Transnational Organized Crime in the Triple Border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru

Juan Carlos Aristizábal González

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6546-8307
jem.regfe2@hotmail.com
Transnational Organized Crime in the Triple Border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru

Juan Carlos Aristizábal González

Summary

The triple border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru, due to its characteristics and vulnerabilities, has become an area where organizations involved in transnational organized crime (TOC) converge. In this regard, this article analyzes the interaction of organized armed groups and organized crime groups with the TOC, which is reinforced through illicit economies on the borders of these three countries. It also describes the effects of the TOC and analyzes whether the mechanisms and strategies to combat it –conceived in the Defense and Security Policies– have achieved the expected results.

Keywords: Amazon, Transnational Organized Crime, Triple Border, International Cooperation, Threats, Security and Defense, Sovereignty.

Introduction

In the South American context, Defense and Security Policies have always been a priority for States, which relate in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous strategic environment.¹ In this environment, transnational organized crime (TOC) is a phenomenon that knows no borders, in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world that facilitates and strengthens the relationship between criminal organizations and the illicit economies in which they are involved. Therefore, the borders shared by Brazil, Colombia and Peru have become the epicenter of profitable illicit economies, where organized armed groups (grupos armados organizados, GAO) and organized crime groups (grupos de delincuencia organizada, GDO) exercise a monopoly on illicit drug trafficking (trafico ilícito de drogas, TID), arms and ammunition trafficking, human trafficking, illegal mining and illegal migration, among others.

The tri-border region is part of the Amazon basin, which has extremely complex characteristics, largely jungle and irrigated by innumerable water tributaries. This region lacks road and energy infrastructure, sources of employment and adequate education, presenting critical social indicators of multidimensional poverty and unmet basic needs. Likewise, these borders are extremely extensive, vulnerable and porous, which limits the control by the authorities.

To understand the existing situation, this article describes the geography of the triple border and its importance as part of the Amazon basin. Likewise, both the effects of the COT and the results of the policies designed to combat the criminal organizations involved are analyzed. Finally, conclusions are provided in order to adopt more efficient strategies and mechanisms to face threats that evolve and strengthen every day.

**Geographical description of the triple border**

In the heart of the South American continent is the Amazon basin, with an approximate extension of 7,352,112 km², in which countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela have interference. In this basin converge the land borders between Brazil, Colombia and Peru, also known as the triple border. Brazil and Colombia share a border area of 1,645 kilometers, Peru and Colombia of 1,626 kilometers, while Brazil and Peru of 2,822 kilometers.

The Amazon basin is the largest hydrographic and tropical rainforest basin in the world, possessing a transcendental strategic value for its biodiversity,
ecosystems, and innumerable species of fauna and flora. This basin is crossed by the Amazon River, 6,992 km long, which begins in the Peruvian Mountains and flows into the Atlantic Ocean. This basin is multicultural and diverse as it is inhabited by around 420 indigenous peoples and numerous ethnic groups, with 86 languages and 650 dialects.\(^7\)

Likewise, in this region the so-called Amazonian trapeze takes on special relevance, made up of the populations of Leticia (amazonas department, Colombia), Tabatinga (Amazonas state, Brazil) and Santa Rosa de Yavarí (Loreto department, Peru),\(^8\) which are located on the banks of the Amazon river or Solimões, as Brazilians usually call it. Most of the population and the socio-economic and cultural development of this geographical area are concentrated in these population centers.

The situation in Colombia

*Scenarios and effects.* In Colombia, the different forms of TOC have been linked –for more than 50 years– to the internal armed conflict, with excessive violence closely related to terrorism.\(^9\) Undoubtedly, Pablo Escobar Gaviria is one of the best known criminals who has operated in Colombia, becoming, after his alliance with Gonzalo Rodríguez, Carlos Lehder and the Ochoa brothers, the top boss of the Medellín cartel, in the 1980s and early 1990s.\(^10\) Pablo Escobar formed a well-structured criminal organization in order to gain a monopoly of the TID in the country, overseeing the import of large shipments of cocaine from Bolivia and Peru, and their subsequent export to the U.S. market.


\(^10\) Ibid., 120.
Likewise, in the 1970s, organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army and the Popular Liberation Army emerged, which, in their beginnings, promulgated different ideologies through a political-military structure, and a model of insurrectionary war or prolonged people’s war against the State. These organizations began to expand, increasing violence in various regions of the country and forcing the government to fight them in the face of pressure from society and the deterioration of security. However, this situation had a negative impact on attention to other crimes and threats that began to prevail during those years, particularly the TID.

