

International Armies Embrace NCO Development

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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The U.S. Army has long understood that developing noncommissioned officers is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage. Though not every nation has embraced NCO development, Army senior enlisted leaders with U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Southern Command, U.S. Army North and U.S. Army South continue to impart the message to partnering nations that empowering NCOs is the key to success.





Navy Fleet Master Chief Terrence Molidor, command senior enlisted leader for North American Aerospace Defense Command and USNORTHCOM, acknowledges the challenges in persuading some countries' leaders that the empowerment of NCOs does not pose a threat to their jobs. Molidor, U.S. Army leaders and state partners gave updates about NCO development efforts during the second day of the International Training and Leader Development Symposium in El Paso, Texas. (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

“We have developed a regional strategy for NCO development with individual countries,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Carlos Olvera, senior enlisted advisor for Army South. “We never force NCO development because the country may not want it. It’s always done by, through and with [their cooperation], and it’s always at their request. In all of our cases, the foreigners have asked us to work with them to develop a more professional noncommissioned officer corps.”

U.S. and international senior enlisted leaders and State Partnership Program members focused on fostering international partnerships and NCO professional development when they gathered April 13 during the second day of the 2016 International Training and Leader Development Symposium in El Paso, Texas. U.S. military leaders and state partners gave updates about NCO development efforts within their areas of responsibility.

“One thing we have learned that’s kind of hard to do is we need to engage with most senior leadership on NCO development in Central and South America to get the real results,” said Navy Fleet Master Chief Terrence Molidor, command senior enlisted leader for North American Aerospace Defense Command and USNORTHCOM. “When that happens, it really gains a foothold and then our SPP partner nations start working on NCO development events.”





International senior enlisted leaders focused on fostering partnerships with their American counterparts at the International Training and Leader Development Symposium. (Photo by James Seals / NCO Journal)

Empower the NCO

U.S. senior enlisted leaders acknowledged the challenges in persuading some countries' leaders that the empowerment of NCOs does not necessarily pose a threat to their jobs.

"You have some differences between the very senior leadership and that mid-grade officer leadership," said Command Sgt. Maj. William B. Zaiser, senior enlisted leader for USSOUTHCOM. "That mid-grade officer leadership feels a little more challenged by a more empowered NCO, where I think the senior leadership, through the experiences they have had working in the United States and with partner nations, see the value in it."

"We are trying to crack the code with Mexico, to get them to realize that having a strong NCO corps not only makes their military stronger it makes them better," Molitor said. "NCO development is not really a top priority in Mexico, whereas in the Bahamas it is a priority."

Olvera said NCO development takes precedence at Army South.

"When I travel internationally with [Army South Commander] Maj. Gen. Clarence K.K. Chinn, we engage the other army commander," Olvera said. "Chinn is always bringing up: 'What are you doing to develop your leaders? You can influence them. Show them the way that we do it.' Then, he often asks, 'Are you developing noncommissioned officers? Here is my sergeant major who can talk about NCO development.' It's work."

U.S. senior enlisted leaders also agreed that all NCO corps don't have to be identical to the U.S. model.



"We have developed a regional strategy for NCO development with individual countries," said Command Sgt. Maj. Carlos Olvera, senior enlisted advisor for Army South, during the International Training and Leader Development Symposium. (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

"I think if there's one thing we do wrong sometimes it's that we think the only good NCO corps is the U.S. NCO Corps, so they all need to look like us," Zaiser said. "One thing we have learned from our gatherings is that that is absolutely not true. We have El Salvador, which has its soldiers [maintaining order] in its streets in a semi-policing environment. That's something Colombia has had to do for 30-plus years. Those different threats drive a different look of an NCO corps. Some are more aligned to being able to react to national disaster and humanitarian efforts. That's a thing we learned early on: Don't make this massive effort to try to make them look exactly like our corps."

Warrant Officer 1 Anthony Lysight, force sergeant major of the Jamaica Defence Force, said his country's NCO corps is similar to that of El Salvador and Colombia.

"In Jamaica, we have a system of NCOs that work starting from the roots," Lysight said. "We

are on the streets, assisting police to maintain law and order. We have the lowest NCO, the lance corporal, in charge of small teams. They go out and find the bad guys. It is a system that works.”

Lessons learned

U.S. senior enlisted leaders and state program partners agreed that they have learned a lot from working with partner nations.

“When we go down and do these exchange trainings, we are learning as much if not more than what we have imparted on our partners,” Zaiser said. “Probably one common thing they exhibit in addressing their threats is strict adherence to standards and discipline. Jamaica talked about that lance corporal walking down the street — he has to be a confident, disciplined noncommissioned officer who has not only the trust of his command but the trust of the population of that country. When we traveled in Central and South America, we learned that the Catholic church and military are the most respected institutions in the country.”

Held up as the textbook model for what “right looks like,” Colombia’s army has successfully developed its NCO corps through persistent engagement, said senior enlisted leaders for USSOUTHCOM and Army South. The country has been locked in a civil conflict against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for more than 50 years.

“To see where they are now is pretty incredible,” Zaiser said. “They are taking partner nation capacity and exporting it to other countries. It’s pretty much the end-state that you hope you get.”

“Colombia is no doubt the example in the region and perhaps even elsewhere in terms of having a threat, defeating the threat and then exporting security expertise based on what they developed,” Olvera said.

Sgt. Maj. Henry Whistler Dulce Dulce, sergeant major of the Colombian army, said his nation’s leadership has learned many lessons fighting terrorist groups for the past 50 years.

“The important thing in this is the NCO corps has been the backbone of the victory of the Colombian army,” Dulce said. “The NCOs have been involved in every step in the fight against terrorism. Many years ago, the NCOs did not have the responsibility that they have now. But during the past years, NCO development has been a work in progress.”

Colombia’s army has also established a sergeant major academy and is inviting other countries from Central and South America into their schoolhouse to learn from them. Dulce said because of NCO development, all generals and colonels are asking to receive a sergeant major — a position that has become indispensable in the command of the Colombian armed forces.

Dulce believes the reason his army has been so successful in developing its NCO corps is because it has never deviated from the model.

“My main campaign during my time as sergeant major of the army was to make our NCOs proud to be an NCO and start to change the culture,” Dulce said. “That way, everyone understands their role. NCOs learn the role of the officer, NCO and soldier. Everybody understands their role and works together.”

U.S. senior enlisted leaders also spoke of the strides other countries have made in NCO development, including Brazil, El Salvador and Chile.

“Chile has a very professional, very structural army,” Olvera said. “Zaiser and I visited when they appointed Sgt. Maj. Julio Peña as the first sergeant major of their army. They essentially have a vision for the NCOs [which mirrors that of the U.S.] They have a structured self-development, some resident courses, some development courses throughout the ranks, so as one gets promoted they must attend a leader development course and then they get promoted. I was truly impressed.”