

# After the Negotiations

## How Reconstruction Teams Can Build a Stronger Peace in Colombia

BY AGUSTIN E. DOMINGUEZ

For more than a decade, Plan Colombia guided our joint U.S.-Colombia efforts to combat narcotics and, more importantly for Colombia, the insurgents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) carrying out the illicit trade. By the end of 2014, the Colombian military, with targeted U.S. support, had degraded the FARC's capacity by 68 percent from its peak in 2002. Relentless pressure on the organization forced them to join the Government of Colombia in peace talks in Havana, and, for the first time in six attempts at peace negotiations, power resided with the state. The talks, which began in November 2012, have led to partial agreements on three of five agenda items, though the most contentious issues, transitional justice and end of conflict, remain to be solved. The talks are also entering a delicate stage. Last December (2014) the FARC announced an indefinite and unilateral ceasefire and largely abided by it until an attack on April 15, 2015, killed eleven Colombian soldiers and wounded an additional twenty. In response to the attack, President Juan Manuel Santos ended the suspension of airstrikes against the FARC in effect since March 2015 and ordered the military to intensify operations, resulting in approximately 40 rebels killed by the end of May.

Despite the recent heightened tensions, the 37<sup>th</sup> round of peace talks began on May 25, 2015, and progress has been made on other issues such as the March 7<sup>th</sup> joint humanitarian demining agreement. On February 23, 2015, in a move welcomed by both sides, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry appointed Special Envoy Bernie Aronson to the negotiations. The appointment highlights the United States' support for the peace process and willingness to help both sides resolve the remaining obstacles to reach a final accord. Even so, for a country faced with the challenges of recent setbacks and the realization that for more than 50 years it fought a war for which no combat-only solution exists, reaching the final peace accord will be easy compared to the large and difficult task of implementing it. Yet, President Santos has declared 2015 the "Year of Peace and Progress,"<sup>1</sup> and to deliver, his government will have to build confidence in the peace process.

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For that reason, and in order to reach a stronger, more durable peace, Colombia should accompany the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process with a Colombian model of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) to extend state presence to the rural areas, and address the root causes of the conflict.

### Plan Colombia and the Democratic Security Policy

How did Colombia evolve from a near failed state to a country with real prospects for peace with the FARC? In 1999, Colombia was suffering two separate, but related security crises: the fight against the FARC and the explosion of drug production and trafficking organizations throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The genesis of both crises was Colombia's inability to exercise state authority over most the country, especially the rural areas. Historically,

rural Colombia has lacked legitimate state presence and authority, enabling the FARC to become the dominant force and use the drug trade to fuel its insurgency.

In September 1999, with his country spiraling out of control and a failed peace process under his belt, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana announced "Plan Colombia." Plan Colombia was a Clinton administration-backed initiative to prevent Colombia's collapse by combating drug production and trafficking; increasing the capacity of the Colombian security forces; and providing development assistance to bolster prosperity. One of the major strengths of Plan Colombia has been its staying power and, in 2002, newly elected Colombian President Álvaro Uribe found another committed U.S. partner in President George W. Bush. The expansion of Department of Defense authorities in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist



Charco, Nariño: a rural area in southwest Colombia that has been plagued by an active FARC presence

attacks against the United States aided President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy to expand state control over Colombia. During Uribe's first term, from 2002 to 2006, the military successfully recovered Medellín, Cali, and Bogotá and its surrounding areas from FARC control.<sup>2</sup> From 2006 to 2010, the Ministry of Defense, under the leadership of Juan Manuel Santos, pivoted to a FARC-centric strategy aimed at reducing the number of FARC and eliminating their leadership.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the Uribe administration, the FARC had been reduced from approximately 20,000 to an estimated 9,000 active insurgents.