Additionally, in the 1980s, far-right paramilitary groups emerged to defend the interests of drug traffickers in the face of massive kidnappings perpetrated by leftist guerrilla groups. Subsequently, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia were established to protect the lands and interests of different guilds and civilians from guerrilla attacks. This action allowed all these organizations to access resources, weapons, property and media, getting involved in the control of the territory and the TID, thus generating a devastating impact on Colombian society.

In September 2016, faced with the demobilization of the FARC, other GAOs and GDOs quickly occupied the abandoned spaces, and sought to monopolize the illicit economies in places where state control was limited.\footnote{Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, “Política de Defensa y Seguridad PDS”, Gobierno de Colombia (Bogotá D.C., Colombia: January 2019), 23–24, \url{https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica_defensa_seguridad2019.pdf}, (accessed April 20, 2022).} In the case of the Colombian Amazon, the GDO known as “los caqueteños”
\footnote{Eduardo Álvarez Vanegas, “El Crimen Organizado en lo Local: Un problema subvalorado en Colombia” Fundación Ideas para la Paz (January 16, 2017), \url{https://www.ideaspaz.org/publications/posts/1449}, (accessed April 21, 2022).} began operating in the service of drug traffickers, in alliance with the GAO. This criminal group acted, mainly, in the department of Amazonas, exercising control of illicit crops on the Colombian side, supported by an
adequate structure on the Peruvian side. Likewise, “the Caqueteños” built an alliance with the Brazilian criminal organization known as the Familia del Norte (FDN), to whom they delivered about 11 tons of cocaine annually. By 2018, this criminal group was dismantled by Colombian authorities, putting an end to its illegal activities.

Similarly, other Colombian organizations such as the Gulf clan, the Urabeños, and the envigado cartel have established relationships with Brazilian criminal organizations such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and the Comando Vermelho (CV). They have even developed alliances with dissidents of the First Front of Miguel Botache Santillana (alias Gentil Duarte), who did not accept the peace process and was killed in a confrontation with dissidents of the Second Marquetalia, in May 2022. In addition, the narco-terrorist Géner García Molina (alias John 40), who like Gentil Duarte did not accept the peace process, consolidated an alliance for the formation of dissidents in the southeast of the country. Subsequently, this alliance was fractured and, currently, it is part of the dissidents of the Second Marquetalia, commanded by Luciano Marín Arango (alias Iván Márquez) from Venezuela. Géner García continues his role as a drug kingpin, exercising control of the cocaine that enters Venezuela from Colombia and is subsequently traded with the PCC and the CV.

Likewise, the armed structures that did not take advantage of the demobilization process became the so-called dissidents or residual organized armed groups (grupos armados organizados residuales, GAOR), among which are the 48 Commandos of the Border Structure and the

---

First Carolina Ramírez Structure.16 Both structures are fighting over the territories previously controlled by the FARC, which has generated confrontations in the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo, the latter concentrating the largest amount of illicit coca crops in the south of the country. Likewise, these Structures dispute control over the GDOs dedicated to the illicit exploitation of mining deposits and other crimes in that region of the Colombian Amazon.17 For this reason, the department of Amazonas is used as a mobility corridor through the basins of the Apaporis, Caquetá, Putumayo and Amazonas rivers, for their movements and the transport of basic cocaine paste (*pasta basica de cocaina*, PBC) and marijuana from the departments of Cauca and Nariño, which are then marketed to Brazilian criminal gangs.18

Policies and mechanisms. Within the framework of the Colombian Government’s Defense and Security Policy (*politica de defensa y seguridad*, PDS) 2018–2022, strategic objectives and lines of action were established to focus efforts on security and defense in order to protect national interests. Undoubtedly, the strengthening of the capacities of the Military Forces (*fuerzas militares*, FF. MM.) and the National Police of Colombia (*policia nacional de colombia*, PNC) was fundamental to guarantee the legal security and well-being of those who integrate them. In that sense, Colombia must strengthen its alliances -through diplomatic relations- with border countries such as Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Panama to combat the TOC.

