

SPECIAL WARFARE

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BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS
IN SOCSOUTH
SPECIAL OPERATIONS
IN THE SOUTH



PROTECTING THE SOUTHERN APPROACH

THE OFFICIAL PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

ARTICLES

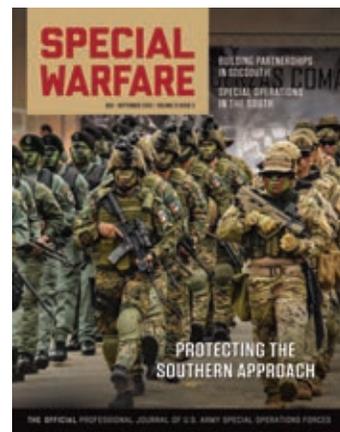
- 06 | SOCSOUTH Overview and Map
- 08 | In Depth: SOCOUTH Commander
- 12 | Regional Threat Overview:
Latin America and the Caribbean
- 14 | Measuring Indirect Effects Over Time
- 18 | SOTF-77
- 22 | Integrated Campaigning
- 28 | Optimization of the Information
and Influence Competencies
- 30 | The Last Line of Defense
- 36 | 5th SOF Truth
- 40 | A Team Effort
- 44 | The People Business
- 47 | Changing Culture
- 52 | **SECTION: COLOMBIA**
 - 52 Colombia Overview
 - 62 Protecting the Southern Approaches
 - 68 Strategic Partnership
 - 76 Enclaves in South America
 - 80 ESMAI: The Future of Colombian PSYOP
- 84 | **SECTION: EL SALVADOR**
 - 84 El Salvador Overview
 - 92 MS-13's Stranglehold on a Nation
 - 96 Evolution El Salvador
- 100 | **SECTION: PANAMA**
 - 100 Panama Overview
- 108 | Off the Range, Into the Jungle
- 114 | Photostory: Fuerzas Comando

DEPARTMENTS

- FROM THE COMMANDANT ____ 04
- FROM THE EDITOR _____ 05

ON THE COVER

An element of the Panamanian Police marches during the *Fuerzas Comando* opening ceremony, July 16, 2018, at the Instituto Superior Policial, Panama. *Fuerzas Comando* is an annual multinational special operations forces skills competition. U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ragin



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Views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official Army position. This publication does

SPECIAL WARFARE

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The Special Operations Center of Excellence

MISSION The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, The Special Operations Center of Excellence, assesses, selects, trains and educates disciplined Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations and Special Forces warriors and leaders, and develops doctrine and capabilities to support the full range of military operations — providing our nation with a highly educated, innovative and adaptive force.

VISION Forging experts in special warfare to adapt and succeed in a complex, multi-dimensional world through innovative training and education.

By order of the Secretary of the Army:
Dr. Mark T. Esper

Official:

Handwritten signature of Gerald B. O'Keefe in black ink.

GERALD B. O'KEEFE

Administrative Assistant to the
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Headquarters, Department of the Army

from the COMMANDANT



In September 2014, I had the great honor of taking command of the U.S. Special Operations Command-South. Having spent much of my career operating in the Middle East and Africa, the move to SOCSOUTH was an eye-opening experience. The enduring relationships between special operations Soldiers and their counterparts in the SOCSOUTH area of operations is the picture of the relationships SOF should form with their partners around the world.

There is a rich shared history in countries like Panama, Colombia and El Salvador. Many of our now retired Special Forces Soldiers cut their teeth training partner-nation forces at the Jungle School and the Airborne School. Later, they learned about insurgency in the mountains of El Salvador and the countryside of Colombia.

The Soldiers of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) have built solid, long-term relationships with our partners in Colombia. The relationship dates back to the formation of the Lancero School in 1956, after Colombian forces joined American forces fighting in Korea under the United Nations. Our noncommissioned officers and officers have enabled the Colombian formations to mature and have watched today's Colombian special operations leadership grow through the ranks. The Colombians, as well as the El Salvadoran forces we have trained, are now stepping up and exporting security around the world.

Traveling throughout the area of operation, you can feel a sense of kinship between American special operations forces and their counterparts. It's one that is built in the jungles, on the rivers and in the mountains of these countries, and those relationships are important. We will call on these relationships as we seek to defend our Southern Approach from multiple threat networks that seek to build instability in the region.


KURT L. SONNTAG
MAJOR GENERAL, USA
COMMANDING GENERAL

“The goal is effective enforcement and interdiction across land, sea and air to degrade transnational criminal organizations, and to do these things while still facilitating the flow of lawful trade, travel and commerce across our borders.”

— *Homeland Security's Southern Border and Approaches Campaign*



01

FROM THE EDITOR

In the Spring of 2012, *Special Warfare* traveled to Colombia to write about U.S. Special Operations Forces and their Colombian counterparts. This was the first time *Special Warfare* staffers had ever put boots on the ground for an extensive period, ushering in a new era in the professional development publication's history.

At the time, Colombia was not what most would consider a safe place. Then-Commanding General of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Maj. Gen. Bennet Sacolick, found it necessary to assign two special operations Soldiers to accompany the team on the trip.

The Colombia of 2012 is a far cry from today's Colombia. In 2012, armed soldiers stood guard on every other corner. Bomb-sniffing dogs wound throughout café tables. Embassy briefings brought dire warnings of robberies and kidnappings. Travel outside the city consisted of caravans and warnings from the embassy battle captain on roads to take and those not to take due to threats from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. A rockslide on a mountain highway became a tense encounter.

Approved hotels for the staff's lodging were protected by armed guards, while vehicles pulling in were checked for bombs.

Earlier this year, the *Special Warfare* staff packed their bags again and headed back to Colombia, with stops in Panama and El Salvador. Missing from the trip was our security detail and contracted drivers of uparmored vehicles. The embassy briefing in Colombia was given over a casual lunch at a western hotel in downtown Colombia. While there was still some talk of 24-hour kidnappings, overall the tone of the briefing was more upbeat. With a great degree of comfort, we drank coffee at outdoor tables at the corner Starbucks — something that wasn't possible six years before.

We had the same types of experiences and freedom of movement in Panama. The ease of the visits in Panama and Colombia were in sharp contrast to what we found in El Salvador. In El Salvador's capital city, armed soldiers and police stand guard on every block. We were warned to stay within close proximity of our hotel — and even then — we had to make a hurried return to the hotel



02

as young men began following us — their assumed goal our photo and video equipment. The tension in El Salvador today, matched that of Colombia six years ago, but the presence of U.S. Special Operations Soldiers in El Salvador, may help change that.

The hope is that the work being done by special operations forces today in El Salvador, and other countries in the region, will bring about the kind of change that creates security and stability in El Salvador as it did in Colombia. **SW**

01
The skyline of the Colombian capital city, Bogotá.

02
A city street in San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador, is reminiscent of the Colombia of 2012 with armed security forces around every corner.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official Army position. This publication does not supersede any information presented in other official publications.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND SOUTH



MISSION SOCSOUTH plans, directs and executes special operations missions throughout Central America, South America and the Caribbean to achieve operational and strategic objectives in support of the Commander, U.S. Southern Command. As directed, SOCSOUTH responds to crisis in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility to protect U.S. vital interests and to fight and win our nation's wars.

VISION SOCSOUTH's vision is a secure, stable and sovereign USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility. SOCSOUTH collaborates with interagency partners, conventional forces, allies and partner nations connected by in-depth networks to detect, deter, disrupt and defeat threats to U.S. vital interests. SOCSOUTH's end state is to prevent conflict in the region.

ABOUT Special Operations Command South, located at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida, is a sub-unified command operationally assigned to USSOUTHCOM. It is a Joint Special Operations headquarters that plans and executes special operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean, principally employing special operations forces provided by the U.S. Special Operations Command and the Services' SOF component commands. The headquarters staff of military, Department of Defense civilian employees and contractors is comprised of more than 200 personnel.

SOCSOUTH has five assigned, or attached subordinate commands, including 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne); 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; Naval Special Warfare; 112th Signal Detachment SOCSOUTH; and Joint Special Operations Air Component-South.

Special operations encompass the use of small units in direct or indirect military actions that are focused on strategic or operational objectives. They require units with a combination of specialized personnel, equipment, training and tactics that exceed the routine capabilities of conventional military forces. These units are formally designated by the Secretary of Defense to conduct special operations. SOCSOUTH is the focal point for SOF operating in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility.

LINES OF EFFORT

- » **One:** Counter Threat networks
- » **Two:** Support to the National Military Strategy's Priority Challenges
- » **Three:** Enable Rapid Response

MAJOR ENGAGEMENTS

- » **Fuerzas Comando:** A special-operations skills competition and senior leader seminar designed to promote military-to-military relationships, interoperability and regional security.
- » **Fused Response:** An annual exercise designed to improve time-sensitive crisis action planning and joint integration with partner nation and government agencies.
- » **Panamax:** A multinational combined/joint task force exercise designed to respond to any request from the governments of Panama and Colombia to protect and guarantee safe passage of traffic through the Panama Canal and ensure its neutrality.

SOCSSOUTH AREA OF FOCUS

SOCSSOUTH's area of focus includes 31 countries and 16 dependencies and areas of special sovereignty. The region represents about one-sixth of the landmass of the world assigned to regional unified commands. The area of responsibility consists of the land mass of Latin America south of Mexico, and the waters adjacent to Central and South America to include the Caribbean Sea. SOCSSOUTH divides its area of focus into four regions:

CARIBBEAN (23)

CENTRAL AMERICA (7)

ANDEAN RIDGE (5)

SOUTHERN CONE (5)



CARIBBEAN ISLANDS

- ANGUILLA
- SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS
- ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
- MONTserrat
- GUADELOUPE
- DOMINICA
- MARTINIQUE
- SAINT LUCIA
- SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
- BARBADOS
- GRENADA
- NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

IN DEPTH



Q&A WITH

REAR ADMIRAL COLLIN P. GREEN, U.S. NAVY *Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command*



Q: The U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility is directly in the neighborhood of our homeland. Why is it important we invest?

A: Where we sit geographically makes our mission literally an extension of homeland defense. Our top priority is to protect the homeland by defending the United States' southern approaches in both the maritime and land domains, while promoting security and stability in the region. To that end, we seek to be a mutually supportive and interoperable partner with the interagency, U.S. Southern Command Components, allies and partner nations.

Since taking command in March 2016, I have started every engagement with, "Why USSOUTHCOM matters and why it is important we invest?" First, inattention and lack of investment in the USSOUTHCOM AOR bring opportunities for nefarious state or non-state actors. We have to be on the field to compete, confront and also cooperate if required. Second, it is imperative we understand what we call "pay for entry pathways" — both land and maritime — where transregional, transnational, illicit threat networks move commodities (drugs, weapons, people) toward our homeland. We are postured with our partners to disrupt and degrade these networks. Finally, Central and South America and the Caribbean have close to 500 million people living in 31 countries and 16 territories. We have strong similarities in our culture and values, along with significant trade and U.S. investment. It is important we stay engaged because if we walk away from them, their problems will become ours.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Rear Admiral Collin P. Green is the former commander of Special Operations Command South. Brigadier General Antonio M. Fletcher is the current commander.



Q: How does SOCSOUTH support the USSOUTHCOM Theater Campaign Plan?

A: Our USSOUTHCOM Commander, Adm. Kurt Tidd, assumed command in January 2016 with a premise that for years we have been triaging the symptoms of the problem commodities rather than addressing the problem itself: development of illicit networks that traffic, trade and profit from these commodities. He has approached this challenge as a network of networks to degrade these transregional, transnational threats. A familiar construct that SOF has used effectively since 9/11, while building a friendly network of interagency, regional, transregional and non-governmental organization partners working to counter threat networks. The Counter-Threat Network line of effort is joined by two other LoEs: Support to the National Military Strategy's Priority Challenge, and to enable rapid response. The first is a recognition that Russia, China and Iran are in the USSOUTHCOM area of operations, and it is imperative that U.S. military operations, actions and investments support the U.S. as the partner of choice and are postured to compete, cooperate and confront the National Military Strategy's Priority Challenges. Finally, enabling rapid response focuses on creating ready and capable forces that can operate with partners who are capable of responding quickly to crises from humanitarian assistance disaster relief to countering threat networks. Supporting imperatives include noncommissioned officer development, gender integration, enabling jointness and human rights. All core attributes of the SOF truths are integrated into all engagements, and more importantly, embodied by our words and actions.

SOCSOUTH's operational approach of build, prepare and influence to protect U.S. and partner nations nests well within the USSOUTHCOM Theater Campaign Plan, our Chief of Mission Integrated Country Strategies and in concert with interagency partners such as USAID, and law enforcement (FBI, Drug Enforcement Agency, Homeland Security, etc.). Our teams are comprised of small, mature and distributed cross-functional SOF elements comprised focused on building partner security forces' capability, leveraging their access and placement to understand the operational environment and conducting Military Informa-

tion Support Operations, Civil Reconnaissance and Civil Action to influence the environment.

Q: Colombia recently signed a peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which has been seen as a success story, and is now seeking a similar accord with the National Liberation Army, or ELN. What is happening there now? And how do you see it moving forward?

A: There is no doubt as a result of the Peace Accord signing between the Colombian Government and the FARC in November 2016, its ratification by the Colombian Congress and the subsequent FARC Demobilization, Demilitarization and Reintegration Plan after more than 50 years of war, that there is optimism about Colombia. They are arguably our most willing, capable and committed partner in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. They are currently exporting security and supporting Northern Tier country capacity building and moving toward achieving NATO SOF standards. They are very grateful for the support USSOUTHCOM and SOCSOUTH provides to their current operations, and as important, to their continued development.

The situation in Colombia will remain challenging in the near term. The Demobilization Plan is progressing slower than expected, and the ELN is at the peace table but continues to fight. The threat is evolving, with significant numbers of FARC and ELN dissidents mutating towards organized armed criminal groups. Additionally, cocaine production is up, oil revenues are down, the populace is suspect of eradication/crop substitution programs and the instability in Venezuela, and the migration across the border is adding pressure on Colombian resources, and ultimately, impacting their own stability.

So, it is important we stay committed to this valued partner for a number of reasons. First, our efficient SOF cross-functional teams are distributed throughout the country providing critical training, intelligence, influence and logistics support in concert with U.S. whole of government efforts to ongoing Colombian current operations. Simultaneously they are leveraging their access and placement to understand the operational environment in a strategic chokepoint along the pathways to our southern border. Second, the Colombians are a recognized leader in the region and are key “connective tissue” to our efforts with Peru, Panama, the Dominican Republic and transregionally with Mexico. Finally, how we treat this valued partner will be closely viewed by current and future partners in support of ensuring we are the partner of choice in our competition with Russia and China.

Moving forward, it is important we stay committed for our mutual interest. SOCSOUTH, in concert with Joint Special Operation University, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School and others from the USSOCOM enterprise, is continuing to support the Colombians as they continue to explore the establishment of a Joint Special Operations Command structure. JSOU and USAJFKSWCS have, and will be, instrumental in

providing a series of training engagements focused on institutional development (e.g. budget, force generation, language development, doctrine and resourcing) that will support a Colombian Joint Special Operations command structure. Finally, we are in the final stages of placing a Foreign Liaison Officer in the J3 International Office at SOCOM to complement a Colombian General Officer who is now the J7/9 at USSOUTHCOM.

Q: We noticed you added Influence to your operational approach and it appears to be a critical piece of your priorities and all you do in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. Why is that?

A: Yes, I would argue that sometimes our most effective and important line of effort in support of competition with NMS Priority Challenges or countering threat network is influence. I came to SOCSOUTH from U.S. European Command/Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe where I watched the speed and the power of the Russian lie, and the need to get out in front to counter disinformation with truth and facts. We are seeing this with Moscow’s increased use of active measures and disinformation in South and Central America namely through *Russia Today* and *Spunik Mundo*, and China through its economic investment in a “long ball,” patient and encirclement approach. While we may lose relationships because our depth of our commitment, where we can do better is by promulgating what we stand for, what we do and how we do it (empowered NCOs, jointness, respect for human rights and gender integration) substantively in comparison to Russia and China. It is also critical as we support partners and U.S. efforts to CTN from the Northern Tier countries (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), Colombia, and to our efforts in Trinidad and Tobago with the ISIS-aspirant threat. At the tactical level, our units of action are our Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs teams that target audiences to influence behavior with military information support *continued on page 10*



02

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Dominican Republic comandos practice at the range in preparation for Fuerzas Comando 2018 in Panama City, Panama.

02
A Colombian Comando runs to the finish line after completing a range lane as part of Fuerzas Comando 2018.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY
STAFF SGT. BRIAN RAGIN

OUR TOP PRIORITY IS TO PROTECT THE HOMELAND BY DEFENDING THE UNITED STATES SOUTHERN APPROACHES IN BOTH THE MARITIME AND LAND DOMAINS, WHILE PROMOTING SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE REGION.

IN DEPTH



Q&A WITH THE SOCSOUTH COMMANDER REAR ADMIRAL COLLIN P. GREEN, U.S. NAVY

continued from page 09

operations, words and messages with our PSYOP teams, and deeds and actions with our CA teams. These teams mutually support each other and non-governmental organizations to bring resources to under-supported populations that extend the legitimacy of the host-nation government to areas in need. Additionally, our MISO efforts mutually support the legitimacy of the government, while building partner capabilities in support of its security forces for the population by messaging the professionalism, competency and effects these forces have on their internal threats. This approach has had success in El Salvador as the government struggles with the growing MS-13 threat. Finally, our military information support operations have been effective in Trinidad and Tobago where we have worked with legitimate community leaders to target youth through a counter recruitment and radicalization series aimed at addressing problems while they are small, before they become big. Moving forward, we will continue to integrate, influence and explore the full-spectrum of information operations to address both NMS Priority Challenges and CTN. It is important that we work with SOUTHCOM and the inter-agency to develop operational constructs at the operational level to synchronize, integrate and direct information operations that are then integrated with our tactical efforts that are synchronized with strategic efforts like the Department of State Global Engagement Center.

Q: The USSOUTHCOM AOR is not normally associated with the global counterterrorism fight; however, we have seen some focus in the Eastern Caribbean and specifically Trinidad and Tobago. What is the situation and how is SOCSOUTH supporting efforts there?

A: TTO is a twin-island sovereign state that is the southernmost nation in the

Caribbean and about seven miles from Venezuela. TTO has a population of 1.3 million of which 6 to 7 percent is Muslim. TTO attracted attention in the last several years because more than 130 foreign terrorist fighters were assessed to have traveled from TTO to Syria to fight with ISIS. A disproportionate number considering its size and small Muslim population. Early analysis of TTO indicated many of the factors present in other foreign terrorist source countries existed in TTO. These included pessimism about daily life, government, security forces, personal security and prevalence of gangs, influential imams and a general lack of hope.

In an effort to address a problem when it is small, SOCSOUTH, in partnership with TTO and the U.S. Country Team, has brought SOF's cross-functional capabilities in mutual support. First, under our "Build" line of effort, we have persistently partnered with Trinidad and Tobago Police Services and Trinidad and Tobago Defense Forces training and equipping security forces to address security threats. Second, under our "Prepare" line of effort, we are leveraging SOF's capabilities and authorities to understand the operational environment and enable our partners to disrupt these threats if required. Third, and arguably our most important, under our "Influence" line of effort, our CA and PSYOP teams are conducting Civil Outreach programs with non-governmental organizations to empower legitimate voices to engage with at-risk Trinidad youth, military-age males vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by ISIS.

This small, persistent SOF cross-functional effort is significantly addressing, in a mutually supportive approach, the legitimacy of the TTO government and security forces, civil outreach and influence both by addressing at-risk youth and an accurate representation of Islam. Moving forward, TTO is an example of why it is important we remain proactively invested and on the field in the USSOUTHCOM AOR to address CTN problems early.

Q: Natural disasters are frequent in the SOUTHCOM AOR. One of SOF's missions in support of SOUTHCOM is rapid response. What is a recent success in this AOR?

A: I think one of my proudest moments as the SOCSOUTH Commander was our prior preparation and response to Hurricane Irma in September 2017, which devastated parts of the Eastern Caribbean and was projected to inflict similar damage to South Florida, including Homestead Air Reserve Base where SOCSOUTH is located. Our preparations and simultaneous actions during crisis, from the safe and successful evacuation and accountability of our families, to the execution of our Command Continuity of Operations Plan (relocation to Eglin Air Force Base), to our rapid response as the first operators on the ground in St. Martin and Dominica to facilitate disaster relief, all were executed flawlessly and embodied preparation and a culture of readiness. I remember giving a simple order to the Senior SOF USSOUTHCOM Situational Assessment Team Commander from our alternate command post at Eglin Air Force Base: "Please get on the ground in St. Martin and figure out what is needed." The SSAT inserted via an AFSOC MC-130J and provided a critical initial assessment of security and infrastructure to include airfields, sea ports and basic services while maintaining continuous communications in preparation for the Joint Task Force Leeward Island follow-on forces. The team,





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comprised of more than 200 SOF operators from SOCSOUTH and across the SOCOM enterprise including all-weather AFSOC fixed-wing support, was critical to the efforts for three weeks on St. Martin and follow-on operations on Dominica. The training, professionalism and competency of the Joint SOF community was a critical enabler resulting in the rescue of more than 2,000 citizens, including 100 American citizens.

Q: SOUTHCOM is consistently challenged by fiscal and manning constraints to achieve necessary strategic and operational effects. What approach do you take to mitigate this reality?

A: Our priority is to understand the capabilities, capacities and authorities of our fellow SOUTHCOM components, U.S. interagency and partners. With that education, we seek opportunities early to be a mutually supportive and interoperable partner in support of SOUTHCOM component, U.S. interagency or partner-led operations. Homeland Security Investigation's Operation CITADEL is a good example where HSI annually surges assets and leads a multinational criminal investigation to focus on identifying, disrupting and dismantling transnational criminal organizations in priority countries. SOCSOUTH support has grown incrementally over the last three years with early engagement and planning. In 2018, SOF will provide analytical, reach back, identity intelligence operations and leverage our persistent presence to support this operation that will have broader CTN effects. With USSOF resources, we have disaggregated elements of our Naval Special Warfare SEAL Platoons,

Special Warfare Combatant Crewman Detachments, Operational Detachment Alphas and our Crisis Response Force, and partnered them with CA and PSYOP elements to build partner capacity and influence and to understand the operational environment of 16 countries and 23 locations. With our SOUTHCOM components and partners, we have sought opportunities where conventional forces or partners can mutually support Defense Institutional Building, and relieve or partner with willing capable and committed security forces in lieu of USSOF. Both Marine Forces South Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force and the Canadian military have been instrumental in engaging key Northern Tier and Caribbean security forces. Finally, we have leveraged the USSOCOM Global SOF Network (Special Operations Liaison Officers, SOST, JIATF-NCR, etc.) and connected it to the broader SOUTHCOM and U.S. interagency enterprise while moving both virtually and physically to interagency centers of analytical excellence like the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force Miami. 

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Participants of *Fuerzas Comando* raise their fist and recite the Comando creed during the *Fuerzas Comando* opening ceremony, July 16, 2018, at the Instituto Superior Policial, Panama. *Fuerzas Comando* is an annual multinational special operations forces skills competition sponsored by U.S. Southern Command and hosted this year by the Ministry of Public Security, Panama. Through friendly competition, this exercise promotes interoperability, military-to-military relationships, increases training knowledge and improves regional security.
 U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. BRIAN RAGIN

REGIONAL THREAT OVERVIEW

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The U.S. Special Operations Command South area of responsibility encompasses Latin America and the Caribbean, which are comprised of 32 countries, 20 dependencies and a land area of 8.15 million square miles, or almost 13 percent of the Earth's land mass.

Central and South America are defined by their mountain ranges, while South America also contains the Amazon Region. Much of South America's population lives in the Andes mountain range, while the Amazon is sparsely inhabited. The region's widespread riverine network is as important as land transportation.

Spanish, Portuguese and English are the primary languages, though French, Dutch and numerous indigenous dialects are also spoken. The region has a variety of religions, with Catholicism being predominant. Indigenous faiths are practiced by many in Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru. In Brazil, Cuba and Haiti, Afro-Latin traditions and tribal-voodoo religions are also practiced. Though a small percentage in comparison, Islam has its strongest representation in Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Other world religions include Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Latin America has a long history of insurgencies, most recently from the 1970s to the 1990s. In Central America, Nicaragua had a violent change of government in 1979, while civil war in El Salvador concluded with a peace agreement in 1992, and the civil war in Guatemala concluded with a peace agreement in 1996. For more than 50 years, civil war

threatened Colombia with groups such as M-19, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia National Liberation Front and paramilitaries conducting attacks against security forces, civilians and the infrastructure. In Peru, Sendero Luminoso posed a significant threat to the government until 1992 when its founder and several high profile leaders were captured. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, democracy has made a return to most of Latin America. Throughout much of the region, elections have resulted in the successful turnover of governments and economic progress has resulted in the lowering of poverty levels.

Although Latin America experienced a revival of democracy in the 1990s and early 2000s, the region continues to experience many challenges.

In Central America, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and 18th Street gangs have replaced the insurgents and, in conjunction with drug traffickers, threaten the governability of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras through crime and violence. The violence has been a major push factor for migrants heading for the United States.

In South America, narcotics production and the ensuing violent crime remain a persistent problem. Cocaine production in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru remains high and Paraguay is the region's top supplier of marijuana. Drug traffickers and gangs also remain active throughout South America, undermining democratic gains through violence and corruption.



— REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA —

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was a Marxist Leninist insurgent group in Colombia from 1964 until 2016 when it signed a peace accord with the Colombian Government. At the height of its strength in the 2000s, the FARC claimed to have some 18,000 men and women. Since the signing of the accord, the FARC has renounced violence and handed over its weapons to the government and UN verification observers. Not all FARC members agreed with the accord, and a small number of dissidents continue to conduct illicit activities.



— NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY —

The National Liberation Army is a Marxist insurgent group that advocates a composite ideology of Marxism and liberation theology. The ELN began its campaign in 1964 and despite a series of efforts to negotiate peace, the attempts have yet to result in serious discussions. Colombia and the ELN are attempting to revive talks that failed in early January 2018 following the termination of a three-month old bilateral ceasefire.

Of the world's top 50 violent cities, 43 are located in Latin America and eight of the top 10 cities are in Central and South America; the remaining two are in Mexico which does not fall under SOCSOUTH's area of responsibility. Venezuela's political and economic crises have evolved into a regional challenge, affecting not only Venezuela, but many of the region's countries, as tens of thousands of Venezuelans migrate in search of food, medicine and safe haven from the violence; most of the migrants have spread throughout South America which further strains social and security services.

In the Caribbean, natural disasters are a significant issue that threatens economic security every year and require persistent support from other countries. The Caribbean also serves as a critical node in the transshipment of illegal trafficking of arms, humans and drugs. Although past mass migration events have been curtailed due to government policies, to a lesser extent, migration remains a persistent challenge.

Even though the threat of terrorism in Latin America and the Caribbean has been reduced in recent years, threats persist. Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have porous borders, limited law enforcement capabilities and established smuggling routes. These vulnerabilities offer opportunities to local and international terrorist groups and pose challenges to regional governments. In Colombia, although a peace agreement was signed between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Front has yet to do so. The government and the ELN are conducting talks, but since the



end of the bilateral cease fire in January 2018, the ELN has resumed attacks on security forces and infrastructure. In Peru, Sendero Luminoso remains active and while it no longer threatens the state, it continues to spread its propaganda and has morphed into a criminal enterprise. In the Caribbean, Middle Eastern-based terrorist groups have found support. In particular, Trinidad and Tobago has been a source of more than 100 foreign terrorist fighters who attempted or traveled to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq. In

early 2018, Trinidadian authorities arrested several individuals suspected of plotting attacks during Carnival. In 2016, Brazil arrested 12 individuals for alleged terrorist plotting prior to the Rio Olympics. Lebanese Hezbollah, the alleged perpetrator of the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Argentina, is suspected of maintaining a terrorist infrastructure in the region.

