

STATE TO STATE

The U.S. National Guard promotes civil-military relationships and provides humanitarian and infrastructure development assistance through partnerships with more than 40 countries

The National Guard State Partnership Program was established in 1993 in response to the radically changed political-military situation following the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Authorities questioned how the National Guard, having provided the United States with strategic credibility during the Cold War, could continue to be relevant in an era when protecting Europe was no longer the driving force behind America's national defense strategy.

The National Guard is the longest serving military service in the United States. Original colonial militias, which formed the basis of the current U.S. National Guard, predate the nation and have been serving for over 367 years. Today, it is being used in a new way: as a full-spectrum force supporting the Army and the Air Force of the United States abroad and defending the homeland, while also responding to natural disasters such as hurricanes.

Every state and territory of the United States has a National Guard, which often features both an Army Guard that supports the Army and an Air Guard that supports the Air Force.

LASTING CONTRIBUTION

Mindful of the uniqueness and strengths of its citizen-soldiers, the National Guard foresaw an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to solidifying the newly established peace. The response was the State Partnership Program (SPP). Elegantly simple in concept, the program sought to link the National Guard in states and territories throughout the United States with ministries of defense in the emerging democratic nations of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia so that each might pursue cooperative activities of mutual benefit.

The National Guard's international initiatives foster



Capt. Colleen Kennedy, right, a doctor for the Virginia Air National Guard, examines a young patient during a 14-day humanitarian mission in July 2002 to four towns in El Salvador. (Photo by Staff Sgt. John Houghton, U.S. Air Force)

democracy, encourage market economies, promote regional cooperation and stability, and provide opportunities for National Guard soldiers and airmen -- as well as civilian members -- to interact with and learn from other nations and cultures.

Currently, the state National Guards are partnered with 21 countries in the U.S. European Command area of responsibility, five countries in the U.S. Central Command area, 15 in the U.S. Southern Command region, and three countries in the U.S. Pacific Command area.

National Guard units support every combatant commander around the globe: the Northern Command and NORAD, Strategic Command, Pacific Command and Pacific Command for Hawaii, Alaska, Guam, and the Marianas, as well as having significant numbers of troops in Europe, Asia, South America, Central and Southwest Asia, and other regions.

The National Guard envisions its partnership program as a way to initiate military-to-military contacts, as well as a way to focus on the economic, political, and military



U.S. military engineers smooth a cement sidewalk adjacent to a health center in St. Kitts and Nevis, a federation of islands in the Caribbean Sea. Army National Guard, Air Force, Army Reserves, and Marine Corps units worked in conjunction with the St. Kitts and Nevis Defense Force in a 2003 exercise known as New Horizons. (Photo by Senior Airman Michele G. Misiano, U.S. Air Force)

benefits accruing to countries that have a viable reserve force of ordinary citizens trained and motivated to answer their country's call to duty in emergencies. The U.S. National Guard is ready, as needed, to organize, staff, train, and equip an effective military reserve force to ensure civilian control of the military.

The National Guard's "Minuteman Fellows" program brings hundreds of citizens of the emerging democracies each year to their partner states in the United States, to learn how the U.S. National Guard ensures the support and participation of "Hometown America" in the defense of the nation, and how the soldiers and airmen of the National Guard balance their military lives with their civilian careers.

Interestingly, the National Guard State Partnership Program was already launched and operating before NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative was approved and established. Now, some 11 years after the establishment of the State Partnership program, it has become a principal way in which the United States supports the Partnership for Peace Program. The State Partnership Program has expanded well beyond its original area of focus, and now has partnerships in Europe, Central Asia, the Far East, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. The program's "Bridge to America" holds the promise of strengthening America's ties to democratic partner nations around the world, and promoting increasing international understanding at the grass-roots level.

THE PARTNERING PROCESS

The formal process to establish a partnership begins with a request submitted by the host nation to the U.S. ambassador in that country. The ambassador then formally requests the theater Combatant Commander who, in turn, requests the Chief, National Guard Bureau, to select a state for the partnership. The Chief of the National Guard Bureau selects a state partner based upon political, military, and socioeconomic criteria relevant to the needs and capabilities of the host nation and the participating state.

This selection is then forwarded to the Combatant Commander for final approval. After a public announcement, the partnership is officially initiated through a ceremony conducted in the partner nation.

SECURITY COOPERATION OBJECTIVES

The State Partnership Program strives to achieve the following security cooperation objectives:

- Improve military interoperability between the United States and the forces of partner nations.
- Demonstrate military subordination to civil authority.
- Demonstrate military support to civilian authorities.
- Assist with the development of democratic institutions.
- Foster open-market economies to help develop stability.
- Project and represent United States humanitarian values.

Security cooperation involves at least 16 types of exchanges and programs, from professional military education to civic leader development.

Materials developed by the U.S. National Guard Bureau's Office of International Affairs were compiled and adapted for this article. ■

