



# Consolidating “Consolidation”

*Colombia’s “security and development” zones await a civilian handoff, while Washington backs away from the concept*

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## Introduction

This report is the result of an attempt to answer a question that has bedeviled state-building, stabilization, and development efforts in conflict zones worldwide: “When can the civilians take over?” Focusing on recent experiences in Colombia and comparing what we learned there with the United States’ experiences in post-surge Iraq and especially Afghanistan, WOLA sought to identify the conditions that should be in place for civilians to replace military personnel as quickly as possible in previously ungoverned and conflictive areas.

This report will lay out some of these conditions. They include clear criteria for security, as would be expected—but security has, in fact, been the easier part. The rest is up to civilians in both the U.S. government and the government receiving the aid. These conditions have proven more difficult to attain. They include civilian resources, technical and management capacity, and especially political will—as well as strong political backing (or prodding) from the highest levels.

Over the course of our research, however, we have seen this civilian handoff question lose relevance, in Colombia and elsewhere. In fact, we face the larger question of whether these ambitious stabilization and state-building programs themselves are a fading idea.

As in parts of Iraq and Afghanistan where the U.S. government has sought to leave behind a functioning government presence, Colombia is also in the midst of a multibillion-dollar, U.S.-backed effort to bring the state into violent, historically ungoverned territories. Colombia’s National Territorial Consolidation Plan (*Plan Nacional de Consolidación Territorial*), which this report will refer to as “Consolidation,” made notable security gains in specific territories and communities. Military personnel, and a few civilian specialists and contractors, reduced illegal armed groups’ presence, and then launched small, but high profile, infrastructure and development projects. They endeavored to convince the population that the state’s presence was desirable and permanent.

In all cases, however—in Colombia as well as in the U.S. occupations—uniformed military personnel were still, by a wide margin, the government representatives with whom citizens, especially in rural areas, interacted most frequently. For several reasons discussed here, the civilian part of the Colombian (and Afghan) government remained largely absent. Critics of the model, including some in the communities themselves,

worried that the model was bringing short-term military occupation instead of long-term governance.

By mid-2012, though, the still-relevant question of military-to-civilian transitions was being eclipsed by a more fundamental concern: “Does this concept have a future?” During the year between posing our initial question and the publication of this paper, the Consolidation model and its closest U.S. analogue, the “Stability Operations” component of counterinsurgency (COIN), have lost significant momentum within the Colombian and U.S. leaderships. The problem has grown so acute that key personnel are now leaving.

Frustration with both the Colombian and Afghan models may be justified, as they have been more costly than expected and—as we shall see—military-to-civilian transitions have been difficult to implement. Troublingly, though, it is not clear whether reforms are imminent, or what will be replacing them.

In Colombia, the government that took power in 2010 has placed much greater emphasis on a land restitution program and a new attempt to negotiate peace with the largest guerrilla group. These efforts are audacious and necessary. But even if a successful negotiation erases the country’s current guerrilla groups from the map, Colombia will still face yawning gaps of governance and justice in vast areas of this map. These gaps will breed further violence and make land restitution dangerous for many beneficiaries, if Colombia lacks a plan to fill them.

The Consolidation program—if it could achieve a true civilian transition—appeared to be such a plan. That is why its apparent decline is so disturbing.

## Colombia’s National Territorial Consolidation Plan: 2004-2010

With heavy U.S. support, Colombia has pursued its National Territorial Consolidation Plan in several violent, poorly governed rural zones. It has come to guide much U.S. support for Colombia, the largest recipient of U.S. security assistance outside the Middle East and Afghanistan.

## THE SUCCESSOR TO PLAN COLOMBIA

Consolidation is the conceptual successor to Plan Colombia, the counter-drug and counterterrorist strategy that began with a dramatic increase in U.S. aid to Colombia in 2000. Aid levels are lower today than during the peak Plan Colombia years of 2000-2007,

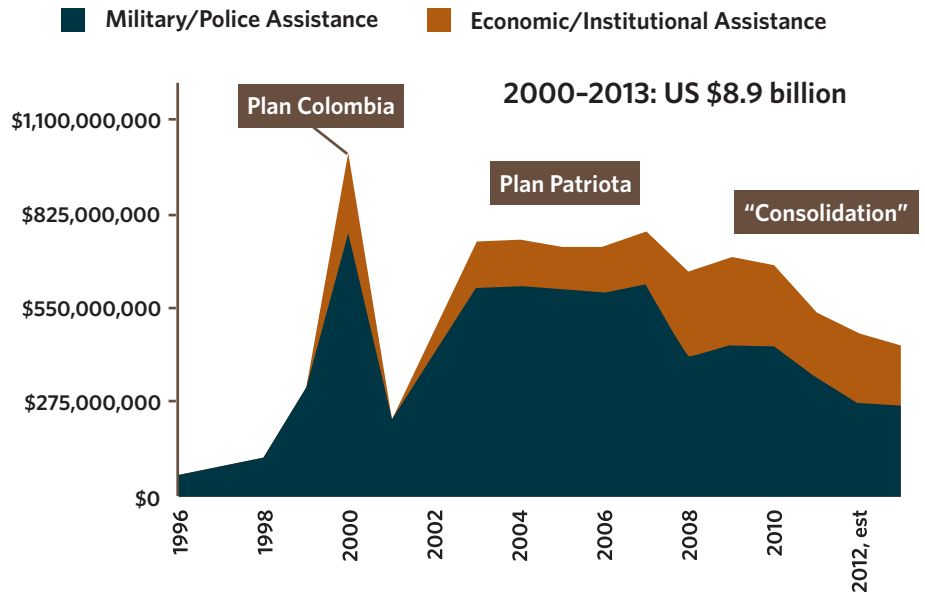
but Colombia remains the Western Hemisphere's number one U.S. aid recipient and among the world's top seven U.S. military and police aid recipients.<sup>1</sup>

Plan Colombia began as a counter-drug program. It sought to reduce cultivation of coca, the plant used to make cocaine, by expanding a program of aerial herbicide fumigation over vast rural and jungle territories with virtually no on-the-ground government presence. These territories were highly insecure, due to the presence of leftist guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) and National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN), and right-wing paramilitary groups—until 2006 confederated in the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC)—that had sprung up to fill the vacuum. As a result, Plan Colombia funded the creation, equipping, and training of specialized mobile military units, among them a new Counter-Drug Brigade (*Brigada Contra el Narcotráfico*) in the Colombian Army. These units' mission was to make these territories secure enough for coca eradication. In some areas, the U.S. and Colombian governments established some hastily arranged crop substitution programs, most of which failed for lack of coordination with security efforts and lack of sustained support.

Plan Colombia dovetailed with a buildup, funded mainly by Colombia, of the country's military and police. This buildup accelerated with the 2002 election of President Alvaro Uribe, whose Democratic Security (*Seguridad Democrática*) policy intensified the anti-guerrilla offensive. Colombia's armed forces roughly doubled, and their budget nearly tripled, between 1998 and 2010.<sup>2</sup>

The armed forces' increased mobility and air superiority, in part a result of U.S.-donated aircraft, removed guerrillas from population centers and main roads. The nation's homicide rate fell by half between 2002 and 2010, making Colombia the only Latin

## U.S. AID TO COLOMBIA



Source: [www.justf.org/Country?country=Colombia](http://www.justf.org/Country?country=Colombia).

American country to experience such a drop during a period of rising citizen insecurity. Cultivation of coca dropped between 2001 and 2003, though it appeared to hit a plateau during much of the rest of the decade.

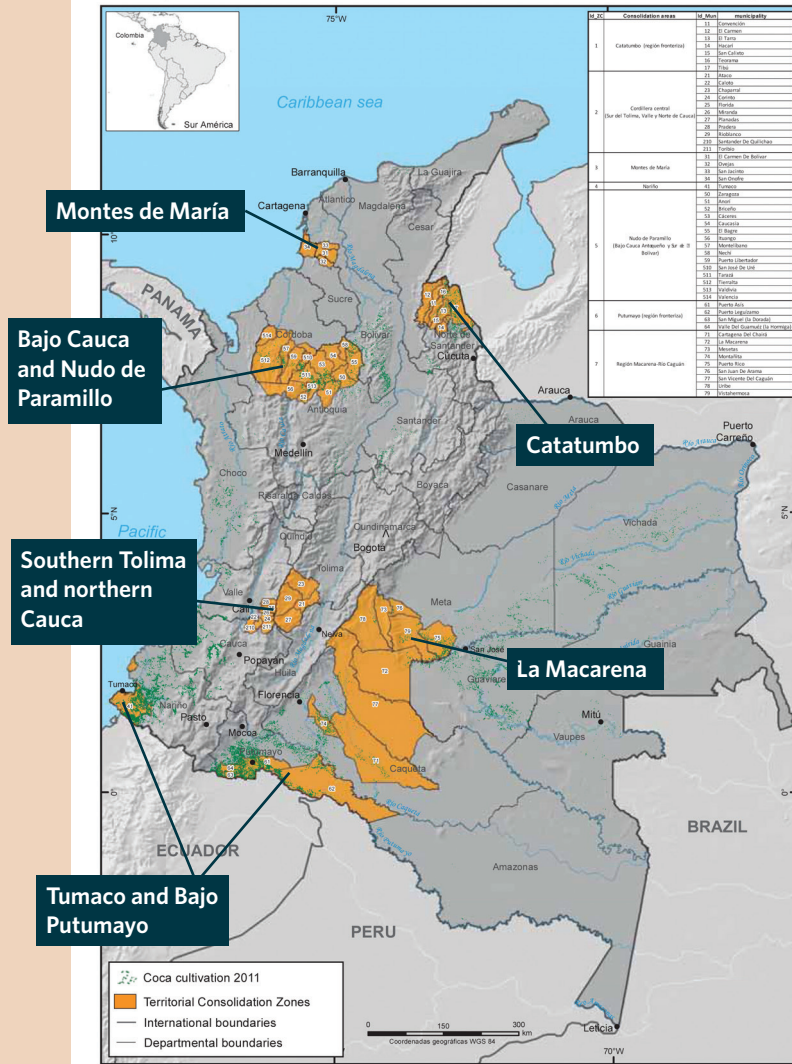
By the mid-2000s, in fact, it was evident that this mostly military and eradication-based strategy was not going to finish the job. Not only did it come with some shocking human rights violations—including a scandal in which soldiers allegedly murdered as many as 3,000 civilians and presented them as combat kills—but Plan Colombia and Democratic Security failed to address a fundamental cause of Colombia's chronic insurgency and drug-trafficking woes.<sup>3</sup>

