was a failed state and that the Colombian government would be overthrown."⁰⁴

Fortunately, this did not transpire. The existential threat to the nation drove an all-out response by the Colombian government and its security forces. This renewed will, coupled with U.S. government assistance — to including U.S. Special Operations Forces building capacity efforts — turned the tide against the FARC and ELN.

USSOF's partnership with their Colombian counterparts helped build highly skilled, professional forces responsible for Colombia's hard-fought transition from a near failed state into an increasingly stable, secure, and prosperous nation. Colombia continues to implement a peace process with the recently demobilized FARC, and is currently negotiating with a much diminished ELN. Not only have Colombian security forces transformed their country, but an increased Colombian SOF capability and capacity enables them to export their lessons learned in security throughout Latin America, helping their neighbors provide for their own security. This increase in regional self-sufficiency has allowed Special Operations Command South to optimize USSOF resources elsewhere in the theater and achieve greater operational efficiencies.

FORGING A RELATIONSHIP UNDER FIRE IN KOREA AND IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

The seeds of what developed into a close SOF relationship between the U.S. and Colombia emerged from the performance of the Colombian Army battalion in Korea, particularly during the brutal fight for "Old Baldy" in March 1953. Colombian valor during this battle established their professional reputation and cemented a shared combat experience between U.S. and Colombian military forces.⁰⁵ After the Korean War, the Colombian military recognized the need for elite, highly skilled soldiers similar to those of the U.S. Army Ranger companies that they saw in Korea.

Accordingly, the Colombian Army sought to establish a Ranger-like program. In 1956, they asked the U.S. Military Group Commander in Colombia to find suitable U.S. Army instructors, with Ranger experience, to help them launch their Ranger course. The Colombians called their Ranger program "*Lancero*," or Lancer, tracing its heritage to the elite cavalymen



who operated in General Simon Bolivar's army during Colombia's war for independence from Spain.⁰⁶

Social, political and economic tensions across different sectors of Colombian society — in particular, those pitting powerful urban elites against the peasantry in the countryside — flared dramatically during the 1948-1966 unrest known as *La Violencia* (the violence), which took up to an estimated 250,000 lives. It was during the latter years of *La Violencia* that the FARC and ELN emerged and began their campaigns to overthrow the Colombian state. These guerrillas drew their core support from the rural areas of Colombia, and thrived on the lack of government security and institutional presence. Thus, the need for the elite Lanceros — the first Colombian Special Operations Forces (COLSOF) — as a spearhead against the increasingly organized armed groups was clear, as their “graduation field exercise... consisted of combat patrols against local quasi-guerrilla bandits.”⁰⁷

By 1964 the FARC, ELN and other illegal armed groups, primarily operating in rural areas, raised sufficient concern in Bogotá to prompt Colombian President Alberto Lleras Camargo to request a specialized USSOF advisory effort for Colombia. According to Charles Briscoe, Camargo asked U.S. Brigadier General William Yarborough, “to provide advice to fight the insurgencies... Many of these ideas were adopted by the Colombian military and incorporated in PLAN LAZO, (Lasso) which was the first national strategy to restore law and order to the countryside.”⁰⁸ PLAN LAZO succeeded, and the Colombian military's (COLMIL) counterinsurgency campaign eliminated

insurgent hideouts, diminished their strength, and reduced violence in the countryside. But despite the military success of this early USSOF advisory support, Colombia's internal problems remained as subsequent governments did not address the social, economic and political issues at the root of the unrest.

RISE OF THE FARC AND ELN

By 1980, the FARC consisted of some 1,200 combatants in 10 “fronts” located primarily in the southeastern portions of Colombia. The much smaller ELN had several hundred fighters organized in three fronts, primarily in the northeast of the country. Figures on non-combatant “supporters” are less precise, but the FARC claimed 28,000 supporters while the more secretive ELN was estimated to have some 2,000 supporters during this time.⁰⁹ During the late 1980's, both groups saw significant growth fueled primarily by a combination of profits from drug trafficking, kidnapping and increased social unrest. The influx of drug money enabled the FARC and ELN to pursue large scale operations, moving from guerrilla warfare to mobile warfare.

The illicit drug trade and its societal impact increasingly became interwoven with the larger conflict in Colombia. This dynamic was the decisive factor behind the FARC and ELN's explosive gains. In 1989, the FARC developed a new campaign plan, seeking to increase their strength to 32,000 combatants and seize control of Colombia through force.¹⁰ By 2000, the FARC had grown to some 60 Fronts with some 16,900 combatants. The ELN also made dramatic gains, growing

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The Special Operations Liaison Officer for Colombia talks with the commander of the *Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral*, where Colombian Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Soldiers are trained.

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Lancero candidates run in formation at the *Escuela de Lanceros* located on the Colombian military's National Training Center in Tolémaida, Colombia.

STORY PHOTOS:
U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY
JENNIFER G. ANGELO



02



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

some 43 percent by the early 1990s¹¹ and reaching 3,700 fighters organized in 42 fronts by 2000. Additionally, the groups claimed 250,000 supporters for the FARC and 10,000 for the ELN.¹²

As the strength of the FARC and ELN grew, so did their combat proficiency and their ability to dominate the battlefield. In 1997 and 1998, the Colombian military suffered 84 ambushes and was attacked 205 times.¹³ The FARC and ELN used surprise to score their greatest successes as they attacked isolated garrisons, which lacked air and artillery support. As an indicator of their capabilities, in August 1998 the FARC brazenly attempted to seize control of both Caquetá and Putumayo departments in their largest offensive to date. Although failing to achieve their overall objectives, the FARC nonetheless overran several large military bases and took numerous Colombian soldiers and police hostage for use as bargaining chips. During this period, more than 150 municipalities were abandoned by the government to the insurgent groups. When the government left, the insurgents moved in and established their own institutions, “where they dictated local government policy, spending and political candidates.”¹⁴