The region's threats have evolved in the last several decades from regional insurgencies to more complex transnational issues such as illegal trafficking of arms, humans and drugs, as well as terrorism, illegal migration and socio-economic political concerns. Since its establishment in Panama in 1986, SOCSOUTH has remained vigilant in countering threats in the region and against the United States by working jointly with U.S. Interagency, allies and partner nations. Through its adaptability, cultural knowledge and language skills, SOCSOUTH continues to play a unique role in fostering regional partnerships, countering threats and mutually developing SOF interoperability between the United States and the region's nations.



SHINING PATH (SENDERO LUMINOSO)

The Communist Party of Peru, more commonly known as the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), is a terrorist group in Peru. When it first started its period of terrorism in 1980, its stated goal was to replace the bourgeois democracy with "New Democracy." Since the capture of its founder, Abimael Guzman, in 1992, the group has gradually faded and is now largely confined to a rugged coca growing region in south-central Peru.



MS-13

The Mara Salvatrucha 13 gang originated in 1980 in Los Angeles with Salvadorans who migrated to the United States during the civil wars in El Salvador. The gang's primary purpose was to protect Salvadorans from more established gangs in Los Angeles. The gang now operates throughout North and Central America. Most members are principally from El Salvador, but it has a sizeable base in Guatemala and Honduras. MS13 activities include extortion, kidnapping and controlling the drug market.



THE USSOUTHCOM ENVIRONMENT

In the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility, U.S. forces are not engaged in combat, but there are still a myriad of problems, from internal security challenges to transnational terrorist and criminal organizations that threaten the United States and its partners in the region. While the DoD is not the lead federal agency in the USSOUTHCOM area of operations, the interagency cannot easily achieve effects without Department of Defense support. Yet, the growing demand for military resources in other parts of the world precludes a large U.S. military presence in the Caribbean and Central and South America. U.S. Special Operations Forces are the principal military presence in the AOR. Still, most of SOCSOUTH operations, activities and investments mutually support achieving the effects of the lead federal agencies in the AOR. Moreover, the military actions often include multinational efforts from regional partners seeking to achieve common national security interests. Employing this indirect networked approach, USSOF operations, activities and investments, or OAI, are optimized to affect the region in pursuit of U.S. national security interests.

SOCSOUTH supports USSOUTHCOM's strategy by collaborating actively with its interagency partners to engage *by, through and with* partner nations. This networked operational approach uses coordinated USSOF OAI to enable U.S. interagency and partner nation efforts to achieve mutually desired effects, or attain positive changes in the operational environment. The increased complexity and longer time frame of non-combat operations makes identifying the cause and effect links much more difficult in USSOUTHCOM. Furthermore, because the AOR is considered stable at a strategic level, the U.S. contributes few forces to generate desired operational effects. It is thus imperative to employ these limited military resources in the most efficient way possible to achieve the desired effects. Answering resource utilization questions in the now-muddled interactions of causes and effects requires a

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U.S. partner forces participate in a SOCSOUTH joint exercise which provides an opportunity to improve interoperability and exchange best practices.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. OSVALDO EQUITE

MEASURING INDIRECT EFFECTS OVER TIME

Phase Zero Challenges to Operations Assessment.

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RETIRED) ALBERTO PEREZ
AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL JEREMY STRINGER, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

Why assessments? Why the extra burden of data collection and analysis placed upon already overmatched personnel? After all, during combat operations desired effects, end states and means are readily defined. At the tactical level, even with a short action-reaction loop, there are many tools to make appropriate adjustments, to achieve desired effects in a timely manner. Yet even in this data-rich environment where desired outcomes are clear, commanders struggle to understand the links between cause and effect. Imagine then the conundrum at the operational level where effects are less direct and achieved over a longer time horizon. For achieving results short of war, the problem of assessing operational results is compounded exponentially from the already difficult operational assessment. How then does the U.S. Department of Defense pursue desired U.S. national interests when Department of State or another agency has the lead in operations?

uniform, comprehensive assessment methodology. SOCSOUTH requires a rigorous scientifically-based assessment program that optimizes USSOF presence to enable partner nations, general purpose forces and the interagency to advance shared national interests in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. Although the details, sensitivities and complexities of SOCSOUTH's operations assessments are beyond the scope of this article, a general discussion of the process would highlight the collaborative way SOCSOUTH approaches the challenges.

SOCSOUTH APPROACH

SOCSOUTH developed an approach that nests with both USSOUTHCOM's and U.S. Special Operations Command's operational approaches. SOCSOUTH identified three overarching campaign activities that nest and reinforce the end states of both strategic commands: proactive theater posture, counterterrorism and counter-transnational organized crime. Each campaign activity was then analyzed to identify a set of subordinated objectives, effects and indicators that support achieving the end states. These are further aggregated and simplified as desired conditions. One of the most correlated conditions identified is the capability of PN forces to counter threat networks.

In fact, partner nation capability is a factor that directly affects all three of SOCSOUTH's campaign activities. The key cause-effect link under this construct is which partner-nation units have the greatest effect in achieving desired objectives. The more capable the PN forces are to counter threat networks, the more security and eventually the greater stability the PN will achieve. As security and stability are strengthened, the overall need for U.S. OAs decrease. To understand the links, SOCSOUTH J5 set up an assessment team focused on assessing PN capacity.

The methodology used to gauge the efficacy of USSOF efforts to build partner capacity uses seven criteria of partner force capability: operational effects, readiness, planning/targeting, command and control, training, logistics and medical. Initially, the unit capability and capacity data helped refine existing BPC efforts (i.e. training, advising and equipping). Over time, the data allows planners to better identify the right units with which to partner for each type of mission, and subsequently identify opportunities to optimize and reallocate USSOF to better achieve results (see figure 01).

The SOCSOUTH assessment team's reporting has better enabled the SOCSOUTH commander to make informed decisions on where and when to engage

PN units persistently, episodically, or not at all. Furthermore, the assessment products allow the commander to identify and articulate the effects achieved by SOF employment to higher headquarters and the Joint Staff.

While the assessment program has been successful to date, PN unit assessments do not provide the complete picture to the commander regarding the rapidly changing operational environment in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. An increase in influence from both state and non-state actors in the region has increased the uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in an already unpredictable region. These changes have precipitated the need for a more comprehensive assessment program that encompasses the causes and desired effects across all regional campaign activities to include threat monitoring and operational reporting. The goal of the revised assessment effort is to scale-up the partner-nation unit assessment process and apply it across a wider spectrum. The new process is designed to answer the questions: are we doing the right things, and are we doing those things right across all OAs in the AOR.

Understanding the desired path forward requires an understanding of the current environment. While Theater Special Operations Commands grapple with how to best use the resources assigned in pursuit of theater objectives, a bigger question must first be answered. Why, with limited resources, is the U.S. involved in the USSOUTHCOM AOR? Answering

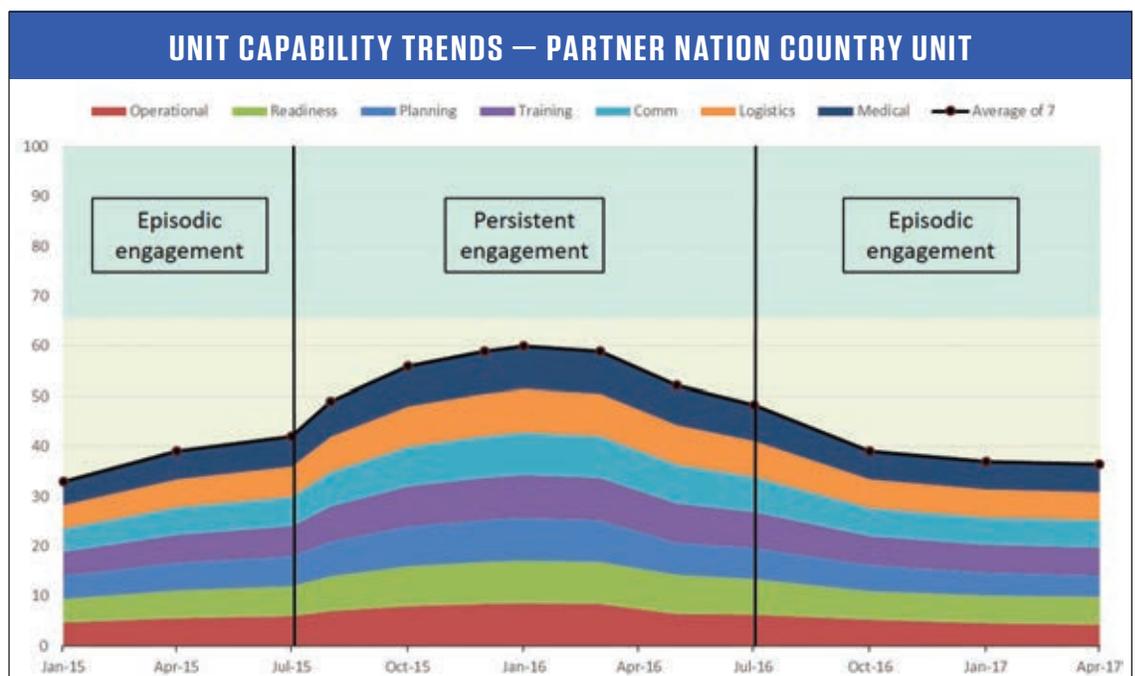


Figure 01
Assessments measuring progress. Based on trend analysis of a partner force unit over the course of a year, the assessment data indicated a gradual, but significant, decline in capabilities in spite of a constant application of USSOF support. After closer analysis, the assessment team found that BPC efforts were not effective in this case: the partnered unit was not fully engaged in countering the desired threats, the unit was not internalizing USSOF training, and the access to threat NAs was reduced. Based on the analysis, the commander realigned USSOF to achieve operational effects in other critical areas within our AOR.



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A competitor from Peru competes in an assault team event as part of Fuerzas Comando, a USSOUTHCOM sponsored multinational special operations skills competition and fellowship program.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. CHAD MENEGAY

02
A U.S. Army Special Forces Soldier with SOCSOUTH assigns sectors of fire to a Panamanian police officer during a hostage rescue scenario as part of Joint Combined Exchange Training in Colon, Panama.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. OSVALDO EQUITE

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this question requires knowledge of the operational environment in the AOR and the *National Security Strategy*, which in turn drives the strategic environment. Regional operational assessments thus inform strategic assessments.

United States presence in the AOR is required because lack of attentiveness and investment opens the door for other state and non-state actors. While not all actors are nefarious, there is no guarantee that conditions will remain favorable to the U.S. without direct involvement. Countering adverse efforts of state and non-state actors requires presence. SOF OAI is in support of the IA, thus assessing the effectiveness of campaign OAI requires input from across the IA. Unfortunately, prior to the current SOCSOUTH effort, no overarching campaign assessment framework existed.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The first step in starting an operational assessment process is determining what will be assessed. For the SOCSOUTH Theater Campaign Assessment, a logical construct is to assess the SOCSOUTH lines of effort through the corresponding intermediate military objectives. By relating each LOE to a series of IMOs, a methodical assessment strategy is formed. Assessing the theater campaign effects requires assessing the theater campaign LOE, which is determined by assessment of each IMO.

At this point, the revised assessment deviates from the PN unit assessment program in that the SOCSOUTH J5 is no longer the only stakeholder. Furthermore, the J5 does not have expert knowledge of, nor deep insight into, every IMO. A successful theater campaign assessment program requires understanding of the key stakeholders for each IMO. For the revised assessment program, SOCSOUTH has assigned each IMO to a directorate that takes ownership for reporting and assessing the data for its particular IMOs. Each directorate, through its subject-matter experts, determines a series of measures of effectiveness and corresponding indicators that give insight into each measure. As SOCSOUTH does not operate separately from USSOUTHCOM, the development of SOCSOUTH LOEs and IMOs is directly tied to USSOUTHCOM LOEs and IMOs.

Owners of each IMO are not expected to assess the required effects in a vacuum, as each IMO requires input from subject-matter experts from across the USSOUTHCOM enterprise, to include IA partners. These experts provide the performance measures, assessment data and relevant analysis required to

track progress of operational objectives. As the assessment SME, the J5 works with each IMO owner to ensure that the right data is collected and that rigor is employed in generating theater campaign assessment products. Previous J5 PN unit assessment products directly support the revised assessment process by providing data in support of multiple IMOs across all campaign LOEs related to effects achieved by PN units.

Once the assessment data is compiled from across the enterprise, the SOCSOUTH assessment team analyzes the information and generates draft assessment products. The products are validated and finalized by the staff, and the commander is briefed on the state of the campaign. Reporting to the commander is not the culmination of the assessment process, but rather a part of the cyclical process. The purpose of assessment is to inform the commander about the effectiveness of the campaign OAIs in order to facilitate decisions to improve the effective application of scarce resources. It is the adjustments (command decisions) that are the desired outcome of the assessment process. The assessment products are only useful if they enable the commander to readjust current force structure to more effectively influence the operational environment in support of U.S. strategic objectives. Once the revised force structure is in place, the assessment process begins anew to determine the effect of the latest cycle of OAIs.

INTERACTIONS WITH ADJACENT AND HIGHER HEADQUARTERS

The output from the SOCSOUTH assessment process does not stay within SOCSOUTH. While the knowledge gained through the process is invaluable to the SOCSOUTH commander, it is also invaluable to adjacent and higher headquarters. As a TSOC, SOCSOUTH has two headquarters: USSOCOM and USSOUTHCOM. A successful assessment program allows for a unified SOF theater picture across both combatant commands. It provides an over arching picture of the environment that can be used across functional and geographic combatant commands.

For the USSOUTHCOM commander, assessments provide a picture of how USSOF is being effectively employed in the AOR. The assessment products allow the USSOUTHCOM commander to more effectively coordinate USSOF and general purpose forces, and to refine the request for the specific USSOF capabilities needed to achieve strategic objectives in the AOR. The assessment products provide the inputs required by USSOCOM for its annual joint assessment, which determines if USSOF are achieving desired effects on a global scale. Likewise for the USSOCOM commander, it provides a picture of where SOF are effective within the AOR and a picture



of where general purpose forces might be better suited to achieve the desired effect. As with USSOCOM, the SOCSOUTH assessment products directly support the US-SOUTHCOM Annual Joint Assessment to determine the effective use of the military instrument of national power in support of USSOUTHCOM LOEs and IMOs.

The SOCSOUTH assessment provides a shared understanding of the ability to achieve desired effects in the AOR by, through and with PN forces. Because of the networked approach described earlier, it is important to collaborate assessments with partners to develop shared insight into how we are collaboratively achieving the objectives required by the National Security Strategy. The process for creating shared assessment is still developing, but there is great promise in the potential for networked assessment efforts.

THE WAY AHEAD

The enduring fiscally-constrained environment and growing global competition makes it imperative to continue to seek the most efficient and effective application of SOF possible. Optimization of SOF employment and commitment of resources requires a comprehensive assessment program. Only by understanding the effects being achieved, and the underlying reason, can the commander employ the appropriate course corrections needed to optimize results. The assess-

ment program must incorporate the entire SOCSOUTH enterprise, to include force providers, the country team and regional partners. Increasingly, SOCSOUTH will have to use its networked approach to assessments to provide the performance measures and relevant analysis required by law under the Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation section of Section 333 Security Cooperation Programs. Fortunately, there are already some baselines in the AOR that can be scaled to provide AM&E compliance for OAI areas related to counterterrorism and counter weapons of mass destruction, counter transnational organized crime, and maritime and border security.

Challenges lie ahead for SOCSOUTH's nascent assessment process, as buy-in is still required across the command as well as from the broader USSOCOM and US-SOUTHCOM enterprise. Misunderstanding the process as more "busy work" could lead to an inefficient process. Overcoming the challenges requires socialization of the process across the SOCSOUTH enterprise, and, more importantly, support and involvement from leaders at all levels. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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SOTF-77

A model for component support to combatant commands.

BY MAJOR DAN HENDRIX

SOF IN THE CONTACT LAYER

Global security threats outside of Declared Theaters of Active Armed Conflict, have evolved as security resources continue to be focused on conflict zones. Threats are intangible and diffuse; they are geographically unconstrained and operate in legal and political gray zones. Security challenges in the Western Hemisphere lie primarily in the *contact layer* and the *homeland layer* in the Global Operating Model as defined in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which drives constant and regional engagement of SOF both in the tactical tasks of defending the

Southern approaches to the U.S., and makes deployed SOF key players in competitive global strategy.⁰¹ Theater Special Operations Commands must now, more than ever, navigate an increasingly complex global environment and weave strategy and operational art into a tapestry of diplomatic, political, economic and cultural concerns. As these challenges increase the need to engage at the operational and strategic levels, these division/numbered Air Force/Naval task force-level staff headquarters must concurrently provide direct support to tactical elements that are four and five echelons down and have limited organic support capabilities. Experience has shown

that this gap between radically different levels in the hierarchy presents an obstacle to effective and responsive support. This article highlights a conceptual shift in SOF organization designed to bridge the gap between strategically focused two-star staffs and tactical, major-led Special Operations Commands-Forward commanding the deployed force.

EVOLVING RELATIONSHIPS TO MEET MODERN CHALLENGES

As Congress debates the relevance of the organizational structures and command relationships outlined in the *Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986*, the realities of geopolitics are forcing an evolution of the systems that support deployed SOF and are reevaluating the responsibilities of force providers (service components) and force employers (combatant commands). This article presents an overview of Special Operations Task Force 77, a battalion-level CONUS-based and Component-run

element that provides administrative, logistic, communication and intelligence support directly to Special Operations Command-South. This echelon, currently at its initial operating capability, provides supplementary support to SOF operations outside of DTAACs by operationalizing service component staff capacity with no personnel tempo costs. This intermediate support staff is a progression of a historical relationship between 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and SOCSOUTH. SOTF-77 is headquartered on 7th SFG(A)'s base at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

The majority force provider for SOCSOUTH is 7th SFG(A). As geographically oriented elements that share a theater with a small SOF footprint, 7th SFG(A) and SOCSOUTH maintain historically close ties. Decades of successive deployments have resulted in united efforts to maximize effectiveness and take advantage of economies of effort and scale. SOTF-77 evolved through these relationships and is an outgrowth of long-standing force provider support efforts to support its deployed personnel by supporting the TSOC. In order to manage both CENTCOM and SOUTHCOM/NORTHCOM requirement since 9/11, 7th SFG(A) employed a force generation model that dedicated a single battalion to Western Hemisphere Theater Campaign Plan Support. This battalion, known colloquially as the "Theater Support Campaign Plan Battalion," provided oversight to the deployment, organization and administration of operational detachments-alpha bound for SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM from 7th SFG(A) in order to centralize and economize deployment preparation and support activities. TSCP Battalion responsibilities included:

- Oversight of individual pre-deployment requirements
- Procurement of supplies for deploying detachments and companies
- Inter-theater transportation coordination and management
- Deployment specific training requirements

- Oversight of field ordering officers and pay agents executing operational funds purchases
- Maintenance, logistics and communications support during deployment

TSCP Battalions did not:

- Exercise OPCON over deployed forces
- Hold Uniformed Code of Military Justice authority
- Provide Intelligence Support

That the TSCP Battalion provided a limited set of SOTF level support functions to area operations bases in the SOUTHCOM AOR

CONTACT LAYER

Environment of the Global Operating Model where Joint Forces will be postured and employed to compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict.

HOMELAND LAYER

Environment of the Global Operating Model where Joint Forces will be postured and employed to compete to defend the homeland.

was understood but lacked formal recognition. It was simply the extension of a force provider's role to organize, train and equip forces into the operational employment phase. It allowed the TSOC staff to remain operationally focused on planning, coordinating and executing special operations while the force provider was assured that downrange forces were getting the best support possible. Since 2015, however, two major developments in SOUTHCOM highlighted the gap that existed between the company-level special operations commands forward and the Joint Forces Component Command -level theater

special operations commands, and drove the creation of a formalized intermediate level of support that became SOTF-77.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

First, a renewed focus on countering violent extremists in SOUTHCOM expanded operational requirements at the SOCFWDs. Previous mission sets were counter-narcotics training operations that focused on the development of national capabilities for foreign governments in support of Title 22 (State Department) initiatives. This revitalized countering violent extremists effort demanded SOCFWD engagement on regional and trans-regional efforts that directly contribute to U.S. national security requirements. This in turn increased the need for intelligence analysis and fusion beyond the SOCFWD's capability.

In parallel to the widened scope of the SOCFWD's mission set, the geographic dispersion of the TSOC's operations greatly expanded due to the increase in the number of Special Operations Forces Liaison Elements in theater. SOFLEs, single person elements that provide SOF expertise at U.S. Embassies to both U.S. Country Teams and host-nation security leaders, have dramatically expanded the SOF footprint into previously untapped areas. These economy of force options have relatively high impact compared to the resources they require. Unlike ODAs and other SOF team-sized elements, they do not have embedded staff functions and require outsized backside support compared with team-sized units.

The result of this was a paradigm shift in the relationship between the TSOC and 7th SFG(A) that resulted in the standup of a SOTF to act as an administrative supplement between the SOCFWDs and the TSOC staff. SOCSOUTH is in the process of solidifying the support relationship between itself and 7th SFG(A) through a formal Request for Support that will be staffed up through COCOM and SOCOM channels and back down

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A Green Beret assigned to the 7th SFG(A) guides a member of the Honduran TIGRES during a shooting drill as part of joint combined exchange training. The TIGRES are a counter-narcotic and counter-trafficking force. As National Security Challenges increase so does the need to support global operations for SOF units with limited organic support elements. SOTF-77 is an organization designed to bridge the gap between the strategic higher headquarters and the SOCFWD deployed tactical force.

U.S. ARMY
PHOTO BY CAPT.
THOMAS CIESLAK

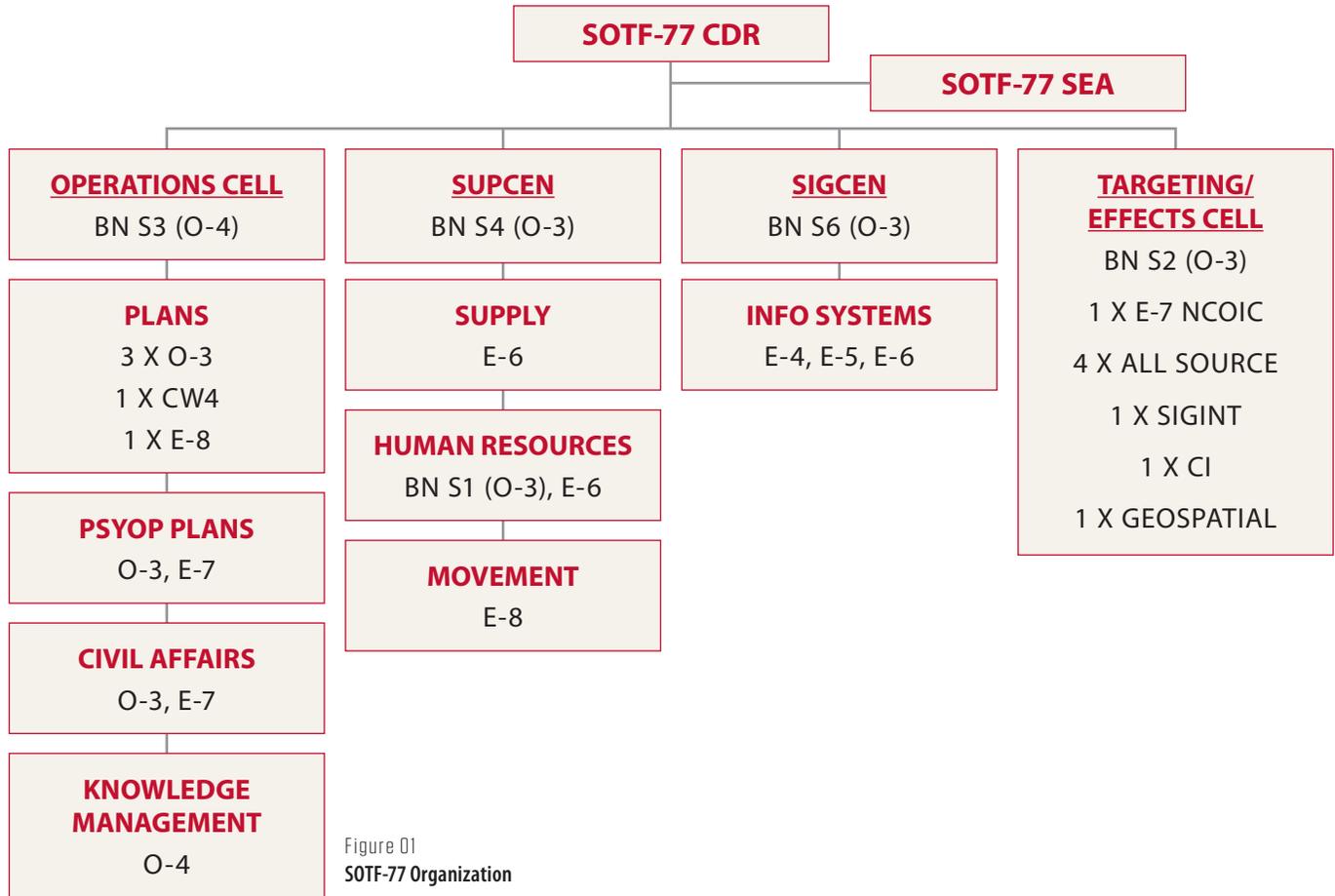


Figure 01
SOTF-77 Organization

through component staffs. The result will be a supporting relationship in which the SOTF provides direct support to the TSOC.

COMREL

Command relationships did not change. The TSOC continues to exercise OPCON over all forces in theater. Special Operations Commands-Forward, who are still task organized under the TSOC, exercise TACON of all assigned forces. Though deployed ODAs are administratively moved from their parent battalions to the SOTF, parent battalion commanders retain most ADCON authorities. In fact, more important than a change in organizational *structure*, the SOTF is a success because of changes it drove in organizational *culture*. Prior to the creation of SOTF-77, TSCP responsibilities were secondary functions to the SF Battalion's primary mission to organize, train and equip. Now a select staff of more than 30 personnel conduct

full-time downrange support during their duty day without affecting their PERSTEMPO. As a result, the SOTF made support to current operations more focused and more responsive at a lower cost.

STAFF FUNCTIONS

SOTF-77 is organized in a similar manner as a deployed SOTF. During the deployment preparation phase, all Soldiers are attached to SOTF-77 for personnel management and it administratively supports all 7th SFG(A) personnel deployed in the SOUTHCOM AOR.

SUPCEN

The SOTF-77 Support Center provides administrative and logistical support to all 7th SFG(A) Soldiers prior to deployment. This support includes processing all operational funds for individual ODAs, supporting CL II and CL IX procurement, managing fuel cards to be used with contracted vehicles, coordinating all necessary OCONUS contracts, and oversee-

ing all deployment transportation and associated joint inspections. These requirements were previously split between parent battalions, the TSCP Battalion and Group Staff.

TSOC P11 and P2 funds that support downrange missions continue to be disbursed to 7th SFG(A) Comptroller and 7th SFG(A) Operations at the group level. This in-house management of TSOC funds is unique among force provider/force employer relationships, and it allows for responsive management of funds to meet the requirements of the deployed force.

Finally, the SOTF-77 Support Center hosts a monthly logistic sync with deployed AOBs, personnel from SOC SOUTH, Army South, Naval Special Warfare, contracting and 7th SFG(A) SPO and GRP S4. This tracks all pre-deployment administrative duties and provides the AOBs with a venue to request support for any logistical issues. Additionally, this meeting allows the SOTF-77 SUPCEN the opportunity to assist the

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Partner forces receive a command update brief during exercise Southern Star in Chile. Global engagement means having a global presence. As security concerns become increasingly interconnected, TSOCs will balance increased requirements for strategic engagement with increased support requirements. SOTF-77 demonstrates how force employers can leverage component staffs to enhance their mission. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. OSVALDO EQUITE

SOCSSOUTH J4 in quickly getting those issues resolved.

