

# The State Partnership Program

## Vision to Reality

By PABLO PAGAN

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In October 2005, forces from U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) traveled to Guatemala City, Guatemala, to support local authorities inspecting damage from Hurricane Stan. The command deployed a 58-person disaster response team and 8 helicopters to the Central American nation as part of relief efforts. Among this team, and among those back in the United States facilitating the recovery assistance programs, were troops whose professional skills and long affiliation with Guatemala's military, civilian, and business leadership proved invaluable in helping the disaster-stricken region. They were members of the Arkansas National Guard helping their colleagues under the auspices of an international security cooperation effort known as the State Partnership Program (SPP).



U.S. Army medics arriving in San Isidro, El Salvador, Exercise *New Horizons* 2005

1<sup>st</sup> Combat Camera Squadron (John M. Foster)

Bridge to Guatemala City after  
Hurricane Stan, October 2005

Fleet Combat Camera, Atlantic (Robert McFill)

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Unlike other combatant commands, USSOUTHCOM is not currently engaged in combat operations. Its daily threats and challenges, however, are no less significant to the security of the Nation or its allies. These issues, and the approaches to solving them, can be more subtle and complex than combat, and they must be confronted in an atmosphere often marred by poverty, inequality, and corruption.

With only 0.4 percent of the defense budget, USSOUTHCOM must use its limited resources creatively to accomplish its mission of conducting military operations and promoting security cooperation to support U.S. strategic objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its tools are primarily those of engagement. As a vehicle that allows for military-to-military, military-to-civilian, and civilian-to-civilian interface, perhaps the most flexible instrument in the command's security cooperation tool chest is the National Guard's SPP.

### Area of Responsibility

U.S. Southern Command is the unified command responsible for all U.S. military activities on the land mass of Latin America south of Mexico; the waters adjacent to Central and South America; the Caribbean Sea, with its 13 island nations and European and U.S. territories; the Gulf of Mexico; and a portion of the Atlantic Ocean. Its area of responsibility (AOR) encompasses 32 countries (19 in Central and South America and

13 in the Caribbean) and covers 14.5 million square miles. The region represents about one-sixth of the land mass assigned to regional unified commands.

Although many nations in the AOR experienced violent internal conflict and high levels of human rights abuse in the second half of the last century, since the 1990s, all but one have adopted democratic forms of government and are working to strengthen democratic institutions, civil society, and political parties.

Nonetheless, their military and security forces face grave challenges to their ability to protect citizens from street crime, gangs, international terrorism, transnational crime, attacks by illegal armed groups, and other forms of violence, while continuing to respect and protect the civil liberties and basic freedoms on which their democracies are based. Military forces, in particular, are increasingly called on by civilian governments to perform nontraditional missions, such as supporting police and other security forces in law enforcement missions, disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, counterdrug and counterterrorism missions, environmental protection, and peacekeeping and peace support missions, all of which bring the military into close contact with civilian populations.

### Command Vision and Theater Security Cooperation Strategy

The USSOUTHCOM vision is to be the recognized partner of choice and center of excellence for regional security affairs within a

hemisphere of escalating importance by supporting defense of the homeland and achieving regional partnerships that:

- promote democratic values and principles
- respect human rights
- secure territories and defend borders
- ensure regional and hemispheric security
- deter, dissuade, and defeat transnational threats to regional stability.

Meeting this vision requires that the command work with the U.S. Ambassadors and their country teams in the area in support of their individual country plans. The command depends on strong relationships with the country teams to integrate inter-agency objectives into its operations.

The command's theater strategy—derived directly from the President's national security strategy—is based on promoting regional security and stability among partner democracies. The command supports U.S. interests in four principal ways:

- building regional cooperative security
- developing military roles and missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- supporting the national counterdrug strategy
- restructuring USSOUTHCOM for the future.

Besides the ever-present resource challenge, meeting the vision requires that efforts have appropriate breadth and continuity, traditionally weak points in a military-oriented approach. In the former case, uniformed military personnel may lack access (by law, custom, or opportunity) to law enforcement, civil government, or private sector contacts, limiting the scope of their activities. Regarding continuity, the typical 3-year tour of duty for regular military personnel assigned to a combatant command or shorter terms characteristic of downrange assignments are limiting factors.