In 1998, Andres Pastrana was elected Colombia’s president on a platform of “Peace at all Costs.” His campaign promised to conclude a negotiated settlement with the FARC and ELN which led to his granting the FARC a Switzerland-sized, 42,000 square kilometer demilitarized zone, known as the *Despeje*. As part of his good faith effort, Pastrana also requested U.S. financial assistance to implement a social and economic development plan. The FARC, however, feigned interest in the peace process, using the *Despeje* as a staging area from which to imprison hostages, recruit new combatants, resupply their mobile columns and military fronts, increase their coca growing capacity and stage attacks on government forces. These attacks ultimately spelled the end of the peace process and any immediate hope of U.S. economic and developmental support. While the COLMIL labored to contain the attacks, Pastrana sent his Minister of Defense to Washington D.C. with a revised request including \$500 million in security assistance: this was the initial resource basis of Plan Colombia.¹⁵

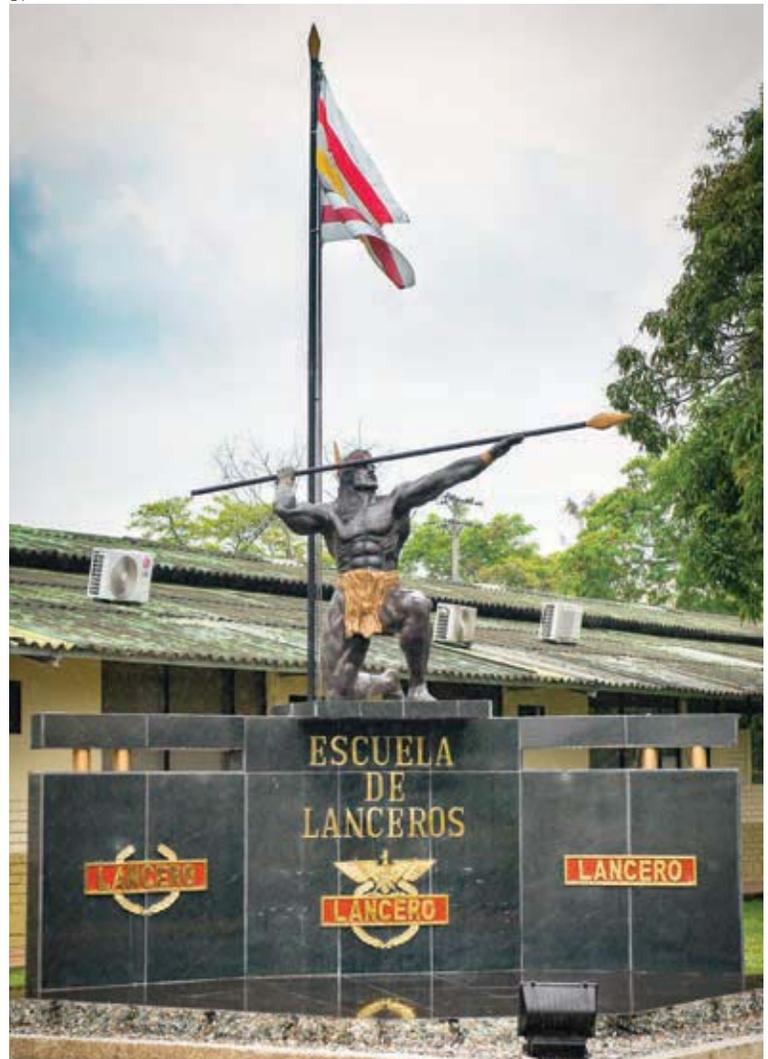
PLAN COLOMBIA

Published in late 1999 by the Colombian Government, PLAN COLOMBIA promulgated a comprehensive strategy to end the violence and transform the country. PLAN COLOMBIA, acknowledging the narcotics-insurgency linkage, included a robust counter-narcotics package. In 2000, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$1.1 billion to support Plan Colombia’s initial police, military and alternative development programs. It is important to note that Plan Colombia assistance focused on combating drug trafficking and placed major restrictions on when and how U.S. assistance could be used against the insurgent groups. Congressional leaders,¹⁶ concerned about U.S. military involvement and the extremely violent nature of the conflict, limited the

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number of U.S. personnel involved in training and advisory work in Colombia to 400 (expanded to 800 in 2005) and stipulated that human rights certification must take place prior to any training of the Colombian military or police.

Almost immediately after the Congressional appropriation, U.S. Southern Command and SOCSOUTH planners began working on the details of the military and police assistance programs. These programs were divided into eight principal categories, most of which had a USSOF component:

i. Rotary Wing Aviation Training and Equipment Support, including UH-1 Huey and later UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters.

ii. Drug Eradication through contractor crop spraying of coca fields.

iii. Drug Interdiction - land and maritime. This included USSOF training assistance to the Colombian National Police Counter-Narcotics Jungle Unit *Jungla*, the Colombian Army Counter-Narcotics Brigade, and the Colombian Navy Riverine Brigade.

iv. Infrastructure Security, with emphasis on protecting oil pipelines, electrical towers, etc. U.S. Army Special Forces provided training support to selected COLAR units, like the 18th Brigade, charged with securing vital infrastructure.

v. Police Presence programs that built, staffed and trained rural police *Carabineros* facilities.

vi. Coastal and Riverine Operations – with Naval Special Warfare training support. Air Bridge Denial, a lethal shoot-down program targeting narcotics transport aircraft.

vii. Air Bridge denial lethal shoot-down program targeting narcotics transport aircraft.

viii. Special Operations – Special Forces training and advisory support to COLAR Mobile Brigades and later to the Rapid Deployment Force. The *FUDRA* combined three COLAR Mobile Brigades, a Special Forces Brigade and included support of the COLAR Aviation Brigade.¹⁷

During the early stages of Plan Colombia, the primary USSOF effort focused on the COLAR Mobile Brigades, even while USSOF also trained the COLAR 18th Brigade, CNP *Jungla* unit and the COLAR CD Brigade. These mobile brigades were essential to the counterinsurgency effort, because they were comprised of professional soldiers and were one of the few offensive forces that could pursue the FARC. At that time, most of the COLMIL strength consisted of conscripts, who per the Colombian constitution could only be used in a defensive role, and thus were largely limited to static positions.