Largely as a result of his success as Minister of National Defense, Santos was elected to succeed Uribe as president in 2010. During the first two years of the Santos administration, the military pursued another FARC-centric strategy known as *Sword of Honor* with the goal of reducing the FARC by another 50 percent. The ability of the FARC to find safe haven in indigenous areas and in neighboring countries caused the conflict to plateau and made a military combat solution nearly impossible. Then Minister of Defense Juan Carlos Pinzón, a former Vice Minister under Santos, called for a strategic review of the campaign plan. The resulting change to *Sword of Honor* was to focus the campaign on winning the hearts and minds of the indigenous population in the rural areas, the enemy's center of gravity. At that point, it was a matter of when, not if, peace negotiations would occur.

Despite the successes of the Colombian government and security forces, the FARC still maintain influence in rural areas, primarily along the borders with Ecuador and Venezuela. In these areas, the FARC receive active support from an estimated 35,000 people of the so-called Terrorism Support Network (RAT by the

Spanish acronym). It is important to note that most Colombian citizens in the rural areas are neither FARC nor part of the RAT, yet they fear that peace implementation and demobilization of the FARC will result in a security vacuum in their communities. Their fear is reasonable based on the Colombian government's historical inability to provide state presence in rural areas.

### Consolidation – A Road Paved with Good Intentions

A quick search of the definition for “consolidation” yields results that include “unification” and “strengthening,” but in the Colombian context, consolidation refers to government institutions uniting their security, justice, and development efforts to introduce and strengthen the presence of the state in previously ungoverned spaces. Sergio Jaramillo, Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace and former Vice Minister of Defense, observed in 2009 that “the problem is not the concept or the idea...All those things are obvious...It's not a question of the ‘what’; it's a question of the ‘how,’ and the ‘how’ is the really difficult thing.”<sup>4</sup> This is so difficult, in fact, that Colombia's history is riddled with consolidation failures. The 1958 Special Commission for Rehabilitation lasted only two years due to disagreements among the commission's ministers, each with different equities. A 1960s welfare program aimed at conflict zones failed due to lack of resources. In 1983, the Colombian government launched the National Rehabilitation Plan, which eventually collapsed in 1990 due to lack of focus and coordination.<sup>5</sup>

One of Colombia's better consolidation initiatives has been the Center for the Coordination of Integral Action (CCAI),

established in May 2004. By the end of 2009, as the Uribe administration was nearing its end, CCAI had achieved results that far surpassed those of previous consolidation efforts. However, the results achieved were in spite of the organization's structure, not because of it. CCAI, because it was established by presidential decree as opposed to legislation, did not have a budget allocation. Instead, it received unspent funds from contributing ministries' budgets.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the lack of legislation meant there was no enforcement mechanism and, as such, ministers could not be mandated to provide personnel to CCAI.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the deficiency in the legal basis created a perverse dis-

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tortion that made consolidation last in priorities for manning and funding from contributing government ministries. CCAI's accomplishments were the result of the influence and devotion of its Directive Council. The failure to institutionalize, vice personalize, CCAI's effectiveness caused the program to stall.

Since taking office in 2010, President Santos has launched strategic reviews of the National Plan for Consolidation and revised the program slightly. Nevertheless, consolidation continues to be under-resourced and over-militarized. The military's success on the battlefield has resulted in their presence in conflict zones far in advance of the civilian

agencies critical for expanding government services. In classic counterinsurgency strategy, the military will, theoretically, clear-and-hold a conflict zone until the security situation is sufficiently stabilized for a transition to civilian agencies that will execute the build phase. In practice, the Colombian military is doing all three. Lacking the ability to build local governance capacity, the military's focus is on winning hearts and minds through short-term reconstruction projects such as building roads and schools. But these types of "quick-win" projects do nothing to address the long-term problems of development. While the Ministry of Defense is well intentioned in attempting to fill this gap, the failure of the rest of the government to participate produces negative unintended results. That responsibility for development falls on personnel that are inadequately trained for those tasks further erodes trust and confidence in the state for failing to provide the services that consolidation promises.