The vast rural zones targeted by aerial fumigation remained almost completely ungoverned. In the country's Amazon and Orinoco basin plains and jungles, in its borderlands and along the Pacific Coast—more than half the national territory—coca growing persisted or moved elsewhere along Colombia's immense agricultural frontier. Here, guerrillas and new paramilitary units, even if diminished and pushed out of population centers, managed to regroup.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States was more willing to move beyond Plan Colombia's initial counter-drug focus. Just as U.S. forces combated insurgents in Iraq and

CURRENT CONSOLIDATION ZONES

Map 17. National territorial consolidation and reconstruction policy



Sources: Government of Colombia, for coca cultivation National monitoring system supported by UNODC. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

Map Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Green areas indicate 2011 coca cultivation.

southern Colombia that, because of the Colombian government’s neglect, was a historical FARC stronghold. Plan Patriota enjoyed easy initial victories as guerrillas, no match for the military’s numbers and airpower, retreated from jungle towns they once controlled.

Plan Patriota had a fatal flaw, however. It came with no plan to bring the rest of the Colombian government into these zones in order actually to govern them. “[E]ach military victory requires the COLAR [Colombian Army] to occupy more territory, leading it to convert mobile brigades into units of fixed area control and reducing offensive capacity,” noted a 2006 cable from the U.S. embassy.<sup>4</sup> A December 2005 cable noted “low morale, a hostile environment, disease, resource shortages, and an inability to drive the FARC out of the area.”<sup>5</sup>

Armed forces units established strongholds in the Plan Patriota zone’s few towns. Yet even today, rural areas beyond the towns—including the tertiary roads between them—remain

Afghanistan, Congress approved a legal change to allow U.S. counter-drug aid to support the Colombian government’s fight against armed groups, especially the FARC and ELN, two leftist guerrilla groups whose origins date back to the mid-1960s. Starting in late 2003 and early 2004, U.S. support, intelligence, advice and guidance made possible Plan Patriota, an offensive that brought tens of thousands of ground troops to a large swath of rural

ceded to the guerrillas. With this experience came a greater realization that only a full state presence, one that goes well beyond the military to incorporate the state’s civilian institutions, can secure places like Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, Cauca, or Putumayo, and integrate them into Colombia’s civic and economic life in a way that improves living standards. This realization represented a break with Colombia’s historic pattern of leaving



peripheral areas ungoverned, in the hands of warlords, or up to the military.

### A PHASED, SEQUENCED PROGRAM

In a process that began with a Southern Command-sponsored conference in 2004 and built momentum by 2006, a new concept emerged in the Colombian government, under the stewardship of Defense Minister (now President) Juan Manuel Santos and Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo. The Defense Ministry, in close consultation with the U.S. Embassy, chose fifteen priority zones, each one consisting of a few ungoverned municipalities (counties), for “consolidation” of state presence. The zones were chosen according to frequency of armed group activity, unmet need for basic social services, and either presence of coca cultivation or use as a “corridor” for trafficking drugs or arms.

By 2007 the Defense Ministry, working with a small coordinating body in the Colombian Presidency’s Social Action (*Acción Social*) office called the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (*Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral*, CCAI), had prioritized one particular zone for a pilot project that would receive most of the program’s initial resources. This was the Serranía de La Macarena region, an expanse of six (later expanded to nine) municipalities, beginning about 150 miles south of Bogotá. The La Macarena region had been in FARC hands almost from the group’s inception, and much of its leadership had traditionally been headquartered in its savannas and jungles. It had twice hosted failed peace talks with the Colombian government and had become one of the country’s principal coca-growing zones.

The design of this pilot program, which would come to be known as the La Macarena Integral Consolidation Program (*Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena*, PCIM), envisioned a phased, sequenced approach to establish a presence of the entire government, building this presence from virtually nothing. Given the zone’s precarious security situation, the first wave would be almost entirely military: armed forces units would carry out offensive operations to evict guerrillas from the zone, disrupt their support and supply networks, and accompany coca eradication.

Once the guerrilla presence was cleared or reduced from the region’s main towns, other state representatives would enter: principally police, prosecutors, and some development workers

carrying out “quick impact” projects. Because of security concerns these small but highly visible projects, usually infrastructure improvements, had to occur under tight military protection—and in some cases were carried out by the soldiers themselves. Communities would be engaged about their development needs, and assistance would begin to flow to productive projects, usually technical and financial support for growers of specific chosen crops.

As these efforts presumably increased security and trust in the state, the plan foresaw other civilian agencies that provide basic services, both from the central and from departmental and municipal governments, increasing their presence and activities. The end result would be a “consolidated” zone in which a functioning, mostly civilian state was providing services in a secure environment to a population fully able to participate in the nation’s politics and economy. Soldiers would then be freed up to start the first phases of similar operations in new regions.

### THE CCAI: INNOVATIVE BUT WEAK

The Consolidation concept originated (with heavy U.S. input) in Colombia’s Defense Ministry, and much of its momentum came from the energies of Defense Minister Santos and Vice Minister Jaramillo. These officials realized, however, that the new program’s success required it to be a “whole-of-government” effort, with buy-in from the civilian part of the state. For this reason the CCAI, which was at least nominally charged with managing the program until a late 2011 shift (discussed below), was located in Colombia’s Presidency, not the Defense Ministry. The CCAI could make plans and set policy, and its Bogotá office included liaisons (usually junior-to-mid-level staff) from cabinet ministries and other civilian agencies. A 2009 decree from President Uribe gave the CCAI legal standing and called on other government entities to honor its requests to help meet needs in the Consolidation zones.

The CCAI, however, had very little budgetary authority of its own. Its officials, with help from allies in the Defense Ministry, had to cajole and convince counterparts throughout the government to divert resources from their existing budgets for projects in the Consolidation zones. The Defense Ministry, together with the Presidency’s Social Action office, was the most generous during these initial years, and it—along with the principal foreign donor, the United States—played

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the predominant role in the Consolidation program’s operations during the CCAI period.

### U.S. SUPPORT

It is difficult to estimate the amount of support that the U.S. government has provided to Colombia’s Consolidation effort since its inception. Though it is theoretically possible, for instance, to get an estimate of the Southern Command’s expenses incurred hosting conferences and sending advisors, or the approximate percentage of helicopter fuel and maintenance contracts that went to support operations in Consolidation zones, doing so would likely require a years-long series of Freedom of Information Act inquiries. In our view, though, a fair estimate of U.S. funds spent on activities in Consolidation zones is between US\$500 million and US\$1 billion between 2007 and 2012. (We estimate all U.S. aid to Colombia during those six years totaling US\$3.82 billion.<sup>6</sup>) This includes support for military operations, eradication of coca, quick impact projects, economic development projects, training and advice, and support of offices administering the program. It also includes US\$227 million in multi-year United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contracts issued in support of Consolidation in 2010 and 2011.<sup>7</sup>

### IN LA MACARENA, PROGRESS

In the La Macarena Integral Consolidation Plan (PCIM) region, where the most resources were dedicated, Consolidation appeared to make quick progress. By 2009 the military and some police—especially those in the National Police counter-narcotics unit—had established a more or less permanent presence in all county seats (*cabeceras municipales*) and several other important population centers.