Plan Colombia assistance restrictions eased significantly after the attacks of 9/11 when the U.S. government acknowledged the links between drug trafficking and terrorism. In 2002, National Security Presidential Directive 18 granted the U.S. military greater leeway in Colombia. First, NSPD-18 allowed the use of funds earmarked for counter-narcotics operations for a unified campaign fighting both drug trafficking and terrorist organizations, reflecting the FARC and ELN's designation by the U.S. Department of State as terrorist organizations. Second, intelligence could be shared between U.S. and Colombian military staffs. Most importantly, the U.S. military and USSOF in particular could now train and assist the Colombians in their fight against the narco-terrorists. This effectively combined counterdrug and counterterrorism resources and authorities for use against the ELN and FARC.¹⁸

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A statue featuring the Lancero symbol stands proudly in the center of the Lancero school, *Escuela de Lanceros*.

The term Lancero was chosen as a way to honor a specific unit of fighters (*Lanceros*) that helped the army of Simón Bolívar in his conflict for the independence of Colombia. This unit showed special bravery and strength during the Vargas Swamp Battle in 1819.

02

Lancero candidates participate in a swim test at the *Escuela de Lanceros* located on the Colombian military's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia.

03

The Lancero patch with Lancero and Airborne tabs.



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In 2002, as Plan Colombia assistance began to arrive in earnest, the COLMIL was finally directed by President Pastrana to take back the *Despeje*. The USSOF-trained elite units of the COLAR, like the FUDRA and other COLAR Mobile Brigades, were key to this effort. By the end of April 2002, the FARC were driven from their safe haven as the COLMIL mounted a sustained and dynamic offensive. The FARC lost territory, recruiting grounds, coca growing areas and the ability to conduct mobile warfare. The USSOF support of the COLAR Mobile Brigades was key to the great success they achieved, especially coupled with additional equipment and rotary wing resources provided by Plan Colombia.

The U.S. continued to send more aid to Colombia, with a significant portion focused on security assistance. From 2001-2003 the U.S. provided an additional \$1.5B in Plan Colombia aid, of which \$1.2B was focused on security and counter narcotics. With these resources, Colombian planners, assisted by USSOUTHCOM, developed a comprehensive campaign to defeat the FARC and other insurgent groups. This campaign envisioned three simultaneous efforts: First, help Colombia win the war, understanding that doing so would require dedicating time and resources to both the military campaign and a whole of government approach. Second, support the Colombian security forces' efforts to transform their institutions and capabilities, leveraging USSOF trainers and advisors. Third, develop and reinforce a strategic bilateral military partnership.

ALVARO URIBE AND PLAN PATRIOTA

In May 2002, the Colombians elected a new president, Alvaro Uribe, who campaigned to defeat the insurgencies by force. President Uribe developed a plan focused on the establishment of security as a necessary precondition for development and societal improvements. Uribe's plan had two components: First, a general security plan utilizing the whole of government

approach, known as the Democratic Security Strategy. The DSS focused on the establishment of the rule of law through the consolidation of state control and the strengthening of government institutions. The second component of Uribe's plan was a military campaign plan known as Plan *Patriota* (Patriot). Plan *Patriota* specifically targeted the FARC and ELN. The key objective was to seize the strategic initiative and put the insurgents on a continuous defensive footing.¹⁸

SOC SOUTH efforts adjusted to better support PLAN PATRIOTA. USSOF began persistent training with COLSOF units, focusing on honing tactical skills and further developing operational planning expertise required to enable these units to carry out strikes against FARC leadership targets. The SOF-to-SOF relationship grew dramatically after February 2003, when three Americans were taken hostage by opportunistic FARC combatants. These Americans were U.S. Department of Defense contractors whose reconnaissance aircraft crashed during a mission. The crash site was deep in FARC territory, and the three Americans were taken captive while the FARC summarily executed a fourth American and a Colombian army sergeant at the scene. The combined planning for an eventual hostage rescue further transformed SOC SOUTH and USSOF interaction with the COLSOF.

MOVING TOWARD A JOINT SOF FRAMEWORK

As Plan *Patriota* began to achieve important successes, senior COLMIL leaders recognized the need for increased interoperability among the different Armed Services in order to synchronize efforts and achieve strategic effects against the insurgents. A critical component of this was to target FARC and ELN high value targets. Gen. Carlos Alberto Ospina, the COLAR Commander, designated the COLAR Comando Battalion and the *Lancero* Group as the principal units to launch HVT strikes. Accordingly, USSOF began providing

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Colombian Army Special Forces, *Fuerzas Especiales*, showcase their capabilities at the Colombian military's National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia. According to USSOF advisors, the Colombian Special Forces are fully interoperable with U.S. forces and have the same training and equipment, and have had a depth of operational experience.

tailored training to Comandos and *Lanceros*, and also provided intelligence support to their operational headquarters, known as the COESE or Army Special Operations Command. In 2004, the COESE expanded into a joint command by adding navy and air force SOF components. Its name was changed to CCOPE or Joint Special Operations Command. SOCSOUTH helped organize the CCOPE headquarters element and ensured the provision of SOF-specific equipment through the USMILGP.

Additionally, Colombian and U.S. planners sought increased USSOF training with CNP units to help advance interoperability and enable integrated security operations between the COLMIL and CNP. As USSOF

elements continued persistent training with the CNP *Jungla* unit, a clear success story was emerging, thanks to expanded engagement authorities. The *Junglas* received counter narcotics equipment, in the form of 18 UH-1N helicopters, plus USSOF tactical training and operational planning focused on raiding and destroying FARC cocaine laboratories. The CNP needed to be in on all military operations to provide final arrest and prosecution legalities required against FARC and ELN insurgents; as the conflict was regarded by Colombia as a law enforcement mission. While these efforts with the COLSOF and CNP grew, USSOF began scaling back persistent training with the COLAR Mobile Brigades, which had been successful in retaking the *Despeje* from the FARC: these units were clearly capable and had “graduated” from USSOF efforts.