Without immediate correction, these shortfalls will be exacerbated in the event of a peace agreement. The Colombian military will not be able to effectively and simultaneously provide security, continue development activities, and implement the peace by disarming and demobilizing the FARC, all while the Colombian population will, reasonably, be expecting their share of the peace dividend.

### **The DDR Paradox**

In spite of the historical challenges it has encountered with consolidation, Colombia is, arguably, perfectly positioned to implement a peace process with the FARC, having executed at least seven different DDR processes.<sup>8</sup> In 1989, the former rebel group 19th of April Movement (M-19) successfully demobilized and transitioned into a political movement. A



testament to their successful transition is the election of a former M-19 guerilla as the mayor of Bogotá. The demobilization of the right wing paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) from 2002-2006 led to sharp declines in violence levels across the country, although remnants of the group continue to maintain control over large drug trafficking operations and other illicit activities.

Additionally, Colombia currently conducts successful individual demobilizations of rebels through the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR). One of the major lessons learned from the process with the AUC is that the central government did not properly coordinate the reintegration program with local authorities, which left the population uninformed and fueled the perception that the central government has abandoned them.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding Colombia's vast experience in DDR, and the many lessons learned, the country has never executed DDR on the scale, or as politically sensitive, as is anticipated with the FARC. Implementation of the peace must be done well or the Government of Colombia risks backsliding to a state of near perpetual war.

The problem inherent with DDR is that the process is typically designed for combatants, meaning it will only seek to reintegrate the approximate 8,000-armed FARC guerillas into Colombian society. The question then is what to do with the RAT and other residents of rural communities that are neither FARC nor RAT. One possible scenario is for the FARC to insert large portions of the RAT and others into the DDR process to get as many benefits for as many of their supporters as possible. This scenario would likely overwhelm the state's capacity and undermine the peace process by creating the impression the government is not

fulfilling its end of the deal. If the FARC do not push rural Colombians through the DDR process, then the excluded portions of society, allegedly at the heart of the FARC's struggle, will remain in the same situation they were in when the war began a half-century ago. The latter scenario reveals the sad paradox of DDR – the process benefits perpetrators, not victims,

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of the conflict. In this instance, the FARC would receive benefits to enter legitimately into Colombian society while the original reasons they took up arms – poverty, inequality, and the persistent lack of state presence in the rural communities – remain unaddressed. The Government of Colombia, with support from the U.S., adopted a Colombia-specific solution to the security crises in 1999 with great success. It can do so again for peace implementation and consolidation by adopting its own model of provincial reconstruction teams to address the issue of security and development in rural Colombia.

### **The “How” – Enter PRTs**

The United States first introduced Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, and later Iraq, to improve civil-military operations and interagency coordination in post-conflict environments. The objective of PRTs was to aid the host-nation's ability to extend the power and presence of the central government; increase the capacity of local governments; advance security; and promote development. To achieve those ends, PRTs required effective

collaboration and integration by the so-called 3Ds: defense, diplomacy and development. As such, The Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) played prominent roles in U.S.-led PRTs. Even so, there was no set structure for PRTs and, indeed, U.S. PRTs were organized differently in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, coalition-led PRTs also had their own models and slightly different operational focus. Even within the two countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, PRTs might be organized differently with various levels of other agencies' participation depending on local conditions and requirements. While this amount of flexibility allows for operational commanders to determine their own local requirements and priorities, many U.S. PRT veterans believe the program would have benefitted from an agreed concept of operations, a central coordinating agency, and explicit military and civilian roles.<sup>10</sup>

Another problem that U.S.-led PRTs faced is that civilian agencies did not have the capacity to properly staff and resource the war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, it was not until then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton implemented the "civilian surge" in 2009-2010 that PRTs, and the war effort as a whole, benefited from improved civilian staffing, funding, and administrative support. Colombia's Ambassador to the U.S. has warned of similar interagency shortfalls in the *Sword of Honor* campaign against the FARC.<sup>11</sup> By the time the civilian surge occurred in Afghanistan, the U.S. had missed the window of opportunity to consolidate the security gains that the U.S. military and host-nation security forces had achieved.