TARGETING AND EFFECTS CELL

The Targeting and Effects Section of SOTF-77 provides support to SOCSSOUTH in three main areas: threat analysis, managing/answering requests for information and asset validation assistance. All members of the intelligence team collaborate with their counterparts at the group, TSOC, joint and interagency levels to ensure that the TSOC commanders have accurate and up-to-date analysis of the threat picture in Central and South America. SOTF-77 intelligence professionals also work with deployed teams directly to provide in-depth threat briefs prior to each team's deployment. They continue that support relationship during the team's deployment by providing reach-back capabilities to answer requests for information. This support culminates once the deployed team returns to their home station where they are debriefed and relevant information is captured and disseminated.

OPERATIONS CELL

SOTF-77 Operations section synchronizes the efforts of the SOCFWDs, SOFLEs and JIIM partners in Central and South America. SOTF-77 members work to develop nested network targeting efforts with mutually supporting courses of action. This provides inter-theater coordination between the SOCFWDs and the TSOC to ensure deployed units are not duplicating efforts. Most importantly, the SOTF acts as the continuity of effort between the SOCFWDs to ensure company-level deployments continue towards a common end state. This has served to limit priority changes that commonly occur during transitions and disrupt progress along key lines of effort.

SIGCEN

The SOTF-77 Signal Center has been instrumental in providing communication support to operations in the SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM areas of operation since its inception. Many of

the communication practices and equipment employed by SOF are not common to conventional organizations. These communicators have been integral to the advancement of theater objectives through the implementation of technology and resources in the AOR. The SIGCEN consists of the supporting battalion's S6 and Signal Detachment. The SOTF-77 SIGCEN provides a consolidated location and point of contact for all communication focused mission preparation for deploying units.

To accommodate these requirements, the SIGCEN is organized into three teams consisting of communicators from each communications specialty. This infrastructure serves two purposes: first it gives the teams the ability to train and prepare for all forecasted communication requirements, second it enables the SOTF to deploy a team to respond to issues within eight hours of notification.

having a global presence. As security concerns become increasingly interconnected, TSOCs will balance increased requirements for strategic engagement with increased support requirements as forces are spread more thinly, across greater areas, and have less organic support. Special Operations Task Force-77 demonstrates how force employers can leverage component staffs to enhance their mission. Service Components and combatant commands have a shared interest in the success of deployed units of action. Components can no longer view the forces they organize, train and equip as, "fire and forget," once they are OPCON to a combatant command. Combatant Commands will greatly benefit from a fused approach to downrange support, which will allow them to focus more of their attention on engaging the strategic fight against international, fluid security threats and ensure flexible support to forces forward. **SW**

SHARED EQUITIES: COMPONENT SUPPORT TO COMBATANT COMMANDS

Global engagement means

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01

INTEGRATED CAMPAIGNING

Countering Threat Networks in Central America.

BY CAPTAIN ERIC BIERSCHENK, CAPTAIN LAUREN POPP

AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL STEVE LEWIS

INTRODUCTION

The global security environment continues to become more complex, less predictable and less responsive to traditional stabilization efforts. The emergence of transnational and transregional threat networks, hybrid organizations that combine the traits of terrorist, criminal, insurgent and extremist groups, defies the attempts of any single security service to defeat and has become a serious threat to global stability and security.⁰¹ In Central America, TNs traffic in narcotics, weapons, bulk cash, intellectual property, illicit goods and/or people; attack government infrastructure; corrupt state institutions; intimidate and manipulate vulnerable populations; facilitate malign external state activities; spread violence and mayhem; and create instability that serves their purposes.⁰² These TNs share two common characteristics: First, they are hybrid organizations made from a variety of illicit and violent groups and thus employ hybrid tools and tactics such as terrorism, subversion, corruption, illicit trafficking and criminal activity. This makes them extremely difficult for

any single organization to defeat. Second, they seek to avoid direct confrontation with the U.S. and its allies, instead seeking to operate in the gray zone between peace and war.⁰³ This combination of hybrid tools and ambiguous activities allows TNs to take advantage of the U.S. and its partner nations' gaps in authorities and capabilities. Threat networks present challenges beyond the capabilities of any one security service, government agency, or civilian organization to address; thus, a truly combined effort is required. According to the former acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, "We now face advanced transregional threats that demand greater levels of coordination and collaboration. And we are redoubling our focus on building relationships

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Local community members, military and police personal, and community volunteers gather together at an event designed to reduce crime and violence at a school in the heart of a disrupted community in Honduras. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

and international and interagency partners.”⁰⁴ Both the U.S. Department of Defense’s Joint Staff and the U.S. Special Operations Command direct the use of “integrated campaigns” that involve a variety of agencies, organizations and specialties.

BUILDING AN INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN

According to USSOCOM’s Special Operations Force Operating Concept, an *integrated campaign* is a series of integrated joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational activities to achieve operational and strategic objectives. These campaigns may last for decades and the DoD may play only a small role.⁰⁵ The Joint Staff defines integrated campaigning as joint force and inter-organizational partner efforts to enable the achievement and maintenance of policy aims by integrating military activities and aligning non-military activities of sufficient scope, scale, simultaneity and duration across multiple domains.⁰⁶ Thus, the imperative for an integrated campaign is to build strong partnerships, which may include SOF, conventional forces, U.S. Government interagency, partner nation agencies and civil society, tailored to address the specific challenges of the operational environment. A similar concept is articulated by the U.S. Agency for International Development, as a broad coalition of stakeholders that is required to create a whole-of-society approach — an approach that incorporates all parts of society, including national and local governments, the private sector and civil society — to apply each parent organization’s most effective capabilities to problem sets.⁰⁷

This article will examine a whole-of-society integrated campaign designed to counter and prevent threat network influence, decrease and prevent violence and mitigate the drivers of instability that led to irregular migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America. The campaign is led by the USG interagency in cooperation with PN national and local governments and civil society.

THE THREAT TO STABILITY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The Northern Triangle of Central America consists of Guatemala,

Honduras and El Salvador and is of strategic importance to the U.S. The combination of extremely high violence, a land route used for smuggling illicit drugs, weapons and other goods, a source and a route for irregular migration, and weak democratic institutions under extreme stress exacerbated by a lack of resources and corruption, make this region, only 900 miles from the U.S. border, of vital importance to the security of the U.S. The principal threats in the Northern Triangle are TNs that take advantage of weak governance and instability to pursue their criminal enterprises. TNs have diversified into smuggling narcotics, weapons and people, including special interest aliens. These groups inflict horrendous violence on vulnerable populations, corrupt and coerce state institutions and directly challenge U.S. allies by degrading security and stability throughout the region. According to USSOUTHCOM’s Theater Strategy, “TNs are now the principal threat to regional security and stability.”⁰⁸

The TNs’ threat to stability comes from both their illicit activities and their efforts to corrupt and shape the operational environment to make it more permissive. The volume of illicit contraband smuggled into the U.S. threatens the peace and health of the U.S. Additionally, this illicit flow has created a window of vulnerability which could potentially be used to smuggle members of terrorist organizations and weapons of mass destruction into the U.S. The second, and perhaps most insidious threat, is the instability and weak governance created by TNs using a combination of violence and corruption so close to the U.S. border. This instability is a major driver for many Central Americans who attempt migration without documentation to the U.S., while others are forced to collaborate with or join TNs for protection. All this occurs within driving distance of the U.S. border.

THE INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN PLAN FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

In light of the importance of stability in Central America to the security of the United States, the USG developed a new *Strategy for Engagement in Central America*.⁰⁹ This strategy

has three pillars: improved security, economic and social development, and better governance in the region. Additionally, as part of this, the USG has assisted the governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to develop their own strategies to address the same factors.¹⁰ The Northern Tier governments’ *Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle* (A4P) and the USG’s *Strategy for Engagement in Central America* both focus on the same pillars of security, development and governance.¹¹

A subset of the CEN Strategy is a set of programs designed to mitigate factors that lead to extreme violence in the Northern Triangle. Violence is a driver of instability. Extreme violence blocks efforts to improve security, governance and prosperity and stimulates migration. Thus, the USG has developed Place-Based Strategies to reduce crime, violence and homicides. The USG adapted PBS first in Honduras in 2014 and has replicated versions of it in El Salvador and Guatemala. PBS in the region started as a joint effort between USAID and the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. The strategy outlines and prescribes a focus in targeted communities that suffer from the highest levels of violent crime. This strategy recognizes the critical interdependence of both prevention activities and enhanced law enforcement capacity to address the current elevated levels of violent crime. The interagency USG team in Honduras describes their PBS strategy as matching a wide spectrum of prevention actions with improved trust and effectiveness of local police, focused on “hot spot” communities with the highest levels of homicides. Better access to reliable crime data helps identify the key neighborhoods, individuals and interventions needed, while sharing evidence of “what works” with alliances of communities and local law enforcement guides continual adjustment and improvement in tactics and strategies to reduce violence and increase community resiliencies.¹²

Lessons from the U.S., Mexico, and other places, has shown the PBS teams that 1) violence concentrates in places (hot spots) where TNs frequently exercise critical influence or even control; 2) victims and perpetrators are unevenly distributed across

INTEGRATED CAMPAIGNING

the community (in Central America, predominantly among young men); and 3) violence is mostly driven by group dynamics (in this case, by gangs and TNs).¹³ By focusing on groups of the right people in the right places instead of relying on traditional, unarticulated activities aimed at a community at large, USAID and their local partners have been more effective. New trust and improved communications between neighborhoods and law enforcement, together with stronger community platforms for social services and support for youth at risk, especially young men and boys, have likely contributed to significant drops in homicides in Honduras. National homicide rates in Honduras have dropped from a high of 86/100,000 in 2011 to 46/100,000 in 2017, and rates in some PBS communities have



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dropped even more dramatically.¹⁴ While more evidence and action are required, the USG and PNs are committed to pursuing and adapting localized PBS strategies for community security.

Place-Based Strategies were designed to leverage the very different comparative advantages of USG agencies. Intentional and comprehensive interagency cooperation better connects individual agencies' authorities and programs and focuses more relevant assets and actions in the most violent urban "hot spots."¹⁵ An open PBS strategy can also synchronize with, and reinforce, PN and community security and development programs. In the

Place-Based Strategies in the Northern Triangle, USAID supports increasing community and family resiliencies to risk, crime and violence. It helps create safe spaces and community cohesion through community and youth centers, secure parks and safer streets and schools as platforms for community engagement. The USAID strengthens local social service delivery, including better community policing and programs for youth at risk of joining gangs and their families (i.e. intensive family therapy, mentoring, expanding schools and vocational training, and school violence prevention). INL focuses on building efficiencies, effectiveness in

police capabilities and accountable law enforcement officers who build trust and legitimacy to better protect and serve their communities. Working with the police to identify hot spots within the PBS sectors and increasing proactive patrolling in these areas have dramatically reduced the opportunity for homicides to be committed in these areas. INL has also transformed the quality of police criminal and gang investigations in the northern triangle. USAID and INL are key partners in developing community policing programs in the Northern Triangle law enforcement agencies. These programs are designed to improve the relationship and communications between the police and the communities they protect. Along with CPPs, USAID has nurtured the creation of dozens of community-police committees against crime and violence. In addition, INL works to promote rehabilitation and reinsertion of adult inmates exiting prison, including ex-gang members. Focusing on the greatest number of "hot people" in the "hottest" areas helps prevent further victimization and deter perpetrators from committing homicides in these communities. Both INL and USAID, working with the U.S. Department of Justice, collaborate to strengthen the host countries' justice sectors, including stronger forensic investigations and better prosecutions. Of utmost importance, USG collaboration, especially by USAID and INL through PBS,



01, 02
Honduras National Police interact with school children during a Joint Task Force-Bravo event in Honduras.

03
A Joint Task Force-Bravo doctor and a police cadet talk with a family about medical needs during a medical readiness exercise in Honduras.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

03

empowers PN organizations, public and private institutions, and civil society groups to sustain crime and violence prevention strategies. The U.S. interagency and country team in each embassy has created a PBS Working Group to drive strategy, synchronize existing programs and develop new ideas.¹⁶ Based on the existing relationships of trust between USSOUTHCOM and the USG Country Teams, the PBS planners incorporated USSOUTHCOM, primarily the SOC-Forward and Joint Task Force-Bravo (discussed below), into the PBSWG, beginning in Honduras in 2015.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ROLE

The DoD role in PBS is purposefully small, but is tailored to have a significant impact. This includes SOF, CF the USSOUTHCOM Humanitarian Assistance Program and the Security Cooperation Office, which, as part of the USG Country Team in each embassy, managed much of the interactions between USG agencies and DoD elements.

All SOF forces in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility are under the operational control of Special Operations Command-South and include a forward command control node located in Honduras that is responsible for all SOF in Central America. The SOCFWD includes Special Forces

Operational Detachment-Alpha, Naval Special Warfare Units, Civil Affairs teams and Military Information Support Teams. MIST and CA teams have been active in these countries for years, but recently pivoted to also support PBS, working through USAID and INL, while other SOCFWD activities such as SFODA partner with INL to train specialized police units providing indirect support to PBS.

CA Role – SOCSOUTH employs CA forces drawn primarily from the U.S. Army; however, the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps have also contributed CA forces over the last 10 years. U.S. Army active component forces include the 95th CA Brigade and the 83rd CA Battalion and reserve component forces are drawn primarily from the 350th CA Command.

SOCSOUTH employs its CA forces to 1) expand the enterprise's understanding of the civil component of the operational environment; 2) build the capacity of the PN security services for civil engagement and civil-military operation; and 3) expand the friendly network, which consists of USG, PN and civil society organizations and facilitates cooperation and collaboration throughout the network in order to make the OE less permissive for T3Ns. CA forces leverage tools to plan and execute civic action projects in collaboration with the friendly network and as a platform to enable collaboration. CA teams support PN medical and small-scale engineering projects

in order to empower PN legitimacy and improve the connection between PN security services and the communities they are tasked to protect.

To facilitate close cooperation between CA forces and the U.S. Country Teams, SOCSOUTH has also deployed CA planners to work with Country Teams. The specific role of each CA planner varies depending on the unique requirements of each country, but basic duties include working closely with both the USAID and INL missions to plan and synchronize activities in support of PBS.

MISO Role (SOF) – The 1st Military Information Support Operations Battalion, headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is geographically assigned to the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility. This battalion has conducted continuous rotations in the Northern Triangle of Central America since 2008. MISTs plan, develop, and conduct joint and/or combined military information support operations and synchronize information-related capabilities for regional contingencies. The MIST main efforts in the Northern Triangle are providing support to PN security forces to counter networks that threaten the homeland and countering drug activities and transitional organization crime. Recently, this support has been decisive in improving National Police strategic communications and recruitment campaigns.

Regional MISTs work with the U.S. Country Teams and PN security forces

to design programs in support of PBS to increase public support for their security forces and increase security force recruitment. MISTs assist in increasing support for police forces in high crime areas and increasing resiliencies against criminal activity in various cities throughout the region.

JTF-B Role (CF) - Joint Task Force Bravo is a conventional-force formation that has been in operation in Central America since the early 1980s and is based out of Soto Cano Joint Air Base in central Honduras. JTF-B is tasked by USSOUTHCOM to synchronize activities within the Central America joint operational area as one of the lead components of USSOUTHCOM's counter-threat network strategy in CENTAM. JTF-B conducts and supports a variety of operations and exercises in support of USSOUTHCOM. One key activity is Joint Task Force-B's medical readiness training exercises that are designed both to build its own capacity for rapid response and to support other components' training exercises. Although these exercises are designed as DoD training events, they require significant coordination with PN military and health ministries. Thus, JTF-B has deep institutional knowledge of the planning and execution of medical events and strong relationships with PN medical elements, such as civilian Ministries of Health, throughout Central America.

As JTF-B started working with the PBS team, it adapted its medical programs to support PBS/PN police requirements. JTF-B provided specialized medical expertise and leveraged its existing relationships with regional health ministries. JTF-B scaled its participation in PN-led events to an appropriately small number of DOD participants.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER - CHAMELECÓN

A recent example of this integrated campaign in action can be seen in the community of Chamelecon, Honduras, a suburb of San Pedro Sula, the second largest city and industrial heart of Honduras. Chamelecon suffers from extremely high violence under constant turf wars between T3Ns, primarily MS-13 and Barrio 18. Many neighborhoods of Chamelecon are effectively hostage to these T3Ns — local buses are extorted multiple times en route as they pass through different territories, schools have frequently suffered from massive absenteeism when students cannot walk to their schools through rival gang borders, and entire neighborhoods are abandoned due to gang threats. Because of these T3Ns' control in these spaces, both the HNP and Government of Honduras' ability to provide security and services in them were severely limited.

Chamelecon was the first PBS priority and the Honduras National Police Metropolitan Prevention Police Precinct 6, responsible for the area, has worked closely with the PBS team and the Community Committee as part of the CPP HNP focus on developing a positive relationship with the community. The UMEP6 chief determined that a medical civil action event, as part of a series of CPP activities, would enhance the relationship between the HNP and the community as well as empower the Community Committee. UMEP6, working with INL, invited the SOCFWD and JTFB to participate in the proposed event.

The Chamelecon planning group primarily consisted of members of the Community Committee, which included the UMEP6 Police Chief, Chamelecon public school representatives, the Chamelecon Fire Department, local businesses, district Ministry of Health officials and several local non-governmental organizations. This group was supported by the MIST, CA team, and representatives from JTF-B as well as INL representatives. The UMEP6 commander selected a secondary school in the heart of a disputed neighborhood with a supportive staff and a securable location to control access. By involving local NGOs, the CA team helped expand the role and visibility of civil society in the event. Simultaneously, the MIST worked with UMEP6 to develop the public messaging plan



01 A Joint Task Force-Bravo Medical Element team member measures a young boy's arm circumference during a joint pediatric nutritional assessment by the Honduran Ministry of Health, Joint Task Force-Bravo and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

02 Joint Task Force-Bravo Medical Element team members sort medications during a pediatric nutritional assessment in Honduras.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY MARIA PINEL

for the event and create products for distribution at the Medical Civic Action Program JTF-B worked with the MOH to plan the layout of treatment locations, determine the requirements for medicine and medical supplies and design the patient flow. JTF-B also supplied several medical specialists to augment the MOH team. The CA team worked with the Security Cooperations Office's HAP manager to provide appropriate medical supplies for the event. MIST and the CA team conducted an assessment of the population to evaluate their needs and popular sentiment. Several HNP specialized units, including the HNP SWAT team, *Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad* (TIGRES), and the HNP crime scene investigative unit, also participated, thereby increasing their own visibility and contact with the local population.

The Chamelecon MEDCAP was successfully executed with no security incidents, treating approximately 2,000 patients. The event allowed a broad coalition of groups to work together toward a common goal, expanded trusted relationships and achieved a positive outcome. The success of the event also reinforced for the community the positive roles both the police and the Community Committee play in protecting and improving their community. The Community Committee, through its strong leadership in the event, capitalized on the increased solidarity built by this MEDCAP to plan follow-on events. Both the PBSWG and the HNP assessed the project as successful.

This event was just one in a series of partnership programs and events planned by the PN with support from the PBS team designed to expand and empower the friendly network and protect the communities.

CONCLUSION

T3Ns are hybrid organizations that use a variety of tools to manipulate social, governmental, economic and security problems in vulnerable environments to make the environment more permissive for their nefarious activities. Although this phenomenon is a direct threat to the U.S., it is not fundamentally a military problem; instead, it calls for a variety

of organizations and expertise working together and applying both “soft” and “hard” skills and tools appropriate to addressing these challenges. Creation of integrated campaigns that involve a variety of expertise can be an effective approach to addressing the complex social, governance and security problems that enable T3N activities.

A place-based strategy, as has been applied in Central America, is an excellent example of a USG and PN plan with small but consequential DOD involvement through appropriate SOF and CF expertise.

Although no single integrated campaign model can work in all situations, the PBS model exemplifies broad participation, flexibility, application of specific expertise from different USG agencies and local organizations, and a willingness to cooperate with non-traditional partners. It is an excellent model for SOF operators to study and adapt as they prepare for their next integrated campaigns. 

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01

OPTIMIZATION OF THE INFORMATION AND INFLUENCE COMPETENCIES

BY CAPTAIN ALLAN BLAIR, CAPTAIN KRISTOPHER LEVY
AND MAJOR STEVEN SANTUCCI

“Virtual War is a global systems approach to achieve social control...The end game is to control and influence the will of a person, group, or larger population to achieve ideological objectives over time in support of a cause or a specific sponsor.” – Colonel (R) Stefan Banach

PERSPECTIVES

A 12-hour drive from Guatemala City exists a rural community lost in a jungle-turned agro-industrial expanse. The only contact most of this community has had with the United States is when loved ones have returned home after being deported. When this experience is the community’s only perception of the U.S. Government, the question becomes, how can United States Special Operations Forces influence this population to meet our military objectives and protect the U.S. southern approach? This exemplifies the problem set that Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units deployed in support of Special Operations Command South confront on a daily basis.

The U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility consists of 31 countries, with a total population of 490 million that speak dozens of primary languages. Tasked with leading the fight against terrorism in this complex environment, SOCSOUTH understands that the problem set is not limited to the physical domain — bounded by geography or borders — but expands into the cyber and ideological domains. Competi-

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A Salvadoran government official discusses event outcomes with Psychological Operations Soldiers assigned to Special Operations Command South during a police academy recruiting event. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY MAJ. CESAR SANTIAGO

tion for political and ideological influence encompasses civil engagement, multimedia communication and interactive Internet activities. In this operational environment, the U.S. is in competition with our adversaries for influence over every person connected to the Internet. Every person is a potential node of influence within the greater network. Mitigating adversarial competition requires persistent engagement to solidify relationships with partner-nation militaries, governments and civil society to maintain dominance while disrupting existing threats, dissuading potential threats and reacting effectively to contingencies.

Within the SOUTHCOM AOR, the integration of United States Government influence activities in the form of Civil Engagement, Civic Action and Civil Reconnaissance, complemented with Military Information Support Operations, that shape messages and persuade target audiences are paramount. This is emphasized by the fact that CA and PSYOP are the only USSOF who have the freedom of persistent movement to engage with partner-nations’ security forces, local government officials and general populace. Targeted MISO and CA Operations maintain critical relationships, ensuring that the western hemisphere remains a permissive environment for the U.S. and allies, while establishing a proactive theater posture while illuminating threat networks. This promotes a non-permissive environment for adversaries and extremist organizations in the physical, cyber and ideological domains.

BUILDING THE SOF NETWORK

While the SOUTHCOM AOR is a steady-state environment that is low on the conflict continuum for U.S. and allied countries, it is important to maintain influence dominance in order to prevent threat networks and competitors from consolidating access to key populations. In this environment, SOF operations, actions and investments are partnered with, and at the request of the countries in which they operate. These operations, activities and investments, or, OIAs) can be in conjunction with interagency partners, such as United States Agency for International Development, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Drug Enforcement Administration and Homeland Security Investigations and

are directly in support of host nation initiatives. For example, in Central America, CA and MISO OAI support the tri-lateral Alliance for Prosperity between Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. This is completed through the USAID-led Place Based Strategy in Guatemala and Honduras, and through the National Security Plan of El Salvador. In Colombia, CA and PSYOP elements operate as part of a whole-of-SOF approach to support Colombian-led operations throughout the country. In these culturally and linguistically heterogeneous regions with widely varied threat environments, relationship building serves as the common denominator that unites all CA and MISO. Creating and maintaining networks between and across partner-nation security forces, and government, as well as between U.S. interagency and civil society prepares SOCSOUTH for contingencies, identifies and mitigates vulnerabilities and most significantly, creates an information environment that supports U.S. objectives.

“Special Operations leaders always have known that ‘you can’t surge trust,’ trust ‘is developed over years by personal one-on-one interaction.’ SOCOM troops’ ability to build such trust, along with language and cultural expertise and the ‘ability to think through ambiguity,’ increases both the command’s credibility and the demand for its capability.” — Admiral (R) William H. McRaven

To shape the information environment, the range of military activities conducted by CA and PSYOP elements must be planned based on a holistic assessment of the operational environment in order to understand and frame the problem. Teams must target a network and apply relevant resources to affect the problem. Once a network is targeted, CA affects identified civil vulnerabilities within that network, which are then exploited through PSYOP messaging efforts. The effects of this methodology bolster the image of partner-nation security forces and government institutions, while building their capability to partner with civil society organizations. It also supports and expands partner nation sovereignty into areas disputed by criminal and transnational threat networks, disrupting and degrading their ability to reach the United States. These OAIs conducted by CA and PSYOP forces build relationships to illuminate networks and shape them in support of operational preparation of the environment.

OPTIMIZATION

The SOUTHCOM AOR is a steady-state environment, and as such received less conventional resources to achieve strategic end states and mitigate potential threats. In this reality, the SOCSOUTH Commander recognized the amplifiable effects CA and PSYOP, together with other information-related capabilities, could have in this AOR. CAO and MISO are the principal mechanisms for delivering influence across the entire region. Pareto’s Law states that 80 percent of your return on investment, or effects, will yield from 20 percent of your application of resources. CA and PSYOP forces make up roughly 20 percent of the SOF units of action in the theater; however, by leveraging unified action partners CA and PSYOP can affect 80 percent of the operational environment.

To frame it another way, as civil society strategists and cultural experts, we are tasked with affecting a country’s entire population yet need to demonstrate the same level of effects as our other SOF brethren. Understanding the impossibility of engaging with all of a country’s civil society, Civil Affairs Teams and Military Information Support Teams must target key networks, populations and audiences capable of distributing influence at scale in support of the commander’s objectives. One of the ways that Influence as a primary line of effort has been effective is how it has resulted in the judicial finish, whether apprehension or neutralization, of high value targets. CA and PSYOP influence operations both disrupt and deny freedom of movement for threat networks, while also attacking civil vulnerabilities and countering threat narratives.

SOCSOUTH has the additional challenge of “doing more with less,” which requires creative optimization, efficiency and cross functional synchronization. As a result, CA and PSYOP have attacked this challenge through the activation and employment of reserve elements to augment the force disposition. Special Operations Commands Forward are complemented with a flexible surge element capable of shifting forces to merge and strengthen regional teams during

key engagements and operations. These creative manning solutions provide long-term strategic synchronization by prioritizing engagement, while simultaneously empowering regional partners to assume more responsibility. This engagement strategy requires additional SOCSOUTH command and control, but integrates a deliberate by-with-and-through methodology to enable long-term solutions. This strategy is imperative for mission success considering the limited array of CA and PSYOP forces within the AOR.

CONCLUSION

The underlying complexity of the operational environment combined with operational restraints due to competing global requirements requires application of principles like Pareto’s Law. The persistent presence and freedom of movement across the AOR enable synchronized CA and PSYOP operations to yield maximum effects. By focusing efforts to maximize effects, CA and PSYOP forces shape the civil society to be non-permissive for state competitors and extremist organizations across the human terrain in the physical, virtual, and ideological domains. These are the tangible effects of building relationships that affect the condition of civil vulnerabilities and messaging to affect behavior. Building relationships prepares the environment and builds capacity to respond to natural and man-made disasters, enhances stability, while disrupting, degrading and deterring threat networks and external state actors. 

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THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE

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Latin America: Beyond Counter-Drug and Counter Transnational Organized Crime.
BY CAPTAIN SHAWN HUEY, COLONEL RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ AND COLONEL PATRICK WINSTEAD

01 A Border Patrol vehicle sits along the border fence line separating San Diego and Tijuana Mexico watching for illegal crossings. The border fence is a deterrent to illegal immigration, drug smuggling and human trafficking. The fence is regularly patrolled by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents on the lookout for illegal crossings. The U.S.–Mexico border, a component of the homeland defense, serves as America’s last geographic line of defense against malicious actors. U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION PHOTO BY DONNA BURTON

No country enjoys immunity from terrorist attacks, not even the United States. The attacks of 9/11 should prove a definitive reminder. The 2017 National Security Strategy acknowledged as much by establishing the protection of the American people and Homeland as part of its first pillar.⁰¹ For U.S. Southern Command and U.S. North Command, the pillar includes the defense of the Homeland’s southern approaches from Latin America. The U.S.–Mexico border, a component of the homeland defense, serves as America’s last geographic line of defense against malicious actors. The last line of defense; however, cannot also serve as the first line of defense. Other defensive initiatives must exist throughout the theatre that degrade and deny access to Homeland. These initiatives can take different forms such as partner-nation capacity and strong governance and accountability through security cooperation. If the U.S. should achieve such an effect, then a wider aperture is necessary to understand Latin American security challenges.