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THE HIGH VALUE TARGET CAMPAIGN

As COLSOF proficiency grew, USSOF shifted their efforts from tactical training to operational planning, advice and intelligence fusion, which was key to the spectacular outcomes of subsequent Colombian operations. In 2007, the CCOPE expanded by adding a Joint Intelligence and Operations Center and changed its name to CCOES. The increased intelligence fusion allowed CCOES HVT operations to target and strike mid-to-senior level FARC front leaders, leading to spectacular successes. In June 2007, CCOES targeted a FARC regional front commander, Milton “JJ” Gomez, who was killed while on a small vessel in a joint land-riverine operation. In the following months, two more FARC front commanders were killed: “Negro Acacio” was killed in September 2007 after intelligence fusion identified his location, enabling an airstrike. Next, Martin Caballero was killed in October 2007 by aerial bombardment in a combined operation using conventional and COLSOF elements. Each successful strike allowed CCOES Comandos and accompanying CNP to conduct crucial sensitive site exploitation, which in turn led to more intelligence on subsequent FARC leadership targets.



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01 A Navy Jumpmaster inspects an Army Soldier's rig in preparation for training on a parachute lane at the Colombian Army's Parachute School. Training in a joint environment helps the different Armed Services in Colombia build interoperability.

Successive HVT operations allowed the CCOES to improve their capabilities and fully capitalize on the intelligence capabilities provided by their organic Joint Intelligence Operations Center. Late in March 2008, the CCOES JIOC verified the accuracy of information provided by Colombian interagency intelligence, pinpointing the location of FARC Secretariat member Raul Reyes to a remote jungle camp in Northern Ecuador. With his location confirmed, the CCOES planned Operation *Fenix* (Phoenix), a cross-border operation to target and kill Reyes.

Operation *Fenix* emplaced COLSOF into Northern Ecuador to seal off possible escape routes and then killed Reyes by an air strike employing U.S.-sourced precision guided munitions, followed by low-level bombing and gunshot strikes that saturated the area, killing FARC security elements. Following these air strikes, the CCOES conducted an air assault and with the CNP, conducted SSE of the FARC camp which led to the capture of laptops and hard drives containing critical information that led to additional HVT operations.

As a result of these COLSOF operations, the pressure on the FARC leadership became acute. During the month of March 2008, FARC Secretariat member Ivan Rios was killed by one of his bodyguards desperate to bring an end to non-stop COLSOF pursuit. That same month, FARC founder and supreme commander, Manuel Marulanda, died of a heart attack likely brought on by the stress of Colombian operations.

Perhaps the most spectacular successes occurred

in early July 2008, when the three U.S. hostages seized in 2003 were rescued by the COLAR in Operation *Jaque* (Check - as in Chess). From 2004-2008, COLMIL success on the battlefield and CCOES HVT strikes had caused significant disruptions to FARC operations and allowed COLAR intelligence to penetrate the communications network of the FARC. COLAR intelligence was able to assume the identity of FARC radio operators in a man-in-the-middle deception operation. These COLAR intelligence agents tricked the FARC commander holding the hostages, leading him to believe that he was to transport the hostages via helicopter provided by a non-governmental organization. As soon as the FARC and the hostages boarded the helicopter, which was a COLAR helicopter masquerading as a faux international NGO, COLSOF disarmed and captured the FARC leaders in a bloodless strike. The U.S. hostages were liberated in time to enjoy the Fourth of July celebrations as free men.

END GAME FOR THE FARC AND ELN

By 2010, USSOF advisers considered the COLSOF to be at the same tactical competency level as their U.S. counterparts. They had been given the same training, carried the same equipment, and had a depth of operational experience. In the opinion of one USSOF adviser, Colombian Special Forces were better than many first world countries and were totally interoperable with U.S. forces.²⁰ In validation of this assessment, the CCOES were now fully capable of decapitating FARC senior leadership.

In September 2010, "Mono Jojoy," the FARC's military strategist and commander, was killed in Operation *Sodoma*. This joint strike included the use of 30 fixed wing aircraft and 27 helicopters. PGMs destroyed the FARC command bunker where Jojoy and his comrades were located, while a COLSOF air assault with accompanying CNP conducted an enhanced SSE which provided a treasure trove of captured laptops and electronics. This led directly to the next major HVT mission, named Operation *Odiseo*, which targeted and killed Alfonso Cano, the FARC supreme leader, in November 2011.

The successes of Plan *Patriota* were indisputable: Colombia had recovered 90 percent of insurgent-controlled territory and completely decimated FARC combatant strength. After peaking at a high of about 21,000 in 2002, FARC manning fell to about 7,000 combatants. The FARC's presence was reduced to 27 out of Colombia's 1,101 municipalities. Meanwhile, the CCOES became a highly competent Joint Special Operations Command, capable of conducting complex joint special operations both inside and outside of Colombia. The COLAR Aviation Brigade became the second largest helicopter fleet in Latin America and, most importantly, was able to project combat power across the entire country.

Based on the success of Plan *Patriota*, President Uribe was able to initiate Plan *Victoria* (Victory)—the next phase in the Colombian military campaign plan — with the specific aim of either totally destroying the FARC and

ELN or forcing them to the bargaining table. By 2012, the FARC began peace talks with the Colombian government, which culminated in the signing of a peace agreement on June 23, 2016 which, after first being rejected in a popular plebiscite, was approved in modified form by the Colombian Congress in November of 2016.

The difficulty in passing the agreement clearly illustrates the deep divisions in opinion surrounding the future reintegration of former insurgents into Colombian society and the challenges that the peace implementation process will face. As part of the peace deal the remaining 7,000 FARC combatants were to be demobilized and receive reintegration training and benefits. However, the overall success of disarmament and demobilization is still undetermined, as a full accounting of the FARC's weapons and monetary assets remains elusive. There also remain approximately 1,200 former members of the rebel group who refused to demobilize under the peace deal and have joined dissident factions still fighting the government, and who continue to engage in narco-trafficking.²¹

The COLMIL and COLSOF continue military operations against the dissident FARC groups and the ELN. On March 20, 2018, the COLMIL conducted a joint operation with troops from Joint Task Force Omega, supported by the intelligence unit of the National Police, in Guaviare Department that killed nine members of the FARC Residual Armed Group.²²

WAY AHEAD

USSOF capacity building efforts in Colombia, founded on a long history of mutual respect and fortified by almost \$10 billion in Plan Colombia assistance from 2000-2008, are a huge success.²³ The USSOF BPC effort directly supported the Plan *Patriota* campaign to defeat the FARC and bring them to the peace table. Along the way, Colombian-USSOF achievements include the development of SOF and joint doctrine focusing on joint operations; the design and implementation of a joint COLSOF Command; the development of targeting skills (which led to agile COLSOF HVT strikes); the expansion of robust training programs which included SOF specialty training, operational planning, SSE, NCO development and joint unit training; and, in general, a dramatic increase in COLSOF capability and capacity.