### Breadth, Continuity, and the National Guard

One way to address the breadth and continuity issues leverages the unique civil-military status of the National Guard. Alone among Total Force components, the Guard has the flexibility to engage partner nations on a military-to-military, military-to-civilian, and civilian-to-civilian basis. While enjoying

this unparalleled access to key sectors of partner nations, Guard members also demonstrate the professionalism and cost-effectiveness of the Total Force concept and the Reserve components, share experiences and skills gained through their civilian profes-

U.S. forces opportunities to train with potential coalition partners in peacetime and contingency environments. Each program is tailored to meet the needs of the host country as well as U.S. strategic goals and interests. Through these activities, the SPP illustrates

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sions, and build personal and professional links among all participants.

The effectiveness and professional links of these personnel are magnified by the continuity and predictability inherent in the National Guard. Not bound to the typical 24- to 36-month tour, Guard personnel may remain in a position significantly longer. Even if key individuals are reassigned, they typically remain within the same state organization and are a source of institutional memory.

**The State Partnership Program**

The United States has faced similar challenges before. Following the disestablishment of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, America was eager to engage the militaries of Central and Eastern Europe in cooperative efforts to confront the emerging threats and opportunities of the post-Cold War world. However, it required supreme delicacy to not upset fragile democracies or send a provocative signal to the new Russian Federation.

The State Partnership Program advances national security policy through constructive military associations with countries in a nonconfrontational setting. Within the context of these relationships, a range of military, civil-military, and civil activities are conducted in support of mutual national interests. The partner nation has access to the National Guard's military capabilities and other government and civil institutions such as business organizations, fire and police departments, and universities. SPP is fully integrated into the Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) strategy, and its activities support TSC objectives and priorities and thus national policies and interests.

As a tool for security cooperation, SPP builds military-to-military relationships, helps develop partner nation security force capabilities and professionalism, promotes the exchange of information, and affords

the value of military subordination to civilian authority, assists in the development of democratic institutions, fosters open market economies to bring stability, and projects U.S. humanitarian values.

Since 1994, the SPP has grown from a regional initiative to a global presence. There are currently 50 partnerships worldwide and 17 SPP pairings within the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility (see table). Florida is

| State                | Partner Nation               |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Arkansas             | Guatemala                    |
| Connecticut          | Uruguay                      |
| Delaware             | Trinidad and Tobago          |
| District of Columbia | Jamaica                      |
| Florida              | Guyana, Venezuela            |
| Kentucky             | Ecuador                      |
| Louisiana            | Belize                       |
| New Hampshire        | El Salvador                  |
| Massachusetts        | Paraguay                     |
| Mississippi          | Bolivia                      |
| Missouri             | Panama                       |
| Puerto Rico          | Dominican Republic, Honduras |
| Rhode Island         | Bahamas                      |
| West Virginia        | Peru                         |
| Wisconsin            | Nicaragua                    |

paired with both Guyana and Venezuela; however, no events have been executed in Venezuela in the last 2 years due to the current political situation there.

**SPP Activities**

*The Arkansas-Guatemala Success.* In the aftermath of Hurricane Stan in October 2005, Soldiers of the Arkansas National Guard helped conduct a week-long assessment of Guatemala's hardest-hit regions to address critical short-term relief and long-term recovery. But cooperation had been building since 2002, when the Arkansas-Guatemala SPP rela-

tionship began. Following an initial exchange of visits, the partners launched a series of joint projects emphasizing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Guatemalan military and civilian personnel shared experiences and techniques with their National Guard counterparts, the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, the State Police, and other law enforcement and public service agencies. When disaster struck, the knowledge and relationships were in place.

Pre-Stan instances of cooperation between Guatemalans and Arkansans paying off include an elementary school, built in 2004 in part by Arkansas Guard troops, which provided civil engineering training for the Americans and a needed facility for over 140 students. The school was equipped with the help of the North Little Rock Chamber of Commerce. A Guatemalan highway safety initiative modeled after an Arkansas program is already helping motorists. Civilian efforts are multiplying as well. Heifer International, an Arkansas-based global nonprofit organization promoting self-sustaining efforts to ease hunger and poverty, is working with Guatemalan farmers on agricultural and economic development projects.

*Mississippi and Bolivian Civil Defense.* Since 1999, Bolivia and Mississippi have worked together to hone emergency response skills. When Hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. Gulf Coast, the Mississippi National Guard was called on to put those skills to practice. Their colleagues from the Bolivian Civil Defense Agency, armed with hard-earned experience from dealing with their country's torrential rainy seasons, traveled to Mississippi to offer support and further cement their relationship.