The historical counter-drug and counter-transnational organized crime frameworks used to understand Latin America are less encompassing today than 25 years ago. The evolution of threats in the theatre transcend this legacy framework. Simply put, the legacy framework is too narrow. The complexity of security challenges now also includes terrorism and other great

powers operating in the theatre. A historical review of how U.S. policy toward Latin America progressed over the last 200 years is necessary to appreciate the complexity. The review shows that when the U.S. shifts its focus away from Latin America, problems emerge. These problems take shape in the spread of communism, drugs, terrorism, predatory economics and great power influence in Latin America, to name a few. The review also highlights the U.S. is currently imbalanced in its approach to mitigate these security challenges that exist in America’s backyard.

LATIN AMERICAN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The American Revolution and Napoleonic Wars helped inspire Latin American countries to seek independence from their European colonial powers in the early 19th century. Shortly afterward, President James Monroe and his administration grew concerned these European powers would attempt to recolonize their previous possessions and transport conflict and instability into the Western Hemisphere or WHEM.⁰² Thus in his 1823 State of the Union Address to Congress, President Monroe stated that the American continents were not subjects for future colonization by any European powers.⁰³ President Monroe attempted to promote stability in the WHEM by deterring outside

actors. In 1904, in response to recent European military interventions in the WHEM, President Theodore Roosevelt reinterpreted the Monroe Doctrine. The new interpretation, called the “Roosevelt Corollary” transformed the Monroe Doctrine from passive policy into justification for U.S. intervention in the WHEM. The Dominican Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico and Haiti serve as examples of active U.S. intervention during the early 20th century.⁰⁴ Thirty years later, the European continent existed on the cusp of war, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed the United States needed to shift its focus across the Atlantic, away from Latin America. President Roosevelt implemented the “good neighbor” policy that again reinterpreted U.S. policy and directed less U.S. involvement in the WHEM.⁰⁵

After World War II, President Harry S. Truman had his own interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine but this time to counter the Soviet Union’s efforts to spread communism globally. The “Truman Doctrine,” as it came to be known, wanted to prevent “forcible expansion of Soviet totalitarianism into free, independent nations, because American national security now depended upon more than just the physical security of American territory.”⁰⁶ While the U.S. focused on countering communist growth in the Eastern Hemisphere, threats grew to the WHEM. Interestingly, in 1953, the United States did not invoke the Truman Doctrine to prevent the establishment of a Communist regime in Cuba by Fidel Castro, which exemplifies the antipathy toward addressing threats in Latin America immediately following World War II. The Kennedy administration’s attempt, however, to expel Communism from Cuba with the Bay of Pigs highlights the difficulty associated with ignoring Latin American security challenges until it is too late.

Beginning in the 1960s, illicit drug trade significantly influenced the U.S.-Latin American policy. In the U.S., drug use was on the rise when President Richard Nixon named drug abuse a serious national threat.⁰⁷ Congress then passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, merging multiple drug laws to gain efficiency and prevent stove piped efforts.⁰⁸ In June 1971, President Nixon declared drugs public enemy No. 1 and initiated the drug wars.⁰⁹ Two years later, the President created the Drug Enforcement Administration as the lead federal agency. To balance the Cold War with the new drug war, the U.S. focused its counter-drug initiatives on supply eradication, crop dusting, transit routes and a pressure campaign to extradite foreign nationals to the U.S. for prosecution.¹⁰ The DEA, the political rheto-

ric, and the pressure to counter Cold War adversaries birthed what are today’s CD efforts.

The U.S. government, in the 1980s, prioritized heroin eradication over marijuana and cocaine.¹¹ The eradication efforts thrust Mexico, a major heroin producer, into the spotlight while Colombian producers and traffickers bolstered their cocaine and marijuana operations.¹² The U.S. focus on heroin allowed the Medellin and Cali drug cartels, both in Colombia, to grow into significant threats.¹³ President Ronald Reagan met these threats with a renewed policy and resource emphasis on the drug wars. The International Security and Development Act of 1981 and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 cumulatively increased funding for the drug wars from \$40 million to \$200 million annually.¹⁴ Additionally, Congress tied foreign aid to a nation’s progress in fighting the drug trade within their own countries.¹⁵ Yet, despite President Reagan’s intensified CD initiatives and drug wars, the national priorities were on the Cold War. During this period, the U.S. focused away from Latin America, the Salvadorian Civil War began, and Grenada and Panama required U.S. military interventions. Arguably, the U.S. heavy emphasis on the Cold War during the 1980s permitted significant security threats to grow in Latin America.

The 1980s and 1990s formed the frameworks used today to understand Latin American security challenges. The U.S. Andean Counter-Drug Initiative, formed from Plan Colombia, refocused resources to Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. The regional shift of U.S. policy within Latin America reallocated resources to include law enforcement training, military and economic assistance, intelligence sharing and training and other direct assistance to counter cocaine trafficking organizations.¹⁶ The CD efforts, while still ongoing, only address part of the problem and do not fully encompass the convergence of threats in Latin America.

The United States has alternated from intense focus on Latin America to circumspect disinterest over the last 200 years. The reasons for this shifting focus varied (e.g., European intervention, countering communism, the World Wars, drugs, etc.) but the threat environment adjusted accordingly. Global conditions and crises dictate which disposition the U.S. assumes within the cycle. The Global War on Terror (redirected American time, resources and efforts toward the Middle East. This is understandable, but it is time to reevaluate that balance. Failure to balance U.S. focus on Latin America against other global challenges over the last two decades has encouraged U.S. peer adversaries to expand their influence in the WHEM. This

... WHEN THE U.S. SHIFTS ITS FOCUS AWAY FROM LATIN AMERICA, PROBLEMS EMERGE. THESE PROBLEMS TAKE SHAPE IN THE SPREAD OF COMMUNISM, DRUGS, TERRORISM, PREDATORY ECONOMICS, AND GREAT POWER INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICA ...



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influence fosters corruption, social unrest, and oppressive regimes in the nation's back yard.

GREAT POWERS IN THE WHEM

The Soviet Union cultivated relationships with Cuba and other Latin American countries until the Cold War's conclusion in 1991. With President Vladimir Putin's rise to power, he renewed Russian interests, investments and pursuit of influence in the WHEM. By 2013, Russian trade in the region exceeded \$24 billion with rights for oil and gas exploration, arms sales, as well as the opportunity to propagate a subtle anti-U.S. mindset in the region.¹⁷ But, the Russians are not the only great power operating within the WHEM.

China has a significant interest in the vast resources available in Latin America. Throughout the world, China employs predatory economics to develop commercial and political relationships to displace the U.S. as a global power and secure resources for the Chinese economy.¹⁸ China's economic growth has provided copious resources directed at achieving these political objectives. Unlike the U.S., China is less concerned with the mode of government, human rights, or the improvement of a given area. Instead, China pursues its interests, often at the expense of weaker nations. For example, China does not subscribe to international standards on environmental safety and social norms.¹⁹ Some of their projects in mining and infrastructure carry significant risk to the environment and some-

times force large populations to relocate.²⁰ Many of China's investments in Latin America support countries with poor governance and are in areas where corruption is prominent, which aids oppressive regimes in maintaining their control.²¹ The Chinese pursuit of national interests in Latin America promotes instability in the WHEM.

These Chinese and Russian relationships foster unsustainable resource extraction that increases Latin American economic fragility. These relationships also increase military presence and erode U.S. influence in the WHEM. The U.S. focus toward counter-terrorism in the Middle East creates opportunities for these peer competitors to advance their interests in Latin America.

EVOLVING TERRORIST THREATS IN LATIN AMERICA

The U.S. has been fighting the Global War on Terror for more than 17 years by focusing on international threats outside of the WHEM.²² The focus on GWOT outside the WHEM contributed to a growing Latin American terrorism threat. Profits and freedom of movement lure terrorist organizations to drugs and other criminal activity in Latin America. For example, Hezbollah, the Lebanon based Shia terrorist organization supported by Iran, has grown its presence and influence in the theatre since 2004, shortly after Operation Iraqi Freedom began. Among various nefarious activities, Hezbollah partnered with the drug cartel Los Zetas, a particularly violent organization with extensive influence in Mexico, which includes drug and arms trafficking and trade-based money laundering.²³ Hezbollah also uses corrupt government officials in Latin America to provide false identification (passport, birth certificate, driver's license, etc.) to facilitate freedom of movement for their people.²⁴ This criminal-terrorist nexus facilitates funding of terrorist activities.²⁵

Furthermore, since the 1980s, Iran and Hezbollah have been present in the Tri-Border Area, the juncture of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. Iran covertly supported its proxy in Latin America while targeting countries by building mosques and Muslim cultural centers to spread their revolutionary rhetoric.²⁶ To facilitate this and other activities, Hezbollah utilizes remote airfields and poor border security in the TBA to transport financial resources to and from Iran.²⁷ The TBA remains an important regional nexus of arms, narcotics, pirated goods, human smuggling, counterfeiting and money laundering, which are all likely funding sources for terrorists.²⁸

Terrorists cooperating with transnational criminal organizations are transforming global affairs and endangering the lives of Americans both at home and abroad. The 2018 National Defense Strategy recognizes the impact of non-state actors that threaten the security environment. For example, jihadist groups (e.g., ISIS) are actively trying to radicalize and recruit using the access and intimidation afforded by international criminal gangs.²⁹ In February 2018, Islamic extremists

01 The Tri-Border Area where the borders of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil meet, is an important regional nexus of arms, narcotics, pirated goods, human smuggling, counterfeiting and money laundering, all likely funding sources for terrorists.

posed such a threat in Trinidad and Tobago planning a terror attack during the nation's annual Carnival activities. Members of Special Operations Command – South were able to advise and assist local Trinidadian security forces to thwart the attack.³⁰ In recent years, TTO-bred foreign terrorist fighters for ISIS and these fighters returned to the Caribbean with combat experience and a violent extremist ideology.³¹

Drugs and terrorism coexist across the globe in a marriage of mutual convenience; Latin America is no exception. Terrorists are looking at Latin America to recruit, corrupt, train and strengthen their power and influence.³² These organizations are turning to criminal networks to generate funding and obtain logistical support.³³ The ascendance of converging threats in Latin America reflects the U.S.'s imbalanced focus favoring Middle Eastern CT efforts. The U.S. can achieve a better balance through tools such as Security Cooperation.

THE WAY-FORWARD

The Chinese and Russian influence and influx of criminal-terrorist entities in Latin America presents formidable security challenges. The GWOT exacerbates this problem because the U.S. has devoted vast resources to defeating terrorists in the Middle East, which has taken U.S. focus away from Latin America. While allocating additional DoD forces to Latin America would be ideal, it is unlikely. The global demands are too high. Within USSOUTHCOM, SOCSOUTH deploys the preponderance of DoD forces to the theatre and is the Geographic Combatant Command's main effort. The remaining USSOUTHCOM service components have limited forces allocated to them due to other commitments. Competing global requirements allow for an allocation of only four percent of the Special Operations Command inventory to SOCSOUTH. Given that SOUTHCOM will likely remain a low priority for U.S. force allocation, the DoD has a unique opportunity to rebalance its Security Cooperation resources.

The current U.S. resources applied to CD and CTOC make up a preponderance of the ongoing SOUTHCOM security cooperation efforts. Coupled with the terrorist threats and peer competitor interest in the region, there exists a gap between current resources and the required resources to close this gap. The DoD's recent revision of the Security Cooperation program updates the planning, approval and reporting of these authorities, but more importantly offers an opportunity to achieve better resource balance. The Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act promulgated Section 333, the global train and equipment authority. This change consolidates several legacy authorities to ensure unified coordination, planning, and execution of security cooperation. Section 333 offers an opportunity to reevaluate U.S. priorities, adjust resources, and take positive actions to improve U.S. security cooperation efforts in Latin America. DoD should consider the converging threats in Latin America during the Section

333 Authority annual evaluation and allocation process. The 2018 Nation Defense Strategy openly accepts risks in the SOUTHCOM theatre as DoD primarily focuses on the threats posed by the peer competitors elsewhere on the globe. Since allocating more forces to USSOUTHCOM is unlikely, granting Section 333 authorities would greatly enhance SOCSOUTH's existing forces to address these challenges with a comprehensive approach. For this to occur, USSOUTHCOM must continue to work closely with the Joint Staff and the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy to navigate the arduous approval process.

Following the publication of the FY17 NDAA, OUSD(P) developed a new oversight management process for Section 333. This process is still a work in progress, but GCCs can leverage Section 333 authorities for their mission priorities. USSOUTHCOM; however, was not allocated Section 333 authorities in FY17 or FY18. Initial staff estimates indicate an allocation of \$30M, roughly one percent of the nearly \$3B FY19 Security Cooperation budget. In the meantime, SOUTHCOM is utilizing Section 322 authorities, which are primarily for USSOF training abroad but provides minimal benefit to partner nations, as a stopgap. This is problematic for SOCSOUTH. SOF contributes military engagement, Security Cooperation and deterrence to protect and advance national security interests and shape regional security in the theatre. SOF also provides an efficient and effective DoD tool that helps build and develop regional security forces while maintaining a deployed presence for persistent engagements and pre-crisis periods. The current Section 322 authorities significantly limit engagement between USSOF and partner-nation forces and hinder the ability to support the NDS's second line of effort: to strengthen alliances as we attract new partners. The NDS acknowledges that "mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to U.S. strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match."³⁵ These partnerships also offer important access to potential basing and logistical support for contingency operations. Additionally, U.S. military equipment sales can modernize U.S. partner-nation equipment and facilitate integration with U.S. forces.³⁶ Partner-nation training and military sales, however, are not enough. Efforts should include improving U.S. allies and partners ability to successfully train, man and equip their own military to promote healthy Defense Institution Building. Section 333 authorities allow for this to occur, while Section 322 authorities do not.

Defense institution building empowers partner-nation defense institutions to establish or reorient their policies and structures as well as make their defense sector more transparent, accountable, effective, affordable and responsive to civilian control. It also improves defense governance and increases the sustainability of DoD Security Cooperation programs. It is typically conducted at the ministerial, general, joint staff, military service headquarters, and related defense agency level, and as appropriate, with other supporting

defense entities.³⁷ Further, defense institution building helps Latin American nations to help themselves. Section 333 authorities enhance DoD's ability to contribute to institution building in Latin America. As good as institution building is in Latin America and U.S. security, without Section 333 authorities, it will stagnate and USSOUTHCOM will continue to fight with one hand tied behind its back.

CONCLUSION

Latin American threats have grown in the nearly 200 years since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine. Currently, the combination of near-peer competitor presence and the unification of terrorist with crime organizations creates significant threats to the U.S. There is still time, however, to mitigate these threats. The SOUTHCOM theatre could best achieve its national security responsibilities by building defense networks throughout Latin America that protect the U.S. Homeland. A single defensive belt along the U.S.-Mexico border will not suffice. The last 200 years show that when the U.S. focuses too much attention away from Latin America, security threats emerge in the WHEM. The GWOT is causing this phenomenon to occur now. The global demands on DoD will likely not decline in the near term, making the allocation of additional forces to USSOUTHCOM unlikely. DoD, however, can have a significant impact in mitigating the convergence of these threats in the theatre by granting USSOUTHCOM Section 333 authorities, which will significantly improve all aspects of security cooperation in Latin America, including DIB. DoD can facilitate USSOUTHCOM's efforts to build defensive belts that protect the American people and the Homeland. **SW**

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U.S. Naval Special Warfare and Trinidad and Tobago special navy units prepare to board a Trinidadian and Tobagonian coast guard vessel during a joint training exercise. Collaborative exercises like this provide opportunities for USSOF to build effective relationships with partner nation forces that carry on into real world missions.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY MAJ. CESAR SANTIAGO

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HOW SOCSOUTH ENABLERS LIVE BY THE 5TH SOF TRUTH

BY MAJOR JAVIE PLA AND MAJOR IVAN RICHARDS

Five truths govern everything that Special Operations Forces do every day around the world. To the critical support personnel behind the scenes handling personnel actions, sustainment and distribution, communications systems and financial management, none is more important than the capstone truth... "Most Special Operations require non-Special Operations Force assistance." This is true no matter the mission or environment and was especially evident during the response to the multiple catastrophic hurricanes that carved a path of death and destruction across the Caribbean and South Eastern United States in the fall of 2017. Though the face of the Special Operations Command South response was the common visage of Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs, they had a formidable force of logisticians, communicators, medics and other enablers backing them up.

The 400 personnel of SOCSOUTH proved to be the linchpin around which humanitarian assistance and disaster relief response pivoted. SOCSOUTH is the Theater Special Operations Command assigned to United States Southern Command, tasked with the primary mission of Countering Threat Networks seeking to exploit the southern approaches to the United States. One specific SOUTHCOM line of effort in this region, and the subject of this case study, is enabling rapid response through prompt crisis response.

As Hurricane Irma left a swath of destruction across the Caribbean basin and zeroed in on southern Florida, SOUTHCOM and SOCSOUTH found themselves evacuating the crisis zone while trying to prepare for expected response actions. SOCSOUTH activated its contingency plan and began preparations to posture personnel and equipment necessary to maintain continuity of operations during the anticipated storm. In Homestead, Florida, SOCSOUTH personnel diligently prepared houses and readied the command headquarters for an expected onslaught. The 112th Signal Detachment's senior non-commissioned officer led preparation efforts for service members and their families in conjunction with the unit's AMBER Cycle Team, securing communications equipment, generators, vehicles and facilities for hurricane impact at home station. The GREEN Cycle Team maintained current signal support operations and prepared remaining detachment personnel for evacuation. The detachment's ability to posture for the hurricane in less than 24 hours was vital in enabling its ability to handle the contingencies to come.

As many prepared to evacuate the impending storm's path, a small team planned to remain in south Florida and endured vicious winds, torrential rains and sweltering temperatures as the storm made landfall. This Ride-Out Team took precise measures to keep server rooms as cool as possible by powering down nonessential equipment to ensure the survivability of SOCSOUTH's essential communications systems. The J6 team sustained SOCSOUTH HQ's Special Operations Information Environment network to maintain real-time communication and situational awareness between home station and the Alternate Command Post located in Northwest Florida. They



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maintained a 24-hour video teleconferencing bridge that was connected to a camera facing the outside of the HQ to help leaders obtain real-time and post crisis assessment of the weather and damage. Logisticians worked tirelessly to ensure those remaining behind in the building had food and water in anticipation of flooding that could prevent anyone from leaving the building until the waters subsided.

Soon, word came from higher headquarters to deploy the SOUTHCOM Situational Assessment Team to Puerto Rico and begin assessments on the situation in Saint Martin and the British Virgin Islands in advance of forthcoming U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Joint Task Force relief missions. SOCSOUTH J3 Operations, J4 Logistics, medics and 112th communicators who had made preparations immediately moved to the disaster zone while recalling personnel from their safe havens to backfill those heading towards the storm.

Immediately upon landing in Puerto Rico, SOCSOUTH J4 personnel engaged the Puerto Rico Army and



Air National Guard units for support. These formations were already alerted and on heightened readiness levels due to impact on the island created by Hurricane Irma. In fact, the island was already conducting full recovery operations for their inland suburbs, which were lacking electricity and water. The SSATs were given an operational space at Muniz Air National Guard Base where they establish their temporary C2 node. SOCSOUTH, Joint Special Operations Air Component and 7th Special Forces Group personnel worked around the clock from their small office to plan movements, coordinate assessments and up channel information from Saint Martin and the British Virgin Islands, back to SOUTHCOM. While establishing SSAT operations in Puerto Rico, SOUTHCOM was mobilizing the full weight of capability to move Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force, now designated as JTF-Leeward Islands from Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras to Puerto Rico. SOCSOUTH logisticians set the stage for reception, staging, onward movement and integration of the JTF and assisted with the communications

between base personnel and helped to set the conditions for the establishment of the JTF.

"The Puerto Rico National Guard received us with open arms, but they were not aware of the massive response force that is coming behind us in a matter of hours. JTF-LI ADVON will be here within hours and we don't have a location to stage their equipment or house them."

SOCSOUTH J4

Despite the miscommunications and the adverse conditions caused by the hurricane, SOCSOUTH J4 personnel were able to push the assessment team to Saint Martin and the British Virgin Islands to join supporting actions with the French, Dutch and local authorities. Their ground truth assessment pushed back to JTF-LI and SOUTHCOM leadership allowed rapid movement of required relief supplies and equipment to these devastated locales and mitigated human suffering in short order.

01 Service members evacuated from the U.S. Virgin Islands in anticipation of Hurricane Maria are processed onto the USS Kearsarge. The amphibious assault ship also assisted with relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. U.S. ARMY PHOTOBY MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 3RD CLASS RYRE ARCIAGA

While the SSAT was executing in the islands, SOCSOUTH was retrograding back to Homestead to reoccupy its headquarters and assume full operations for SOF efforts throughout the SOUTHCOM AOR and continued HA/DR SSAT taskings post-Hurricane Irma. However, that was easier said than done. South Florida escaped the widespread devastation that rendered the islands nearby uninhabitable, but there was still plenty of damage which made roads impassable, power intermittent and supplies scarce. Additionally, SOCSOUTH personnel were spread all over the United States and had to slowly make their way back amidst long lines of traffic and congested highways. As personnel slowly trickled back into home station, Hurricane Maria developed from a worrying blip to a behemoth storm that threatened massive destruction on a scale that would soon dwarf Irma. As Maria aimed toward Puerto Rico, SOCSOUTH readied for another round and proactively postured for additional tasks. Utilizing Air Force Special Operations Command aircraft assets, additional personnel moved to Puerto Rico the day before the second storm landed.



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Once on the ground, they sheltered in place with the remaining SSAT personnel. SSAT leadership and a small element had already moved to Curacao with JTF-LI leadership elements to maintain command and control during the expected loss of communications and power once Maria stormed ashore. Communicators of the 112th Signal Detachment are an example of SOF enabler ingenuity and skill, shot a tactical satellite signal through the eye of the hurricane enabling communication with SOCSOUTH in real time during the storm's passing.

Emerging after the storm had passed, they gazed on massive devastation that would be recounted in excruciating detail in the 24-hour news cycle for weeks to follow. Even though the destruction was almost total, the response would have to be handled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and United States Northern Command. SOCSOUTH was needed elsewhere.



02

The changing mission and multiple geographically separated SOF elements necessitated a change in construct. USAID/OFDA and JTF-LI (possessed mass) in the region and a myriad of assessment capabilities at hand. Multiple efforts were now converging on the new locations at once. The SSAT, originally deployed for Irma missions in Saint Martin and the British Virgin Islands, was transformed into a SOF Liaison Element and tasked to move a team to Dominica and Martinique as soon as transportation allowed. AFSOC rapidly deployed two MC-130s to Barbados to provide key lift assets to Dominica and Guadeloupe with assistance from SOCSOUTH logisticians arranging bed-down support while the aircraft were already in the air.

On the ground in Dominica, the team found themselves in conditions that were as non permissive as could be found outside of an active combat zone. Due to heavy rains, landslides and high winds, infrastructure was inaccessible, degraded or nonexistent. Roads were inaccessible and there was little to no access to fuel on the island. Yet, they pushed on by rotary wing to Ross University to lead the evacuation of students and American citizens back to the airfield for fixed-wing movement to the U.S. in addition to providing much needed support to evacuees at State Department processing centers and newly established USAID coordinating cells. Through it all, communications again proved to be the lifeline. With power nonexistent and no generator assets on hand, traditional 112th Signal Unit solutions were rendered all but useless. Instead, the expert communicators utilized man-portable tracking beacons to pass text messages back to home station to keep leadership apprised and up channel requests for critical logistics support.



2017 HURRICANE SEASON SOC SOUTH QUICK FACTS

300 DEPLOYED PERSONNEL

10 HELICOPTERS

4 C-130'S

1 AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT SHIP

1 FAST TRANSPORT SHIP

**340,000 POUNDS OF
RELIEF SUPPLIES**

83,000 GALLONS OF WATER

2,200 PEOPLE EVACUATED

One of the SOCSOUTH logisticians fortuitously had her Government Purchase Card on hand and was authorized by SOUTHCOM to become the de facto purchasing agent for JTF-LI, then on Martinique, which had been spared a direct impact from Maria. She performed a yeoman's duties in procuring critical rescue equipment, fuel stocks and supplies as well as coordinating resupply movement of food and water that JTF-LI required to fulfil the mission.

While the teams forward were rapidly evacuating people off the islands, USAID/OFDA reached out to SOCSOUTH J4 back at home station requesting assistance with high priority shipment of relief supplies to Dominica. With the words "we can't help you" not in their vocabulary, J4 members quickly coordinated between OFDA, SOUTHCOM and the 612 Air Operations Center to prepare cargo for air shipment from OFDA's Miami warehouse to Dominica. Pulling together all available bodies, SOCSOUTH logisticians, contracting officer and J3 Air personnel spent a sweltering day building aircraft pallets to get first responder equipment and enough plastic sheeting to protect 2,500 Dominican homes ready for a C-130 mission departing in short order.

The 2017 hurricane season was unprecedented in the destruction wrought on the islands of the Caribbean, continental United States, and the lives impacted throughout the region. From the approach of Hurricane Irma through post Hurricane Maria, SOCSOUTH personnel were always moving towards the storms...not away. When everyone finally came home, exhausted and ready for a hard-earned rest, the final tally was awe inspiring. JTF-LI and its supporting elements deployed more than 300 personnel along with 10 helicopters, four C-130s, an amphibious assault ship and a

fast transport ship. Collectively the force moved more than 340,000 pounds of relief supplies, desalinated 83,000 gallons of water and evacuated 2,200 people left stranded by the combination of storms across the Caribbean basin.

SOF was the first out the door when these hurricanes laid waste to the islands, but the operators by themselves could not do it alone. The communicators, logisticians, medics and other enablers from SOCSOUTH moved mountains to bring the full weight of the command to bear. In doing so, they rewrote the book on what SOF can provide in support to conventional forces in an HA/DR environment. Then-SOCSOUTH Commander, Rear Admiral Colin Green summed it up best when saying, "As a mutually supportive interoperable partner, SOF brings unique capabilities to our partners in need, and the joint task force. We have the right people with the necessary skills and equipment always ready to deploy." 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Maj. Javie Pla is an officer in the U.S. Army, and works in the Support Operations Cell, J4, at Special Operations Command South.

Maj. Ivan Richards is an officer in the U.S. Air Force and is the Deputy Director, J6, Special Operations Command South.

01
Service members load a container of supplies onto an aircraft in Honduras for delivery to areas in the eastern Caribbean Sea affected by Hurricane Irma. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY CPL. MELANIE KILCLINE

02
A St. Maarten resort during Hurricane Irma. COURTESY PHOTO



01

A TEAM EFFORT

Rapid Response and Proactive Theater Response
in the Caribbean.

BY COLONEL RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ

The MC-130J pilots calculated we would land one hour before sunrise. Hurricane Irma struck Puerto Rico on Sept. 6, five days later the recovery was still ongoing. Even at night, however, the damage was visible from the air. Most of the special operators flying on Air Force Special Operations Command Expeditionary Special Operations Group, or ESOG, aircraft managed to steal sleep between cargo pallets, under vehicles or slumped over in their seats. It's the kind of sleep that doesn't leave you feeling rested, yet you know it's necessary. One astute operator set up a hammock that he anchored to the aircraft's frame. He was the envy of the chalk. The uncomfortable sleep was familiar to the special operators arriving at Puerto Rico's San Juan International Airport to stage for operations 230 miles away on the island of Saint Martin.

Two weeks prior to arrival in Puerto Rico, members of the SOCSOUTH staff gave little thought to the tropical wave forming over western Africa. As this tropical wave moved west and weather conditions fell in its favor, Hurricane Irma was born. The SOCSOUTH staff started keeping a close watch. On the morning of Sept. 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall in Saint Martin at peak strength. The aftermath was catastrophic as trees were ripped from the ground, vehicles washed away, buildings collapsed, island-wide power outage occurred and critical water infrastructure was damaged. Saint Martin was devastated. Shortly afterward, the French government made an official request to the United States for support. U.S. Southern Command began planning for a humanitarian assistance/disaster relief mission but was missing a critical ingredient — boots on the ground to provide situational awareness on Saint Martin.