The security partnership between USSOF and COLSOF continues to advance. One example is the U.S.-

Colombia Action Plan. USCAP provides U.S. military deployment funds to Colombian military and police trainers, enabling them to export their expertise to Central American partner nations in order to help those countries meet their internal security challenges. Ongoing SOCSOUTH and USSOF support to the CNP *Jungla* unit enables their efforts to export their abilities to Honduras with a SOCSOUTH priority unit, the Honduran National Police *Tigres*. Besides facilitating a regional lessons-learned exchange, the USCAP/*Jungla* effort allows USSOF previously allocated to the *Tigres* training mission to transition to supporting another regional priority unit, thus achieving operational efficiencies with available resources in the USSOUTHCOM AOR.

Another U.S.-Colombian collaboration is a SOCSOUTH regional security educational program in conjunction with the Colombian War College, focusing on a regional audience of Special Operations, counterterrorism and security experts. Its goals include developing SOF partnerships and promoting common awareness of global terror threats.

In recognition of the special partnership between the U.S. and Colombia, Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, the USSOUTHCOM Commander, recently told Congress that Colombia is, "an anchor for regional stability and an emerging contributor to counter-ing global security challenges. Colombia remains a staunch friend whose leadership is critical to addressing threat networks."²⁴ 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENCLAVES IN SOUTH AMERICA

Networks that are outpacing our own.

BY MAJOR PHIL SAULS AND
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER TWO
JEREME VASQUEZ



01

For more than 60 years United States Government relationships in South America have reflected varying degrees of U.S. domestic security policy. Shifting from economic worries, such as Guatemalan nationalization, to combatting illicit trafficking from Colombia and, later, stemming unhindered migrant flows across the continent despite decades marred by terrorist action. Through these changing agendas, SOF presence in South America has remained persistent, fielding some of U.S. Army Special Forces best examples of unilaterally deployable, international SOF partners. In all cases, the SOF mission was highly influenced by the environment and driven by policy to counteract or capitalize on those environmental factors...but this paradigm is changing. As Dr. John Arquilla pointed out in 2001, networked warfare is becoming the preferred method of our adversaries where, “power is migrating to non-state actors because they are able to organize into sprawling multi-organizational networks ... More than ever, conflicts revolve around knowledge and the use of soft power.”⁰¹ As the trend has grown in war-torn areas of responsibility akin to U.S. Special Operations Command-Central fighting transnational networks

is becoming the norm for Special Operation Command-South.

In 2016, and again in 2017, Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) supported Colombian Security Forces experienced first-hand the ebb and flow of U.S. foreign security goals; interest in drug interdiction waned ... finding and fixing transregional actors grew. Not surprisingly, the list of challenges among our partners also grew: parochialism, corruption and resource constraints, to name a few, hindered our partner’s ability to avoid U.S. scrutiny. Additionally, the recently initiated FARC demobilization process became a lead contributor to our own environmental friction. Notably, the safe havens that resulted from the peace process, established zones around FARC demobilization camps placed over areas of high coca cultivation. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 7115 partnered directly with TF Poseidon and assisted the partner command to tackle the complications of targeting GAOs (Higher Threat Armed Organizations) while adhering to the FARC demobilization process. Predictably, navigating such a complex environment required significantly more ground truth than previous missions.

Our area of operations was centered on Tumaco, Narino district, an

underdeveloped port city despite an economic responsibility for up to 30 percent of the country’s sea bound trade. Tumaco has produced some of the most spectacular drug interdictions in Colombia’s history. No surprise in a country that provides 90 percent of the U.S. cocaine import with⁰² 43 percent originating from the Tumaco municipality.⁰³ In August 2017, I drove through Tumaco seeing a town abandoned by the state, despite the objective of Juan Santos, President of Colombia and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, to improve the economic corridor between Narino and Belem, Brazil.⁰⁴ Instead of finding local governing systems ... we found Alex.

Alex Christian Fernandez, an Afro-Colombian, was born in 1980 in Vallenato, a rural village in the border region of Tumaco, Colombia. At an early age, Alex was responsible for earning money for his family, a pragmatic alternative to a FARC-dominated route to school. At first, he made money by stealing and begging but found little revenue in an isolated community of poor Colombians. As he grew older, he picked up a part-time job harvesting coca leaves for his neighbor whose four acres of coca leaves served as his sole source of income.

As a teenager he and his friends pooled their money to build a small



assault rifles a month into Tumaco and Buenaventura. He grew a diversified portfolio of arms trafficking, a highly active Sicario office in Cali, and also enabled cocaine trafficking. Not until 2017 was CTI (Colombian FBI) able to make a case against Alex that finally put in him in prison for good. This story is told time and again in Tumaco, Colombia. An illicit actor's career model similar to this is not just found in Colombia, we can find the same thing happening in places such as Wardak, Afghanistan.

The 7th Special Forces Group has also learned some hard lessons deployed to countries a world apart from South America. This experience continues to highlight that our understanding of underground networks, radicalization and recruitment is evolving. Past examples of civil outreach, such as village stability operations served to "embed" SOF teams in the environment as means to extend governance and security. However, in the end, there were few indicators that suggested long-term reliability and trust had been built between a fledgling government and its citizenry. Consistently encountering tight-knit rural communities that paid little credence to local governance. In fact, we found that our presence sometimes exacerbated the problem. Similarly, our ability to "find" and "fix" networks in South America are challenged by safe havens, third-party spoilers and friendly coalition politics. Perhaps the most perplexing problems are those related to displaced people, or in the case of Tumaco, an enclave population.

