

Introduction

For over 30 years, the State Partnership Program (SPP) has been instrumental in developing enduring relationships and increasing cooperation between military and security forces worldwide. The SPP is a critical security cooperation tool linking National Guard (NG) elements of U.S. states and territories with the armed forces of partner nations. Administered by the Department of Defense (DoD) National Guard Bureau (NGB), in coordination with the Department of State and geographic combatant commands, the SPP serves as a cost-effective instrument for advancing the U.S. national security interests through the cultivation of lasting partnerships.

Leveraging the unique capabilities and expertise of the NG, which encompasses both military skills and civilian knowledge across a wide range of fields, the SPP operates a network of 115 partner nations strategically aligned with NG elements across all 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia. Through these partnerships, the SPP seeks to build relationships and support the capabilities of regional militaries and security forces to confront internal challenges to stability, sovereignty, and security.

More specifically, in alignment with the Department's Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG), the SPP directly supports the objective of increasing the burden-sharing with partner nations to deter or fight adversaries alongside, or in lieu of, U.S. forces. The SPP enhances the military capabilities of partner nations through joint exercises and professional development programs, thereby improving their ability to respond to security threats and maintain stability within their borders.

The June 25, 2025, testimony will focus on South Carolina's partnership with Colombia. However, another example of a partner nation's military capabilities which have been strengthened through SPP activities, combined with other security cooperation authorities, is the strong partnership with the Philippines. Since its establishment in 2000, the Hawaii and Guam National Guards have fostered the longest-standing SPP partnership in the Indo-Pacific region. This collaboration has been instrumental in advancing the Philippines' capabilities, in combination with other authorities, in critical areas such as air domain awareness, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, rotary wing operations, and implementing policy to professionalize the Philippine military's Reserve Force. Through active participation in major joint exercises, including BALIKATAN, SALAKNIB, and COPE THUNDER, the Hawaii and Guam NGs have not only strengthened military interoperability but also deepened the strategic partnership, ensuring the Philippines is better equipped to address regional security challenges and respond to crises effectively. This mutually beneficial relationship underscores the vital role of the SPP in enhancing global security and fostering resilience among partner nations.

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Establishing New State Partnerships

Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 5111.20 governs the annual SPP nomination process. It begins with a partner nation's formal request, endorsed by the U.S. Ambassador or Chargé, and by the relevant combatant command. The submission undergoes Joint Staff and Office of the Secretary of Defense (OUSD) for Policy evaluation before a state or territory NG is selected by the NGB and approved, with Department of State concurrence, by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

Overall, countries are selected based on U.S. strategic interests and states are determined by factors such as existing relationships, cultural or economic links, and the unique capabilities of a state's NG in relation to the partner nation's requirements. The SPP has grown considerably in the last three years, with 20 countries being invited to join.

South Carolina National Guard and Colombia: A Strong Partnership

The South Carolina National Guard's (SCNG) partnership with Colombia, formally established in 2012, continues to be an active and valuable component of SPP. It is built on a foundation of mutual respect and a shared commitment to regional security and disaster preparedness.

SCNG security cooperation engagements are executed in accordance with the U.S. Southern Command's (USSOUTHCOM's) Theater Campaign Plan and Country Annexes, with Intermediate Military Objectives for Colombia, and with the U.S. Embassy's Integrated Country Strategy. The SCNG helps ensure the United States remains the partner of choice for Colombia. Though international politics sometimes make relations ebb and flow, the military-to-military relationship between the SCNG and Colombia remains strong.

The SPP with Colombia directly enhances U.S. national security in several ways. By strengthening Colombia's military forces, the SPP, in combination with other assistance authorities, contributes to overall regional stability, reducing the potential for instability that could impact U.S. interests. Additionally, Colombia is a transit point for illicit activities. The SPP supports Colombia's efforts to combat drug trafficking, human smuggling, and other transnational crimes, which directly impacts security of the homeland. Lastly, Colombia resides in a geographically significant location. A strong relationship with Colombia ensures continued access and cooperation related to South American ports and other strategic assets.

SCNG's engagement with Colombia has led to improved logistical capabilities, strengthened trust and communication with the partner nation, and improved cyber capabilities. SCNG SPP activities generally concentrate on joint/shared priorities that include fixed and rotary wing maintenance, logistics and sustainment, cyber defense, civil engineering, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and officer/non-commissioned officer professional development.

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The SCNG actively seeks collaboration with other U.S. Government programs to avoid duplication of efforts and to create new engagement opportunities that support SPP growth. Recent activities include:

- **Subject Matter Expert Exchanges:** Not intended to be training, SCNG and Colombia completed ten engagements this year (six in Colombia) focusing on rotary wing search and rescue operations, aviation standardization (maintenance, safety, and readiness), explosive ordnance identification and remediation, disaster preparedness, military courtroom procedures, and professional military development.
- **Upcoming:** Three additional engagements are planned for the remainder of the fiscal year: 1) combat casualty care; 2) cyber security and defense; and 3) expeditionary humanitarian assistance and disaster response.
 - **Bilateral Staff Talks:** Executive meetings between Colombian and U.S. military leaders occur annually to discuss agreed actions, objectives, priorities and mutually beneficial lines of effort. These lines of effort serve as the foundation for shaping engagements through 2027, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding. The development of five-year Partnership Support Plans outlines clear objectives aimed at enhancing the interoperability of U.S. and Colombian forces, enabling them to effectively cooperate and achieve shared security cooperation goals.
 - **Exercises:** The SCNG leverages its SPP relationships by increasing interoperability with Colombia at several different command levels by supporting exercises and other regional collective activities as directed by USSOUTHCOM. Efforts to embed a Colombian Army platoon alongside SCNG soldiers during Joint Readiness Training Center rotations are emblematic of SPP intent to identify, coordinate, and execute opportunities to further develop Joint Force readiness and interoperability.

Conclusion

The SPP stands as a valuable, relatively low-cost investment in global stability and security, benefiting the American people. Responsible stewardship of the program necessitates a continued focus on maximizing the program's impact through strategic prioritization. This includes deepening existing partnerships to ensure the most effective use of resources, fostering burden sharing, and adapting the program to address evolving security challenges. The SPP remains committed to working closely with Congress and other stakeholders to ensure its continued success in advancing U.S. national security interests. Thank you for your time and interest in the SPP.

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