Around this same time, SOCSOUTH issued an evacuation order to its service members and their families. Hurricane Irma's projected path was directly over Miami-Dade County and safety became paramount as families departed southern Florida. Rear Admiral



01
 Disaster Assistance Response Team, Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force and Situational Awareness Team members meet with Brig. Gen Peter De Vin, commander of Netherlands forces in the Caribbean in response to Hurricane Irma.

02
 U.S. Southern Command Service Members prepare U.S. citizens for evacuation from Dominica in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria.

U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTOS BY SGT. IAN LEONES

02

Collin Green, SOCSOUTH Commander, directed the activation of its alternate command post to maintain command and control. While in the process of evacuation, a small cross-functional command and control element sent their families to safety and then began working from the alternate command post. Battle tracking in combat is no easy task. Battle tracking more than 300 families who have the freedom to choose where to go anywhere in the world is even harder. Some families chose to stay, some drove to other parts of Florida, others drove or flew across the country, some joined together with other families and others split into smaller groups. Their movements were constant. As Hurricane Irma's trajectory changed, over-packed minivans traveled opposite of Irma's projected path. It was a J33's battle tracking nightmare. What drives special operators, however, is not just the work they achieve, but also the work of achieving it. Over the next few days the SOCSOUTH Continuity of Operations Plan staff mapped every address, accounted for every family, and maintained constant communications with all members of the command.

Just as information management was getting under control, on the after-

noon of Sept. 10, USSOUTHCOM notified SOCSOUTH to assemble and deploy a SOUTHCOM Situational Assessment Team to Saint Martin. The Geographical Combatant Commander needed boots on the ground. Our COOP site seemed fortunate at the time, but our luck was a residue of design. The infrastructure and support afforded SOCSOUTH by its host was COOP heaven, and we knew it. Everything the SSAT needed, and almost everything the SSAT wanted, was on site and available for employment. The SSAT grew by one ODA and proceeded forward to provide situational awareness support for key decision-makers on the ground. In sequence, AFSOC's ESOG landed under the command of U.S. Air Force Colonel Mike Jackson at Hurlburt Airfield with three MC-130Js later that evening. This was an impressive demonstration of capability on less than 10 hours notice. Shortly after, we were en route to Puerto Rico.

The SSAT personnel and its equipment landed in Puerto Rico in the early morning hours and immediately began preparation for their flight onto Saint Martin. A small command and control element would stay on Puerto Rico to maintain communication with USSOUTHCOM and SOCSOUTH. The SSAT and Joint Special Operations Air

Detachment-South decided to collocate in a small office entrusted to Col. Jackson, courtesy of a professional relationship with the Puerto Rico Air National Guard. The office was small; however, it had a view of the airfield. During daylight hours on the morning of Sept. 11, 2017, less than 24 hours after notification, SSAT personnel landed at Princess Juliana International Airport on the Dutch side of Saint Martin. Irma spared little on the island. The first special operators on Saint Martin were careful observers of human motivation and social interaction.

RAPID RESPONSE

Military personnel want metrics to measure themselves against. In rapid response, time is that unit of measure. How fast can SOF safely and effectively arrive at a crisis location? SOCSOUTH's culture, and SOF writ large, is imbued with a readiness mentality and rapid response posture. It is a critical capability that SOF contributes to the Joint Force, and in this case, to USSOUTHCOM. Every month, the SOCSOUTH SSAT equipment is unpacked, tested and repacked. Every week, the SOCSOUTH SSAT roster is scrubbed name-by-name. Every day,

the disposition of forces in the SOUTHCOM AOR is recalculated. It's tedious. It's mundane. It's imperative.

Enabling Rapid Response is just as much a culture as it is an action. It's a steady facet of all SOCSOUTH's operations, activities, and investments. Enabling Rapid Response is part of all SOCSOUTH's battle rhythm events. It effects planning at all levels, TDY trips, leave plans and sometimes cancelled leave plans. It effects SSAT composition and capability. Rapid Response is part of a special operator's core. The access and placement SOCSOUTH forces have throughout the theatre is indispensable. Language, cultural awareness, acclimatization, relationships, training and equipment, all contribute to SOCSOUTH's Rapid Response capabilities. SOCSOUTH's ability to quickly get on site anywhere in the SOUTHCOM AOR is formidable. SOF's response to Hurricane Irma proves a definitive reminder.

SAINT MARTIN

Despite the French request for U.S. assistance, airfield limitations forced the SSAT to land on the Dutch side of the island. The Dutch military and USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team members were easy to locate. The security situation was relatively stable and there was a sense the Dutch military was in control of [their] situation. The Dutch were friendly, polite, and easy to work with. What took the SSAT members by surprise however, was how little was known about the French side of the island. The political decisions in France and the Netherlands were manifesting more than 4,000 miles away on Saint Martin. This is a lesson the SSAT would learn from their interaction on the island, and one they will carry for years to come. Politics always matter — even in HA/DR.

The SSAT coordinated with the Dutch military and received approval to move throughout their territory. Within 48 hours, the SSAT completed dozens of infrastructure assessments, identified local leaders, sent supply list of items most in demand, and most importantly, provided this information to USSOUTHCOM. Information was flowing. Every day the situation improved on the Dutch side. The SSAT worked closely with DART to cover more ground and compare notes



01

and observations. It took time, but the relationships grew and interagency team gained momentum. Simultaneously, at USSOUTHCOM's COOP site, diplomatic efforts were underway for the SSAT to cross the border onto the French side. The French approved the crossing.

The French side of the island was noticeably more desperate. The streets less navigable. The buildings more damaged. The French military more cautious. The first time meeting the French military went well but when the SSAT asked to spend the night at the L'Esperance Airport, the French promptly denied the request. It made for a long drive back to the Dutch airfield. Infrastructure assessments continued on both sides of the island. The DART and SSAT primed the island for the SPMAGTF and handover began shortly after the Marines' arrival.

Steady state operations were within reach when news of Hurricane Maria grew louder. Puerto Rico was once again in a hurricane's path. The SSAT C2 element had to decide to relocate or ride out the storm in Puerto Rico.

PROACTIVE THEATER POSTURE

The original SSAT members operating on Saint Martin consolidated

and returned to CONUS for refit and recovery. AFSOC's ESOG flew their air package of operators and maintainers back to Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. The SSAT C2 element relocated from Puerto Rico to Curacao. A new rotation of SSAT members landed on Puerto Rico to collocate with the SPMAGTF main body to ride out Hurricane Maria. There were a lot of moving pieces. Everyone however, was in place to continue operations through the new storm's duration and resume full operations after it departed.

Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico. The island had no power and our communications equipment could not operate in hurricane conditions. The Curacao C2 element assumed full command. Equipped with two lap tops and four smart phones, operations continued on Saint Martin and planning began for Dominica. As the new SSAT (later renamed to a Special Operations Forces Liaison Element) waited in Puerto Rico, the urgency rose to attain situational awareness on Dominica. SOCSOUTH re-missioned a Naval Special Warfare (NSW) team to Dominica. SOCSOUTH's proactive theater posture investments was paying high dividends. The ability to have deployed



01 Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force team members set up a Lightweight Water Purification System at a water distribution site on Saint Martin. The system purifies approximately 1,800 gallons of water a day in order to supply communities affected by Hurricane Irma. U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO BY SGT. IAN LEONES

02 Mission Planning on Ross University's rooftop. COURTESY PHOTO

forces in theatre, near a crisis, reduces risk and increases flexibility. Proactive theater posture is a strong pillar within SOCSOUTH's capabilities. The access and placement that deployment forces afford SOCSOUTH proved invaluable.

DOMINICA

The SOFLE, comprised of SSAT and NSW teams converged on Dominica with little information. Prior to their arrival, the C2 element now staging from the island of Martinique, conducted a one-hour recon of the airfield but nothing else. Shortly after the SOFLE's arrival, they made their way across the island to a large concentration of American citizens at Ross University School of Medicine. As in Saint Martin, the security condition seemed stable, but the SOFLE did not enjoy complete freedom of movement. US-SOUTHCOM sent constant reports of American citizens scattered throughout Dominica. The sheer number of reports overwhelmed the SOFLE and C2 element. The work that lay ahead seemed impossible.

By nightfall, the SOFLE secured the rooftop of the tallest building on the medical campus because the struc-

ture's height facilitated good communications. Vehicles were on hand. Department of State representatives were on site. *The USS Wasp* anchored off the western coast with two helicopters on strip alert. The hodgepodge of DoD and interagency capability began working together almost immediately. The SOFLE began locating and evacuating Americans. Every evening on the rooftop, the SOFLE reviewed all the information on hand and prioritized the next day's missions. As the missions decreased, the SOFLE used the extra time to begin infrastructure assessments of Dominica. Much like Saint Martin and Puerto Rico, the devastation was indescribable. The Dominican government had little disaster response capability and even fewer humanitarian assistance supplies; however, the Dominican people were resilient. The people enforced the momentum of their will on the inertia of the circumstances. They began clearing their roads and repairing their homes. They began helping each other endure and survive. The SOFLE received a warm welcome at nearly every location and a grateful Dominican smile could be found wherever the SOFLE offered assistance.

CONCLUSION

Crises are often difficult to predict and generate risk. SOCSOUTH's Rapid Response capability coupled with its Proactive Theater Posture reduces this risk across the SOUTHCOM Theater. Special operators across the services can converge on a crisis site where a SOF presence already exists or is in close proximity. Commander's may have to begin an operation from a cold start, but warm starts are often possible with SOCSOUTH's access and placement earned over decades of engagement throughout Latin America. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colonel Rafael Rodriguez, U.S. Army, is currently serving as the Special Operations Command – South J3. He graduated from the United States Military Academy, earning a BS in Economics in 1998. COL Rodriguez also graduated from the Naval Postgraduate School with a graduate degree in Defense Analysis in 2009. Prior to his current assignment, he served as an Army War College Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.



01

THE PEOPLE BUSINESS

Leveraging Interagency and Partner Nation Relationships to Shape Narratives in the Information Environment.

BY CAPTAIN MORGAN MARTIN

Psychological Operations are ultimately a people business that require maintenance of relationships with key individuals to gather and update knowledge of one's operational environment. Having the right relationships can also provide the access and placement needed to influence the information environment at crucial points during a mission. During recent events a Military Information Support Team deployed to Trinidad and Tobago, and was able to leverage these key, pre-existing relationships to conduct counter-messaging operations in collaboration with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the aftermath of an operation.

Trinidad and Tobago, a small twin-island nation in the Western Caribbean of some 1.3 million people, gained its independence from Great Britain in 1962 after 160 years of colonial rule. During this rule, a number of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups came to the country, either through slavery, colonization, immigration or indentured servitude. This resulted in the island becoming a cultural mosaic consisting of Africans, Indians, Natives, Europeans, Syrians and Southeast Asians. All of these groups were further divided religiously into various sects of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and other syncretic religions.⁰¹

Soon after gaining independence, the country went through a period of social upheaval due to the residual effects of colonialism. For example, some ethnic Africans resented ethnic Indians' willingness to work for the British even after the Africans' emancipation. Ethnic Indians resented the Africans whom they perceived as listless.⁰² Another contributing factor was the Afro-Trinidadian population's awareness of the unrest that was ripping through the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the Civil Rights movement. The free movement of ideas, facilitated by ease of travel, and the ascent of mass media

fomented the development of homegrown Black Power movements in Trinidad and Tobago.⁰³ This was a symptom of the perceived historical disenfranchisement of the Afro-Trinidadian community at the hands of the growing, prosperous, Indian minority as well as their colonial overlords.

Along with the ideals propagated by the Black Power movement, a version of Islam similar to that promoted by the Nation of Islam in the United States began to see a growing number of adherents in the Afro-Trinidadian community.⁰⁴ Elements of this ideology blended and merged with elements of Islam that had been present since the introduction of indentured servants from the Indian subcontinent after the abolition of slavery across the British Empire in 1830. The result was a brand of the religion that's uniquely Caribbean.⁰⁵

Tensions continued to simmer in the undercurrent of Trinidad and Tobago's national consciousness until late July 1990 when Yasin Abu Bakr, an Afro-Trinidadian Muslim, led his organization, Jama'at al-Muslimeen, in a coup. According to Abu Bakr, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had become unable to fulfill even the most basic functions expected of a government. Corruption was out of control and the country's vast oil wealth was being grossly mismanaged at the highest levels.⁰⁶ He also took issue with the government's alleged apathy about the increasing rate of drug trafficking. Abu Bakr aimed to set the country back on course by any means necessary. Around 100 of his militants seized control of the country's executive mansion in Port of Spain. They also seized Trinidad's largest television station which allowed Abu Bakr to speak directly to the populace as the coup was unfolding.⁰⁷

While the coup ultimately failed, with dozens of lives lost and the perpetrators receiving amnesty from the government, it had an impact that is still felt today by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Public perception of the Muslim community took a serious hit in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, in spite of the fact that the majority of Muslims wholeheartedly condemned the attacks. Despite this, it has acted as a wedge that socially segregates the

01, 02

Screen shots of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Twitter feed during the 2018 carnival. The TTO police use social media to keep the public informed and to showcase police presence.



T&T Police Service
@TTPoliceService Follow

Media Release - Media Brief Statement re Threat to Disrupt Carnival Activities

Corner Edward & Sackville Streets, Port of Spain
Telephone: 1 (868) 625-8395 Fax: 1 (868) 625-7133
Email: publicaff@tps.gov.tt

February 8th, 2018

MEDIA RELEASE

Media Brief Statement re Threat to Disrupt Carnival Activities

Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has unearthed 'credible' information of a threat to disrupt Carnival activities.

Given the nature of the information received, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service found it necessary to detain several persons of interest.

These persons of interest are presently being interviewed and active operations are continuing in relation to this threat to disrupt Carnival activities.

Prior to this however, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service had implemented certain security measures to provide for the safety and security of residents and visitors.

Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will continue in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to ensure that persons enjoy Carnival 2018 in a safe and secure environment.

Trinidad and Tobago Police Service gives the assurance to residents and visitors, alike, that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service supported by partner agency, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, will be providing the necessary security and safety arrangements for Carnival 2018 to be effectively enjoyed by all.

Corporate Communications Unit
February 8th, 2018

9:34 AM - 9 Feb 2018

02

Muslim minority in the country (around 5-10 percent of the population) from society. In the face of outwards hostility, the community became more insular. Many Muslims can be observed wearing traditional dress. Some eschew social contact with non-Muslims. They also believe that the coup has acted as a justification for perceived governmental persecution.

This narrative of persecution gained traction among the Muslim community in the years immediately following the coup, and served to prime the 'next generation' to become more receptive to similar narratives. The rise of the Islamic State represented a unique appeal to some of these wayward youths. While the Jama'at had failed to create an Islamic society, they believed that they would be able to succeed in Iraq and Syria by fighting under the banner of another Abu Bakr. The Islamic State's sophisticated propaganda machine effectively appealed to them using many of the same narratives that they grew up hearing. They were bombarded with messages detailing alleged injustices committed against Muslims in the Western world, and declared that the only place one could truly live according to the tenets of Islam was the newly established Caliphate. The first Trinidadians left to fight for the Islamic State in 2014. The flow of foreign terrorist fighters continued, making Trinidad and Tobago the largest per-capita contributor of FTFs to the Islamic State. Alarmingly, those who left to fight for the 'Caliphate' often made the journey with their families as well.

This was the situation that led to the increase of U.S. SOF involvement in Trinidad and Tobago in late 2016. A MIST was established there to address the threat of terrorism.

In early February 2018, military intelligence analysts within the U.S. Embassy received credible information that indicated several known extremists

within Trinidad and Tobago were planning to attack the Carnival holiday with improvised explosive devices. Similar to much of Latin America, Carnival serves as the country's largest public holiday and draws several thousand tourists from all across the world every year. SOF elements in TTO immediately formulated a plan to address the threat, and surged support elements from SOCSOUTH to facilitate a partner-nation led operation.

Throughout the planning process, the Regional PSYOP Team, in coordination with the U.S. Country Team, shifted to an advise and assist role and developed messages that would generate planning options for their partner-nation security forces. The content of these messages covered a variety of scenarios, ranging from the most dangerous to the most likely outcomes. Due to the team's past relationship they worked directly with senior leadership within Trinidad's Ministry of National Security.

Leadership within the MNS ultimately chose a special action unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to carry out the arrests. They would conduct the raids that were ultimately responsible for dismantling the IED cell. The TTPS officers were able to quickly and efficiently apprehend known suspects without injuries. When the news broke concerning the raids, however, the public's reaction was as immediate as it was varied. While some praised the TTPS for eliminating a threat against Carnival revelers, others denigrated them for their alleged inability to act without the use of U.S. intelligence. Still others thought it was a false flag event meant to bolster support for the beleaguered government. A large portion of the populace vented their frustrations on social media when a high-ranking TTPS official adhered to MNS OPSEC guidelines during a press conference about the events. The conference was meant to provide clarity and a sense of transparency, but many Trinidadians felt that their government was being frustratingly vague.

In the aftermath of the operation, certain pre-existing narratives gained additional traction amongst Muslim target audiences. The MIST was able to observe a persecution narrative in several venues. These venues included radio, print and social media. This narrative was spread among Muslims after the 1990 coup attempt. While it admits that the coup attempt was unjustified, it claims that the



resulting public backlash, characterized by a lack of trust and public exclusion of Muslims, was also unjustified. The news that partner-nation security forces had arrested several Muslim men in connection to a nebulous threat against Carnival participants further fueled this narrative.

Concurrently, the persecution narrative began to pick up conspiratorial elements that ranged from the fantastic to the ludicrous. Several members of the Muslim community suggested, for example, that these arrests were a precursor to widespread persecution and eventual large-scale deportation of the Muslim community. Others said that the raids were proof that Trinidad and Tobago had become, for all intents and purposes, a client state for the United States. Muslims feared that the government would begin to wage an unjust war against Islam in the Caribbean. While most people rightly saw these conspiracies as baseless, it would be necessary for the government to conduct counter messaging to maintain control of the narrative surrounding the events leading up to Carnival.

The MIST was able to observe the development of these narratives via OSINT products and by viewing local mass media. At the outset of the operation, political sensitivities between the government and the U.S. Country Team prevented the MIST from actively addressing the emerging narratives by, with, and through the partner nation until after local mass media outlets had broken the news. This highlighted the need for the Embassy PAO, the MIST and the Communications Directorate of the MNS to coordinate and plan for messaging options for future contingencies. Once given the approval to engage, the MIST leveraged pre-existing relationships to reach out to the MNS' Communications Director. The MIST established an information common operating picture between the Communications Director and Embassy PAO, and then proposed mitigating measures to counter the negative perceptions of the arrests.

One additional anecdote demonstrates the value of maintaining relationships and an awareness of the information environment. During the course of the arrests, TTPS officers entered a mosque believed to contain

certain illicit materials. The officers made every effort to conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Despite this, rumors circulated that officers muddled the mosque and brought dogs to aid their search. This incensed the Muslim community. Amateur social media commentators took to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to spin the events to fit their narrative. Fortunately, the Imam of the mosque in question released a video exonerating the officers of any sort of misconduct. He explained that they had behaved as true professionals while doing their duty and that any accusations to the contrary were not valid. The MIST was able to forward this video to the Communications Director for the MNS, who then shared the video on national platforms managed by the government. This amounted to a win for the partner nation government, as they were able to effectively push a counter narrative via an Islamic key communicator in the aftermath of an already-delicate situation.

Maintaining relationships is one of the 'glass balls' that a Psychological Operations specialist or officer can't afford to drop while he or she is conducting a mission. Constant contact, patience and the slow build-up of credibility ended up paying dividends for the MIST's mission. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Captain Morgan Martin graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham's ROTC in 2010, and is currently serving as a PSYOP Company Executive Officer at Fort Bragg.

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01

Imam Shiraz Ali speaks out on Facebook to address some of the false accusations made by the public about the police search of his mosque in search of persons of interest in the threat to disrupt carnival activities. In the video he speaks to the professionalism of the police search and urges the public to stop spreading false news.



02

CHANGING CULTURE

Operational adjustments to
match the operating environment.

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL MICHAEL STONE
AND CONTRIBUTIONS BY CAPTAIN WILLIAM BROWN

When I first learned I was going to command a Regional Psychological Operations Battalion focused on the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility, I immediately realized I had a lot to learn. I grew up in the PSYOP Regiment exclusively focused on CENTCOM. I have learned a great deal after assuming command and working “down South” for the last couple of years. I appreciate the inherent differences between these AORs, their conditions and the threats faced by the deployed regional PSYOP teams.

One of the consistent mantras surrounding culture and behavior is that change takes time. This applies to both the foreign audiences we influence, as well as our own organizations as we assess conditions and adapt to operational realities. In developing and implementing the Alternative Regional Engagement Strategy, I have experienced both of these realities as the battalion has adapted employment methodology for the deployed teams, and those actively training for deployment, to sustain influence effects against a range of adversary threats.

CONDITIONS DEMAND ADAPTABILITY

A little more than three years ago, I was sitting in Kabul, Afghanistan in command of the Military Information Support Task Force. Even as I was in command of that organization, I already knew I was selected as the Battalion Commander of a Psychologi-

cal Operations Battalion at Fort Bragg. During one of the quiet evenings, I was contemplating the growing demand for our professional skills in the SOF enterprise and the finite numbers within the PSYOP Regiment. At this time, I was not aware of the imminent 1:2 Deployment to Dwell policy and the corresponding support for it from the leadership of 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command. Nevertheless the current resources within the Regiment were not enough for the growing requirement.

As an extension of this condition, and reflective of the diverse nature of our adversaries and their actions, I sought a way to adapt how we were employing teams to satisfy standing requirements while also maximizing the benefit of these teams’ deployments. Teams in many places have been deployed into one country to work directly with a respective Country Team, partner units, U.S. Government agencies and partner nations against shared objectives outlined in theater special operations command strategy documents, theater campaign plans and integrated country plans. The fundamental challenge to this model is that many of the adversary threats, from non-state to state, don’t constrain their efforts to one country at a time. The average number of countries across all Geographic Combatant Commands is 38 within their AOR. A fully manned Regional Battalion can only employ 24 total teams. Even under a 1:1 dwell time policy, a GCC could only ever address a fraction of the possible deployment locations in a one team — one country model.

I took command of the battalion in the summer of 2016 and found that we were operating at 100 percent commitment of available forces, even before implementing a move to 1:2 D2D. This deployment model was dependent on the battalion force strength at 100 percent with 100 percent of those personnel available for deployment. I knew this was unrealistic and untenable and sought a change that would protect the force, the mission and meet D2D guidelines. Born out of this calculus was the Alternative Regional Engagement Strategy. This strategy is not new as other Regional Battalions are operating similarly in other GCCs, but had not been implemented in SOUTHCOM. The battalion staff conducted mission analysis and course of action development to design a phased implementation for ARES that would ultimately reduce the footprint at the tactical

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A Psychological Operations Soldier talks with Salvadoran police officers to coordinate events in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAYMIEN MCMILLIAN



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end to reinforce the available forces at the operational level while also seeking opportunity to employ the teams in training as part of the D2D pre-mission cycle. The chief benefit of ARES for the TSOC Commander and his primary staff was its ability to sustain current gains while also providing for an enhanced contingency force to respond to annual catastrophic weather events or emerging crises within the AOR. Under the past practice, any new business would have required stopping or postponing current efforts to address any new contingencies. By building a bigger bench at the deployed C2 nodes within the AOR, the command was gaining a greater capacity to enhance and synchronize regional effects as well as an immediate response force to address new requirements.

ARES made sense to the TSOC Commander and his staff based on the analysis, D2D ramifications and conditions within the AOR. The CG subsequently authorized the ARES concept for implementation. This was the easy part of the problem — the harder challenge would be the subsequent changes to practice and culture within the battalion to make this operating model a reality.

CHANGE TAKES TIME

Some of the manifestations of this culture, due to past deployment practice, was the routine rotation of forces with one company being relieved by forces from a sister company. While this made pre-mission training far easier under the past 1:1 D2D model, it was disruptive under the 1:2 policy as no one company could manage the entire mission load. Additionally, under the “company in, company out” model, the teams’ efforts were constrained to their individual six month band of excellence. This reality led to sometimes divergent efforts between teams as they hit the ground and sought to make their mark within this time window. As part of the ARES implementation, portions of the AOR were assigned to each company. This move enabled these teams to sustain a longer term focus on specific countries while also increasing the incidence of forces returning to the same countries, engaging with the same personal-

ities, and working on the lines of effort within a broader, long-term engagement strategy.

The second promised benefit of ARES was the integration of episodic support both from the SOC-Forward command and control location as well as teams in training back at Fort Bragg. This episodic support from CONUS has been proven viable through the deployment and integration of audio-visual teams to augment deployed forces with additional media capability. Similarly, PSYOP teams in their pre-mission training are available to deploy forward for short periods to reinforce the deployed team, augment partnered training, and conduct pre-deployment site surveys as part of their pre-mission training. Finally, the immediate resource of additional personnel at the SOC-Forward can flex into the countries of their region to augment teams on the ground. This specific practice was used to generate excellent results during a recent deployment to Central America.

CENTRAL AMERICAN PSYOP PLANNER

In Central America, the rotating deployment of four RPTs into four separate countries, with the same overarching problem set, facilitated conditions for the operationalization of ARES and the augmentation of a PSYOP planner collocated with each SOC-Forward command and control element. ARES places more emphasis on the PSYOP planner and their role in the intersection of relationships with the deployed RPTs, the SOC-Forward, the TSOC J-39, and the resources available at the force-provider level at Fort Bragg. In essence, the PSYOP planner streamlines communication between deployed RPTs and greater SOC enterprise by not only acting as a liaison through the SOC-Forward’s reporting to the TSOC, but to also articulate how PSYOP effects are occurring within the region. These planners either coordinate the temporary employment of flex support from the Force Provider, or they manage the RPT’s forecasted demand signal to identify and catalog future opportunities on how to meet this demand signal. Given this role, the PSYOP planner must fully understand the RPTs’ operations, actions and activities in order to both articulate

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Products developed by a PSYOP A/V team to support El Salvador's ongoing information campaign to champion the National Police as the 'Heroes of El Salvador.'

U.S. ARMY IMAGES



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the short-term demand signals to the SOCFWD and the force provider and the long-term opportunities to the J39 at the TSOC.

This requires the ARES concept to place the most experienced PSYOP operators at the planner position to provide a long-term context to PSYOP OAs as part of an over arching influence narrative. In the case of Central America, the SOF problem set is one where the supported countries are battling endemic corruption at the political level leading to a paucity of resources with which the partner-nation security forces seek to affect lasting change. The nature of SOF partnerships is to identify areas for development which will have an enduring impact beyond the original scope of the investment. PSYOP's strongest contribution to this effort was the development of a long-term 'image enhancement' narrative incorporating the actions from all U.S. Country Team security related successes into a coordinated campaign extending beyond these individual efforts. This coordinated campaign not only integrated existing and forecasted PSYOP series, but also identified areas from which other SOF effects could support the aforementioned series' messaging. With this approach, PSYOP in Central America encourages positive behavior in two important ways. First, it provides security forces a professional standard to live up to with measurable benchmarks from which all security forces could feel pride in their accomplishments. Second, these coordinated actions drive support from the population towards these security forces while also articulating the population's role in this struggle.

With this in mind, the PSYOP planner at the SOCFWD proves an invaluable resource in articulating how all reporting comes down to three important elements: outcomes, insights and opportunities.

From a reporting perspective, outcomes are valuable because they indicate a change in the operational environment that commanders can leverage to sustain momentum within their respective missions. Insights are observations that further illuminate the operational environment and enable commanders to update the assumptions being incorporated into current and future planning.

