



KYARNG PAO (David W. Altom)

Effective Engagement

The Case of Ecuador

By JOHN R. GROVES, JR.

The United States recognized the opportunity to reduce its military presence in Europe and Latin America after the Cold War. A peacetime strategy was needed to promote stability, economic progress, and democratic institutions. In Europe, the Partnership for Peace (PFP) initiative served to encourage military-to-military and military-to-government assistance and exchange programs in former Warsaw

Pact countries and newly independent states. Its subset, the National Guard State Partnership Program, has sought to extend and build upon mil-to-mil relations.

Although related, the programs differ. State partnership originated with the National Guard Bureau and the Army and Air National Guard of participating states and includes Europe and Latin America and may be extended to Southeast Asia. It links individual states with militaries in partner countries to improve bilateral relations. Program goals reflect an evolving mission for the National

Major General John R. Groves, Jr., ARNG, is adjutant general of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and a member of the Reserve Forces Policy Board.

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Guard and promote regional stability and civil-military relations in support of U.S. policy.

Sponsoring states use the PFP concept to engage host countries in Europe and increasingly in Latin America. It combines National Guard assets including civilian skills and ethnic affinities as well as support from state governments, education institutions, and the private sector.

The PFP program remains a strong force in fostering relations between NATO and newly independent states. Similar needs for engagement exist today in Latin America. State partnership builds on the European experience to shape the environment and reinforces democratic institutions and economic progress. U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has aggressively advanced the strategy of engagement within the region. Awareness of

Kentucky initiated one of the first state-to-country partnerships in 1997

host country conditions and emphasis on cooperation, professionalism, and respect for participants have been its guiding principles. Theater engagement planning coordinates and combines active component training and assistance in host countries, under the CINC and in cooperation with our ambassadors and their country teams. The results have been effective exercises and exchanges and continuous, diversified shaping activities. Eleven state partnership programs currently exist in the SOUTHCOM region.

Latin American Bellwether

Unique conditions in Ecuador have led to a singular engagement plan. Kentucky initiated one of the first state-to-country partnerships in 1997, organizing its efforts to meet host country requirements and U.S. interests. Ecuador has three north-to-south geographical bands—the tropic lowlands, Andean range, and rain forest—with their respective subgovernance issues of ethnicity, poverty, regionalism, unemployment, environment, and infrastructure.

State Partnership Program

Partnerships with foreign defense establishments were first proposed by U.S. European Command (EUCOM) in consideration of the concerns expressed by the Russian Federation to active U.S. military personnel in the region and a decision to staff liaison teams with members of the Reserve components. In 1993 the National Guard Bureau recommended pairing states with Baltic nations (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). From this initiative emerged a military-to-military program for Central and Eastern Europe. Since then it has grown beyond the Joint Contact Team Program established by EUCOM to become a tool for engagement throughout Latin America and Europe and has been expanded to the Pacific region, promoting interaction in the social and economic as well as military spheres. State partners participate in training, exercises, internships, exchanges, and civic leader visits. Activities are coordinated through CINCs, country teams, and other agencies to build democratic institutions that assist nations in many regions of the world. Partnerships create long-term relationships based on confidence and trust. Current participating countries (*and their state partners*) include:



130th Airlift Wing (Charles R. Ware)

Albania (*New Jersey and New York*), Belarus (*Utah*), Belize (*Louisiana*), Bolivia (*Mississippi*), Bulgaria (*Tennessee*), Croatia (*Minnesota*), Czech Republic (*Nebraska and Texas*), Ecuador (*Kentucky*), El Salvador (*New Hampshire*), Estonia (*Maryland*), Honduras (*Puerto Rico*), Hungary (*Ohio*), Jamaica (*Washington, D.C.*), Kazakhstan (*Arizona*), Latvia (*Michigan*), Lithuania (*Pennsylvania*), Moldova (*North Carolina*), Macedonia (*Vermont*), Panama (*Missouri*), Paraguay (*Massachusetts*), Peru (*West Virginia*), Philippines (*Hawaii and Guam*), Poland (*Illinois*), Republic of Georgia (*Georgia*), Republic of Kyrgyzstan (*Montana*), Romania (*Alabama*), Slovakia (*Indiana*), Slovenia (*Colorado*), Turkmenistan (*Nevada*), Ukraine (*California and Kansas*), Uruguay (*Connecticut*), Uzbekistan (*Louisiana*), and Venezuela (*Florida*).