We have learned first-hand that culture is an important factor when describing perspective. Michael Agar uses a concept called Languaculture to objectively compare cultures of interest. Applying this framework to Tumaco we found that when governments encounter issues with communicating and connecting with the population, the divide can grow to

the extent that a sub-national identity is established. Enclaves innately contain the best insurgent mobility resources: free spaces, transportation, communication, dark finance networks and early warning systems already support the internally displaced population.⁰⁵

Based on our assessment, three overarching factors create an enclave population susceptible to supporting illicit activities: 1) Historic factors that influenced the ethnic group to settle where they have; 2) Geographic and topographic factors that hinder the government from being able to access these communities; and 3) the lack of opportunity for legitimate economics. Little speculation confirms as to why Colombia has the second most African descendants in Latin America only to Brazil. "Africans were imported from the 1520s into settlements along the northern coast of colonial New Granada. Black Africans and their descendants were used in agriculture and as personal servants in this region from early on, but they were mainly used in the mining areas. Prior to 1600, perhaps 100,000 slaves were imported, but from 1560 the Spanish settlement in the gold-rich Cauca Valley and northern Antioquia increased the demand for slaves."⁰⁶ As a result of the Spanish and Native-Colombian conflict, a new race was formed, Mestizos. Mestizos are a mix of Spaniard and Native-Colombians and in Colombia are referred to as los blancos or the whites. Today Mestizos make up 84.2 percent of the population while Afro-Colombians make up 10.4 percent.⁰⁷ Afro-Colombians settled in three regions: The Pacific region, primarily Tumaco and Buenaventura; the Caribbean region, primarily Cartagena and Barranquilla; and San Andres island. These regions are some of the poorest and most underdeveloped in Colombia. Tumaco has a 90 percent population of Afro-Colombians and

cocaine base lab, where they would turn cultivated coca leaves from his old employer into a hardened chemical base. Later with a few boats and a few connections to the Cali Cartel, their base product turned into cocaine export.

Ultimately, Alex had no desire to get into smuggling drugs. It was too risky. The former President Uribe was cracking down on the FARC and as a result, the cocaine traffic leaving by sea was being interdicted frequently by the Ministry of Defense. Instead, Alex found arms trafficking much more lucrative and easier to get away with; Alex had a passport, and connections in Texas, tapping a vast supply of military-grade weapons. For over a decade Alex's network propagated violence in areas dominated by FARC, ELN and Mexican Cartels.

When Alex was arrested and deported by the USG his robust international network continued business as usual, moving as many as 100

TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MAJORITY OF COLOMBIANS, SUPPORTING COCAINE TRAFFICKING IS VIEWED AS IGNORANT, ILLEGAL AND ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUES IN COLOMBIA. FROM THE AFRO-COLOMBIANS LIVING IN THIS REGIONS PERSPECTIVE, THIS IS THE ONLY WAY OF LIFE.



COLOMBIA

ENCLAVES IN SOUTH AMERICA

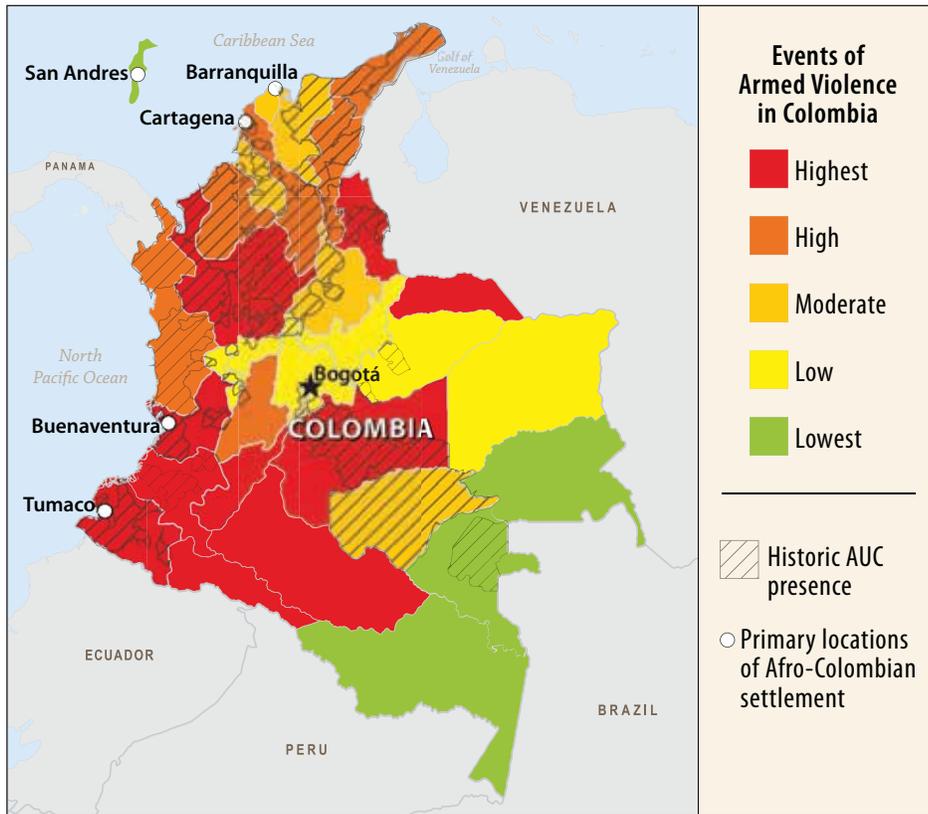


Figure 01

Figure 01
Historic United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) presence aligns with Afro-Colombian communities. These areas of the country also experienced numerous massacres, kidnappings and other events of armed violence.

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Special Forces Soldiers from 7th SFG(A) train with partner forces in Colombia. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

a 10 percent mixture of Mestizo and Native-Colombian population.⁰⁸

Noted in *figure 01*, our target population also align with a heavy historic United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia presence. AUC guerrillas offered a counter revolution to FARC Marxist expansion and, "defined themselves as an anti-communist advance guard in the defense of private property and free enterprise."⁰⁹ These areas of the country experienced numerous massacres and kidnappings at the hands of bandas criminales as former AUC are now known, in an attempt to counteract the people's movement of the left. AUC also provided a critical early link to Mexican Cartels in the 1970s acting as hired militias to protect drug producing resources.¹⁰

Additionally, Tumaco sits along the Pacific Coast and shares a porous border with Ecuador. Both of these circumstances contribute to it being such a lucrative region for illicit trafficking and activity.