Most importantly, however, is the PSYOP planners' identification of opportunities and development of plans to exploit that opportunity. These plans highlight what conditions or shortfalls need to be updated, and in what phase, in order for the opportunity to be realized. These comprised the demand signals that empower commanders at all levels to determine what internal resources are available to minimize the identified shortfalls. With respect to ARES, and the increased emphasis on the PSYOP planners, this drives the communication between the planner and the force provider to identify what opportunities can be forecast by teams in pre-mission training. On a more immediate level, it enables the planner to articulate what forces can be temporarily flexed from the force provider or within the augmented planner cell to meet that demand signal sent up from the RPTs on the ground.

During the most recent rotation, these demand signals enabled the PSYOP planner to request audio-visual teams from a sister battalion at the force-provider level. One audiovisual two-man team was able to update product imagery in anticipation of El Salvador's revitalization of an ongoing partner-nation led information campaign integrating a current PSYOP series that championed the 'new look' El Salvadoran Policia Nacional Civil as the 'Heroes of El Salvador'. The initial PSYOP Series in El Salvador leveraged the U.S. Country Team's investment into the training and revitalization of the PNC. Products from within the series championed over arching themes of a 'revitalized police force' and set conditions for PSYOP to be heavily integrated into event planning for maximum dissemination. These events enabled increased civil engagements between the PNC and locals wherein 'prizes' were given to civilians who could best describe the positive developments within the PNC. This type of engagement facilitated PNC led events to be expanded

THESE DEMAND SIGNALS ENABLED THE PSYOP PLANNER TO REQUEST AUDIO-VISUAL TEAMS FROM A SISTER BATTALION ... ONE A/V TWO-MAN TEAM WAS ABLE TO UPDATE PRODUCT IMAGERY IN ANTICIPATION OF EL SALVADOR'S REVITALIZATION OF AN ONGOING PARTNER-NATION LED INFORMATION CAMPAIGN.



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into under-governed, less permissive areas throughout El Salvador. This expansion of civil-security activity provided opportunities for increased observables that could strengthen the messaging for continued expansion. The RPT in El Salvador identified this opportunity and forecast the demand signal to enable an A/V team to update the footage for future products during the holiday season that led to an extension of the 'Heroes of El Salvador' PSYOP series for another year.

In Panama, the RPT was able to leverage a temporarily flexed A/V team to take advantage of a joint training event between other SOF elements. In this case, there was no ongoing RPT-led PSYOP series to champion the security forces in Panama. However, the Panama RPT employed the A/V team which enabled the separate security forces working in the land, maritime and air domains to showcase interoperability within the Panamanian Security Forces. Additionally, the capturing of observables for future products facilitated an increased partnership between the RPT and both SENAFRONT (border forces) and SENAN (maritime forces) to adopt a more holistic approach to combatting narcotics in their country. Success from the RPT's role in this joint training event led to products that encourage increased coordination from partnered security elements both from within SOF and the U.S. Country Team.

Deploying short-term forces from Fort Bragg is only one example of the value of an augmented PSYOP planner cell to meet the short-term requirements from the deployed RPTs. The added personnel depth at the planner position provides an immediate resource to support team requirements. In this way, a PSYOP planner was able to conduct assessments of border aligned units in Honduras and Guatemala, freeing the RPTs to sustain their relationships with their partnered forces. These assessments were conducted in line with a new SOCFWD

priority to identify areas of interoperability between different countries along the porous border regions.

In Guatemala, the PSYOP planner was able to leverage support from the SOCFWD element to conduct an assessment of an interagency task force working on the southern Guatemalan-Honduran border. This assessment led to the RPT in Guatemala increasing the relationship with a unit that had regional oversight over multiple interagency task forces throughout Guatemala. Follow-on working groups between the RPT and the regional unit will enable the interagency task forces methods from which to share best practices for civil engagements across multiple departments. This will be especially important considering the RPT's ongoing relationship with the Guatemalan doctrinal center for civil-military engagement and the need to ensure the newest practices are sustained throughout the operating forces in Guatemala.

In Honduras, the RPT's relationship with the border forces were not as strongly established. However, given the SOC-Forward's new prioritization of the border regions and the PSYOP planner's shared perspective, the PSYOP planner was able to work with the SOC-Forward Civil Affairs Planner to integrate with a Civil Affairs team travelling to the Honduran border region. This joint assessment led to a structured approach towards developing a common operational picture that will facilitate a deliberate approach to future trans-border influence initiatives. These trans-border influence initiatives will be grounded in understanding the conditions and vulnerabilities of border aligned units and will also identify which behaviors can be reasonably encouraged among the populations on both sides of the border to support the security forces' efforts.

During the most recent PSYOP rotation to Central America, the ARES construct oversaw the successful flex-

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Students play sports with Salvadoran police officers in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador, as part of a national campaign to revitalize the connection between the police force and the community. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAYMIEN MCMILLIAN

ing of temporary forces into theatre to action forecasted opportunities that led to stronger partnerships and stronger product development. Additionally, the construct enabled the RPTs to set the groundwork for partner-nation assessments necessary for developing a long-term engagement strategy. When looking at these multiple lines of effort facilitated through the SOC-Forward PSYOP planner, it is clear why the ARES concept reinforces this node with additional personnel and experience. The PSYOP planner leads through standardizing reporting formats from the teams, informing the SOC-Forward, TSOC J-39 and to the RPTs in pre-mission training. Furthermore, the ARES Concept successfully identifies the effects from the RPT's partnership with the supported countries' respective security forces to be the most valuable element from the RPTs' rotations. The nature of RPT's partnerships determines the potential, and feasibility, of ongoing and future PSYOP campaigns to be conducted by, with and through the partner nation. As the primary sensor on the ground, the RPTs work through the ARES construct to identify opportunities and push up demand signals that are articulated and actioned by the PSYOP planner to incorporate resources both from within the SOC-Forward and from the force provider.

These forecasts for demand signals are not specific to the deployed RPTs. The long-term nature of the overall PSYOP mission and the short-term nature of the RPT's deployments require a mechanism of continuity to facilitate communication through multiple rotations. These mechanisms are captured in the standardized assessments from the deployed RPTs of their specific partner nation relationships. The SOCFWD PSYOP's planner's role in this relationship is to maintain understanding of these assessments and communicate with the force provider how these assessments forecast requirements for future RPTs. The cross talk between the force provider and the deployed RPTs determine the nature of what resources are temporarily flexed to exploit opportunities and what resources are developed as part of a three to five year engagement strategy.

The Alternate Regional Engagement Strategy in Central America placed a majority of emphasis on PSYOP planner's ability to articulate to the SOF-Forward Commander the operational considerations of effects being generated by deployed teams, to identify opportunities for exploitation and to ensure constant communication with the training teams. These opportunities are derived from the RPT's relationship with the partner nation. Given this redirection of mission priorities, PSYOP's role in the regional mission set enables the RPTs' deployed footprint to contract or expand while maintaining the spotlight on the operational effects from the RPTs' enduring relationship with the partner-nation security force.

FRICION AND THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

In any change there is always friction. In organizational change that is a certainty. Resistance to these changes ran the gamut from, "That's not the way we've always done it," to, "I can't be effective with this few

people." To the first complaint, I would offer that the implementation of ARES was based on the conditions, constraints and decision made by the TSOC Commander. As his principle representative for PSYOP within his AOR, it was my responsibility to preserve both the mission and the force. The battalion is training its third wave of ARES Teams for deployment this fall. These teams have been trained and prepared for ARES as opposed to implementing it mid-stride. As such I am confident they will continue to improve the team-based competencies of planning, communication, and managing the broad range of engagements with U.S. Government, SOF and partner nations. Similarly the competence at the PSYOP planner level will continue to improve as will their ability to provide immediate flex forces and coordinate short term support from the teams in training. Soon this will be, "The way we've always done it."

Regarding the reduced footprint at the team level, that was done intentionally for a couple of reasons. The first was to reinforce the planner position at the SOCFWD to enable regional integration of effects. The second, and arguably more important reason, was to prevent the teams from pursuing a six-months-of-excellence model by forcing them to coordinate their efforts within the country, across adjacent teams and requesting support from the team training to replace them. This simple adjustment created the practical reality that enables adherence to an integrated and coordinated three-to-five year strategy instead of an independent and unsynchronized three-to-five month strategy. In other words, if everyone on the team is invested in the tactical outcomes, who is minding the shop at the operational and strategic levels.

The TSOC is under-represented with PSYOP manning, with only two or three assigned personnel within the J-39 section. The battalion reinforces this with an additional four personnel. Even with this additional manpower, it is a struggle to get beyond current operations tracking and reporting. In the 21st century digital information age, where every action or event can be captured and around the globe, live and in near-real time influence must be a pre-consideration of every plan, CONOP and action. PSYOP's role is to understand the human domain, and identify how and where these actions can be made to effect behavioral change. As indicated in the operational vignette above the synchronization of PSYOP, Special Forces and Civil Affairs and Naval Special Warfare creates opportunities for all of these elements to apply their unique skills, not just within SOF, but as a broader effort integrating U.S. Country Team resources and partner-nation forces. This integration begins at the planning stage, is sustained in execution and must be continued through assessment. ARES seeks to connect the deployed forces, the TSOC staff and the entire Battalion here at Bragg to participate in, and operate as, part of this integrated effort. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lt. Col. Michael Stone is the Commander of the 1st Psychological Operations Battalion.

Capt. William Brown is a Psychological Operations officer.



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.

"AT A TACTICAL LEVEL COLOMBIA IS ON PAR WITH A SELECT FEW COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE ... THEY ARE CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING HIGH-VALUE TARGETING INTERDICTION RAIDS AT A LEVEL NOT MANY COUNTRIES CAN BOAST."



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



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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)



PROTECTING THE SOUTHERN APPROACHES

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.

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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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- 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.

02
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

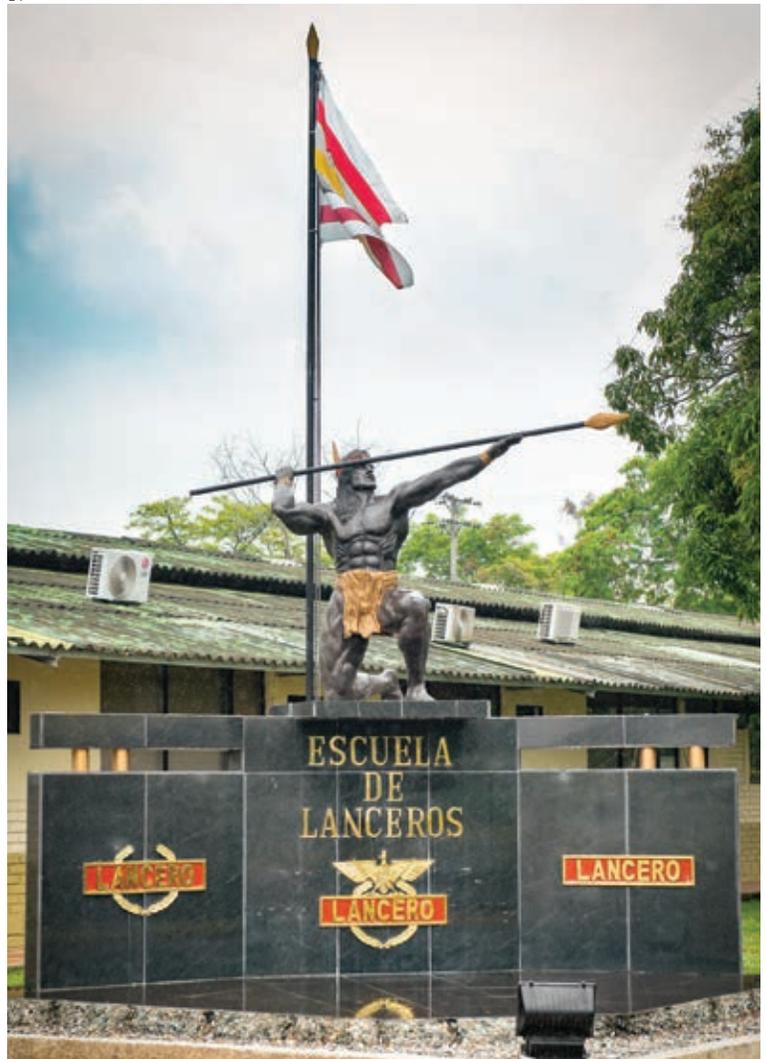
PLAN COLOMBIA

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

01

A statue featuring the Lancero symbol stands proudly in the center of the Lancero's 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

01, 02, 03, 04
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.



03

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.



04



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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

01
A Navy Jumpermaster 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.

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

Col. (Ret.) Robert Gaddis is the Deputy J5 for Special Operations Command South. Col. (Retired) Gaddis served in Infantry, Airborne and special operations units. He spent a great part of his career in Latin America, including two tours in Panama, where he fought in Operation Just Cause; served in Peru, El Salvador and Honduras (during Operations Golden Pheasant and Solid Shield); and was the U.S. Military Group Commander in Senegal, Nicaragua and Ecuador. While assigned to USSOUTHCOM J3, he managed the provision of military assistance to Colombia as part of Plan Colombia, the coordination of USSOF training and advisory deployments to Colombia, and the organization and employment of Planning Assistance and Training Teams, which supported the Colombian Army during their counter-insurgency campaign, Plan Patriota.

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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



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

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

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.



ENCLAVES IN SOUTH AMERICA

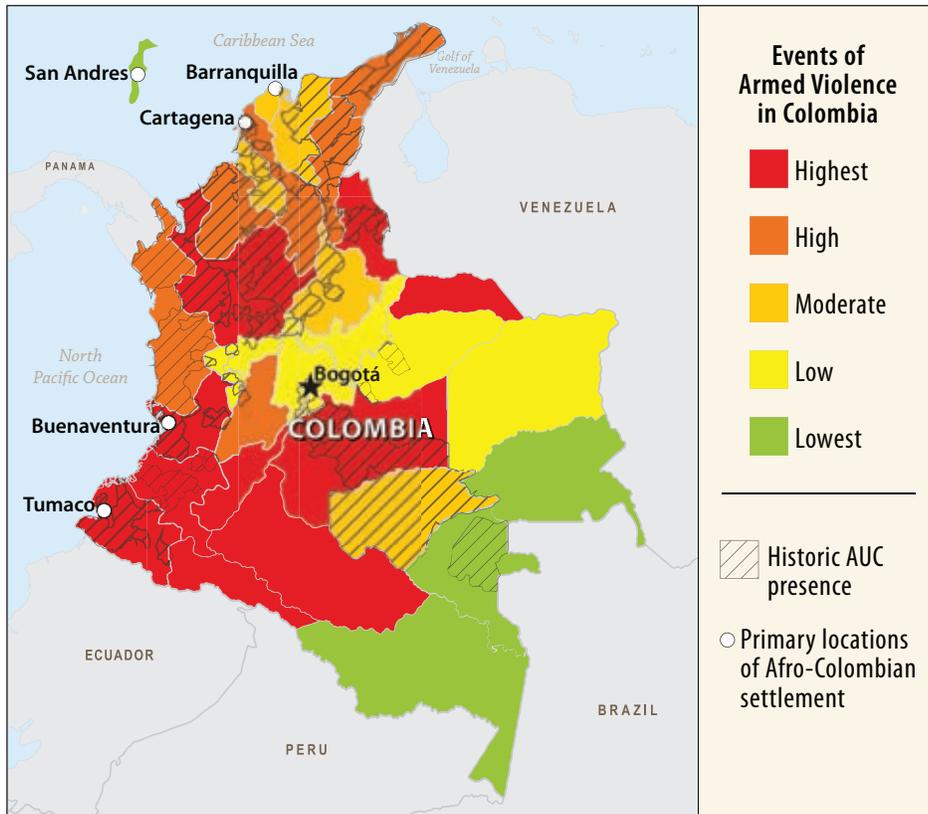


Figure 01



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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.

02
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

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 Brigade, 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 ESMAI, 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, ESMAI 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, ESMAI conducts two PSYOP courses: a basic and a specialized PSYOP course.



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ESMAI 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 ESMAI campus features the ESMAI 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, ESMAI 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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CAAID and ESMAI 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

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, ESMAI 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, ESMAI (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**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

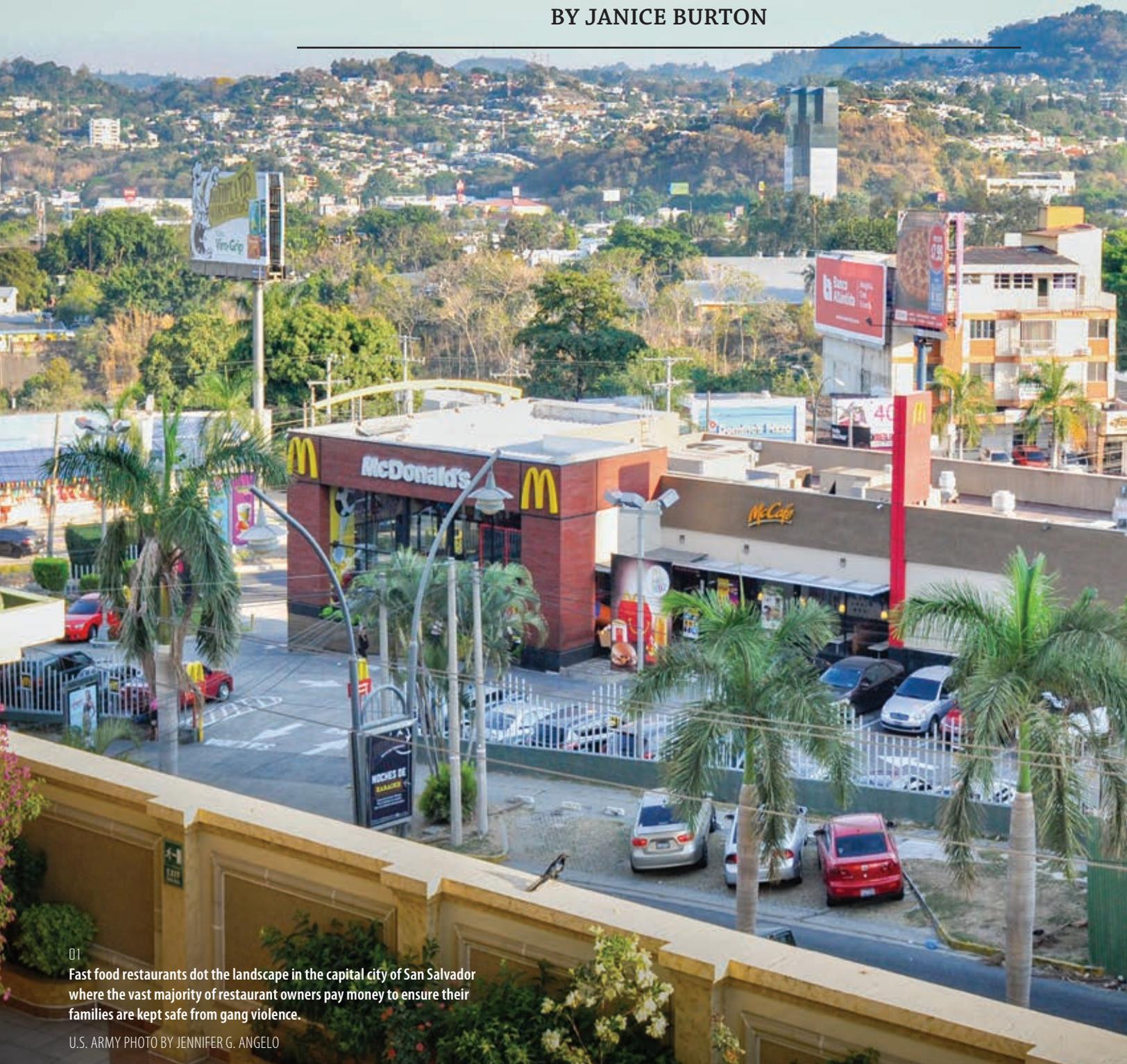
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EL SALVADOR

BY JANICE BURTON



01
Fast food restaurants dot the landscape in the capital city of San Salvador where the vast majority of restaurant owners pay money to ensure their families are kept safe from gang violence.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO



The airport in El Salvador seems quite a distance from the capital city of San Salvador, but it's really not. As you exit the doorway of the airport, the heat quickly overwhelms you. As you looked around, you recognize a country in transition, on that is trying to blend the new and the old.

Adjacent to the airport is brand new Harley Davidson dealership, but the cantina just a few miles away still serves a meal for a less than a dollar on non-matching tables with wooden benches. El Salvador is a nation torn between the past, the present — and sometimes even its future.

The ride from the airport to San Salvador is an adventure. Brand new vehicles whizz by horse-drawn carts and bicycles. Like many countries El Salvador has a deep divide between the rich and the poor, which can be seen in not only the roads, but also the homes where people live.

Visitors to the country are quickly informed that there are many safe places to be in the city. Tourism is quickly becoming one of El Salvador's economic mainstays due to its beautiful beaches that are known for surfing. That being said, there

of its neighbors. Security measures have been put into place in San Salvador's most troubled areas. The government understands the need for stability that is brought about by the rule of law, and is working many avenues, including safety campaigns and recreational activities to keep youth from joining the gangs. A security camera program was also implemented so the police can monitor the most heavily trafficked areas of the city.

Entrepreneurs who recognize what El Salvador can become have invested money into the economy.



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are places in El Salvador that are still very much the Wild West. Leaving the city center of San Salvador, it is suggested you keep your windows closed because people are robbed at stoplights. A traditional marketplace not that far from the city center is not somewhere you want to go during the day or night according to local residents. The market has a reputation for fighting and for killing. Police and emergency personnel scoop up bodies in the morning, following a night of partying. This is the home of MS13, and the gang's impact on the country is crushing.

In 2002, crime rates doubled, although today it is no worse than many

Looking out the window from the posh Barcelona Hotel, you can see restaurants of every type and flavor – for Americans, it might look a little too much like home with McDonald's, Denny's, Tony Roma's and many other franchise restaurants dotting the landscapes. Those entrepreneurs know there is a price to be paid for doing business. The businessmen who are hoping to bring the country forward have to pay protection money to the gangs to ensure they can keep their doors open. It is nothing for a restaurant owner to pay \$2,000 or more a month.

The impacts of the gangs and their business practices have major



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repercussions in the country and particularly to its economy. The Central Bank of El Salvador estimates that Salvadorans spend \$756 million in extortion fees every year — and overall violence costs the country 16 percent of its GDP.⁰¹

Just days prior to *Special Warfare's* visit to El Salvador, the country hosted national elections, which many believed would create instability within the capital city. Since the end of the El Salvador's civil war in the '80s, the government was under the direction of the ARENA Party, a conservative party, for 17 years. During that time, the country saw an improvement in the economy and in living conditions for the people of the country. Corruption by some in the ARENA party led to their ousting from power in the 2009 elections. The former president, Tony Saca is now in jail for corruption; his fall ushered in two elections that were won by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front — the actual rebel group



LIKE MANY COUNTRIES EL SALVADOR HAS A DEEP DIVIDE BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR, WHICH CAN BE SEEN IN NOT ONLY THE ROADS, BUT ALSO THE HOMES WHERE PEOPLE LIVE.

that caused the civil war. While the FMLN was in power, foreign direct investment decreased by 71 percent and unemployment hit highs in the 7 percent range.⁰²

On March 4, El Salvador held its legislative and municipal elections, which brought the ARENA Party back into power. The elections had the lowest turnout of voters at 45.8 percent since 2009.⁰³ The ARENA Party won by a huge margin, and has the seats and majority to overrule any decision made by current President, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a member of the FMLN. Cerén will leave office in 2019 with a record of “anemic economic growth, weak govern-

ment effectiveness, and a surge in violence and drug trafficking and rising gang-related homicides.”⁰⁴

It is in this landscape that U.S. Special Operations Forces work with partner-nation forces in El Salvador to try and bring about stability. As in most countries in the SOCSOUTH AOR, operations and missions conducted by special operations forces fall under the auspices of the Special Operations Forces Liaison Element and the Special Operations Liaison Officer. In El Salvador, Military Information Support Teams and Civil Affairs Teams that work within the population conduct the bulk of the SOF mission. Special Forces teams

work directly with the El Salvadoran military to enhance training.

Efforts of the CA teams in country and those of the MIST teams, work hand in glove. The MIST Team Leader in El Salvador explained, “From a PSYOP standpoint, we have been concentrating on two campaigns: Heroes of El Salvador, and most recently we started a new campaign, Denied Revenue.”

The Heroes of El Salvador campaign focuses on increasing the image enhancement for the El Salvador Police, while Denied Revenue focuses on countering extortion attempts by the gangs. These two



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01 Inside the “safe zone” of the San Salvador armed police officers and security guards stand constant watch at the entrance of nearly every business or home compound. The safe zone started with a small area in the middle of the city and as the security presence expands and crime is pushed out, the zone continues to grow larger.

02 Just outside the safe zone in San Salvador is the heart of MS-13 territory where crime and extreme poverty is rampant, a stark contrast to the manicured landscapes and strong security presence just a few blocks away.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

03

A social media product from the El-Salvador anti-extortion campaign reads “You do not have to pay extortion.” This advertisement and others like it are part of an anti-extortion campaign started in 2017 in joint effort between the National Civil Police Force and the Regional PSYOP Team.



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01. 04
Civil Affairs team members coordinate future engagement events with Salvadoran counterparts in El Salvador. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

02
Students play sports with Salvadoran police officers in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador during a community engagement event. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. MATTHEW FLAHERTY

campaigns allow the El Salvadoran people to see that the government can and will protect them, but it also calls on the people to be active participants in building a safer El Salvador. One campaign builds on the other.

The MIST leader explained, that the success of the “Heroes” campaign increases the perception of the police to the civilian population. That increase in belief of the ability of the police to protect them, makes the community members more likely to report extortion attempts by the gangs. As those reports are received, they turn into investigations, and the investigations turn into arrests. When the arrests happen, the MIST teams again showcase the arrests to the population, again, increasing the perception of the police and of their security in their communities, businesses and homes.

The Civil Affairs team in country does humanitarian projects in conjunction with the military and police. The projects build support for the government within the community, but also provide access

and placement for the MIST teams to do analysis and assessments on the changes in perception and behavior within the population. The MIST team leader explained, “We have to do the analysis and we have to do the work. We have to look at the conditions and vulnerabilities within the communities and the government that allow the gangs to operate. We have to look at the people and the media situation – how are the people receiving media? When we compile all of this information, we can see where and how we can have the greatest effect on influencing the population and achieving the goals of the embassy and the TSOC commander.”

The MIST assessments also play a big role in where the CA teams want to go and where they want to be. From a CA standpoint, their partner of choice is the El Salvadoran military. The U.S. CA teams work directly with the commanders of El Salvadoran Army Brigades and their C5, which is the CA element within the brigades. PSYOP’s work to this point has been more closely

aligned with the police due to the nature of the campaigns; however, the MIST teams in country work diligently to make connections to military leaders and to identify beneficial partners for the embassy.

“In El Salvador, the people running CA and PSYOP are the same people within the Army. We work closely with these individuals because no one knows El Salvador better than the El Salvadoran people.”

Making enduring connections with El Salvadoran, similar to those already established in countries like Panama and Colombia is very important. A key to building those relationships is an understanding of the language and culture. During the *Special Warfare* visit to El Salvador, the CA Team Sergeant was a native speaker, born and raised in Puerto Rico. Even though he is fluent in Spanish, he noted that for SOF to be truly effective, they must be more than fluent.

“In these South American countries certain words are unique. If you come to a country like El Salvador, it is important that you



learn those words before you come because they can aide in building a relationship or tearing it down.”

He explained that understanding the nuances of the language allows Soldiers to build immediate rapport with their partners. Lack of that understanding can build barriers, as can lack of cultural understanding.

“In many South American countries, the people do not want to tell you no, so they will say yes in a certain way that if you understand the culture, you will know they are really saying no,” he explained. “This is not something you can learn in the classroom. Understanding words and actions only comes from exposure. Immersion should really be a part of pre-mission training. Speaking the language alone is not enough. You must be able to pick up on the norm from country to country. As a PSYOP team it is of the utmost importance because

you want to deliver a message that resonates with the people, but by simply using a certain word, you could cause more problems and not achieve your effects at all.”