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Until recently the country's military was largely deployed against an invasion from Peru. Ecuador and Peru engaged in a violent border clash in 1997. The prospect of all-out war was real. Signatories to the Rio Accords that drew boundary between the two countries in 1945—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States—intervened, created a buffer zone, and cooled down tempers. For almost two years an observer mission, fielded by

the guarantor states, contained the situation. The dispute was ended by treaty in October 1998. [For details, see Glenn R. Weidner, "Operation Safe Border: The Ecuador-Peru Crisis," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 11 (Spring 98).]

After the treaty was signed, representatives of Ecuador and Peru as well as the United States attended a symposium in Cincinnati on emergency management. The state partnership programs of Kentucky and West Virginia brought together officials from Ecuador and Peru on neutral ground

Building school in Ecuador.



National Guard combat engineers.



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sucre) was recently tied to the dollar, and preliminary reports indicate that the economy has stopped its freefall. Needed investment, including savings deposits in Ecuadorian banks, are positive signs along with larger revenues from oil exports.

Ecuador was one of the first countries in Latin America to move toward democracy when the military government called for free elections in 1979. But with six presidents over the last few years, punctuated by the only recent coup in the region, the future is uncertain. Although the coup in January 2000—led by the senior military commander—lasted only a few hours, President Jamil Mahuad was ousted and Vice President Gustavo Noboa took over when Mahuad tried reforms that his opponents found too draconian. Until recently, even a failing banking system and a decision to renege on international loans could not create a consensus for action. At the same time polling by the Inter-American Development Bank and the European Union disclosed that Ecuadorians had the least regard for democracy in the region, with only 41 percent preferring this form of government in 1998.

Strikes, ethnic violence, corruption, and damage from El Niño also have confronted the country as a resource-constrained military battles narco traffickers. Added to this volatile mix is the fear of internal alliances among unions, indigenous Indian groups, and Colombian guerrillas.

for reasons of mutual interest. A small but positive step was taken toward shaping the geopolitical environment between the countries.

Despite peace with Peru, Ecuador is in turmoil. Although it has abundant natural resources and adequate infrastructure, Ecuador lacks the discipline required to join the mainstream of fiscally responsible, self-supporting,

and stable nations. Indeed, Ecuador received the dubious distinction of being the only country to default on Brady bonds that allow mostly Latin American countries to shed debts owed from the 1980s. On a more optimistic note, the national currency (the

Kentucky-Ecuador State Partnership

Following the model of the Partnership for Peace program developed in Eastern Europe, Kentucky officially joined Ecuador in July 1997 in establishing the first state-to-country partnership in Latin America. With the exception of Operation *Nuevos Horizontes* (New Horizons), each of the following activities have been funded by U.S. Southern Command:

■ **Medical.** Beginning with a medical readiness training exercise (MEDRETE) in Alahuela in 1996, there have been five deployments by the Kentucky National Guard and a reciprocal visit by Ecuadorians to conduct MEDRETE operations and emergency medical training for military and civilian healthcare providers.

■ **Disaster Assistance.** Two north-to-south and two south-to-north military support to civil authorities exchanges have taken place involving military and civilian disaster response specialists. Additionally, participation by the Kentucky National Guard and *Defensa Civil* in Ecuador, as well as counterparts from West Virginia and Peruvian civil defense ministry in a symposium in 1999 led to a disaster emergency mutual assistance compact between Ecuador and Peru.



Texas Army National Guard in Argentina.

55th Signal Company (Valentino Garcia)

■ **Symposium on 21st Century Strategies.** Two events were conducted in cooperation with faculty from the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Relations at the University of Kentucky. A four-day seminar in Ecuador at the *Escuela Politecnica de Ejercito* was attended by that nation's military and civilian leadership.

■ **Military Support to Civilian Authorities-Law Enforcement.** A south-to-north exchange by Ecuadorian military and national police officers and the Kentucky National Guard to observe law enforcement training, crime scene preservation, and forensic evidence analysis techniques in use by military police, Kentucky State Police, and Lexington Urban-County Police. A north-to-south reciprocal visit by the U.S. personnel took place in 1999.

■ **Military-to-Military Coordination.** South-to-north visits by Ecuadorian army, navy, and air force liaison officers took place in 1997 and 1999 to provide an orientation to operations involving the Kentucky National Guard.

■ **Nuevos Horizontes I.** U.S. Forces Command sponsored the deployment of 2,000 members of engineer, medical, aviation, and military police units from the Kentucky National Guard to Esmeraldas Province in 1998 to construct schools, clinics, and sanitary facilities in conjunction with conduct of joint MEDRETE operations.