Likewise, continuity should be given to the different border security plans and other bilateral and multilateral agreements that allow improving capacities and strategies to face this phenomenon of transnational criminality that affects the triple border. Similarly, relations between the armed forces of neighbouring countries should continue to be strengthened in order to

16  Ibid.
17  Ibid.
achieve interoperability and conduct joint and combined operations with tangible results against the TOC. Likewise, the Colombian Government must strengthen its leadership in the border region, weakening the sources of financing and neutralizing the structures of these criminal organizations, taking advantage of the experience acquired in the fight against insurgency and counterterrorism.  

The PDS has allowed the undertaking of a frontal fight against the COT, which can only be achieved through actions articulated with countries that are also affected by these crimes. To this end, international cooperation in operations, intelligence, information sharing, and cybersecurity will be intensified in order to combat COT-related crimes. Likewise, the presence of the FF. MM. should be accentuated in a differentiated way throughout the Colombian territory, according to the criticality in each area, and through the “unified action” of the State that allows synchronizing, coordinating and integrating governmental and non-governmental efforts with military operations, in order to achieve unity of effort and make the transition from territorial control to institutional control of the territory.

Based on the government's policies and the National Development Plan 2018–2022, the different plans of the FF. MM. and PNC were designed, in accordance with the Political Constitution of Colombia. Likewise, on September 9, 2020, the FF. MM. issued Permanent Directive 5002 (strengthening of control at formal and non-formal border crossings), which establishes the responsibilities of military units whose mission is the

20 Ibid., 53.
control and stabilization of border areas, through procedures in accordance with regulations and in full observance of human rights and international humanitarian law.²⁴

In this regard, the South East Joint Command No. 3 was established, with responsibility for the departments of Meta, Guaviare, Vaupés, Caquetá, Putumayo and Amazonas, with the purpose of developing joint and inter-institutional military operations against the GAO and GDO, weakening their illicit economies and their relationship with the COT in the southern eastern region of Colombia. This Joint Command has a ground component (two National Army Divisions), a Naval Component, an Air Component and the Omega Joint Task Force to achieve the national or multinational strategic objectives expected by the national government.

Additionally, in February 2021, the national government activated the Command against Drug Trafficking and Transnational Threats (CONAT) with the aim of strengthening the offensive against drug trafficking and other transnational threats such as the illicit exploitation of mining deposits, extortion, kidnapping, arms trafficking, illegal migration and migrant trafficking.²⁵ To this end, CONAT has three Brigades against Drug Trafficking, a Brigade Against the Illicit Exploitation of Mining Deposits, and the Deployment Force Against Transnational Threats.

Results. According to JorgeLeón González Parra, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces of Colombia, in 2020, 130,000 hectares of coca crops were eradicated and 103,000 hectares in 2021, fulfilling the goals imposed by the national government. Similarly, in 2021, 5,700 laboratories used for the processing of PBCs were destroyed and 600 tons of cocaine were seized. In addition, two campaigns were carried out with the participation

---

of other countries to reduce the economic income of GAOs and GDOs. On the one hand, the Orion strategy was led by the Colombian National Navy with the support of 40 countries and 102 institutions, achieving the seizure of 262 tons of cocaine. On the other hand, the Zeus strategy was led by the Colombian Air Force, carrying out interdiction operations with 5 countries in the region to detect illegal traces, being able to neutralize 38 clandestine runways used to transport the alkaloid, immobilize 4 aircraft, and seize 22 tons of cocaine. Likewise, in 2021, more than 5,000 members of different GAOs were neutralized, including captured, brought to justice, demobilized and killed during the development of military operations.  

In March 2022, CONAT carried out a joint and inter-institutional military operation against the GAOR Estructura Comandos de Frontera in the rural area of the municipality of Puerto Leguizamo (department of Putumayo). As a result, the neutralization of 15 members of this armed group was achieved, as well as the seizure of war material, quartermaster and communications, considerably weakening its armed capacity and affecting its main source of financing, the TID. Subsequently, in October 2021, the Joint Special Operations Command carried out an air attack near the municipality of Morichal (department of Guainía), neutralizing 10 members of the GAOR, including Jaider Steven Cisneros (alias Mono Ferney), designated as the lieutenant of Néstor Gregorio Vera (alias Iván Mordisco), the top leader of the GAOR. These successful results show that articulated work achieves high-impact effects against TOC.