Also important to understand in El Salvador is the rank structure. The NCO Corps in many countries is not as well developed as in the United States and officers frequently do not want to talk with the team sergeant and may even become insulted if the team sergeant injects instead of the officer.

“It is a very definite officer-led environment here in El Salvador. If the Team Leader cannot communicate, it falls to the NCO. Before we ever enter a meeting, we’ve discussed the end states and how we want to communicate our message. They want to see the officer in charge at least try to communicate, and once that has been established, they are fine with the NCO commu-



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A Psychological Operations Soldier talks with a Salvadoran police officer during a community engagement event in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAYMIEN MCMILLIAN

05
A Civil Affairs medic treats a local citizen during a medical readiness event in El Salvador.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO

nicating, and that begins the establishment of trust,” he explained.

A 7th SFG(A) Warrant Officer serving as the detachment commander in El Salvador explained that the mission in El Salvador is very complex.

“We are conducting split team operations, with half of the team in Honduras, the other half here in El Salvador. We identified and are working with partner-nation military units that are SOF specific.”

He said that the detachment is focusing on training at the tactical and operational level. At the tactical level, the team is conducting training on basic rifle marksmanship, advanced marksmanship, and advanced marksmanship in the urban terrain and special reconnaissance; while at the operational level training focuses



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on intelligence and operations fusion, operations synchronization with intelligence and targeting.

The Detachment Commander noted that the problem sets in El Salvador can be divided into three main categories: political, cultural and geographical.

“These problem sets are very complex and are unique to El Salvador,” he said.

Much of the complexity stems from the country’s civil war in the ‘80s. As noted earlier, El Salvador has two competing parties — the FLMN and ARENA, with the FLMN leaning to the left and ARENA leaning to the right. At the end of the war, the peace accords stipulated that commanders who fought with the FLMN would be integrated into the nascent police force, while ARENA commanders were tied closely to the military.

“We have these two parties fighting for power on the political front and that causes clashes between the military and police. Many of those in command at higher levels in the police and military knew each other in the war – and they were fighting on different sides – so when it comes time cooperate that doesn’t always happen,” he continued. “They don’t trust each other because of the war.”

While he believes it will take a long time for all of the wounds to heal, the team is making inroads. They are engaging key personalities in the military and the police and conducting training in a joint environment, which helps the leaders understand what a positive relationship between the police and the military could do to stabilize the country and move it forward.



01, 02, 03
Special Forces Soldiers from 7th SFG(A) train with partner forces in El Salvador.
 U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY
 JENNIFER G. ANGELO

To date, the team has conducted joint training between the military and police to develop tactics, techniques and procedures that will allow them to operate together. Additionally, the team has hosted subject matter engagements at the operational level. The team brought personnel from the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation to host a seminar for 11 different agencies to help them identify information gaps between the agencies by utilizing practical exercises working together and understanding the operating environment. The Warrant Officer said that the event was key in building

relationships and identifying gaps in their ability to work together.

Another problem facing the police and the military is a lack of funding.

“There is no doubt that the partner force is very capable,” he said. The problem is funding, equipment and modernization of the force. On the other side, the gangs have diversified their income streams and have the capability to modernize their weapons and training. That is a big problem.”

In regards to the relationship with the partner force, he noted, “It is a solid relationship. They are open to any support the U.S. Can provide and they adapt it to their situation here in El Salvador.” **SW**



ADDITIONAL CONTENT ONLINE AT:

<https://www.soc.mil/swcs/SWmag/archive/SW3103/video.htm>

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MS-13'S STRANGLEHOLD ON A NATION

USSOF's need to shift focus in El Salvador.

BY CAPTAIN ANDREW L. MAYVILLE

Nestled between the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Sierra Madre mountain ranges to the east, El Salvador's geography is as rich as its culture. At just over 8,000 square miles, the country is approximately the size of Massachusetts and, although the smallest country in the region, its population of 6.1 million people makes it the most densely populated Central American country.⁰¹ El Salvador's history is riddled with turmoil and violence, and United States Special Operations Forces have had a steady involvement in that history. 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) has operated in El Salvador for decades, dating back to the country's civil war from 1979 to 1992.^{02,03} The end of the war led to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation, the former guerrilla force, becoming a legitimate political party after reaching an agreement with the Salvadoran government and signing a UN-sponsored peace accord in 1992. The 2009 national El Salvadoran elections resulted in the FMLN winning the presidency. The FMLN remains in power today, and is now partnered with the United States in bringing stability and security to the country.⁰⁴

While U.S. Special Forces are no longer advising Salvadoran forces against communist guerrillas, their advisory roles are equally important in today's struggles. As part of U.S. Special Forces' persistent and continuing involvement in El Salvador, a Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha deployed to the country from June to October 2017 under Counter Narco-Terrorism Training authorities to train and advise counter-narcotics partner forces. Counter Narco-Terrorism missions across Central America typically mirror one another and are designed to combat what many believe to be shared Central American problems. As such, SFODAs generally partner with elite police and military forces in order to combat narcotics trafficking. These types of missions have yielded a variety of results across the region, but to assume this status quo is a good fit for El Salvador is to fail to understand El Salvador's unique problem set.

Upon appraising the situation on the ground, the SFODA quickly realized that drugs are not the immediate threat to the nation, or U.S. interests in El Salvador. The actual threat is much more violent, organized and existent. It is not a drug cartel, but a group of criminals that proliferated from a lowly street gang to one of the most expansive criminal enterprises in the western hemisphere. That criminal organization is Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13.

MS-13, THE ACTUAL THREAT

MS-13 originated in the poverty stricken neighborhoods of East Los Angeles during the 1980s. These neighborhoods were flooded with immigrants from El Salvador; fallout from the increasingly violent civil war.^{05,06} The war-hardened immigrants assimilated into the Mexican Mafia controlled neighborhoods, where they organized and grew in numbers. By the mid-1980s MS-13, with Mexican gang alliances, extended their presence throughout much of the southwest U.S. MS-13 was gaining power and attention from the U.S. Government, and by the end of 1990's the U.S. government began deporting foreign-born residents convicted of crimes. The massive deportation influx was extremely difficult for El Salvador to handle due to the post-civil war frailty of the nation. Thus, El Salvador provided an opportune environment and opportunity for MS-13 to flourish.⁰⁷

With 70,000 members between El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, MS-13 is the largest Transnational Criminal Organizations in 7th SFG(A)'s area of responsibility.⁰⁸ The primary means of income for the gang is extortion, with 80 percent of small to medium businesses in El Salvador paying MS-13 under threat of violence. This accounts for approximately \$9.6 million dollars a year of steady income for the gang.^{05,06}

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Billboards throughout the city promote a hotline for victims of extortion as part of an anti-extortion campaign started in 2017 in joint effort between the National Civil Police Force and the Regional PSYOP Team.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

U.S. EFFORTS IN EL SALVADOR

Currently, the U.S. Department of Justice and Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs are spearheading U.S. efforts, in conjunction with the State Department, to combat MS-13 in El Salvador. USSOF; however, remain largely focused on combatting the narcotics flow from Colombia to Mexico and the United States. Despite MS-13's power and extortion modus operandi, the U.S. State Department assesses that they do not have the influence to move beyond local drug trafficking and sales. In addition, due to the country's poverty level, Salvadorans do not typically use, produce or distribute narcotics at a rate that compares to other countries in the AOR.⁹

In El Salvador, the priority partner force for the SFODA was a specialized counter-narcotic task force called Grupo Conjunto Cuscatlán, or simply the GCC. Created in 2013, this unit is a mix of Salvadoran army and navy (SOF and conventional forces) and anti-narcotics police. The task organization and chain of command of the unit is somewhat difficult to navigate due to the fact they are a mostly military unit controlled by a police agency. While the military in El Salvador has the authorization to conduct domestic operations, legally an anti-narcotics agent must be present during the time of the arrest of a suspect when it concerns drugs. The strengths and weaknesses of the GCC mirror those of many similar units throughout the AOR. Although the motivation to train and conduct missions is extremely high within the ranks of the GCC, there are few drug-related operations being conducted in the littoral waters and coastal areas that the GCC primarily operate in.

While the isolated ports and fishing villages dispersed along the Pacific Coast, Gulf of Fonseca and Jiquilisco Bay provide narco-traffickers the ability to repackage large bundles to smaller ones for the final movement north, geographically there is not ample coastline to allow for heavy narcotics trafficking in littoral waters. The vast majority of narcotic interdictions happen in blue-water areas off the coast of El Salvador, and out of the reach of the GCC's organic capabilities—unless enabled by specific intelligence or luck to interdict the right vessel moving in or out of a fishing village. Approximately 94 percent of the flow of drugs from South America comes along the Pacific coast of Central America to Mexico and the US, with the vast majority moving through waterways or air routes.⁷ In an attempt to increase the efficiency and success rate of the GCC, the SFODA spent the summer expanding their capability to operate within riverine and littoral waters. This effort was a collaboration of USSOF and GCC leadership, recognizing the need for the GCC to gain relevancy in the country's efforts to combat narco-trafficking. This is a testament to the unit's awareness of the overall situation on the ground, and also telling of their need for a real mission.

SHIFT IN FOCUS

The SFODA and their GCC counterparts worked tirelessly to improve the capabilities of the Salvadoran task force, but the latter rarely received the opportunity to utilize their acquired skills operationally. Small unit tactics, intelligence-operations fusion, littoral maritime

operations, staff functions and mission planning are some of the areas the SFODA trained the GCC on in their robust training program. Relationships were formed, graduations occurred, certificates were presented and the unit's capabilities grew. However, missions to disrupt narcotics trafficking through the country did not occur, at least not at a rate to give credit to the intent and concept behind a CNT mission.

According to USC Title 10 Section 333, CNT missions have legal authorities to train, advise and provide limited equipment to a host/partner nation force. Detachments are armed with subject matter expertise, language skills and the ability to train a foreign force. They are prepared to execute training and provide limited resources to their partner forces. The detachment was successful in providing the training piece — but the advising portion was greatly hampered by the dwindling of funding and absence of real-world missions for the GCC. The U.S. Embassy in El Salvador also noticed the lack of results from the GCC. It became more apparent that the flow of drugs was more prevalent through maritime routes outside of the GCC's brown water operating space, and support was increased for the El Salvadoran Navy's blue-water narcotics interdiction efforts. Meanwhile, outside the protective walls of the U.S. Embassy, MS-13 continued to operate freely.

The brutal tactics MS-13 uses to carry out violence rivals those used by the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations. The targeting of these acts range from civilians, police officers, judges, prosecutors and other government employees. When the gang cannot reach the desired target they often turn their sights on family members; including parents, spouses, cousins and even children.¹⁰ El Salvador has taken much action in an effort to combat MS-13 and other dangerous TCOs.

THE MAIN EFFORT AGAINST MS-13

Las Fuerzas Especiales de Reacción de El Salvador, or the FES, is an elite anti-gang unit belonging to the police special operations. They are one of the premier fighting forces tasked with hunting down and dismantling violent gangs, and MS-13 is their top priority. With an operational tempo that rivals most USSOF, the FES is the tip of the spear in the fight against MS-13. While they have a wealth of real-world experience, the majority of their personnel lack advanced formal training. This created the potential for an SFODA to increase the capabilities and lethality of the unit at the forefront of the war on MS-13.

Historically, Special Forces detachments have only worked with the FES in a limited capacity, focusing on

THE PRIMARY MEANS OF INCOME FOR THE GANG IS EXTORTION, WITH 80% OF SMALL TO MEDIUM BUSINESSES IN EL SALVADOR PAYING MS-13 UNDER THREAT OF VIOLENCE.

training the leadership and upper tiers of the organization and staff functions. The detachment's involvement with the FES centered on the detachment commander and team sergeant injecting themselves into the FES as often as possible, understanding that the resources of a single SFODA are limited, but also recognizing that the FES were combating the real threat in El Salvador. SFODA leadership attended weekly meetings and operations synchs, provided a specific Special Forces MOS to give specific training when able and attempted to affect change where they could. It was apparent to the detachment that the future focus of Special Forces needed to shift.

HOW SPECIAL FORCES CAN ENHANCE THE FES

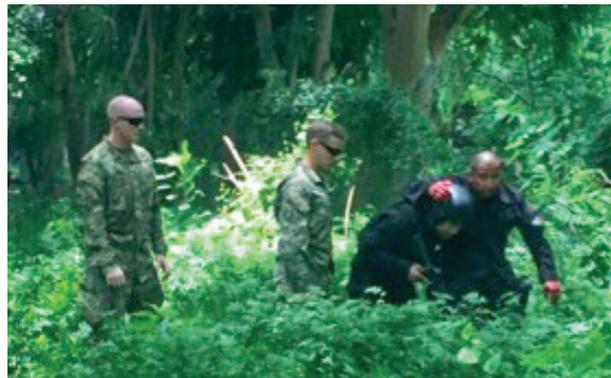
With the attention of a full SFODA, and a dedicated program of instruction, the FES will be able to greatly increase their capabilities as a counter-gang unit. The specific training that the FES needs is not any more complex than the type of training similar units receive from SFODAs throughout the region. Mission planning, intelligence-op-



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erations fusion, staff functions and battle tracking are all fundamental blocks of instruction an SFODA can train and advise the FES leadership. They will also be able to enhance the FES teams on the tactical level. Small unit tactics in urban and rural environments, advanced marksmanship, tactical movement and combat lifesaving are areas that SFODAs specialize in training partner forces on. Furthermore, the SFODA would be able to leverage the Salvadoran Special Forces to train and work with the FES; providing advanced training and specialized infiltration platforms not normally available to the FES.

A shift in focus like this for an SFODA would not be difficult to execute in El Salvador. Not only is a detachment designed to think critically, evaluate the situation on the ground and adjust accordingly, but the operational USSOF architecture on the ground in El Salvador is designed to support counter TCO operations. The mission of both Civil Affairs and Military Information Support Teams would greatly enhance the effects of an SFODA's counter-gang partner force. Furthermore, the issue of shifting focus to a predominantly counter-gang mission



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would still fall under the current authorities granted to Special Forces teams operating in El Salvador.

Section 333 of Title 10, "permits the Defense Department to provide counter-narcotics assistance and training for foreign security forces, including foreign police forces. Furthermore, this section also allows the Department of Defense to provide the same amount of support to build partner nation capacity to combat counter-transnational organized crime operations. This includes the authorities to train and advise with limited equipping."¹¹ In the instance of USSOF in El Salvador, it is not necessarily an issue of authorities—it is an issue of deliberate repurpose and refocus, with concurrence at all levels.

MS-13 IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The threat of MS-13 is not relegated only to Central America. There is a growing number of MS-13 members in the United States today. The FBI assesses that the MS-13 threat is present in 42 states, including the District of Columbia.¹² The crimes committed in the United States are conducted in the same brutal manner as those carried out in El Salvador. In early 2017, 13 members of the gang committed seven murders in New York — including two teenage girls.¹³



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01 A Special Forces Weapons Sergeant conducts a layout with the FES before a major training operation in Comalapa, El Salvador.

02 Two Special Forces Medical Sergeants observe a FES agent moving a casualty to safety during a medical training scenario lane in El Salvador.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS COURTESY OF 7TH SFG(A)

03 Items seized during an operation targeted gang members and associates involved in transnational criminal activity, including drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, human smuggling and sex trafficking, murder and racketeering.

04 MS-13 tattoos cover the chest of an individual arrested in the U.S. for gang activity.

05 U.S. Special Agents prepare to enter the residence of a target during an operation aimed at transnational criminal gangs and others associated with transnational criminal activity. Throughout the five-week operation more than one thousand individuals were arrested across the U.S.

U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT PHOTOS

In addition to crimes being committed on the streets, the prison system is also suffering from a rise in brutal attacks carried out by MS-13, or by other gangs that are extorted and coerced to carry out these crimes.¹⁴ The measures taken to defeat MS-13 in El Salvador may very well serve to disrupt the atrocities they also carry out in the United States.

THE WAY AHEAD

Moving forward, it is crucial that all parties involved in the protection of U.S. interests and helping improve the country of El Salvador recognize that the actual threat in the country is MS-13; from the force provider to the theater command, and from the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador to the Special Forces team on the ground. The country of El Salvador has communicated how real and grave the threat of MS-13 is, and it now falls on the United States to get in step with the right Salvadoran partner of choice. The U.S. and El Salvador have a complicated history of shared bloodshed and hardship. 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers advised and assisted Salvadoran forces during their civil war and, Salvadoran Special Forces fought alongside U.S. and Coalition Forces abroad in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Our Salvadoran partners have stood by the U.S. in our hour of need, and we should be prepared to shift to assist them in theirs. We will best achieve this by tailoring our efforts and resources to what it is our Salvadoran partners need, ensuring our combined lines of effort are nested and prioritized accordingly.

The instability of El Salvador affects the security of the United States. This instability allows for the freedom of movement for illicit activity dangerously close to the southern approach of the United States. MS-13 is a major cause of instability within both El Salvador as well as the United States; presenting a greater threat than drug flow. Special Forces teams deliberately training and advising Salvadoran forces to combat MS-13 will help bring stability to the country, thus protecting U.S. interests both at home and abroad. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EVOLUTION EL SALVADOR

How Psychological Operations teams
continue to make an impact in a dynamic
operational environment

BY CAPTAIN MEG CRUZ

El Salvador is a truly a complex problem. A cursory search of the country in Google reveals headlines describing organized crime, gang dynamics and the Trump administration's growing concerns about Salvadoran immigration in the U.S.⁰¹ Clicking on "images" yields a puzzling mix of breathtaking tropical landscapes and smiling faces juxtaposed with tattooed men in handcuffs.

Contrast is a common theme in the Salvadoran environment. The wealthiest areas of the country are skirted closely by *favela*-style slums, accentuating the country's large income gap. Both foreign and local humanitarian, religious and not-for-profit organizations work year-round to serve the community, while gangs clash with police and each other for territorial control. Unemployment rates are high despite a thriving economy in the capital, San Salvador. The main political parties are often viewed as corrupt and divisive, yet the Salvadoran Government continues to seek a bigger seat at the international economic table.⁰²

Special Operations Forces are charged with navigating these problems while simultaneously developing and supporting Salvadoran security forces as a regional partner. PSYOP is uniquely trained and positioned to do this through the lens of culture, history and human psychology. Central America remains a key piece of terrain in the global security conversation, especially as adversaries to the United States seek to plant influence south of her borders. Over the last two and a half years, Regional PSYOP Teams from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, have deployed to El Salvador, wielding influence as the weapon of choice. This article will describe primary RPT efforts, historical context, operational successes and the future of PSYOP there.

In an environment ripe with bifurcation, RPTs work diligently to strike a balance between meeting multiple commands' objectives, supporting U.S. Embassy efforts and empowering a key security partner in the region. To meet these goals, PSYOP teams must evaluate key aspects of a given operational environment, and identify the attitudes and behaviors in the population that contribute to a particular problem set (in the case of El Salvador, instability, violence and lack of border security). Teams then precisely tailor messaging campaigns alongside partner nation forces to counter these challenges. Although the origins of the Psychological Operations Regiment are often associated with the use of loudspeakers and leaflet dissemination for influence, the current regional repertoire has evolved to include various techniques layered through military and U.S. Embassy



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channels. Regional PSYOP Team Soldiers in El Salvador engage with local leaders on key issues, conduct surveys and assessments to build an operational picture, collaborate with non-governmental and charitable organizations, nest efforts with Special Forces and Civil Affairs teams and conduct subject-matter expert exchanges with host-nation counterparts. RPTs also play a role in the targeting process by working with other U.S. and partner nation military units, and advise country teams on messaging opportunities and implications.

The beginning of many current Salvadoran security challenges was its civil war (1980-1992), which leaves a distinct mark on cultural narrative today. The communist-influenced guerrilla force, the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation), took up arms against the Salvadoran government after years of repression and social injustice.⁰³ Following the peace accord, many ex-FMLN fighters were integrated into the National Civil Police force.⁰⁴ Both the PNC and Armed Forces of El Salvador currently comprise the entire body that is the national security force effort. However, numerous members of both organizations were involved in the conflict on either side, and still maintain some of their views and grievances. Grudges and distrust between the military and police create challenges for integrated efforts despite many attempts by leaders to dissolve residual tensions.

In addition to supporting interoperability and information exchange, RPTs must circumnavigate force structures traditionally seen in the U.S. and with her other allies to balance efforts in El Salvador. Due to the fallout of the civil



war and subsequent peace accord, the PNC is the only organization with the authority to arrest or detain suspected criminals. Like its Northern Triangle neighbors, El Salvador has experienced more criminal activity than it can manage with the police force alone, thus the augmentation of citizen security by the military. The result is that Salvadoran armed forces are almost exclusively oriented at threats internal to the country. However, they are not granted arrest authorities, and must lean on police counterparts to act on intelligence. Many PNC and AFES units have been merged in an effort to quell this problem, but much work remains to be done for a cohesive security solution. Thus, counter-illicit trafficking and gang proliferation operations must always include police, but can call upon military support.

It is amid this quandary that PSYOP officers and NCOs must find an effective middle ground. Part of the RPTs' successes have been mitigating bifurcation through integrating centers of gravity in Salvadoran networks to meet common goals. In 2016, the RPT identified another long-standing issue since the war: a lack of trust in the police force by the general population. Thus, the "Heroes of El Salvador" campaign was born. The idea was to integrate messaging and police outreach in communities that would enhance trust in the PNC. Greater trust in the police would lead to an increase in legitimacy, citizen participation in the justice process, and greater overall support and respect for the government and its institutions.

The RPT saw opportunity here to bring U.S. and host nation network efforts together. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has

the mission of helping "countries deliver justice and fairness by strengthening their police, courts, and correction systems" to "reduce the amount of crime and illegal drugs reaching U.S. shores."⁰⁵ The RPT quickly teamed up with INL and the PNC to develop a campaign to achieve their shared goals.

In support of this effort, the national police began engaging more in after school programs, soccer tournaments, *charlas* (town-hall style discussions) with local parents regarding their concerns for their children, and *oratorias*, or public speaking competitions that encouraged Salvadoran kids to think deeply about the values involved in public service. As a result, and in spite of tensions toward government entities in recent months resulting from the broader election season, approval ratings of the police increased after "Heroes" launched. This effort has laid the foundation for future prevention efforts in the PNC as they continue to seek opportunities for community cohesiveness. Ongoing efforts will contribute to the shared priority for increased good governance and a capable security partner in CENTAM.

Through subject-matter expert exchanges and collaborative efforts with other ARSOF elements in the country, RPTs have also enabled Salvadoran military organizations. Most Salvadoran Army units have a designated section in charge of both Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations: however, the two are generally treated as the same entity. Lack of funding and training also create a challenge within this department across the military. In conjunction with deployed CA teams, the RPTs have created relationships

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U.S. Army Psychological Operations team members conduct an interview with a female police officer in Sonsonate, El Salvador. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. MATTHEW FLAHERTY



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A Salvadoran police officer gives a backpack with school supplies to a student in Zacatecoluca, El Salvador. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAYMIEN MCMILLIAN

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A Salvadoran police officer builds a pinata with two students in Sonsonate, El Salvador. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. MATTHEW FLAHERTY

with military leaders that will serve as the foundation for future enabling efforts. These partnerships were achieved through a combination of key-leader engagements, CA projects and PSYOP integration with military units. The outcome has been significant. In many areas of El Salvador, military and police elements are beginning to work together toward their common goals to counter gang recruitment through youth engagement.

As partner nation security efficacy increases, so too does the power to fight transnational criminal organizations. The issue of *maras*, or gangs, remains the most prolific and difficult to address. The Salvadoran gang phenomenon began in the late 1990s with the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, in which the U.S. deported undocumented gang members in Los Angeles, California, to their countries of origin. This was the inception of El Salvador's current gang problem.⁰⁶ The gang empires thrive for many reasons. As a result of decades of income inequality, lack of work opportunities, broken family structures and undergoverned peripheral communities, the gangs provide what greater society cannot. Other institutional challenges further complicate the problem at a strategic level. Although the administration under President Cerén has implemented *Plan El Salvador Seguro*, a security plan designed to address critical levels of violence and criminality in 50 different municipalities,⁰⁷ Salvadoran news media outlets continue to report gang-related homicides on a near daily basis. Additionally, Salvadoran prisons are severely over-populated, thus posing many human rights questions as authorities strategize and select courses of action to attempt to reduce one of the world's highest homicide rates.⁰⁸

The two largest and most influential gangs are *Mara Salvatrucha 13* (MS-13) and *Barrio 18* (18th Street). Tactics, techniques and procedures among all the *maras* are

relatively consistent: most of their financial resources are acquired through illicit means, mainly extortion. Kidnappings for ransom are also common. Eliminating gang enablers is a key piece of combating the gangs themselves until a time in the future when aspects of Salvadoran life that proliferate this culture fizzle out. Thus, PSYOP teams have placed emphasis on eliminating sources of income as part of a long-term plan for success in the country.

With the buy-in of the PNC and INL, the RPTs were able to launch a national anti-extortion campaign in the fall of 2017. The plan was twofold: first, Salvadoran victims of extortion needed to be reminded that this kind of robbery did not have to be a part of their daily lives, or an informal "life tax." They could choose not to pay gangs, and instead seek justice through the PNC's Anti-Extortion Task Force. Second, the Task Force needed more actionable reports in order to illuminate the threat network and begin to dismantle its financial structure. Through the use of billboards and social media products to distribute the call center phone number, the population was getting the message. Phone calls to the line increased around 3,000 percent after one month of dissemination compared to the same date in 2017. Hundreds of actionable calls were received, resulting in hundreds of investigations opened and several arrests.

The future for the mission continues to trend in a positive direction, even in the face of force restructuring challenges. The PSYOP community has recently launched a new format for deploying forces to Latin America as a response to reduced manning. The Alternate Regional Engagement Strategy (or ARES Concept) was recently implemented. It removes the need for a five-man PSYOP team in every country. Instead, it places one officer and a contingent of Soldiers forward deployed to oversee all the CENTAM missions and provide support to the SOC





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Forward command, while a smaller RPT deploys to each subsidiary country. This ARES node provides regional oversight, a connection to reach-back support from Fort Bragg, as well as the capability to flex down to specific locations when needed to supplement a given team. The result is that all elements have been able to achieve mission effects in their respective countries in spite of having the historically smallest teams.

As SOCSOUTH and SOUTHCOM refine efforts to counter transregional threats, Psychological Operations teams in CENTAM must also keep communication open and frequent across borders. Part of enabling security partners means

building the operational picture first, and deployed RPTs understand the importance of prepping the battlefield from all three sides of the Northern Triangle. Although much progress has been made in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras toward identifying and filling gaps that enable illicit trafficking, international agreements, lack of infrastructure and challenging terrain contribute to ongoing problems. El Salvador does not face narcotics movement issues to the same scale as her neighbors in the Triangle. Nonetheless, pressure applied in other countries against criminal organizations could always result in a change in tactics, thereby routing increasingly more illicit product through the country. Persistent RPT presence in the coming years will mean ongoing assessment and consistency of messaging across borders.