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Infusion of U.S. funds and effort into Colombia to counter narcotics trafficking and insurgents has yet to make itself fully felt. But early indications are not encouraging. Drug trafficking is a cancerous threat to the already precarious state of governance in Ecuador.

The impact on Ecuador from increased counterdrug initiatives in Colombia remains unclear though

here preliminary indications are worrisome. Especially in the border area, the spillover from Colombian guerrilla and trafficking groups has burdened law enforcement and military personnel. The extent to which Colombian narco interests will move into Ecuador is not known.

Like many partnership programs, the Kentucky National Guard has completed a number of engagement activities. They are coordinated with SOUTHCOM goals for Ecuador and the Andes. Annual planning and scheduling meetings consider command projects and National Guard training to develop engagement events. Annual training may be dedicated to the partnership mission while other events are funded by SOUTHCOM and involve National Guard members for deployments beyond normal two-week training periods. Occasionally exercises funded by U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) or the Joint Chiefs enable deployment of Reserve components for several months. Deploying battalion-size engineer units to both Panama and Ecuador are examples. These activities mainly used members of the National Guard who rotated to the host country in an annual training status for two weeks, with a small staff to provide continuity.

Partnership efforts have included support to civilian authorities through disaster assistance and law enforcement exchanges, medical readiness training exercises, rural health care, mil-to-mil visits, and symposia conducted in Ecuador by faculty members from the University of Kentucky. A six-month deployment in 1998 of over 2,000 engineer, medical, aviation, and military police personnel from the Kentucky Army and Air National Guard assisted with a FORSCOM-supported operation known as *Nuevos Horizontes* (or New Horizons). Though not a traditional CINC activity, it was a benchmark event with a continuous and broadly dispersed series of infrastructure improvement projects at the grass roots level. Units exercised the full range of mobilization tasks and deployed into environments where total self-sufficiency was demanded under conditions of high operational activity. Training benefits for the National Guard, mostly cycled in deployments of 15 to 18 days, were the best possible under peacetime conditions. Retention remains high. The local impact was the creation of long-term cultural and community improvements to enhance

medical and educational opportunities for thousands of mostly rural people. Moreover, an intangible benefit is the sense of accomplishment embedded in the history of the participating units.

People Are Key

State partnership activities have been criticized as lacking in methods to objectively measure outcomes. While some engagement falls into the categories of goodwill or information exchange, the basis for Army and Air National Guard deployments is clear—training value and accomplishing mission essential tasks. The deployment of the Kentucky National Guard exposed engineer units to real world missions under demanding conditions, including the movement of vehicles and equipment by road, rail, and sea.

Many partner states have reinforced mil-to-mil activities through networking and ventures in collaboration with cultural, business, educational, and government organizations in their states. The Kentucky National Guard has worked with groups having longstanding contacts in Ecuador, most notably the Partners of the Americas (founded in 1964 as the people-to-people component of the Alliance for Progress) whose volunteers include farmers, artists, emergency planners, building officials, sports teams, and university faculty. Part of the long-term vision of the program is that military-to-military activities will gradually

the value of the state partnership program is day to day engagement

be offset by interaction involving non-military interests, initiative, and institutions in furtherance of democratic institutions and market economics.

The peoples of Latin America are generally aware of civic life and governance in the United States. This awareness results in part from immigrants to this country who remain in close contact with their families at home. Although comparatively few immigrants from Ecuador have settled in Kentucky, those who have settled elsewhere are a source of information on democratic institutions. This ebb and flow of knowledge about the United States and



Base camp Bluegrass,
Esmeraldas Province.

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its value system is fertile soil for the grass roots engagement which the program seeks to cultivate.

The value of the state partnership program is day to day engagement. Although Kentucky and West Virginia were aligned with Ecuador and Peru when border hostilities were taking place, the program can take little credit for the peace accord. The same can be said for the military coup in Ecuador with its counterproductive and embarrassing implications. Program participants were little more than bystanders. Counterdemocratic tendencies in Ecuador are part of a political culture in which the military has seen itself as the second team ever ready to govern when civilian institutions fail.

The country has a tradition of democratic idealism, but its economy and internal conflicts have blocked progress. Now threats from drug trafficking and guerrilla activity are enormous.

There is no quick fix for Ecuador or any other developing country. The key is contact between peoples. In their limited but effective way, state partnerships seek to build confidence in the rule of law and commitment to the institutions in which democratic principles are grounded.

The Kentucky National Guard and counterpart organizations in other

states—working with the active components through unified commands—are engaged in efforts to diminish the potential of conflict in various regions of the world. Winning on the battlefield remains job number one, but achieving national security objectives without a resort to arms is also worthy of our effort.

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