The situation in Brazil

Scenarios and effects. Brazil is the sixth largest country in the world and the first in South America, with an area of 8,515,770 Km and an approximate population of 212 million inhabitants. Although its economy is the twelfth largest in the world, the high unemployment rates and the low standard of living of its inhabitants is evident. What's worse, Brazil is the second country with the highest cocaine use in the world, after the United States, and one of the most violent, with a rate of 30 homicides per 10,000 inhabitants. Brazil also has high rates of crime and violence due to the criminal actions of criminal organizations that engage in the TID, expanding violence and crime nationally and internationally.

Among the most relevant criminal organizations in Brazil –dedicated to the TID and other crimes associated with the COT– are the PCC, the FDN and the CV, which had their origins in the country’s penitentiary centers. The number of members of these organizations has been increasing, as the prison population increased and conditions in these centers deteriorated. Initially, they demanded rights and minimum-security conditions within these centers, but, progressively, they were expanding their dominance in most states, especially in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Manaus. From these places, they began to exercise the monopoly of the TID through the different routes established not only for domestic consumption, but also to export drugs to North America, Europe and Africa.

Brazil has vulnerabilities in its land and river borders, especially on the Amazon River, as it shares them with the main cocaine-producing countries

31 Ibid.
32 Hernández, “Brasil, el segundo mayor consumidor de cocaína...”
such as Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Consequently, the characteristics that are presented in the triple border are striking for these criminal gangs, incentivized to obtain resources illegally through the TID, arms trafficking and illegal mining. These illicit activities seek not only an economic end, but also a hierarchy and dominance through violence in alliances with other criminal organizations in Colombia and Peru, becoming a transnational threat.

One such organization is the FDN, established in 2006, which exercises some degree of control over illicit economies in the state of Amazonas and over cocaine shipments from Colombia and Peru on the triple border across the Solimoes River. Likewise, the FDN established an alliance with Peruvian drug trafficker Wilder Chuquisuta Velayrse, one of its drug suppliers, using the urban centers of Leticia and Tabatinga as collection centers for its illegal activities. The criminal alliance between the PCC and the CV with the GAOR in Colombia and Venezuela, as well as with several Colombian drug cartels, such as the Oficina de Envigado, demonstrate the strong links between these criminal organizations.

Policies and mechanisms. Considering that security and defence are essential aims of the State, all branches and institutions of the State integrate their capacities to safeguard national interests. In that sense, Brazil’s Defense White Paper is of vital importance for security, as a mechanism that articulates national policy and strategy. In addition, Brazil owns 60% of the Amazon, arousing the interest of some countries for its geographical position and geopolitical impact.

35 Rey and Rodríguez, “Crimen Organizado Transnacional…”, 68.
36 Ibid., 39.
37 Redacción ET, “Masacre en cárceles de Brasil salpica a la mafia colombiana”.
Indeed, in 2000, the Brazilian Government signed the UN convention against the TOC and ratified it in 2004. This international instrument provided tools and support for the government to address the offences set forth in that convention. In that sense, adjustments were made in terms of security and defense—including the legal framework—so that the Armed Forces (fuerzas armadas, FF. AA.) can face the COT in the Amazon region, positioning military units along that border. Likewise, the integration that should exist between the FF. AA. and the various authorities was emphasized, entities and powers of the State for the fulfillment of that responsibility.

Within the instruments generated and the tasks assigned to the FF. AA. the following were conceived: (i) The Strategic Border Plan, of 2011, for the strengthening of both the prevention, control, control and repression of cross-border crimes in the border area, as well as alliances with neighboring countries to articulate efforts, customs control and joint actions between border authorities, respecting sovereignty and their respective legislations; (2) The Calla Norte Program, of 1985, to increase support for national defense, promoting sustainable development in the Amazon region and strengthening territorial integrity and sovereignty; (3) The Amazon Protection System (GIAHS), with its operational arm the Amazon Surveillance System (SIVAM), to combat piracy and deforestation, and protect natural parks and mineral and indigenous resources; (4) The Integrated Border Surveillance System (SIFRON) to counter cross-border crimes, as well as to strengthen and articulate interoperability and integration of efforts among neighboring countries against the TOC; (5) The articulation of the Brazilian Army, through the Military Command of the Amazon and the Military Command of the North, composed of six Jungle Infantry Brigades and located in three Amazonian states, with the purpose of guaranteeing the control and security of those border states,

39 Ibid., 181.
safeguarding national interests; (6) The Special Border Platoons to monitor and secure the border line through river and land axes.41