Waterways are also a major contributor to the populations vulnerability to cocaine trafficking. Leading into the Pacific Ocean are numerous riverine systems that move throughout the majority of the department

and are naturally essential to the Tumacan's way of life. The riverine systems are not only a source of food, they are also the primary method of transportation, such as farmers making their way to market.

Second is the lack of road infrastructure. This leaves the government with few options to access the isolated Tumacan populace, typically involving a military deployment of forces.

Third is the lack of economic opportunity in the region. To the government and the majority of Colombians, supporting cocaine trafficking is viewed as ignorant, illegal and one of the most significant issues in Colombia. From the Afro-Colombians living in this regions' perspective, this is the only way of life. There is no way for a farmer to provide for his family with a crop other than coca. During engagements with farmers in the region our team learned that coca farmers might stop if there was a viable alternative. Of course, the topographical limitations restrict movement to market, while cartels are more than happy to pick up the product where it is grown, further incentivizing the behavior.

All of these factors play into why this enclave population could be dangerous. In essence, their situation



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is a valuable resource for non-state and trans-regional actors to coopt their illicit networks. The Colombian government has made numerous attempts alongside their U.S. Inter-agency counterparts to promote crop substitution but have not addressed all three factors simultaneously. This idea also ignores the violent pressure placed on farmers by traffickers to comply with their illicit goals. Security could not be ignored.

Understanding the limitations, the detachment built a Joint Task Force that sought more than military solutions. Leveraging the newly established Accion Integral Brigada, Civil Affairs enablers and well-established local policing networks, clarity was achieved. In fact, this model dissolved Task Force Poseidon in favor of an interlocking Joint Task Force Atlas consisting of around 10,000 personnel from elements from TF Poseidon, the Anti-Narcotics Brigade (BRACNA), the police's anti-narcotics forces (DIRAN), and an Army Brigade (35th Brigade)¹¹ that continues to target illicit networks in Nariño today. Aggregating the various data points, we concluded: Though the peace accord removed a key source of mobilization in the enclave community, the community



to support illicit activities. The enclave will continue to attract trans-regional and transnational predation and provide a leverage point for criminalized states. So what's the good news?

The Minorities at Risk data set (MAR), associated with the START initiative has collected data on sub-populations that meet our description of enclaves. Focusing on factors such as discrimination, access to governing functions and employment opportunities since 1943, data collected through open source scraping describes the Afro-Colombian enclave in a "fence rider" status.¹⁵ So far, we view populations such as those around Tumaco as opportunistic. In fact, it is incredibly common for the local cartel middle man to also be the local police's best informant. However, the MAR data set also suggests that enclaves gain little audience during times of civil war in a host country, a balancing factor that is evaporating rapidly. We must improve our fox hole now.¹⁶ Dr. John Arquilla suggests three steps to build effective friendly networks: 1) Create many small units of action, 2) Emphasize finding before trying to fight, and 3) Learn to swarm the target.¹⁷ Critical to the success of each of these steps is a focus on organizational redesign that prioritizes patience, accurate intelligence and trust in subordinate leaders. We must continue to grow friendly networks like JTF Atlas, to provide infrastructure that can shrink transnational actor's mobilizing resources and impede their reach. **SW**

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itself is a resource to any non-state actor willing to challenge Colombia's counter GAO resolve. As noted in crime insight analysis, "The criminal economies that have sustained the FARC for the last 50 years have not disappeared with the stroke of a pen on the peace agreement."¹² The fact remains, future counter terrorism efforts in the region will find network illumination elusive without 1) a clear understanding of the populations that are most susceptible to non-state agency and 2) a capable friendly architecture to operate through to achieve steady state illumination.

One thing is abundantly clear: the enemy in South America no longer recognized national borders, and their international coalition has become a growth competitor to our own. The

closeness between transregional criminal organizations, and homegrown terrorist groups and their leveraging of "useful idiots" around the world reflect third state foreign policy and by extension, a deliberate intervention into our partners' domestic policy.¹³ The most recent example including Hezbollah's critical financial link to the FARC in Colombia and the Tri Border area where criminal facilitators "linked to the group only by virtue of the services they provide" in the drug trade.¹⁴ More importantly, these networks serve to build inter-state dependency, and contribute familiar regime preserving influencers found in governments akin to Maduro and Assad.

In summation, the capitulation of the FARC in Colombia, will leave behind a subnational populace primed

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01

ESMAI: THE FUTURE OF COLOMBIA'S PSYOP

**BY CAPTAIN CHANCE D. PANTER AND
SERGEANT 1ST CLASS ALEJANDRO FUENTESZAMORA**

How does one measure the success of psychological operations in a non-lethal environment? If one accepts that success can be seen as a long term, generational change then the Soldiers of the U.S. Army's 1st Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne) can claim success through the establishment of a dedicated Psychological Operations course at Colombia's Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral or ESMIAI; translated as The School of International Missions and Integrated Action. Acción Integral serves as the Colombian equivalent of U.S. Civil Affairs and PSYOP, but they are integrated within a single command structure from the Ministry of Defense down to battalion and company levels.

THE PAST

The United States has provided PSYOP support to Colombia since 1984, with continuous support established in 1990. Over the past 30 years, PSYOP has evolved alongside both the conflict in Colombia and the national interests of the United States. Originally, PSYOP support was dedicated to the Colombia National Police under the requirements of the U.S. Government at the time to counter-drug trafficking within the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility. The CNP were the primary partners for these efforts for the better part of two decades; however, U.S. PSYOP also developed units capable of conducting PSYOP within the Colombian Military at a small scale.

Following the attacks of 9/11, U.S. Government policy changed to allow U.S. PSYOP support to counter-narco terrorism. This dedicated PSYOP to both counter drug trafficking and counter terror efforts. The increase in scope allows greater engage-



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ment with COLMIL partner forces; a relationship that endures with both Colombian Military and Colombian Police Units.