Progress in El Salvador since the RPTs arrived has been gradual and incremental, but concrete. Through the new regional engagement strategy, ARES, and long-standing country team and host-nation relationships, future RPTs will continue fomenting security efforts of our partners to the south. Especially with acute focus on transnational threats across U.S. Departments of Defense and State, the need for extended networks and influence in those networks remains crucial. In the case of El Salvador, security partners and country team allies will continue to show their buy-in for a more safe and prosperous country. **SW**

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A social media product from the anti-extortion campaign, featuring the call center number. It reads "Extortionists control their victims to intimidate them." U.S. ARMY PHOTO

NOTES **01.** The Department of Homeland Security announced that the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of Salvadorans in the US would end in January 2018. See Miriam Jordan, "Trump Administration Says That Nearly 200,000 Salvadorans Must Leave," *The New York Times*, 8 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/us/salvadorans-tps-end.html>. The POTUS's State of the Union Speech in January of 2018 also addressed mounting immigration concerns on the basis of MS-13 presence in the US: see Liz Robbins "Why Was MS-13 Targeted in Trump's Speech?," *The New York Times*, 31 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/nyregion/ms-13-gang-trump.html>. **02.** Salvadoran politicians are actively seeking to participate in the customs union that Honduras and Guatemala entered into on June 26, 2017, the *Unión Aduanera Guatemala Honduras*. The agreement is intended to increase both nations' GDP by facilitating ease of passage for travelers and goods across borders. See "El Salvador begins negotiations for customs union with Honduras and Guatemala," 16 October 2017, <https://us.invertalia.net/news/el-salvador-begins-negotiations-for-customs-union-with-honduras-and-guatemala-10988>. **03.** William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: the United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill & London, 1998), 36-47. **04.** See Mike Allison, "El Salvador's brutal civil war: What we still don't know," *Al Jazeera News*, 1 March 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/2012228123122975116.html>. **05.** Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) homepage article, "Security Through Justice," <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/>. **06.** José Miguel Cruz, Jonathan D. Rosen, Luis Enrique Amaya and Yulia Vorobyeva, "The New Face of Street Gangs: The Gang Phenomenon in El Salvador," Florida International University Report to the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), US Department of State, p.13, https://lacc.fiu.edu/research/the-new-face-of-street-gangs-in-central-america/the-new-face-of-street-gangs_final-report_eng.pdf. **07.** See "Plan El Salvador Seguro, Executive Summary," Presidency of the Republic of El Salvador, p.3, 15 January 2015, www.presidencia.gob.sv/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/El-Salvador-Seguro.pdf. **08.** See Tristan Clavel, "InSight Crime's 2017 Homicide Round-Up," 19 January 2018, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/2017-homicide-round-up/>.



PANAMA

BY JANICE BURTON





The Isthmus of Panama, also known as the Isthmus of Darien, lies between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean and links North and South America. The country itself is ethnically diverse, and the population is massed mostly in urban areas such as the Panama City and Colon.

The Republic of Panama is a sovereign state, much like the United States, with three governmental bodies: legislative, executive and judicial. Unlike many of its neighboring countries, Panama has a progressive economy, and is considered by many to be one of the most stable in America, and is tied to finance, tourism and logistics based around the Panama Canal.



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From 2002 to 2009, the country's Gross Domestic Product doubled, from stimulation to the economy largely through foreign investment and tourism. According to the UN, the country has the highest per capita income in Central America, coming in at just under \$14,000 annually.

That being said, Panama is still a country of the have and have-nots. Traveling from the city's gleaming downtown replete with high rises and fine dining, you can easily find yourself in neighborhoods that even security forces are hesitant to patrol. A missed turn going from downtown to the U.S. Embassy can land you in El Chorrillo, a neighborhood that you wouldn't want to be in during the day, and definitely not at night. Outside of Panama City, Colon, a port city located on the coast, is often considered a war zone with rival gangs fighting for control.

The Darien Gap is an ungoverned space that separates Colombia and Panama. Its high crime rate is due in part to a presence of Colombian guerrillas and the drug trade. Today, it is used as route to move people through the area. During a recent patrol between

Colombian forces and Panamanian security forces, refugees from Africa were found moving through the gap headed north toward Mexico.

It is the flow of people through the country that U.S. Special Operations Forces focus on, as they work to protect the Southern Approach. Stopping the illicit movement of people throughout South America into Central America and on into Mexico is a major task for SOCSOUTH. Panama is key in this effort.

Panama is one of two countries in the SOCSOUTH area of operations that does not have a standing army, instead Panama has a paramilitary security force, which is comprised of armed police and internal security forces, as well as a small maritime and air force known as the Servicio Nacional Aeronaval or SENAN. Another element, the SENAFRONT is the police force whose job it is to "plan, organize and direct all actions that guarantee the security of the territory within the sovereign jurisdiction of Panama's borders." These two organizations are the partners that American forces train and work with in Panama.

PANAMA IS ONE OF TWO COUNTRIES IN THE SOCSOUTH AREA OF OPERATIONS THAT DOES NOT HAVE A STANDING ARMY, INSTEAD PANAMA HAS A PARAMILITARY SECURITY FORCE, WHICH IS COMPRISED OF ARMED POLICE AND INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES, AS WELL AS A SMALL MARITIME AND AIR FORCE.





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Cargo ships enter the Miraflores Locks in the Panama Canal to be lowered from the Pacific Ocean. The Panama Canal, which is approximately 51 miles long between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was cut through one of narrowest saddles of the isthmus that joins North and South America. Ships from all parts of the world transit daily through the Panama Canal with some 13 to 14 thousand vessels passing through it every year, connecting 160 countries and reaching some 1,700 ports in the world.

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A mobile training team from 7th SFG(A) works with police and security forces in Panama, training on methods used to collect biometrics and gather evidence and combining those techniques with tactical training.

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



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While *Special Warfare* was in Panama, a mobile training team from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) was on the ground to work with these elements on gathering evidence, identifying those persons moving through the country illegally and strengthening security within the region. They not only worked on tactical training, but also on the collection of evidence, which allows the partner forces to identify the makers of drugs flowing through the region, how to use technology to identify people passing through the country by the use of biometric technology. The U.S. Soldiers learned the technology through training at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and Schools advanced training, and now use it give another tool to their partners in Panama.

A Sergeant First Class assigned to 7th SFG(A) led the MTT to Panama.

“The ODA requested we come down and conduct a site exploitation training class with the Panamanian force to help them better understand site exploitation, biometric enrollment and the illicit pathways that run through Panama to help stop drug trafficking, human trafficking and special interest alien trafficking,” he explained.

The team worked with three different police units: the regular force, the SWAT force and the force focused on intelligence. The SWAT force is the tier one element in Panama and is known as UTOA.

“They understand the basics of site exploitation and they go all around the country to interdict all of the threats, but the more they understand the process-



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01 A team of Panamanian Police prepare to enter a building during a culmination exercise that combines training learned in the classroom and on the range to test their operational skills.

02, 03 Members of the Panama police force gear up to put tactical skills to the test during a culmination exercise conducted by a mobile training team from 7th SFG(A).

04 A U.S. Army Special Forces Soldier from 7th SFG(A) works with members of the police force in Panama, training on methods used to collect biometrics and gather evidence.

05, 06 Skills learned in the classroom are put to the test during the final culmination exercise.

es, the more successful they will be whether they are the force collecting the evidence or the force not.”

The team also worked with the Panamanian force to help them identify smuggling routes, where they stop and who has been there. He noted that using biometric profiling they can stop the smugglers from crossing the borders into other countries. U.S. forces cannot do that in country because they do not have the authority or permissions, that is why it is impertative that partner forces are enabled with the skills to do it.

Following the training, he said he felt the students had a good understanding of the tactics and techniques and that it was now up to them to practice and refine standard operating procedures into a more cohesive plan for execution. More iterations of training are also in the planning stages.

“The next step is for the participants to go back to their units and conduct train the trainer with their subordinates so the force as a whole understands the process,” he said. “Another big thing that came out of the training was that three different units were included and they were able to build bonds, which fostered a sense of ‘Yes, we can work together,’ which creates a great partnership.”

He added, “It’s a wonderful thing for guys in 7th Group to be able to come down here multiple times during their career and build rapport with the units. We can provide initial training for their new members, but we also train senior members whom we



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have worked with in the past and they really appreciate the relationship.”

Col. Javier Cardona, Chief Security Cooperation Office in Panama, knows a lot about those long-term relationships.

“It’s really a team effort,” explained Col. Javier Cardona, Chief Security Cooperation Office in Panama. “Upon arriving in Panama, we (special operations forces) figured out the units on the ground. We had some SOF elements - Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs - who were already doing engagements based on the authorities they were working on. We



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quickly identified the need for a more permanent presence in order to address current threats and concerns of the region. We recognized the growing threats of the transit zones. Panama is the first first gate for the passage of illicit networks throughout the region.”

Col. Cardona explained that his long-standing experience in the SOCSOUTH AOR as a member of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), helped him better understand the problems and allowed him to begin working with SOCSOUTH to create a SOF engagement plan for Panama. Key to that permanent presence was the creation of the Special Operations Forces Liaison Element and the naming of a Special Operations Liaison Officer on the ground. From that beginning, SOF forces established two elements in the form of operational support teams: one from Special Forces and another one from the Naval Special Warfare Group.

Cardona believes the success of SOF in Panama is tied to the increase in operational readiness of the partner-nation forces. He explained that the relationships built between U.S. SOF and the partner-nation made a significant impact on the skills of the partner nation.

“We not only engage with special mission units in the country, our forces quickly came on the ground to conduct assessments to train other security elements. I will tell you that the success story in Panama today is the increased operational readiness of our partner nation's security forces. To tell you to tell you the extent of how SOF has expanded our presence here in Panama, you have to understand that our forces are now engaging



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with the national police and their special unit UTOA, which is a maritime narcotics unit. We have engaged with the national counterterrorism force. We have also engaged with the SENAFRONT, which is the border security force. We work with a mobile strike forces and the special forces to conduct long-range regional operations. U.S. SOF working with the partner nation forces works because we bring the language skills and the cultural understanding. We have long-standing background and knowledge in the area. And, most importantly, we also enjoy the necessary authorities.

A key success story in Panama was the ability of the partner nation to generate its own organic operation and deploy forward with Colombian forces for operations in the Darien Gap.

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Skills learned in the classroom are put to the test during a culmination exercise with a mobile training team from 7th SFG(A).

HISTORY OF U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN PANAMA

U.S. Army Special Operations Soldiers have a long history with the country of Panama, beginning with the establishment of the 8th Special Forces Group in 1963 at Fort Gulick, Panama. The primary mission of the group was counterinsurgency training for the Armies of Latin America. The training was conducted under the auspices of The School of the Americas.

In the Spring of 1962, an advanced party from Co. D, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), based out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, traveled to the Panama Canal Zone to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the 8th SFG (A). After the initial coordination was conducted, augmentation teams arrived in country and became known as the Special Action Force.

In January 1963, Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simons took command of Company D, 7th SFG (A), and it, along with the SAF, was officially redesignated as the 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), which included a Military Intelligence Detachment, a medical detachment, a military police detachment, an engineer detachment and a psychological operations battalion. The group was also responsible for operating an NCO Academy, an Airborne School and an Underwater Operations Schools for U.S. Army South, as well as the Jungle Operations Training Center. Later, the unit was tasked with developing and maintaining a HALO School.

While not conducting training, the 8th SFG (A) participated in several notable operations, including the organization of a mobile training team that trained and advised the Bolivian Ranger Battalion that captured and killed Che Guevara. They also trained counterinsurgent units in Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador that killed three of Guevara's lieutenants.

MTT's from the 8th Special Forces Group also assisted the Venezuelan Army in the construction of a jump school. They trained the first students and the cadre for follow-on classes. They also trained Dominican Republic Army units in counter-guerrilla warfare. And, at the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Sherman, SF Soldiers trained Guatemalan airborne personnel.

In 1972, the 8th Special Forces Group (A) was deactivated and its members were assigned to 3rd Bn., 7th SFG (A). In 1999, all military bases in Panama were turned over to Panama, along with the Panama Canal.



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Another success story is the increase in advanced training of partner-nation forces. Cardona said the training elements were able to push the envelope with a recent multi-service counterterrorism exercise, which was conducted by a Crisis Response Force from the 7th Special Forces Group.

"On a national level of training, the enthusiasm and motivation to progress by the partner forces is what we see every day," he explained. **SW**

ADDITIONAL CONTENT ONLINE AT:

<https://www.soc.mil/swcs/SWmag/archive/SW3103/video.htm>



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OFF THE RANGE, INTO THE JUNGLE

Optimizing Special Forces in a Combined Operation.

BY CAPTAIN BRETT BONANNI AND
CAPTAIN JONATHON WATERS

In August 2017, a combined Panamanian-Colombian force embarked on Operation OSO II, a targeted clearance mission in the famed Darien Gap. This operation, and the supporting role played in it by two Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha, serves as an excellent example of how to optimize U.S. Special Operations Forces' role in the U.S. Southern Command Theater of operations. This also exemplifies the ability of U.S. Special Forces working within the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility to synchronize efforts between two countries with similar problem sets. The two SFODAs from 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) deployed to Central and South America, the primary AOR for 7th SFG(A), for a counter-narco terrorism mission. The focus of both detachments was to build partner nation capacity through specialized training designed to enhance and build the host nation's security capabilities. To accomplish this task, the detachments would push their efforts into increasing interoperability between internal security and governmental departments, bolster communication laterally among these partner force agencies and U.S. agencies, and assist in driving the partner forces' operations and intelligence cycle to fully encompass the domestic assets available, thus strengthening unity of effort within each country.

The SFODA in Panama was the fourth team to partner with Panamanian forces on a CNT mission in recent history, and their priority partner was Panama's premier border protection force: the *Servicio Nacional de Fron-*

teras (SENAFRONT). The SENAFRONT's Eastern Brigade is located in the small remote town of Meteti, Panama, which is situated at the mouth of the famed Darien jungle.⁰¹ This is the location in which the detachment lived and conducted all CNT activities with the unit. The detachment in Colombia was partnered with the 7th Division of the Colombian Army, who primarily operated in the Northern tier of Colombia; including the Darien Gap border region with Panama.⁰² Additionally, both detachments operated with Civil Affairs Teams, Military Information Support Teams (MISTs), and Naval Special Warfare teams in their respective countries; strengthening the SOF approach and assisting the SFODAs with non-lethal methods and activities.

A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT WITH A COMPLICATED PROBLEM

The Terrain: The Darien Gap is where Central and South America come together at the Panama-Colombia border. It is a vast rain forest well known for its remoteness and the illicit trafficking routes that cut through the thick jungle vegetation. A vast swath of jungle, spanning more than 60 miles in length of almost impenetrable jungle, the Darien Gap encompasses the total landmass between where the Pan-American Highway stops in both Panama and Colombia. The Darien Gap lacks roads, infrastructure, and governmental influence from either Panama or Colombia.



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Drug cartels and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) guerillas have historically used the Darien as a staging point for criminal activities, as well as a viable land route to conduct illicit trafficking from the South American continent into North America.⁰³ Furthermore, Panamanian and Colombian security forces have had a difficult time projecting influence into the area due to the terrain and the lack of accessibility.

For Special Operations Command-South, the command responsible for the employment of Special Operations Forces in Central and South America, the border region of the Darien is of high importance. It is a natural chokepoint from South America into Central America and rife with trans-regional/transnational threat networks. Specifically, the Clan de Golfo Cartel has a dominant presence in the area specializing in cocaine and illegal mining.⁰⁴ A prevailing threat for the U.S. in this area is also the movement of special interest aliens, which the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs and Chief Diplomatic Officer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Policy, Alan Bersin, defines in his written congressional testimony as a population that, “consists of unauthorized migrants who arrive in the United States from, or are citizens of, several Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries.”⁰⁵ DHS commonly refers to these countries as Special Interest Countries and migrants from these countries, “may include migrants who are affiliated with foreign terrorist organizations, intelligence agencies and organized criminal syndicates.”⁰⁶ These individuals have been known to use this geographic choke point as the movement corridor from South America into Central America with a final destination being the U.S., which is a security concern for all nations along this pathway.

The Forces: Panamanians have traditionally conducted security operations in the Darien by projecting influence through a combination of persistent presence in remote communities and sporadic interdiction operations. During these operations, the SENAFRONT frequently nets undocumented immigrants and SIAs moving from Colombia into Panama. On the Colombian side of the border, the CNP and Colombian Army use similar tactics to exert nominal control. Both countries target narcotic production and facilitation areas, while attempting to deny T3Ns freedom of movement through terrain denial and interdiction operations. Conducting interdiction operations in the Darien; however, is similar to finding the proverbial needle in the haystack due to the dense jungle terrain hindering access coupled with an entrenched illicit early warning network in the local population that alerts traffickers of security force activities. In response, the Panamanians and Colombians established multiple combined border outposts on a mountain ridgeline that is a natural and political divide between the two countries, with an agreement from both governments to establish more posts in the future.⁰⁷ The outposts are designed to act as sentinels over the land crossing

and enable both countries to project security forces from those locations.

Historically, the Panamanian government and security forces have been reactive in nature to criminal activity in the Darien. Intelligence is developed and disseminated from the top, as opposed to subordinate units and commanders feeding intelligence upwards based on information gathered during operations. This creates an intelligence gap that hinders the development of productive targets needed to drive operations. The SENAFRONT normative is to react to HUMINT provided information about illicit activity in the border region, which in turn generates an interdiction operation. The results have been inconsistent, due primarily to the challenges posed in conducting surgical interdiction operations in dense jungle terrain.

In contrast, the Colombians have a lengthy history of training engagements with the United States, namely United States Special Forces, beginning with the fight against communist expansion in Operation LAZO and transitioning into the fight against the FARC and prevalent drug trade.⁰⁸ The institutional design of Colombian and U.S. Army intelligence and operations are very similar, and this has contributed to their development of a



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01 Both Panamanian and Colombian patrols conduct final PCC/PCIs prior to departing into the Darien Gap.

02 Colombian soldiers prepare to depart for Operation OSO II.

03 Standing on the border near the Gulf of Uraba, Colombia can be seen in the distance. The Gulf of Uraba is a battleground for anti-narcotics operations in northern Colombia.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS COURTESY OF 7TH SFG(A)

well-fused partnership. In both Panama and Colombia, USSF typically deployed and trained their partners on marksmanship, basic patrolling, land navigation, communication, medical skills, and engineer tasks. However, the Global War on Terrorism has pulled a large portion of USSOF to the U.S. Central Command AOR, and that has affected the overall personnel strength available for SOUTH-COM rotations and the ability to achieve effects at a more operational level. With a refocus on the AOR, 7th SFG (A) is transitioning from the historical flat range and small unit tactics mindset to a concept of expanding and strengthening our host-nation partners operations and intelligence cycles at a higher level. This will in turn strengthen our partners' ability to provide security and governance within, while optimizing the employment of the limited USSOF available for deployment to the region.

The Whole Picture: The Darien Region has evolved from a narcotic highway to an avenue of a more diverse and complex criminal activity that encompasses drugs, weapons, stolen goods, illegal mining and human smuggling (i.e., SIAs). This has been recognized as a substantial threat to the U.S. due to the porous border that facilitates ease of illicit trafficking through multiple pathways with the potential to continue to the southern border of the U.S.⁰⁹ Considering the difficult terrain, a developed threat network, lack of ongoing shaping operations in the area, and the general lack of cooperation among internal agencies, both partner forces and the SFODAs had a difficult path to navigate in order to develop a combined plan against the illicit networks operating in the region.



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A COMBINED APPROACH

To truly assist the partner force in building operational capacity and open the aperture in which USSF operates in Panama, the detachment working with the SENAFRONT sought to develop a deliberately planned operation and maintain involvement from planning through execution. The operation would be designed to shape the operating area, provide the SFODA with knowledge into previously unobserved partner force capability gaps, and energize international security cooperation in the Darien Gap. By the partner force choosing to become pro-active, using bottom-fed intelligence could drive subordinate commanders to nominate operational targets that truly degrade and deter illicit activity in the Darien. The Panamanians were already manning border outposts with the Colombians. The natural evolution of the relationship was to begin coordinated, deliberately targeted combined operations. Moreover, the two countries had an established operational relationship through a series of bilateral maritime interdiction training exercises that had been conducted over the previous years;¹⁰ this would expand that relationship into the terrestrial domain.

Operation OSO II was developed by the SENAFRONT, with USSF mentorship, to target a known location that has been used by the Clan de Golfo cartel as an exchange and facilitation area for narcotics, weapons and human smuggling. After further mission refinement, the SENAFRONT decided that in order to



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achieve maximum effects, the Colombians should conduct a simultaneous operation on their side of the border. SENAFRONT leadership contacted Colombian Army leaders from the 7th Division in Medellin, Colombia, to see if there was mutual interest, and to begin coordination. Because the scale of the operation was so large compared to previous operations in the Darien, USSF personnel from both Panama and Colombia decided to observe the execution phase of the mission from a secure border outpost that would serve as the operations center for the mission. This was the first operation in recent years that USSF in Panama would observe mission activities from a forward position, which for legal purposes would be considered the last covered and concealed position.

International Planning: Once the Panamanians confirmed that the Colombians were interested in participating and that planning would begin, the detachment reached out to the SFODA working in Medellin to begin coordinating efforts to synchronize planning and execution details. Embassy and TSOC approval was still required for the detachment in Panama to move forward to the secured border outpost during the operation. To obtain approval, the Detachment Commander in Panama, with the assistance of the Office of Defense Cooperation, presented the U.S. Ambassador to Panama the full Operation OSO II mission brief. The Ambassador viewed the operation as a great opportunity to assist Panama in achieving bilateral security cooperation, while building internal security capacity, and approved the plan. Additionally, SOCSOUTH approval was needed in order for USSF to position



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Members of the Panamanian SENAFRONT and Colombian Army personnel work side-by-side sharing intelligence and refining the plan during a planning conference in Carepa, Colombia.

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SENAFRONT personnel conduct static load training under the supervision of USSF prior to a night air insertion exercise. This training event aided in building interoperability between SENAN pilots and SENAFRONT ground elements; which greatly set the conditions for successful night insertion during Operation OSO II.

03
USSOF observe as the SENAFRONT and Colombian Army leadership rehearse the ground tactical plan at the border outpost the night prior to mission execution.

04
An SFODA member looks out into the Darien jungle during insertion to the border outpost.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS COURTESY OF 7TH SFG(A)



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forward at the outpost. The SOCFWD-CENTAM Commander briefed the concept to the SOCSOUTH staff and commander for approval, and the concept was reviewed to ensure all activities were legal and within operational authorities. The SENAFRONT was informed of the approval, and they immediately began seeking authorization from their chain of command, which in the end went up to the Presidential level. This was followed by a multilateral planning conference in Carepa, Colombia, between the Panamanian SENAFRONT, Colombian Army and detachment leadership from both countries. The conference was a success as it enabled all parties involved to share intelligence, synchronize the ground tactical plan and resolve logistical friction points. The planning conference also acted as a springboard for the SFODA in Colombia to obtain the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia's permission for participation due to the operation's potential to bolster international security cooperation between Colombia and Panama. Operation OSO II was finalized as a seven-day operation to be executed Aug. 26– Sept. 1, 2017.

Into the Jungle: The only way to reach the border outposts is by air. For Operation OSO II, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement provided three helicopters to lift the SENAFRONT and USSF partners from an airbase in Meteti to the remote border outpost. This was a groundbreaking event for INL, as they are involved in training Panamanian security force pilots from the Servicio Nacional Aeronaval and each helicopter would be co-piloted by SENAN pilots during insertion for the operation. The SENAN pilots had not previously delivered

a ground force to a remote location in support of a named operation. So, in order to set the conditions and build interoperability between the pilots and ground force for the operation, the SENAFRONT and the INL-trained SENAN pits conducted a series of air mobility training events that culminated in a night insertion exercise in close proximity to the SENAFRONT's Meteti base. As a result of the training, the INL and SENAN pilots were able to conduct the Operation OSO II insertion under night vision goggles during hours of limited visibility, validating their capability to support future Panamanian security operations. Following the Panamanian insertion, the Colombians were inserted to the remote outpost via their own military helicopters. A total of four USSF personnel (three from Panama and one from Colombia), and a member of the US MIST team from Panama, were located at the outpost for the duration of the operation. The MIST team had worked with their SENAFRONT counterparts to pre-plan messages for various contingencies, and would provide reach back to the dissemination source if needed. Prior to the patrol's departure, USSF observed the Panamanian and Colombian forces through all pre-mission checks, including communications and the final patrol brief.

Throughout the execution of Operation OSO II, USSOF remained at the secured border outpost acting as the operations center, and were able to observe both the Panamanian and Colombian's processes for battle tracking, communications, medical readiness and logistical support. Detachment leadership in Medellin, Colombia, positioned themselves with the Brigade Commander and Division Operations Officer at the 7th Division Headquarters, while detachment members from the SFODA in Panama, were positioned at the SENAFRONT base in Meteti, Panama with the Eastern Brigade headquarters. Both detachments positioned at their respective partner force headquarters were able to observe the higher headquarters' ability to assay information, analyze the tactical situation and revise the plan when needed. The USSF personnel were able to provide ground truth to both the U.S. Embassies and host-nation command elements, and provide recommendations based off of USSF reporting from the secured outpost. This greatly aided in reducing the friction points for the mission. For the duration of Operation OSO II, USSOF were the bridge that flattened communications from the border outpost to mission command elements in both countries. This assisted both partner forces' ability to react quickly to information coming



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USSF assists the SENAFRONT in marking the HLZ at the border outpost in preparation to receive the ground force during hours of limited visibility.

02

The SENAFRONT conduct a pre-mission communications exercise with the Colombian army.

03

A SENAN pilot gives the air mission brief prior to insertion to the border outpost.

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The combined SENAFRONT and Colombian Army patrol following the successful clearance of the objective.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS COURTESY OF 7TH SFG(A)

ON THE OBJECTIVE, THE PANAMANIAN SENAFRONT AND COLOMBIAN ARMY CLEARED THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS AND FOUND EVIDENCE OF CARTEL ACTIVITY, ILLEGAL MINING AND POSSIBLE HUMAN SMUGGLING.



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from the ground forces. By synchronizing communications between all elements, USSOF were provided observation into how each partner force receives and reacts to information updates during a real-time operation.

On the objective, the Panamanian SENAFRONT and Colombian Army cleared their respective areas and found evidence of cartel activity, illegal mining and possible human smuggling (this was assessed based on evidence found and the state of the cartel camp). Additionally, the Panamanian SENAFRONT had several follow-on targets to be planned and executed. This would continue the momentum of Operation OSO II and include the incorporation of Colombian forces to further disrupt the numerous crossing routes within the Darien Region.

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Operation OSO II highlighted the ability of USSF to drive operations through a multi-national combined mission with a viable force to affect a threat network. Both detachments involved with this operation had demonstrated that USSF was the connective tissue to unify two countries to operate together, while building partner force capacity to combat narco-terrorism and T3N's. The Panamanian-Colombian operation further bolstered international security cooperation and enabled both partner forces to disrupt aggressive cartel activity, the movement of illicit materials by T3N's and human smuggling. More importantly, the SFODAs were able to establish their ability to be more than trainers, but rather the force multipliers that possess the capacity to coordinate, drive planning and prepare

key partners for conducting command and control of a multi-national operation at the tactical level. The need for SFODAs to build an operational level capacity with host nation forces is critical. If our partners cannot develop their own targets, understand the dynamics of the enemy, and carry out their own missions, then we have not created a capable or sustainable force. Through more operations and opportunities such as Operations OSO II, USSOF have the ability to assist in a more effective development of our host nation partners. The mutual relationship between the U.S. and our partners satisfy our most important security objective — protecting the homeland. **SW**

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FUERZAS COMANDO

Building Partnerships
through SOF Skills.

BY SOCSOUTH J7

“Fuerzas Comando is yet another link in a global network. This network brings together our hemisphere’s special operations forces and key leadership into an interlocking tribe of families, partners and true friends.”

— General Raymond A. Thomas III,
Commander, USSOCOM

Sponsored by United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and executed by Special Operations Command South (SOC-SOUTH), Fuerzas Comando is a Combatant Command Exercise and Engagement (CE2)-funded SOF skills competition and senior leader seminar designed to enhance multinational and regional cooperation, and promote mutual trust, confidence, and interoperability among U.S. and participating partner nations SOF.

Each year, the entire exercise occurs at a select partner nation, formally invited by the Commander, USSOUTHCOM, and accomplished through the execution of 1) an international SOF skills competition consisting of a series of special operations tasks for a SOF assault team and sniper team from each participating nation; and 2) a simultaneously conducted Distinguished Visitor Program (DVP) seminar which includes three senior representatives from each participating nation. This year, Panama hosted the event.

Fuerzas Comando increases training knowledge and furthers interoperability between countries in the Western Hemisphere. It is one of several multinational exercises that fosters regional relations and cooperation against common threats while maintaining partnerships that promote cooperative security arrangements. Transnational security challenges require international cooperation; USSOUTHCOM and SOCSOUTH are committed to building and sustaining enduring partnerships. 





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