The effectiveness of the civilian surge was also hampered by the fact that personnel in the civilian agencies could not be ordered to deploy; they had to volunteer. This prevented the DoS and USAID from identifying those personnel with the requisite skills to accomplish the mission, comparable to the problems Colombia encountered with the CCAI. Moreover, many of the civilians that did deploy lacked the language and cultural expertise to be effective. In addition, whatever gains U.S. PRTs made in Afghanistan and Iraq did not have a lasting effect because of the fact that local populations, and the enemy, understood that the foreign forces providing security, governance, and development would eventually leave.

Notwithstanding the identified shortfalls of PRTs, Colombia's adoption of its own PRT program to parallel the DDR effort with the FARC will yield a stronger, more durable peace. First and foremost, Colombia is fighting an internal war. Colombia's version of PRTs would be fighting to secure peace in their own country and would not be hampered by lack of language or cultural expertise, or the lead-time it would take to develop those skills. Furthermore, the establishment of PRTs, irrespective of a peace accord, offers several strategic benefits. By tackling the issue of security and development in the FARC's zones of influence, the Colombian government will build confidence in the peace process by demonstrating its willingness to address the root causes of the conflict. In addition, the PRTs' presence in the FARC's primary areas of influence would help drive a wedge between the FARC and their supporters. This is a key advantage of the PRTs because it cuts off support for the anticipated members of the FARC that refuse to demobilize, instead seeking to

continue their illicit ways. Alternately, should the peace process fail, a rift between the FARC and its bases of support would render the rebels less effective should hostilities resume. Perhaps more importantly, the portions of society most affected by the conflict and disillusioned by previous peace processes would finally receive the state provided services they deserve.

### A Colombian Model – DRTs

To ensure the proper level of central coordination and budget allocation that failed previous consolidation efforts lacked, Colombia's PRTs should fall under the Ministry of Post-Conflict, Human Rights, and Citizen Security (Post-Conflict). The Minister of Post-Conflict in coordination with the Commander of the newly created Strategic Transition Command

(COET) could then negotiate different roles for interagency civilian and military personnel and provide clear direction to PRT commanders. The COET is responsible for advising the government's negotiators on DDR and planning and implementation of DDR. The military also has the most detailed information regarding the country's security environment. As such, the COET will have key insights to the strengths and weaknesses of the DDR model and where PRTs could most significantly address those gaps. Additionally, because the military has been at the forefront of consolidation efforts thus far, they have explicit knowledge as to where PRT efforts would provide the biggest impact to communities and return on investment to the government. Working through the Ministry of Post-Conflict as the central coordinating agency would eliminate



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Over 100 participants receive training from Colombia's Agency for Reintegration, a government organization devoted to the reintegration of members of illegal armed groups who voluntarily demobilize, either individually or collectively.

the ad hoc arrangements, guidelines, and priorities that U.S. veterans complained plagued the U.S. programs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, the cabinet-level Post-Conflict Minister, who reports directly to the President of Colombia, can work to eliminate inter-agency turf battles, direct civilians under his charge, and ask the President to direct agencies to match the military's current capabilities and resourcing to ensure robust PRTs. An alternate organizational solution would be for PRTs to fall under Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace in the executive branch of government. Because the High Peace Commissioner reports directly to the President, he would enjoy some of the same advantages from directing civilian agencies as the Minister of Post-Conflict, but would likely have the same resource constraints experienced by the CCAI.