While the FARC presence remained strong outside of town centers, guerrilla attacks and acts of sabotage dropped sharply, as did homicides and other measures of violent crime. According to Colombia’s police and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 77 percent of coca grown in the PCIM region was eradicated between 2007 and 2010, and in some (though certainly not all) cases, authorities

offered families whose crops were eradicated access to food security and other short-term assistance.<sup>8</sup>

With support from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI, a small, less bureaucratic facility focused on short-term projects in unstable environments), 538 quick impact projects were completed in La Macarena during this period, from small road improvements to school construction to water projects.<sup>9</sup> New police stations opened in six towns.<sup>10</sup> Social Action and CCAI, together with Colombia’s armed forces, met with community leaders and agreed on priorities for projects to support agricultural production. By 2010, US\$254 million had gone into the non-military side of the Consolidation effort in the PCIM region: 75 percent of it from Colombian government sources (mainly the Defense Ministry, the Presidency and the local departmental government, with most of the rest from the U.S. government), and 65 percent of it for infrastructure.<sup>11</sup>

The La Macarena zone quickly became a showcase. Between 2008 and 2011, this former guerrilla stronghold hosted visits from U.S. congressional delegations, several deputy secretaries of Defense, a CIA chief, a White House drug czar, a deputy secretary of state, a Joint Chiefs chairman, two Southern Command commanders, and at least one assistant administrator of USAID. Journalists from major U.S. periodicals visited as well; nearly all produced positive coverage.

Among the visitors were U.S. military and security planners facing similar challenges in “Panama, Mexico, Afghanistan, Paraguay, and other countries,” according to a January 2010 State Department cable.<sup>12</sup> The program offered “a remedy palatable to a Democratic-led U.S. Congress not only interested in emphasizing social development over military aid for this country but also looking for solutions to consider in Afghanistan,” read a May 2009 *Washington Post* report.<sup>13</sup>

Cross-pollination between the Consolidation model and the counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan even involved visits of high Colombian officers to Kabul to share their experience, as well as visits to Kabul of Colombian police trainers.<sup>14</sup> “This concept applied in Afghanistan is something that could really help,”



## TIMELINE OF COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL TERRITORIAL CONSOLIDATION PROGRAM

### 2004

- ▶ **The Plan Patriota offensive establishes a military presence in town centers** through a broad, previously ungoverned swath of southern Colombia. The rest of the state remains largely absent, while FARC persists in the territory's rural zones.
- ▶ **U.S. Southern Command presents a proposal to Colombia's Defense Ministry** and President Alvaro Uribe to create the CCAI. A series of planning meetings follow in 2004-2006.

### 2006

- ▶ **Juan Manuel Santos becomes Defense Minister of Colombia**, and Sergio Jaramillo, his Vice Minister, takes on management of the Consolidation program.

### 2007

- ▶ **USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives begins its support of Consolidation.**
- ▶ **CCAI launches its main pilot project, the La Macarena Integrated Consolidation Plan (PCIM).** The zone will see security improvements in town centers and reduced coca cultivation over the following few years.

### 2009

- ▶ **CCAI Coordination Centers are formed** to manage operations in La Macarena and Montes de María.
- ▶ **A presidential directive moves the CCAI out of the Defense Ministry** and into the Presidency's Social Action office.
- ▶ **Defense Minister Santos seeks to place Consolidation at the center of a defense strategy**, which he calls the "Strategic Leap," that is more solidly based on counterinsurgency.
- ▶ **Defense Minister Santos resigns in order to run for president.** Vice Minister Jaramillo resigns several months later.

### 2010

- ▶ **Juan Manuel Santos is elected President.** He names Jaramillo his National Security Advisor.
- ▶ **The Santos government announces that the Consolidation program will be undergoing a thorough reorganization process** to "institutionalize" it.
- ▶ **USAID approves the first of three contracts, together totaling US\$227 million**, to support Consolidation in several zones.

### 2011

- ▶ **USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives leaves Colombia.**
- ▶ **Colombia approves a Victims' and Land Restitution Law.**
- ▶ **After more than a year, the Consolidation program is reorganized as the Special Management Unit for Territorial Consolidation** within the Presidency's Social Prosperity office, the successor to Social Action. Alvaro Balcázar, head of the PCIM, is named to direct this new Unit.

### 2012

- ▶ **The Special Management Unit runs into crisis** as the Santos government refuses to hire Balcázar's nominees for key positions.
- ▶ **The Colombian government enters into peace talks** with the FARC guerrillas.
- ▶ **Balcázar resigns and is replaced by German Chamorro de la Rosa**, a veterinarian who managed President Santos' campaign in Nariño department in 2010.

Defense Minister Santos said during a March 2009 visit from U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen.

And we have particular experiences, like crop eradication, like the integrated fight against trafficking whereby we go after every link in the chain. In Afghanistan there are some jobs that are more important or less important than those that

we have here, but the concept is applicable there. It is in this way that we think our experience could contribute in some way to solving the problem in Afghanistan or the problem in Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

By 2009, support for Consolidation had become the axis of U.S. aid to Colombia, essentially replacing the Plan Colombia framework. The Colombia Strategic

Development Initiative, or CSDI, was the label the U.S. government gave its military and economic support for Consolidation, billing it as the counterpart to the Merida Initiative in Mexico, the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). The CSDI intended to support Consolidation in five to seven of the program’s chosen zones.<sup>16</sup>

### The “Stability Operations” concept in Washington

The approach represented by Consolidation, long derided in Washington as overambitious, costly “nation-building,” gained in appeal during the Bush administration’s second term. This was in part due to the 2006 midterm election, which gave congressional majorities to a Democratic Party that preferred to fund a less military-heavy approach in Colombia and elsewhere. But it owed even more to the national mood, frustrated with worsening violence in U.S.-occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, which helped sweep the opposition party into power.

By 2004-2005, just as Colombia was having difficulty holding on to territories gained through the Plan Patriota offensive, the pursuit of a military occupation strategy without a civilian governance component—“clear” without “hold” and “build,” in security planners’ parlance—was extracting an even higher toll on the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Though U.S. troops could weaken insurgents and exert some control over the population in cities like Fallujah and Ramadi, actually governing them proved much harder, and violence persisted or worsened. In Afghanistan, vast areas continued to be no-man’s lands in which the Karzai government’s writ was absent, violence was the norm, and opium poppy cultivation proliferated. The word “quagmire” came into frequent use to describe both occupations.

### THE REVIVAL OF COIN

In response, first in the U.S. military, then in the State Department, USAID, and elsewhere in the executive branch, a new set of strategies began to take shape, incorporating elements that had been all but abandoned after the Vietnam War.

The shift began after the September 11, 2001 attacks. U.S. officials and security planners, alert to scenarios of future vulnerability, came to view the mere existence of “ungoverned spaces” around the world,

with their potential to harbor terrorist groups, as a national security threat. “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones,” declared President Bush’s September 2002 National Security Strategy.<sup>17</sup> Six years later, the U.S. Army’s revamped Stability Operations manual would concur: “The greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people.”<sup>18</sup>

Then, as the military occupiers of Iraq and Afghanistan found themselves facing growing insurgencies, the objective changed further. Instead of simply combating enemy groups and securing territory, the emphasis shifted toward winning the support and trust of the ungoverned territory’s population. The insurgents killing U.S. personnel and sowing chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan, officials concluded, could best be weakened by convincing the civilian population to shift, or establish, allegiances in favor of the Iraqi and Afghan states (and their U.S. partners).

It also became evident, at least at the policy and planning level, that this larger mission could not be left up to the U.S. military alone. While making the population feel secure was a crucial first step, winning its support for the state would require providing a host of services—from justice to roads to food security—that the armed forces are not equipped to deliver on their own.

A milestone for this realization was National Security Presidential Directive 44, which the Bush administration issued in December 2005. This document called for a new approach to stability operations based on interagency integration. It placed the State Department formally in the lead through a recently created office, the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), which sought to institutionalize civilian agencies’ central role in efforts to establish governance in insecure, ungoverned territories.<sup>19</sup> A week before NSPD 44’s release, the Defense Department issued its own guidance, Directive 3000.05, laying out the military’s own responsibilities in such operations.