After three decades of advising the Colombian Military and one decade of in-depth partnership, the Colombian Military increased their investment in the PSYOP capability. Mobile Training Teams and cross training with Colombian personnel at Fort Bragg's U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School was a limited expansion of COLMIL PSYOP capability. On May 30, 2011, the Colombian government passed Resolution 009, to establish the Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral (ESMAI). Resolution 009 merged Escuela de Relaciones Civiles y Militares (ERCM), the School of Civil and Military Relations and Escuela de Apoyo a Misiones Internacionales, the School for Support to International Missions. Prior to the establishment of ESMAl, the training of Colombian PSYOP personnel fell under the direction of ERCM. The school's training was derived from the original mobile training teams sent from 1st Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne), and with the assistance of ERCM instructors, trained Colombia Military forces in the art and science of PSYOP. Their efforts during the previous two decades demonstrated the possibilities of a Colombian Military PSYOP effort that gained the support of the senior echelons of the Colombian

military. This led to the integration of Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs as a single command; Comandó de Acción integral y Desarrollo (CAAID). CAAID now represents elements of Colombian Army, Navy and Air Force. Together, they synchronize PSYOP and civil-military operations across traditional military commands to support a Colombian whole of government approach to their current problems.

THE PRESENT

Through the continued partnership between Colombia and the United States, ESMAl has established itself as an exceptional military training institution for both Colombian PSYOP personnel and international students from throughout the region. In order to facilitate and sustain the demand for PSYOP throughout Colombian operations, ESMAl conducts two PSYOP courses: a basic and a specialized PSYOP course.



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01 ESMAl students from the Colombian Army and Marines prepare for a block of instruction. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. HUNTER XUE

02 A statue on the ESMAl campus features the ESMAl logo on the front with the symbol for Psychological Operations adorning the top. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

03 Col. Cesar Karan, ESMAl Commander, discusses doctrine revision with United States PSYOP Officer. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. HUNTER XUE



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01 A Psychological Operations Non Commissioned Officer conducts a period of instruction on planning psychological operations with partner nations.

02 A Psychological Operations Non Commissioned Officer illustrates the United States PSYOP model.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SPC. HUNTER XUE

03 The flags of the Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral or ESMAI; translated as The School of International Missions and Integrated Action. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

The basic course is designed to allow the officers and non-commissioned officers of the Colombian Military to gain a basic knowledge and understanding of PSYOP. The intent is for graduates to be prepared to work in conjunction with PSYOP teams as well as to serve as members of Acción Integral teams if required to support CAAID operations. This course does not provide graduates with a new occupational specialty but rather provides a certification in a functional area.

The specialized course fully trains noncommissioned officers and officers of the Colombian Military in the planning, execution and supervision of PSYOP at both the tactical and strategic levels. The graduates of this course are designated as specialist in the field of PSYOP and transition from their previous occupational specialty to PSYOP. The creation of the PSYOP occupational specialty is the first step towards the establishment a PSYOP branch within the Colombian Armed Forces, ensuring that PSYOP continues to play a role in post conflict Colombia.

The members of 1st POB (A) work in conjunction with the leadership of ESMAI to constantly improve the capability and the relationship that has developed over the past three decades. 1st POB (A) Soldiers provide vast knowledge of PSYOP from operations around the world, in both combat and non-combat environments. Colombian PSYOP Soldiers are able to share the lessons from what was, until recently, the longest insurgency in the

Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, Colombian PSYOP partners possess one of the greatest assets that PSYOP personnel need to operate within Colombia; an in depth understanding of the target audience. As members of the same society that they intend to influence, COLMIL PSYOP personnel have an understanding of the audience that U.S. personnel will never achieve.

THE FUTURE

Colombia has shown an ever increasing desire for PSYOP and is currently working to dramatically increase its PSYOP capabilities, but what does the future hold? It is the authors' opinion that U.S. PSYOP will continue to possess a prominent role in Colombia, but that an increasing share of the burden for planning and executing PSYOP will shift to Colombian forces. History has shown the weaknesses of the previous engagement strategies of MTTs and subject matter expert exchanges: lack of advanced training, imbalance of training allocated amongst Colombian forces, inability to sustain the volume of requested training and lack of cohesion between taught topics over time.

Recognizing these problems within their own force, Colombia provided the solution desired by both countries; ESMAI. Now, and in the future, 1st POB (A) Soldiers can focus on working with partner nation through a single nexus. At the request of, and in conjunction with, senior



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IN LESS THAN TWO DECADES, COLOMBIAN PSYOP HAS PROGRESSED FROM SMALL TACTICAL UNITS TO A TRAINING INSTITUTION THAT SUPPORTS ALL BRANCHES OF THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.

operational level effects, and integration of external elements into PSYOP.

Of further note, ESMIAI is also responsible for the training and preparation of international missions. Under the current U.S.-Colombian Activities Plan, the United States supports the exportation of Colombian security expertise throughout the AOR. As Colombia assumes a greater role in regional and world activities over the next decade, ESMIAI (and therefore, Colombian PSYOP) will be at the forefront of these developments.

To answer the question posed by the authors at the beginning of the article, in Colombia success is measured by the change of the Colombian military's interest and support to PSYOP. Thirty years ago, U.S. PSYOP support was focused on counter-drug operations in conjunction with CNP. Those early successes generated enough interest to begin small scale application of PSYOP in the Colombian Army. Following 9/11 and the change of U.S. PSYOP objectives in Colombia, the Colombian military greatly increased their demand for PSYOP. This demand has been so strong that in less than two decades, Colombian PSYOP has progressed from small tactical units to a training institution that supports all branches of the Colombian Military, international students, as well as the exportation of Colombian security expertise throughout SOUTHCOM.

Colombia is now taking more responsibility for PSYOP in Colombia. This does not make the U.S. PSYOP mission in Colombia obsolete. On the contrary, it places U.S. PSYOP exactly where we are needed; alongside our Colombian partners to address regional problems that affect the entire AOR. **SW**



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CAAID and ESMIAI leadership, 1st POB (A) is now working to revise Colombian PSYOP doctrine. This, in turn, has led to every Colombian PSYOP student being exposed to concepts and training that were previously discussed in periodic MTTs or SMEEs. Going forward, Colombian PSYOP personnel will share one base of knowledge which can be further developed through specifically selected SMEEs, to include greater emphasis on strategic and

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