*Wisconsin Support to Nicaraguan Police and Firefighters.* When Milwaukee found itself with a surplus bomb squad emergency response vehicle, the SPP facilitated its use. The Wisconsin National Guard coordinated its donation and delivery to the Nicaraguan Police Anti-Terrorist Unit, where it will provide a much-needed capability. Links between public service agencies provided several fire trucks and ambulances now used by the Managua Fire Department. Other cooperative efforts cover areas such as humanitarian demining, emergency management, airport security, and urban search and rescue.

*Louisiana-Belize Emergency Response and Search/Rescue Activities.* Louisiana's SPP was established in 1996 with two partner nations,

Belize and Uzbekistan. The Louisiana Army and Air Guard have executed over 100 SPP events since then. As with many SPP relationships, there is great mutual interest in emergency management, and state authorities have forged strong links with the Belize National Emergency Management Organization and associated local public safety organizations.

During 2003, Louisiana hosted the International Workshop for Emergency Response, a joint, multilateral planning and response gathering that used demonstrations and hands-on exercises to show how local and state agencies react to industrial disasters. Besides their Belize Defence Force and Uzbek counterparts, the workshop was attended by representatives from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and several West Indies nations.

The Louisiana-Belize program has also focused on search/rescue and law enforcement professional development. Subject matter expert exchanges have paid great dividends to both sides. In one exchange, a search/rescue exercise in Belize yielded a bonus when the mock mission led to salvaging a potentially repairable aircraft.

*New Hampshire and El Salvador.* Shortly after New Hampshire and El Salvador began their SPP relationship, two powerful earthquakes struck the Central American nation. Over 100 people were killed, and 1.3 million were displaced or left homeless—approximately 300,000 more than the population of New Hampshire. The skill and professionalism of the Salvadoran military saved the day and left an indelible impression on their U.S. colleagues. Their deft command and control sped vital aid where it was most needed and helped save lives. Today, New Hampshire and El Salvador average five major SPP events annually, with emphasis on not only military topics but also business development and academic exchanges.

*Missouri-Panama.* Missouri's relationship with Panama comfortably predates their 1996 entry into the SPP. Since 1935, when Southeast Missouri State University adopted Panama as a sister state, the Missouri public university system has been linked to Panamanian counterparts. While the formal military relations are somewhat more recent, they are certainly significant.

Beginning in 1985, Exercise *Blazing Trails*, an engineer readiness drill, saw 9,500 troops constructing or repairing 42 kilometers



GEN Peter A. Schoomaker, USA, speaks to Conference of American Armies in Buenos Aires

U.S. Army South (Kaye Fickey)

of road over a 6-month period. Since then, Missouri Guard members have participated in constructing or repairing over 200 kilometers of roads, 7 bridges, 27 schools, and 14 clinics in addition to drilling 13 wells.

Today, the bonds between Missouri and Panama reach far beyond those initial military links. On a recent trip to Panama City, Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder led a 16-person delegation to assess and expand the pair's

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health, agriculture, economic, public safety, and higher education ties.

### The Road Ahead

As the above examples illustrate, SPP activities focus the attention and resources of a very small part of the Department of Defense—a state National Guard—with a single country in support of shared U.S. and partner nation objectives. This concentrated focus allows for the development of long-term institutional relationships, lasting personal relationships, and a mechanism to catalyze a broad and expanding base of support from outside the Defense Department—in particular, state/local governments and private industry.

The criteria for a successful SPP partnership are few. First, shared U.S. and partner nation objectives must be identified and programs tailored to address them. Second, both the partner nation and U.S. state must

be committed to a long-term relationship. Third, the association must incorporate nonmilitary actors at every level. Finally, activities must require minimal resources beyond those the participants would devote to the effort acting independently.

In the war on terror, the United States has been forced to adapt to meet the new and unique demands posed by a nontraditional, amorphous enemy. The world situation has driven us toward cooperating with other nations at an unprecedented level and utilizing all instruments of national power. Successful cooperation is built on a foundation of mutual understand-

ing, trust, and respect. In this context, it is significant that the four Western Hemisphere countries that joined the U.S.-led coalition in Operation *Iraqi Freedom*—the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua—are SPP participants.

Besides the challenges posed by the war on terror, the nations of the hemisphere face a range of concerns—including transnational crime, internal threats to democracy and the rule of law, natural disasters, and mass migration—whose solutions lie outside the traditional boundaries of a purely military approach. To address these issues, USSOUTHCOM's ambitious vision and theater strategy need the backing of flexible and powerful tools. The State Partnership Program is one such tool. **JFQ**