The new thinking was further cemented by the U.S. Army and Marines December 2006 counterinsurgency (COIN) field manual, authored principally by Gen. David Petraeus, who would go on to command U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and then head the CIA. The manual called for a population-centric



SIMILAR DIAGRAMS

**Secuencia y convergencia de los esfuerzos del Estado y el avance de la seguridad**

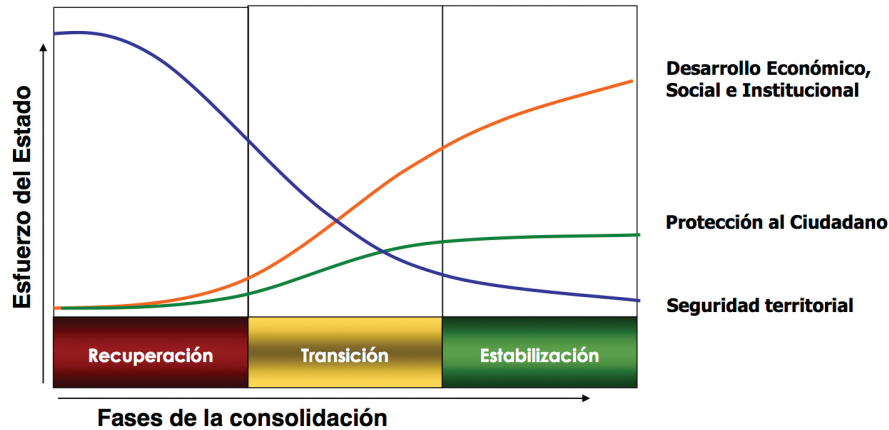
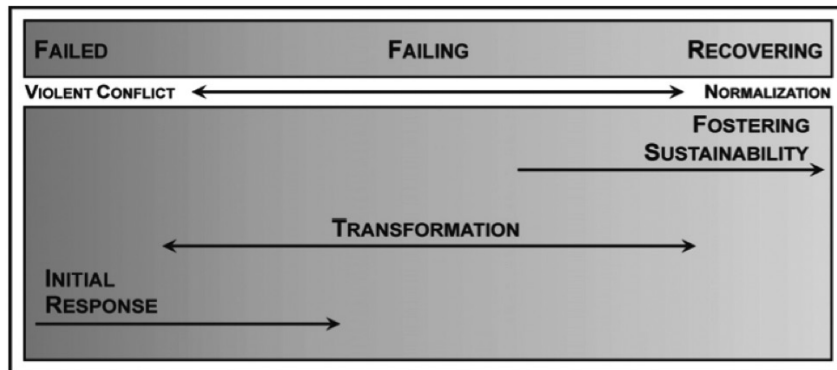


Image source: CCAI PowerPoint presentation, 2011.



**Figure 2-4. The stability operations framework**

Image Source: U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07: Stability Operations.

approach to territories beset by violent insurgencies and explicitly called for the participation of civilian government agencies in the effort. It would guide much of the post-2006 “surge” that reduced violence in Iraq and the post-2008 effort in Afghanistan.

Another U.S. military field manual, the U.S. Army’s October 2008 Stability Operations guide, further fleshed out the approach to state-building and providing “civilian” services to the population in ungoverned areas. “Stability operations are fundamental to COIN,” the document declared.

“Stability operations are the ‘build’ in the COIN process of ‘clear, hold, build.’”<sup>20</sup>

In targeted areas, the Stability Operations manual prescribed a phased, sequenced approach that closely resembled that foreseen in Colombia’s Consolidation zones. Even the stylized graphics explaining the approach in the programs’ public documents looked similar to the CCAI’s renderings.

As manuals for military personnel, these documents include only a few references to civilian governance. The COIN manual in particular envisions soldiers

*The COIN manual in particular envisions soldiers and Marines themselves taking on new, not inherently military, roles, and interacting constantly with local populations.*

and Marines themselves taking on new, not inherently military, roles, and interacting constantly with local populations.

The U.S. government's espousal of COIN and its stability operations component hit its high-water mark in the early years of the Obama administration, in Afghanistan. Beginning in the fall of 2009, with Gen. Petraeus at the helm of U.S. Central Command, the U.S. government invested heavily in efforts to improve governance and win over populations, with a particular focus on the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. In what at times appeared to be a "laboratory" or "proof of concept" approach, specialized military units and hybrid State-USAID-military "Provincial Reconstruction Teams" (PRTs) focused on specific regional goals like providing basic services, fostering development projects, reforming security institutions, or strengthening local governance. The effort included an unusual tolerance of opium poppy growing when alternative economic support was not in place—a key difference from Colombia, where eradication was a central component. It also included rules of engagement that placed greater emphasis on human rights, requiring unusual restraint from the U.S. military personnel mixed in with the population.

The Obama administration's experiment gradually came to include a greater civilian role. While the office was created in 2004, notes Johanna Mendelson Forman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "it was not until 2009 that S/CRS [the State Department's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization] actually engaged" in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> "The 2008 elections brought a change to U.S. policy. The Obama administration, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the lead, reasserted civilian leadership in the area of reconstruction."

#### **WHEN CAN THE CIVILIANS TAKE OVER?**

Civilian leadership at the core, however, did not mean that the face of U.S.-supported stability operations, when seen on the ground in Afghanistan, became a civilian one. The U.S. (and to a lesser extent the Afghan) military remains the predominant presence.

The question of "When can the civilians take over?" remains unresolved in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"In COIN it is always preferred for civilians to perform civilian tasks. Whenever possible, civilian agencies or individuals with the greatest applicable expertise should perform a task," reads the 2006 Army-Marines Counterinsurgency Manual. "[H]owever," it goes on,

[T]he ability of such agencies to deploy to foreign countries in sustainable numbers and with ready access to necessary resources is usually limited. The violence level in the AO [area of operations] also affects civilian agencies' ability to operate. The more violent the environment, the more difficult it is for civilians to operate effectively. Hence, the preferred or ideal division of labor is frequently unattainable.<sup>22</sup>

**Security** is the principal barrier to civilian entry. Today, Afghanistan's "proof of concept" zones remain violent, susceptible to frequent Taliban attack. This should not be surprising after only a few years; a counterinsurgency effort can take decades. However, it means that to this day, basic services are provided either by civilians who can only venture out with tight military security, or by military personnel themselves.

The civilianization question most often gets framed, then, in security terms. While the reality is far more gradual than "throwing a switch," COIN literature contends that the environment can support a military stand-down and a civilian takeover when it passes from "contingency" to "steady state." That is, when instead of a special emergency circumstance in which the likelihood of violent aggression is too high, the zone exhibits—in the words of the Stability Operations manual—"a relatively secure environment free from most wide-scale violence."<sup>23</sup>

There appear to be no hard-and-fast criteria for judging when this threshold has been crossed, and the situation is too dangerous for civilian governance. Obviously, though, the relative frequency of armed-group attacks, homicides, threats, and similar violence offer quantifiable—and thus the most readily available—



measures. Determining the presence of a “steady state,” however, is a case-by-case endeavor requiring reliable intelligence to determine the likely permanence of any lull in violence.

A 2011 Rand Corporation report about the U.S. experience sought to outline some criteria for a civilian takeover, which it called a “COIN transition.”<sup>24</sup> It found four:

- ▶ The level of violence between the government and the insurgents has been declining over the previous 12 to 24 months.
- ▶ Political, judicial and similar reforms are being pursued.
- ▶ The population interacts with and supports the security forces and government representatives and assistance workers.
- ▶ The police forces of the government combating the insurgency are taking over responsibility for internal security from indigenous (and any foreign) military forces.

These are all security criteria. In fact, reckonings of “lessons learned” from the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan offer a few clues about conditions **other than security** that should be in place if civilians—whether U.S. government representatives or, preferably, state officials of the country itself—are to be able to take over from the armed forces.

While security is the principal—or at least the initial—challenge, it often masks other factors impeding civilian involvement. In Afghanistan, these have included a lack of capacity and rampant corruption among civilian authorities, and the U.S. government’s own enormous, persistent imbalance between military and civilian capacities for Stability Operations. While the State Department has endeavored to build a Civilian Response Corps “to deploy rapidly to provide conflict prevention and stabilization assistance,” this body remains tiny and underfunded; its website has not been updated since mid-2011. USAID is similarly hamstrung by a lack of resources, especially personnel; its stabilization programs must rely heavily on private contractors.

In the intermediate stage when violence is reduced but by no means a steady state, the U.S. government has relied on hybrid military-civilian models like PRTs, whose record has been mixed. (PRTs do not operate in Colombia.) Passing from these to a more civilian—or better yet, an Afghan or local government—effort has proved more difficult. The main reasons appear

to be existing civilian capacities—both Afghan and American—and a lack of political will to improve them.

### In Colombia, the civilians don’t take over: 2010-2012

The experience of Colombia—which has a much more capable, institutionalized state than post-invasion Iraq and Afghanistan—offers several more criteria for what must happen on the civilian side if the civilians are ever to “take over.”

By 2009-2010, the RAND Corporation’s four security criteria were on their way to being satisfied in parts of Colombia’s La Macarena and Montes de María Consolidation zones (the latter a historically conflictive zone, with little current guerrilla presence, near Colombia’s Caribbean coast). Still, there was little evidence that the rest of the government was arriving with sufficient strength to replace the soldiers.

Some Colombian government documents acknowledge this. A late 2009 CCAI PowerPoint presentation noted “the National Police’s deployment is slow once territorial recovery has been secured,” that there had been a “lack of response on the part of the Agrarian Bank” to provide credit to farmers in La Macarena, and “INCODER [the Agriculture Ministry’s land-distribution agency] has failed to respond by titling productive un-owned land.”<sup>25</sup> A government source told the Colombian investigative journalism site *La Silla Vacía* (The Empty Chair) that “[d]uring the Uribe government the Transportation Ministry never wanted to get seriously involved.”<sup>26</sup>

The United States and other donor nations, WikiLeaks cables indicate, were also quite aware of the problem and sought gently to prod the Colombian government to increase its civilian presence and participation in Consolidation. “The lag in effective participation of civilian ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, and other actors undermines the PCIM [La Macarena Integrated Consolidation Plan] model of integrated state action,” noted a January 2010 cable.<sup>27</sup> “The current ad hoc inter-institutional process will result in poorly coordinated interventions that lack a long-term, structural impact.”