Results. The national border and boundary security program, called “VIGIA,” implemented by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in 2019, seeks to prevent the entry of weapons, drugs, contraband, vehicles and boats into the country. To this end, the Arpão river base was installed, located between the municipalities of Coari and Tefe, on the Solimoes River, the main river route for the trafficking of cocaine and marijuana to Manaus. Since its implementation to date, more than 800 tons of drugs, 100 million packages of cigarettes, 4,000 vehicles, 400 boats and 133 tons of agrochemicals, among others, have been seized.42 Also, thanks to the exchange of information between Colombian and Brazilian authorities, in 2021, in the border region of the state of Amazonas, 3,244 kilograms of creepy marijuana and several boats used for drug trafficking were seized, and 13 criminals (6 Brazilians and 7 Colombians) were captured, affecting the finances of the GAOR by approximately 17 million dollars.43

In recent years, the efforts made by the FF.AA. in the fight against the COT have been significant, managing to limit resources to organizations that commit crimes in Brazilian states. However, the profitability of illicit economies for these organizations means that new methods and strategies are constantly designed to evade the control of the authorities. In addition, the corruption of public officials facilitates the development of illegal activities throughout the country. On the other hand, the extension of the Amazon and the large number of water tributaries hinder the work of the authorities to exercise effective control of the borders, generating opportunities and freedom of action for the illicit activities of these organizations to cross the borders.

41 Ibid., 173–177.
The situation in Peru

Scenarios and effects. According to the White Paper on the Defense of Peru, multidimensionality in regional security issues is linked to various problems of common interest with neighboring countries such as Brazil and Colombia. In this context, some of these threats have reached a transnational character and constitute potential risks for the State. During the 1980s and 1990s, armed groups such as the Shining Path (sendero luminoso, SL) and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement maintained a close relationship with drug trafficking, concentrating their criminal activity mainly in two coca growing basins such as the Alto Huallaga Valley and the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro River Valley (VRAEM). Consequently, these groups held armed confrontations and, in other cases, built alliances to exercise control of the territory and control of coca crops in the aforementioned basins, exacerbating the violence that mainly affected the central and southern part of the country.

Colombia, Bolivia and Peru are the main producers of coca leaf worldwide and make up the so-called “white triangle.” For this reason, Peru is the second largest exporter of cocaine below Colombia, although since 2016 there has been a slight trend towards an increase in illicit crops, due, among others, to a decrease in crops in Colombia since 2018. Similarly, the great demand from consumer countries such as the United States and others in Europe has generated a marked increase in cocaine production in

these three countries, going from 865 tons in 2014 to 1,827 tons in 2019.\textsuperscript{48} As a result, TID becomes a serious threat to national security. Peruvian drug traffickers partner not only with various Mexican, Colombian, Brazilian, Italian, Russian and Serbian cartels, including remnants of SL that serve as custodians of illicit crops in regions with predominance coca growers, but also with national criminal organizations throughout the country, facilitating the production chain, transportation and marketing to national and international markets.\textsuperscript{49}

As for the illicit arms trade in Peru, this has increased in recent years, becoming a very lucrative black market for the remnants of SL and organized crime networks. In that sense, these organizations use any lawful or illicit means to obtain weapons, exerting a certain degree of control over the population through threats to fulfill their criminal purposes.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Policies and mechanisms}. Peru’s national security and defense policy aims to guarantee its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as well as the protection of its interests and the fulfillment of its objectives for the good of society. In this sense, the Peruvian Government must face the different threats, internal and external, with clear policies, in close cooperation and coordination, identifying priorities under a multidimensional approach. The national security and defense policy determines the guidelines for the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the policy and, in this way, to be able to design the strategy that generates the appropriate mechanisms for its fulfillment.\textsuperscript{51}

In the criminal and procedural sphere, the Peruvian State has developed various mechanisms that seek to identify those crimes associated with organized crime and the way in which they should be prosecuted, tried

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
and punished. Among the normative instruments are Law 30077 against organized crime, Legislative Decree 1106 for the effective fight against money laundering and other crimes related to illegal mining and organized crime, and Legislative Decree 1244, which strengthens the fight against organized crime and illegal possession of weapons.⁵²