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The 2009 "civilian surge" in Afghanistan aimed to improve district governance throughout the country in the hopes of providing the stability required to successfully counter an insurgency. Faced with the impossibility of transforming 401 districts throughout the large, geographically complex, and tribally diverse country, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) focused on 94 key terrain districts and 44 area of interest districts.<sup>12</sup> This narrowed focus allowed ISAF, Afghan National Security Forces and local governments to make significant short-term progress,

even if its long-term success cannot yet be fully determined. What is discernible is that the Colombian government will not have the resources for a similar effort. Additionally, the time required to properly carry out such an ambitious plan does not lend itself to the political sensitivities of the peace process, as the Colombian government will be under pressure to deliver quick results in a post-conflict environment. In comparison with the ISAF strategy, Colombia is divided into a manageable 32 departments plus the capital district. Moreover, not all of these departments are created equal. Some are richer than others; some are more urban than rural; and some have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. The five biggest and most prosperous cities in Colombia – Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, Cali, and Barranquilla – have mostly capable authorities and are able to govern themselves and even assist nearby municipalities.<sup>13</sup> In view of these reasons, Colombia's version of PRTs should reside in the department capitals in the form of Departmental Reconstruction Teams (DRTs). Furthermore, the Ministry of Post-Conflict, in coordination with the COET, should determine key terrain departments to focus the government's limited resources. Initial DRT efforts should focus on Antioquia, Cauca, Choco, and Valle del Cauca in the west, Arauca, Meta, and Caquetá in the center-south and Putumayo, Huila, and Nariño in the southwest. It is essential to emphasize the importance of determining the key terrain departments in coordination with the COET, to link the effort to the DDR plan and maximize the chances of success through unity of effort.



### DRTs' Structure – Demilitarize and Decentralize

DRTs, from their regional hubs, would focus on building the capacity of the departmental governments, led by a governor and assembly, and when applicable, the subordinate municipalities. Furthermore, the DRTs would have the flexibility to operate in the villages and towns of rural Colombia, carrying out development and reconstruction projects where the FARC has historically been the dominant force. Living in their operational areas would allow the DRTs to provide an element of security for the population while simultaneously extending the presence of the state's civilian agencies that have had limited or no presence in the past. This would relieve the military of being the sole provider of security for the population in these areas, allowing them to execute their other constitutionally mandated missions with maximum flexibility. Moreover, as DRTs build local governance capacity, they would also be empowering those entities to execute their own budgets and development plans, saving the state resources that can be applied to the DDR effort or subsequent consolidation efforts in other departments and municipalities.

Unlike the U.S. military-led version of PRTs in Afghanistan, civilians that report to the Minister of Post-Conflict should lead Colombia's DRTs. The Colombian military, much like the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq, far outpaced its civilian counterparts in reaching Colombia's conflict zones. Having a civilian leader would force the Ministry of Post-Conflict to take greater ownership of consolidation and incentivize other agencies to provide their best personnel. A common shortfall of all of Colombia's consolidation efforts thus far is that they have been overly

reliant on military forces. Militarized consolidation in post-conflict zones by Colombia, and by the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan, has often been criticized because it perpetuates the belief in those communities that the state is failing to deliver on its promises, and citizens worry about the vacuum that will be left when the military departs.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, the DRTs should be modeled more like the UK-led or German-led version of PRTs in which military involvement in reconstruction was limited; the degree of civil-military integration was higher than that of the U.S.-led PRTs where civilians were embedded into military teams; and the responsiveness to UN and NGO suggestions was high.<sup>15</sup>

All DRTs would have a military deputy commander and a core three-pillar structure of governance, development, and security (preferably including a police representative). This structure resembles the 3D concept, except that diplomacy is replaced with governance because of the internal nature of the Colombian effort. The DRTs' military deputies provide continuity of personnel that have been involved in consolidation efforts thus far and a link to the local commander of forces, keeping the DRTs updated on the security environment. Furthermore, the military deputies provide a link to the COET and the execution of disarmament and demobilization. As DDR progresses and the plan adjusts, the COET can inform the military deputies, and they, in turn, can advise the DRT commanders to adjust their plans as necessary to complement the DDR effort. At this point, DRT commanders would only need to inform the Ministry of Post-Conflict of the next phase to their plans, thus ensuring the whole-of-government approach to DDR and Consolidation is

centrally coordinated, but executed with decentralized control.

Beyond the three core pillars, the structure of DRTs could be tailored to include experts from other ministries, such as justice, agriculture, health, education, and transportation, based on the local requirements developed by the DRT leadership in consultation with the departmental governor and commander of Colombian security forces in the area. In some departments, economic infrastructure might be the focus; in others, the sustainability of the licit agrarian sector might be the priority; and others might be in desperate need of urban development in cities in order to accommodate the influx of internally displaced persons.<sup>16</sup> Consolidation must be centrally coordinated because the state will provide the majority of the resources for DRTs, but each team will need the decentralized authority to build and execute their own departmental plans.

### **Peace and Progress**

In order to achieve President Santos' goal of peace and progress, the Government of Colombia must strengthen the real security gains it achieved during the last 15 years. To do so, the state will have to extend the presence and legitimacy of the central government, build the capacity of smaller local governments, project security to large swaths of the countryside, and promote development, all while undertaking the huge task of managing a large and politically sensitive DDR process with the FARC. To increase its chances of achieving a strong and durable peace, the Government of Colombia should implement its own model of PRTs in specifically targeted departments under a centrally coordinated effort. Doing so will advance Colombia's

interests by projecting the state's presence and legitimacy in the communities most affected by the conflict. Additionally, the FARC, as defenders of rural Colombia, would be able to claim a win for their supporters, therefore building confidence in the peace process. More importantly, the central and local governments would have the capacity to tackle the root causes of the conflict by providing for the large, disaffected portions of society that are the FARC's center of gravity. Should Colombia adopt its own version of provincial reconstruction teams, the United States should once again stand ready to respond with targeted support. Such efforts would solidify the United States' special relationship with Colombia and strengthen support for the peace process. **PRISM**

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia, Christmas address, Bogotá, Colombia, December 24, 2014, accessed March 16, 2015 <http://todaycolombia.com/2015-will-be-the-year-of-peace-and-progress-for-colombia/>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter DeShazo, Johanna Mendelson Forman, and Phillip McLean, "Countering Threats to Security and Stability in a Failing State: Lessons from Colombia" (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Juan Carlos Pinzón, Minister of National Defense, "Colombia at a Crossroads: A Conversation with Colombia's Minister of National Defense," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Devlin, "Organizing the Return of Government to Conflict Zones: Colombia, 2004-2009," *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, accessed at <http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties> on 20 May 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> David Spencer, "Recommendations for Colombian Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)" (Washington, DC: Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, 2013), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Morgenstein, "Consolidating Disarmament: Lessons from Colombia's Reintegration Program for Demobilized Paramilitaries," (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Perito, "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified," (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2005), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pinzón, "Colombia at a Crossroads."

<sup>12</sup> Frances Z. Brown, "The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance: Lessons for Transition," (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Weiss Fagen, "Colombia: urban futures in conflict zones," (Norway: The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2015), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Isacson, "Colombia's 'security and development' zones await a civilian handoff, while Washington backs away from the concept,"

(Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not Sufficient," DIID Report, 2005:6 accessed at [http://www.nps.edu/CSRS/Resources/Civ-mil/Jakobsen%20PRTs\\_danes.pdf](http://www.nps.edu/CSRS/Resources/Civ-mil/Jakobsen%20PRTs_danes.pdf) on 26 May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Fagen, "Colombia: urban futures in conflict zones."



Socialist parade in conjunction with the XII Presidential Summit of ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) held in Guayas, Ecuador in July 2013. ALBA is a regional intergovernmental organization named in honor of Simón Bolívar who wanted to see Hispanic American united as a single nation.