The same document lamented that police takeover of security responsibilities from the armed forces “continues to lag” in La Macarena and that it took “nearly two years of lobbying to secure” the presence of a special prosecutor and two investigators from Colombia’s Prosecutor General’s Office (*Fiscalía*

## SO, WHEN CAN THE CIVILIANS TAKE OVER?

Our inquiry in Colombia and in Washington revealed the following criteria.

### SECURITY CRITERIA:

- ▶ Steady state security conditions: the territory has experienced reductions in measures of violence. These reductions have been sustained for at least a year, ideally more.
- ▶ While security conditions remain yellow, reforms to local governance have begun in earnest.
- ▶ A significant portion of the local population—ideally a majority as measured by polling and participation in development planning meetings—desires to participate, and desires a greater state presence.

### CIVILIAN READINESS CRITERIA:

- ▶ Civilian government bodies have sufficient resources to participate.
- ▶ Civilian government bodies have sufficient trained personnel to deploy to the territory.
- ▶ Civilian government bodies are included in the design of the program; this design is not simply handed down from the military.
- ▶ Civilian government bodies have bought into the program and have the will to participate—OR they are compelled to do so by legislation and by hands-on encouragement from the highest levels of the executive branch.

*General de la Nación*) in the La Macarena zone—meaning that the judicial branch remained almost completely absent. These officials, meanwhile, were tasked to investigate only crimes related to terrorism and drug trafficking. A 2009 cable singled out the Agriculture Ministry as “a reluctant interlocutor and generally absent from the PNC [National Consolidation Plan] interagency coordinating process.”<sup>28</sup>

A late 2009 cable noted La Macarena Consolidation officials’ “perception of a lack of clear, sustained political will at the national level to ensure effective participation of responsible line ministries and other resource drivers.”<sup>29</sup> This was in evidence in August 2009, another cable details:

The third CCAI senior coordinating meeting (*Comite Directivo*) was held on August 18. Despite a letter from President Uribe’s office to ministries directing them to support the PNC, no ministers or vice-ministers attended. Key ministries, such as Agriculture, did not send any delegate, while the Ministry of Interior and Justice representative said her ministry was too preoccupied with other business to prepare a report.<sup>30</sup>

In a January 2010 discussion, international donors agreed that the civilians had a long way to go, with much of the non-military work left up to the Presidency’s Social Action [*Acción Social*] office.

On GOC leadership, the head of the CDA [Canadian Development Agency] said that Accion Social — the lead civilian agency for the PNC [National Consolidation Plan] — was “showing all its warts” through its guidance of the consolidation process. The senior official of the Dutch Development Corporation said that although Accion Social was not suited for a leadership role, there was no alternative and it was necessary to continue encouraging it. The Canadian Political Counselor expressed concern about key personnel being stretched thin, given that PNC leaders all had “day jobs.”

“Donors’ concerns about the PNC echo our own,” the cable concludes, “but like us, donors believe the challenges are not insurmountable.”<sup>31</sup>

Outside of the La Macarena and Montes de María Consolidation zones (and perhaps southern Tolima, which WOLA has not visited but where officials say there has been progress), it seems to make little sense even to entertain the “when can the civilians take over” question. In the remaining zones—Tumaco, Bajo Cauca and Nudo de Paramillo, Cauca, Putumayo, Catatumbo—the program is simply too incipient (or insufficiently launched), and the security situation is too volatile, even to begin asking about when the armed forces can give way to civilians. Only in mid-2012, as USAID contracts have come on line, have large-scale projects begun in some of these areas.

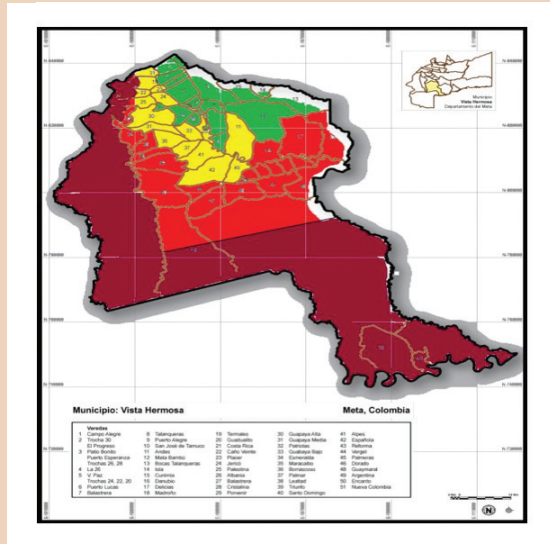
### SECURITY CONDITIONS

In parts of La Macarena and the Montes de María, security conditions have approached the “steady state” viewed as necessary for a greater civilian government presence. In fact, the Colombian government, particularly its Defense Ministry, has developed a relatively sophisticated system for determining when such conditions exist.

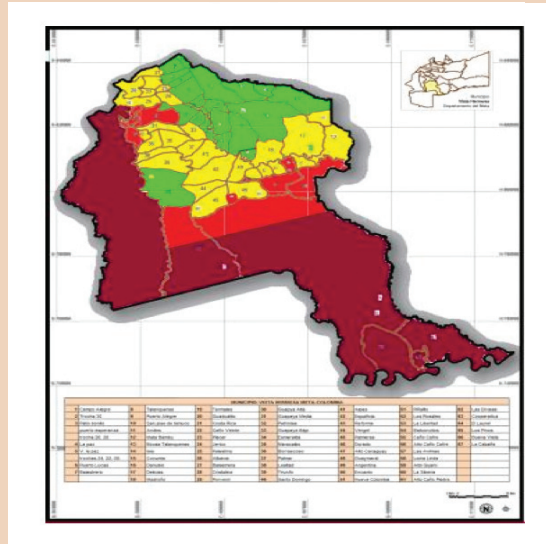
It feeds real-time data and intelligence analysis into frequently updated “stoplight maps” of the

## SPOTLIGHT MAPS

Diciembre 2007



Marzo 2011



This CCAI PowerPoint graphic indicates changes in the security conditions “stoplight” in villages of Vista Hermosa, the municipality where the La Macarena Consolidation Program is headquartered, between December 2007 and March 2011. The darker red in the south indicates national parkland, which includes a significant guerrilla presence.

security situation in Consolidation zones. Areas of “contingency” or “non-permissive security” in which all state representatives need constant military accompaniment are depicted in red. Areas considered to be “consolidated” or “steady-state,” in which civilian government representatives can do their work unguarded, are green. Areas in between, “transition zones” where violence is reduced but its likelihood remains high, are yellow.<sup>32</sup>

In Consolidation zones, these maps are maintained at the sub-municipal level, by individual *vereda* (hamlet). They nearly always show county seats filled in green, with surrounding areas and other principal towns yellow, and more remote towns and rural zones nearly always red. In the La Macarena zone, reads a 2011 document from Colombia’s Ideas for Peace Foundation,

[A] very important FARC presence exists in the rural zones, in hamlets far from the town centers. For example, in the majority of municipalities the [guerrilla] recruitment of young people and children persists, with particular intensity in Vistahermosa. In hamlets like La Cooperativa, the population fears giving information about these activities

because they suspect that the state presence will be temporary, and that the guerrillas’ return is inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

The stoplight maps, if regularly updated, offer a useful tool for gauging whether a “steady state” exists (although we have heard local community leaders dispute the designation of zones they believe to be unsafe as green). However, firsthand observation and dozens of interviews confirm that green has generally not meant “civilians actively taking over from the armed forces” in the Consolidation zones. Even when security conditions are favorable, the “When can the civilians take over?” question remains unanswered.

### SLOW-MOVING CIVILIANS

Numerous interviews with observers and communities, the majority carried out in November 2011, May 2012, and September 2012, coincide that the civilian part of Colombia’s government is proving extremely slow to show up in the Consolidation zones. Even in the town centers of green zones, the presence of the Ministries of Health, Education, and Transportation, as well as justice system and internal control agencies, remains scarce. In La Macarena, except for county seats and the



few towns where police stations were built, even the Colombian National Police was largely absent (with the partial exception of the elite, specialized, police counter-narcotics division).

The Presidency’s Social Action office, the titular coordinator of the program, has maintained a small presence of engineers and development specialists in the zones. It has done so in tandem with USAID (and USAID/OTI) contractors carrying out quick impact projects, productive projects, planning sessions, and training workshops. Departmental (provincial) and municipal officials’ performance and presence has also varied; in Meta department, which includes the La Macarena zone, the departmental government, flush with cash from oil royalties, increased spending on infrastructure. But these were exceptions: in terms of manpower, resources and roles, the Colombian military has been the overwhelming presence even in the “green” areas of the Consolidation map.

This leads to another criterion of “when the civilians can take over” that has little to do with security. *Civilian agencies can take over from the armed forces when they are willing—or sufficiently compelled by incentives—to do so.*

Civilian agencies’ willingness or compulsion has been absent, despite frequent cajoling from CCAI, Social Action, and the Defense Ministry, and despite a 2009 presidential decree requiring other ministries to prioritize the Consolidation zones in their spending plans. The Consolidation program, according to many interviews, has yet to achieve the entire state’s full buy-in.