Likewise, the State has generated political instruments that complement the criminal and procedural regulations against organized crime and associated crimes, among which are: (1) The National Plan for Citizen Security 2013–2018, which aims to have an articulated system with five strategic objectives aimed at preventing crime and strengthening the justice system against organized crime; (2) The National Strategy to Combat Drugs 2017–2021, which seeks to strengthen the Presence of the State in coca growing areas and protect the population from the effects of this criminal chain; (3) The National Multisectoral Policy to Combat Organized Crime 2019–2030, which aims to strengthen the capacities of the State to control illegal markets and prosecute criminal organizations, as well as to prevent the linking of citizens to organized crime, assisting the victims of this scourge.⁵³

On the other hand, regarding the responsibility of the FF. AA. in the fight against the COT, this is limited only in operational support to the National Police of Peru (policia nacional del Peru, PNP) and the Public Ministry.⁵⁴ Similarly, the role of the Peruvian Army in support of the PNP is focused on interdiction operations, as long as the operational capabilities of the PNP are exceeded. In the case of the Navy, it supports the PNP in the interception of vessels in ports on the seacoast and river ports in areas of coca influence within Peruvian territory. Finally, the Air Force’s mission is the interception of aircraft in the airspace to evidence the commission of crimes related to the TID and must inform the PNP and the Public Ministry. Likewise, as a result of the amendment to Legislative Decree 1241 through Law 30796, the

---

⁵³ Ibid., 123–124.
⁵⁴ Ibid., 325.
participation of the FF. AA. in the interdiction of the TID in areas declared in a state of emergency was authorized. In this context, the VRAEM Special Command (CE-VRAEM) has been carrying out operations against terrorism and TID in areas declared in a state of emergency over the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro valleys.\(^5^5\)

Additionally, through Directive 055 of 2008, the Joint Command of the FF. AA. established border surveillance zones among which is border surveillance zone No. 2, whose responsibility is in charge of the Army through the Fifth Division and its organic units in the department of Loreto. For its part, the Operational Command of the Amazon (COAM) has responsibility for water tributaries between the interdepartmental boundary of Amazonas-Loreto (on the border with Ecuador) to the interdepartmental limit Loreto-Ucayali (on the border with Brazil). Similarly, the border areas it shares with Colombia and Brazil have six authorized crossing points, which are reached only by river. In addition, there are two river combat posts in the Strait and Soplin Vargas. Therefore, all the capabilities and efforts of the FF. AA. and PNP are integrated and complemented with the purpose of combating the TOC that affects that border area of the three countries.\(^5^6\) However, these resources and efforts are not enough.

**Results.** In the fight against TID and illegal mining, excellent results have been achieved by the Armed Forces in support of the PNP. In September 2020, during an operation carried out by the COAM in the department of Loreto, four Colombians were captured who, according to military intelligence, were members of the 48Th Border Commando Structure, achieving the seizure of 11 kilograms of cocaine, long weapons, pistols, grenades and ammunition. For its part, in September 2020, the CE-VRAEM, in the department of Ayacucho, seized 200 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride and 3 tons of inputs for the processing of PBC. In addition,

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 326.

the PNP seized 231 kilograms of cocaine from the VRAEM, which were to be airlifted from a clandestine airstrip bound for Brazil and Bolivia.

With regard to illegal mining, in 2020, the FF. AA. and the PNP, with the support of the Prosecutor’s Office, located and destroyed 22 illegal mining camps, and intervened in the sectors of Vuelta Grande and Laberinto in La Pampa (Madre de Dios), where 30 engines, 26 rafts and 11,916 liters of fuel destined for the extraction of gold illegally were seized, among others. It should be noted that La Pampa has become an important mining enclave as a result of the construction of the Brazil-Peru Interoceanic Route.57

Alliances to confront the TOC in the triple frontier

Taking into account that in the area of the triple border shared by Brazil, Colombia and Peru there are similar threats linked to the TOC, which threaten the security, stability and development of the communities of that particular area, these three States have been strengthening their alliances through the existing bilateral mechanisms. For this reason, the High Commands of the FF. AA. of these countries and the Binational Border Commissions continue to meet, and the Binational Annual Operational Plans are being developed.58 These mechanisms are intended to generate alliances, seeking the strengthening, cooperation and integration of capacities for the development of joint and combined operations between the FF. AA. of the countries in the area of the triple border with the support of other public entities, so that these actions have a strong impact on the TOC. Additionally, the Meeting of Regional Border Commanders is held by the FF. AA. of the three countries, in order to carry out the analysis of the threats affecting that particular area and other forms of the TOC.59