### REASONS FOR THE CIVILIANS’ DELAY

There are several reasons for the foot-dragging, some rather petty and some valid. The first is simply the dynamic that bureaucracies exhibit around the world: resistance to change, interagency rivalry, caution, and slowness to action. “[I]t is difficult to extend the state presence of a democracy because democratic budgeting and decision-making structures are cumbersome,” La Macarena program chief Álvaro Balcázar told an NGO forum on Consolidation in late 2009, adding that he and Consolidation officials “have no real authority and must make progress by influencing and persuading local actors such as municipal administrations.”<sup>34</sup>

This dynamic is most easily overcome by the provision of new financial resources to pay for the

new policy direction. However, until very recently, the order to devote more energies and resources to Consolidation zones came with little or no new budgetary authority.

Second is the Consolidation program’s origin in the Defense Ministry. By 2008-2009, the rest of the government was being presented with—and asked to contribute to—a plan, designed with little outside input, operating in zones chosen by the Defense Ministry according to defense and counterinsurgency priorities. “A senior CCAI official told us that the GOC [Government of Colombia] has internally discussed and acknowledged its initial mistake in presenting the PNC [National Consolidation Plan],” reads a September 2009 State Department cable. “The image has been decidedly military because the MOD [Ministry of Defense] has been responsible for ninety percent of the content of presentations. He added that the prime example of consolidation has been the La Macarena zone, which has a distinct military flavor.”<sup>35</sup>

Third, government ministries could argue that they saw little justification for diversion of already stretched resources. In the slums surrounding Bogota alone are millions of people living in poverty, many of them internally displaced persons (and, it bears noting, many of them potential voters). Balanced with such needs, the slowness in responding to calls to invest in a faraway zone like La Macarena, whose total population is roughly 100,000 scattered across about 13,000 square miles, may be understandable.<sup>36</sup>

Fourth, unlike the armed forces, civilian government ministries lack “surge capacity”: the presence of, and budget to pay, hundreds or thousands of trained professionals who can drop what they are doing and deploy to a new area at a moment’s notice.

And fifth, military and civilian professional incentives are quite different. For a member of the armed forces, deployment to a strategically critical zone like La Macarena might be desirable and even offer hope of career advancement. For a civilian government health, education, engineering, or judicial professional, though, being sent to such a dangerous backwater is a hardship, even a punishment or career setback.

This reality is not unique to Colombia. Civilian agencies need much more than calls to “do the right thing” if they are to participate in a state-building or Stability Operations effort. The Rand Corporation observes:

Even though national-level goals may call for collaborative action, unless an agency has an institutional incentive to participate in such action, the extent of its participation is likely to be suboptimal from a national perspective. High-level exhortations and directives for organizational action that are not aligned with the basic mission of an organization do not have much chance for success, since the incentive system is aligned with the primary mission of the organization and not with what the directive may exhort the organization to do.<sup>37</sup>

In Colombia, the civilians' absence has hampered the Consolidation program in several key ways:

- ▶ In the absence of judges and prosecutors, human rights violations (which have occurred, but do not appear to have been systematic, in these zones) and official corruption—including alleged ties to armed groups—have gone almost totally uninvestigated and unpunished, negatively affecting the population's already-high distrust in the state.
- ▶ In the absence of economic support services and food security, forced coca eradication has too often left cultivating families with no way to sustain themselves, with resulting re-entry into the drug economy and anger at the state.
- ▶ In the absence of Agriculture Ministry and public registry officials, land titling has been extraordinarily slow, inhibiting farmers' access to credit and feeding fears—which lie at the heart of rural residents' distrust—that with a greater state presence will come wealthy landowners who will dispossess them of their lands.
- ▶ With the absence of the Transportation Ministry, one of the communities' most strongly expressed demands—for the building of tertiary farm-to-market roads—has gone badly unmet.

### A program on autopilot

By 2010, former Defense Minister Santos, a principal backer of Consolidation, was elected to the presidency. It might have been reasonable to expect the program to accelerate, with more resources and with civilian agencies more forcefully compelled to participate. This did not happen. To the contrary, even in La Macarena, the initial rapid pace of progress was not sustained.

Our research doesn't lead us to conclude that the program has yet regressed, although FARC activity

and attacks have persisted even in some yellow and green *veredas* in the La Macarena zone. But not only have the civilians not arrived, the program itself has substantially dropped from official discourse.

After assuming office in August 2010, the Santos government appeared to give the Consolidation program a lower priority. It has given far more political weight to two other ambitious, and worthy, projects: a victims' and land restitution law approved in June 2011, and a negotiation process with the FARC guerrillas, whose exploratory phase began in early 2012 and became formal in September 2012.

The groundwork for these negotiations was laid principally by Sergio Jaramillo, the national security advisor who as vice minister of defense had championed the Consolidation program. Between February and August of 2012, Jaramillo traveled secretly to Havana about ten times to hammer out a negotiating agenda with FARC representatives. With the new title of High Commissioner for Peace (*Alto Comisionado para la Paz*), he is now one of the Colombian government's five principal negotiators. As a result, his current engagement with Consolidation is minimal.

In interviews, we have heard a widely expressed view that the Santos government is not offering Consolidation the high-level political support it would need in order to convince or coerce civilian agencies to participate fully. This view is shared by NGO and academic observers in Colombia, but also, in off-the-record discussions, by U.S. officials and contractors with development responsibilities. Budget data appear to indicate that Colombian government investment in the program dropped by more than half, from COP\$320 billion to COP\$125 billion, from 2010 to 2011.<sup>38</sup>

With the new government came personnel changes. Sergio Jaramillo, the Vice Minister of Defense who championed the Consolidation program most energetically, left the government in December 2009, months after Santos left the Defense Ministry, and rejoined in August 2010 as President Santos' national security advisor: a position with "strategic direction," but no managerial or budgetary authority, over the Consolidation program. ("Post is watching to see if the recent departure of Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo, a major proponent of the PCIM model, results in less attention and urgency from Bogota on the success of consolidation in the Macarena,"

*While universally regarded as an able manager, Balcázar was not seen as a well-connected political heavyweight with a penchant for the bureaucratic battle in which the director of an unestablished program must engage.*

noted a prescient January 2010 U.S. embassy cable.<sup>39</sup>) Álvaro Balcázar, a development expert and university professor who had managed the La Macarena program, was promoted to run the entire Consolidation effort within the Social Action office. While universally regarded as an able manager, Balcázar was not seen as a well-connected political heavyweight with a penchant for the bureaucratic battle in which the director of an unestablished program must engage.

#### **"INSTITUTIONALIZING" CONSOLIDATION**

To the extent that it sought to move the program forward, the Santos government has opted to "institutionalize" it, endeavoring to make it a permanent part of the government's security and development apparatus. This has included the addition of Consolidation as a priority item in the Santos government's four year development plan, approved by the Congress in mid-2011.<sup>40</sup> The institutionalization process offers the promise of achieving civilian buy-in and the long-awaited "takeover" from the military in Consolidation zones. But it, too, has moved very slowly.

Shortly after Santos' August 2010 inauguration, officials announced that they were undergoing a thorough review of Consolidation in order to determine how better to integrate it with the rest of the state. Fourteen interagency thematic working groups, incorporating officials from relevant ministries, met regularly to negotiate future participation in the program. This review process was to be complete by June 2011; this date passed, however, with no announcements. It was not until November 2011 that the Santos government announced its institutionalization of Consolidation as part of a larger shakeup of the Presidency's mammoth Social Action department, rechristened Social Prosperity (*Departamento de la Prosperidad Social*).

This new department, separate from the cabinet and with a larger budget than most ministries, included a Special Management Unit for Territorial Consolidation (*Unidad Administrativa Especial para la Consolidación Territorial*), headed by Balcázar and

comprised of the National Territorial Consolidation Plan, manual coca eradication, and alternative development.

Though in part an exercise in bureaucratic reshuffling, this institutionalization effort is worthwhile. It indicates that, at least in Bogota, the Consolidation program is being civilianized and becoming more explicitly independent of the Defense Ministry. Its establishment as a permanent state policy increases the likelihood of Consolidation having its budget locked in, and Balcázar says that the Santos government plans to spend US\$1.2 billion on the program between 2011 and 2014.<sup>41</sup>

Integrating Consolidation more closely with the rest of the government also increases the chance of it dovetailing with and supporting the Santos government's land restitution effort. If President Santos' incipient dialogues with the FARC should succeed—an outcome that would turn much of the government's "stoplight maps" of the La Macarena zone bright green—Consolidation could support it by creating the state presence necessary to carry out demobilization, reintegration, and other commitments made at the negotiating table.

#### **A MANAGEMENT CRISIS**

The slowness and apparent lack of urgency of Consolidation's institutionalization, however, continued after the review process ended in November 2011. By September 2012, ten months after the Social Prosperity department's Consolidation Unit was constituted, it had not yet begun to function at anywhere near full strength.

A key reason was the sort of issue one would expect to see in a program with insufficient political support and bureaucratic weight: Consolidation was being hamstrung by a requirement that the curriculum vitae of officials nominated to run the program be posted online for public comment, ostensibly as a transparency measure. Balcázar had submitted the names of all officials managing Consolidation, all of them already working for the program on a contract



basis pending their formal hire. As of late September, though, the CVs had still not been posted. Colombian journalists and interviews with officials confirmed that this seemingly simple step had not been taken because of pressure to nominate less-qualified individuals with political connections.

Without permanent management in place, Consolidation virtually ground to a halt. In May-June 2012, as their contracts expired, top program officials were forced to work for weeks without pay.<sup>42</sup> They were ultimately re-contracted on a temporary basis, at reduced salaries.

Balcázar rejected several of the government's suggestions to replace his current team with individuals connected to established political parties but little development or security experience. This eventually proved untenable for Balcázar, whom the Santos administration asked to resign at the end of September 2012. His replacement is a veterinarian who ran President Santos' presidential campaign in the department of Nariño. Germán Chamorro de La Rosa has little security and development background, but is reportedly the choice of the U party, part of the ruling coalition.<sup>43</sup>

As of publication, the Consolidation Unit is carrying out programs—most of them in the early quick impact phase—in all seven zones. In these regions, its momentum is heavily fueled by the large USAID contracts approved in 2010 and 2011. In Bogota, however, the program appears stalled on the launch pad, with uncertain direction, low political backing and severe management problems. Even if new hires are made quickly, two very serious concerns emerge.

The first is that, with the program and its new management responding to more political criteria, it becomes less a state-building program and more of a traditional, clientelistic giveaway program. "I worry that this could just turn into another PLANTE," said a Colombian official linked to the Consolidation program, referring to a large alternative-development program during the government of Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) that invested heavily in white elephant projects, but failed for lack of consultation with communities and lack of coordination with security forces.<sup>44</sup> This would be a major retreat back to business as usual, and certainly the opposite of what USAID had in mind when it committed US\$227 million to Consolidation since 2010.

The second concern surrounds what could be called "overinstitutionalization": the creation of a plan and structure that are so detailed and rigid that they render the program inflexible and discourage creative action and decision making. Interviews with communities, experts and some inside government revealed a concern that the Bogota-based managers of the Consolidation unit, though well intentioned, were losing precious time perfecting their organizational charts and PowerPoint presentations, while residents of the Consolidation zones saw few concrete changes.

### OTI TO USAID

The U.S. government's support also grew slower with the early 2011 exit of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). "Regular" USAID was now at the helm, with a much longer-term, slower-moving development approach, the result of decades of work in permissive security environments.

"Regular" USAID, however, also means far more resources devoted to Consolidation than OTI was able to provide. The large contracts now under execution are supporting Consolidation regions in La Macarena, Montes de María, southern Tolima/northern Cauca, Tumaco/Bajo Putumayo, and Bajo Cauca/Nudo de Paramillo.

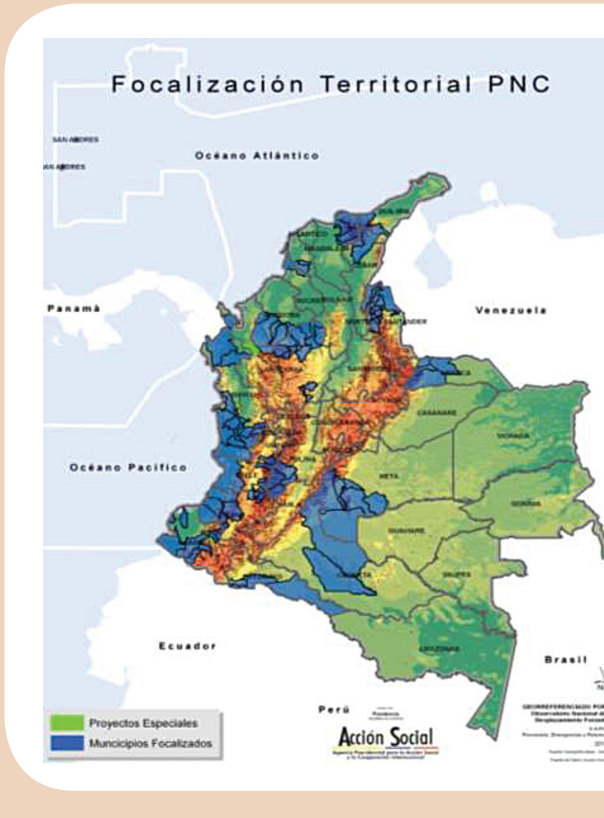
These efforts are now underway, though generally without the visibility that the OTI-supported quick impact projects offered.<sup>45</sup> Though it is far too early to evaluate their performance, we must hope that delivery of services moves quickly, is appropriate for conflict environments, and manages to avoid falling out of sync with the Santos government's new emphases of land restitution and peace dialogues.

### A REDUCED PROFILE AND A NEW DEFENSE STRATEGY

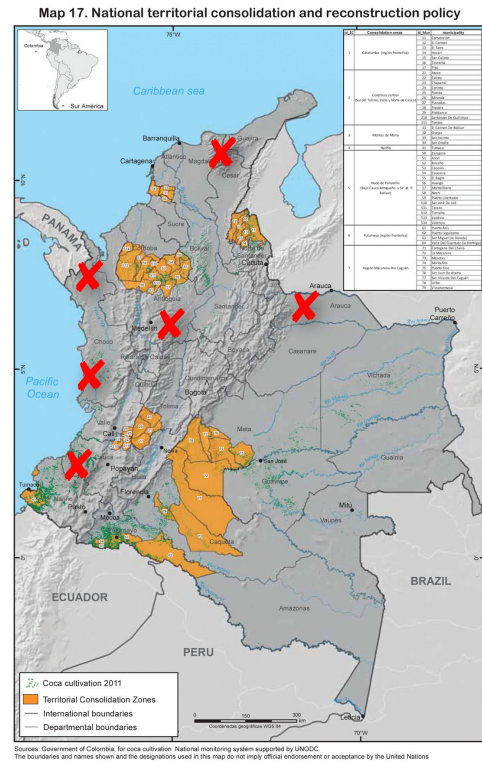
It is still not clear, though, that Consolidation is in sync with the Santos government's principal priorities. While it appears less frequently in the President's, and especially the Defense Minister's, speeches, the newly relaunched program's geographic scope has been reduced to 51 municipalities in seven regions, from 100 in fifteen regions.<sup>46</sup> Official interviewees coincided that this is largely a factor of lack of civilian capacity to cover all of these regions and a realization that these programs are more costly than expected.

## THE PROGRAM SHRINKS

2010



2012



These seven regions correspond almost exactly to the areas where USAID has approved contracts to support the program.

These seven regions correspond almost exactly to the areas where USAID has approved contracts to support the program. With the partial exception of Catatumbo on the border with Venezuela, where U.S. assistance has been scarcer, there are now no Consolidation zones where Colombia is carrying out the program alone, without U.S. support and accompaniment. (Officials interviewed say, though, that the program may soon add a new region: parts of the oil-producing department of Arauca near the Venezuelan border.)

For its part, the Defense Ministry's reduced "ownership" of Consolidation, while a net positive, is double edged. While it is good to see the program being civilianized, at least at its core in Bogotá, there

is reason for concern that less military resources may be destined for protecting and securing it in the field.

The Defense Ministry's priorities are moving on. Its new campaign plan, launched in 2012, does not dovetail, either geographically or conceptually, with Consolidation. This strategy, known as *Espada de Honor* (Sword of Honor), is operating in a series of regions of Colombia that overlap only somewhat with the Consolidation regions.<sup>47</sup> (It does not operate, for instance, in most of the La Macarena zone—only in Caquetá department—or in the Montes de María.) Its regions have been selected according to the strength of FARC structures present in the area, or their importance to the FARC's supply or drug trafficking operations, and not according to the population's

deprivation or isolation from the state.

The goal of Espada de Honor is to weaken or eliminate these FARC structures. Unlike Consolidation, it does not include a civilian governance component. Joint military-police task forces (with U.S. advisors), largely made up of elite personnel, are carrying out mobile operations with a strong emphasis on intelligence and air power. There is no effort to ensure civilian coverage of territory, nor is “holding” and “building” there a priority receiving significant resources.

Espada de Honor is clearly less ambitious, less expensive, and less reliant on slow-moving civilians than Consolidation. It is not Stability Operations. It is much more modest in scope—or at least more go-it-alone military in character, like Plan Patriota before it.

Nor is Espada de Honor necessarily meant to replace Consolidation. (If anything, it is replacing the military’s earlier targeting of top FARC leaders, focusing on its structures instead.) The new strategy, however, is getting far more attention, and enthusiastic mention, from Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzón and Colombia’s high command.

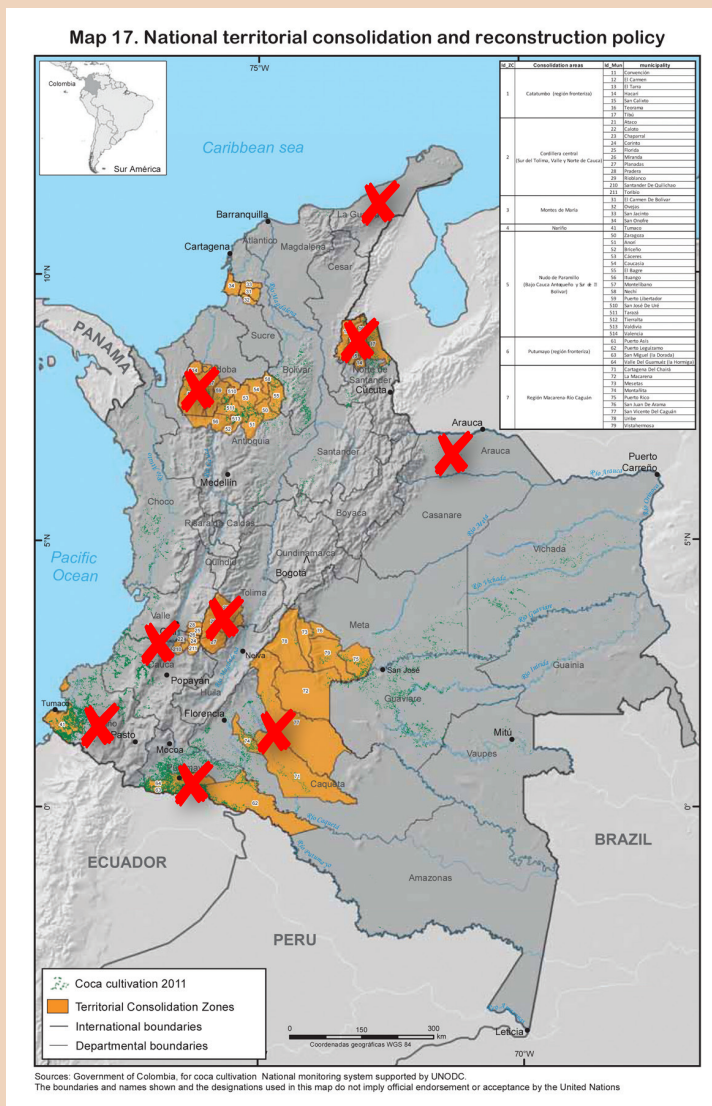
### Cracks in the U.S. model

Similarly, the United States is evidently scaling down its COIN or Stability Operations mission in the countries it has been militarily occupying. Building functioning governance in Iraq and Afghanistan was a very ambitious goal, requiring a very long-term commitment, local elites willing to reduce corruption and make sacrifices, populations willing to be integrated into their states and national economies, and steady progress from red to green on security maps.

## CONSOLIDATION OVERLAPS ONLY PARTIALLY WITH COLOMBIA’S NEW DEFENSE PLAN

### Consolidation Zones

### ✗ “Espada de Honor” Zones



Governing ungoverned areas of Colombia, of course, requires that similar ingredients be present. There, long-term commitment is signaled by “institutionalization” of Consolidation but threatened by evidence of waning interest and politicization. Local leaders’ performance and corruption are varied



*A former U.S. Defense official interviewed in October 2012 put it more succinctly: “Stability Operations? That’s so 2007.”*

but, in many zones, are big obstacles. Populations are certainly more willing to be integrated into national life than in, say, the tribal areas of Afghanistan, but most remain highly suspicious of Colombia’s state and governing elites. And progress from red to green, though slow, is occurring.

In Afghanistan, these ingredients are absent. With a major withdrawal announced for 2014 and the departure of the officials who first championed the strategy, a long-term commitment to governing Kandahar, Helmand, and elsewhere is unlikely. Local elites’ corruption and lack of capacity have set back the program considerably. Many Afghan tribes, especially in the east, “largely want to be left alone and don’t want the development that comes with COIN,” concludes former Defense Department counterinsurgency advisor Col. Gary Anderson.<sup>48</sup> And many of these zones are going from green to red.

This is encouraging U.S. security planners to turn away from COIN and Stability Operations in favor of the much less ambitious, less civilian Counterterrorism (CT) approach. Here, the focus is more on containing and weakening the most violent groups, but leaving other factors, like state presence, largely unchanged. “In some areas of Afghanistan,” writes Anderson, “COIN has been put on the back burner and is eclipsed by counterterrorism (CT) because COIN is expensive in people and treasure, and with the coming drawdown it cannot be done everywhere; in this CT is an economy of force effort.”<sup>49</sup>

A former U.S. Defense official interviewed in October 2012 put it more succinctly: “Stability Operations? That’s so 2007.”

As in Colombia under Espada de Honor, the U.S. emphasis in Afghanistan is shifting instead to the use of elite military units, intelligence and airpower—especially drone strikes (which are not employed in Colombia, though the Colombian armed forces have expressed interest in more sophisticated surveillance drones).<sup>50</sup>

In this context, much note was made in early 2012 of the less-than-privileged position that Stability Operations occupied in the Obama administration’s January *Defense Strategic Guidance* document. It now appears ninth on this document’s list of

the ten Primary Missions of U.S. Armed Forces, with a narrative that notes, “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”<sup>51</sup> The document calls for “emphasiz[ing] non-military means” to “reduce the demand for significant U.S. force commitments to stability operations,” but offers no clues as to how to operationalize a handoff to U.S. civilian agencies.

Only six years after the publication of Gen. Petraeus’s field manual—six years marked by the expensive, often frustrating experience of Stability Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—this strategy’s star has dimmed. In both countries, the question of “when can the civilians take over” has remained largely unaddressed.

### **What is next?**

The United States, in the midst of a severe fiscal crisis, is now scaling back its post-September 11 approach to “ungoverned spaces” in favor of something less ambitious, and perhaps (despite ambitions expressed in Quadrennial Review language) even less civilian. It is unclear, though, what may emerge to replace Stability Operations. For the time being, perhaps nothing.

“After combat operations in Iraq and the end of the ‘surge’ in Afghanistan,” writes Mendelson Forman, “we have entered a third generation in which skepticism about the value of and capabilities for doing this work is on the upswing.”<sup>52</sup> In Afghanistan, speculates Anderson, “we may increasingly see a true hybrid form of warfare where COIN, CT, IW, and paid surrogates are used simultaneously in a concerted strategy.”<sup>53</sup>

In other words, the United States will be improvising in an atmosphere of few resources and doing so in a way that relies very heavily on Special Forces, intelligence gatherers, drones and other unmanned technology, private contractors, and probably cutting deals with adversaries.

Colombia’s strategy appears to be headed in a similar direction. The Espada de Honor strategy is a CT strategy, not a COIN or Stability Operations strategy. And it incorporates many of the same elements: elite units, technology, and reliance on intelligence. At

the same time, Colombia's dialogues with the FARC indicate a willingness to abandon insistence on military victory and reach agreements that may leave some of the guerrillas' local power intact.

Still unclear is the future of the Consolidation program, which in some areas had reached a phase in which armed forces could be replaced by civilians—if the civilians are available. For now, it appears that Consolidation will be a relatively small program, confined to seven or fewer zones, with a low profile in several of them. Or, as current USAID contracts reach their end date around 2016, the program will be quietly dropped.

We still hold out the possibility that talk of “stagnation” or the decline of Consolidation—or rather, the decline of the very idea of bringing civilian governance to ungoverned areas—is misplaced. It could be that the institutionalization process is quietly happening out of the public eye, and that personnel changes at the top will not affect the delivery of services on the ground. If the program, with USAID support, continues in even a few areas, progress could lead to soldiers' withdrawal in favor of civilian institutions, leaving behind clearer answers to the “when can the civilians take over” question.

Our fear, though—which is not eased by recent management frustrations—is that Consolidation has lost high-level backing in the Santos government, and that other, more military-heavy and less governance-oriented, models are taking root in its place.

### EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN RAISED

While Consolidation is flawed—and many of its flaws owe to the absence of civilian state representatives—

**dropping the program is a poor choice.** The Colombian government needs to stand by its original commitment: to bring to these chosen zones a functioning, civilian state whose representatives act without impunity.

In several historically violent regions of Colombia, a major effort, carried out with much fanfare, has raised populations' expectations for governance, citizenship, and integration into their country's national life and economy. To dash these expectations—withdrawing and leaving these territories stateless and forgotten once again—is to leave a generation with deep cynicism about their state and to risk further violence, criminality, and social injustice. It is to continue consigning them to a status that falls well short of citizenship.

This is true even if Colombia's 2012 peace process succeeds. If the FARC disappear from the scene, peace is far from guaranteed in places like La Macarena, where an unprotected population remains at the mercy of bandits and organized crime while struggling to survive in the legal economy. These people must see continued action from their state and must be able to participate in this action.

Raised expectations must be met. Success in establishing civilian, democratic governance will not come from the creation of a perfect plan in Washington or Bogota. It will come from a transition from soldiers to civilians, as soon as it is responsible to do so, in the ungoverned zones themselves. That transition depends on a renewed search for answers to the thorny question of “when the civilians can take over.”

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Aerial view of the La Macarena "Consolidation" zone in south-central Colombia, a sparsely populated jungle and savanna region with a history of government neglect, violence, and drug trafficking.