In the case of collective security, it is challenged at the very moment in which the threat acts, so it is important to integrate the efforts and capacities of States to identify possible threats that may affect security, establishing priorities and seeking mechanisms that allow influence on border territories and beyond national limits. In that sense, Brazil, Colombia and Peru signed a Memorandum of Understanding to combat illicit economies such as TID and weapons on border and/or common rivers in the triple border. Similarly, there are other bilateral and multilateral treaties and mechanisms to which Brazil, Colombia and Peru are party for the security and protection of the Amazon basin, such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization of 1998 or the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure of the year 2000. The latter aims to promote, coordinate and articulate the work of its members for the development of transport, energy and telecommunications infrastructure, in order to attract investment in this region and allow economic and social progress by increasing security indices in the Amazon basin. However, greater and constant involvement of the top political decision-makers of these three countries is required if the TOC is really to be effectively combated on the triple frontier.

Conclusions

The triple border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru, due to its characteristics and vulnerabilities, has become an area where criminal organizations involved in the TOC converge. This situation is aggravated since Colombia and Peru are two of the main producers of cocaine, while Brazil is the second largest consumer worldwide, factors that alter and considerably affect security and stability in the region. Due to its geostrategic importance, the Amazon basin should be considered a precious asset for those who are part of it, and every effort should be spared

61 Ibid., 208.
62 Ibid., 211.
for its protection, security and conservation. Therefore, the necessary mechanisms must be implemented to preserve it from the predatory action of criminal organizations engaged in illegal activities, crossing borders and transgressing the sovereignty of the States that share this region.

Although Colombia has been involved for more than five decades in an unprecedented internal armed conflict, it continues with the effort and frontal struggle against TID and other related crimes. Unfortunately, this struggle has caused many deaths, disappearances and forced displacement in various regions of the country. For Colombia, PDS has always been a priority in order to facilitate the development and well-being of society. In this regard, the Colombian State has accumulated enough experience to redesign and cohere itself in terms of security and defense to combat TOC, terrorism and other threats. For this, a strong civilian leadership was required to design efficient policies in security and defense, achieving the modernization and professionalization of the FF. MM. and PNC, as key factors to turn them into regional references in the fight against terrorism, insurgency and the TOC.

Brazil also considers the protection and conservation of the Amazon rainforest to be one of the State’s priorities. For this reason, the security and control of land and river borders are key to that purpose. In this context, plans and programs such as GIAHS and SIVAM have been instrumental in the FF. AA. combat the TOC and related crimes along the border line and river axes, taking away initiative and capacity from these criminal organizations.

For its part, Peru faces threats similar to those of Brazil and Colombia in the triple border, the main one being the TID, since the country is the second largest producer of cocaine in the world. However, there are other transnational threats that also affect the country, such as illicit arms trafficking, human trafficking, irregular migration and environmental damage. For this reason, the Peruvian State has been strengthening the measures in criminal and procedural matters against the COT, seeking
appropriate mechanisms to prosecute, judge and punish them. Likewise, the FF. AA. play a fundamental role in the fight against terrorism and the various forms of TOC, especially on the borders with Brazil and Colombia, and in the VRAEM.

In the triple border, not only does TID predominate as the main illegal economic activity, but also other illicit activities such as illegal mining, arms trafficking, illegal migration and illegal trafficking of flora and fauna, among others. States must therefore ensure capacity building in the FF. AA. and other public institutions involved in combating the TOC, but mainly they must ensure that all instruments of national power are involved in this struggle in a coordinated manner.

Brazil, Colombia and Peru have sufficient unilateral, bilateral and multilateral policies, plans, programmes and mechanisms to prevent, prosecute and combat TOC. However, greater collective and cooperative reciprocity is required to strengthen the institutions involved in this struggle. In the same way, it is important to consolidate legal tools and a regulatory framework adjusted to current needs, which provide guarantees to the members of the FF. AA. in the development of operational procedures against these transnational threats.

About the author

Juan Carlos Aristizábal González is Colonel of the National Army of Colombia, specialist in administration of military resources from the “General José María Córdova” Military School of Cadets, and specialist in security and national defense from the Superior War School of Colombia. He has also completed a diploma in international relations and contemporary geopolitics from the Universidad del Rosario (Bogotá – Colombia). Currently, he is a military deputy at the Colombian embassy in Peru and an analyst at the Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies.