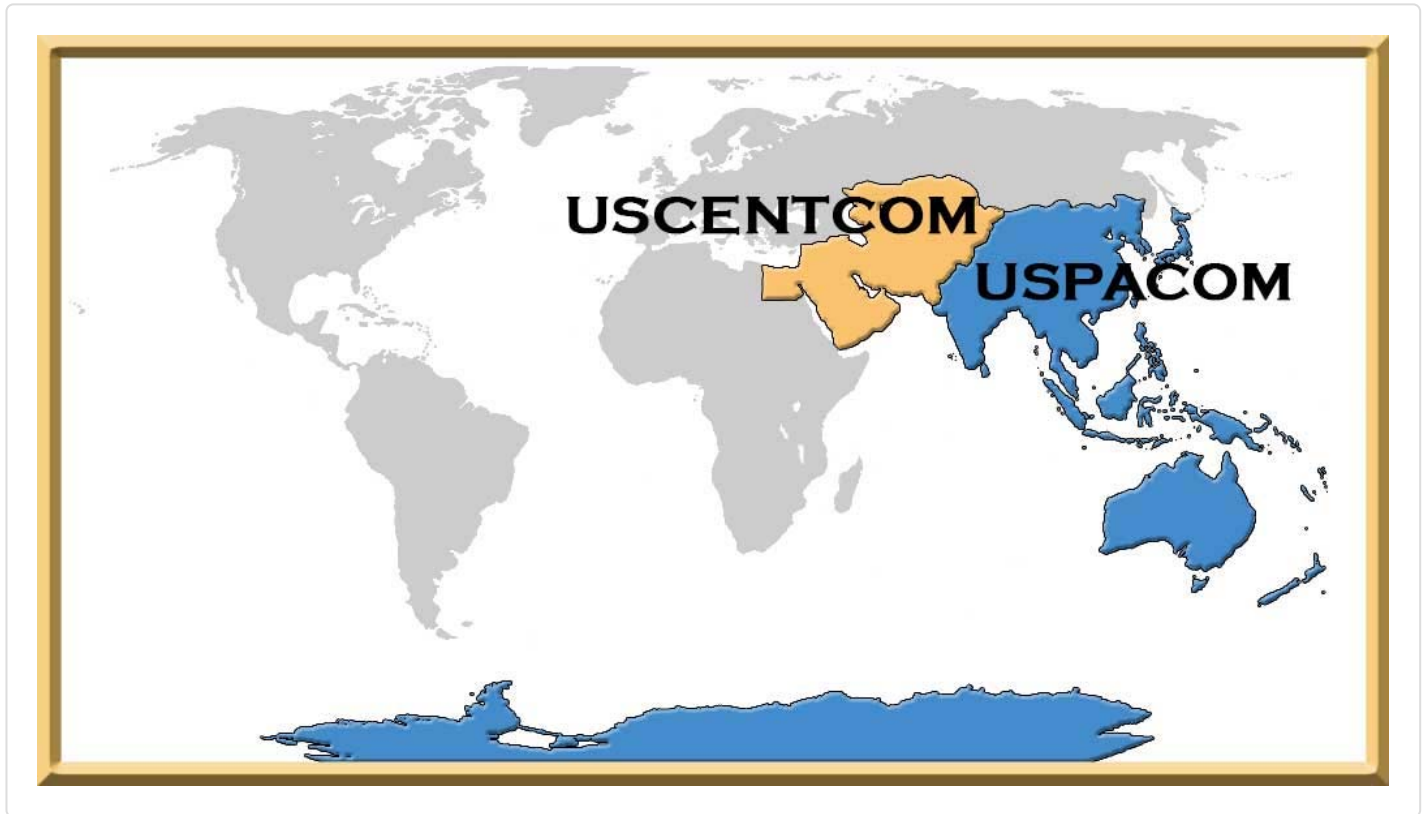


# U.S. NCOs Tackle New Threats with Help from Allies in Pacific, Central Commands

By Clifford Kyle Jones - NCO Journal

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When senior enlisted leaders from the regions covered by the U.S. military's Pacific and Central commands gathered two weeks ago during a breakout session of the sergeant major of the Army's International Training and Leader Development Symposium, it didn't take long before the conversation turned to the regions' most pressing threat: the Islamic State.

USCENTCOM covers areas in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. USPACOM encompasses more than half of the world's surface, including much of Asia. Worldwide, about 188,000 Soldiers from the active, Guard and Reserve components support combatant commands in more than 140 locations worldwide, and almost 60 percent of them are tied to Pacific or Central command.





A group of U.S. and international senior enlisted leaders listen during a breakout session on PACOM and CENTCOM at the inaugural International Training and Leader Development Symposium for enlisted leaders. (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

Command Sgt. Maj. Ng Siak Ping, the sergeant major of Singapore's army, noted that his small nation has been infiltrated by members of the Islamic State who travel through Indonesia and other nearby countries, requiring a shift in warfighting tactics.

Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Agueda, the operations sergeant major for USCENTCOM's land component, U.S. Army Central, said, "Jordan is dealing with that right now, too."

"Both Kazakhstan and Jordan have well-developed NCO corps," he said. "They have academies and they work out very well. And as we make plans on how we help them train, the reality of the world is that the enemy has some say about what you train on. In Jordan, the priorities changed dramatically when the [Islamic State] and Syria situations started happening.

"So we started focusing more on border security," Agueda said. "Also, they're dealing with all the refugees, so from an intel aspect of who's coming into their country, the priorities shifted dramatically."

Chief Warrant Officer Mohammad Al-smadi, the sergeant major of Jordan's army, agreed.

"Nowadays, you don't know who is your enemy," he said. "ISIS is not a country; ISIS is an idea. And the ideology can enter this room right now. They are supported from many countries all over the world. So we have to focus on different ways of training, and probably a better way of communication with security agencies in Jordan."





Command Sgt. Maj. Bryant Lambert, the command sergeant major of USPACOM's land component, U.S. Army Pacific, was one of the facilitators of a breakout session on PACOM and CENTCOM at the inaugural International Training and Leader Development Symposium for enlisted leaders. (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

Command Sgt. Maj. Bryant Lambert, the command sergeant major of USPACOM's land component, U.S. Army Pacific, was one of the facilitators of the breakout session. Though he acknowledged the changing nature of the conflict armies around the world, he encouraged participants to focus on the areas NCOs can affect, including training and professional development, and how to best share information in those realms.

"Right now, we're just trying to identify what are our roles as noncommissioned officers in our environment or region and what different ways we can have an effect," Lambert said. "All our countries have multiple cultures within our militaries and within our societies. So it's imperative that we understand each other's culture before we engage each other, that we understand what the needs are, that we understand who has the lead in a particular country."

The sergeant major of Singapore's army noted that his soldiers interact closely with the armies of the Philippines, Brunei and especially Malaysia. Lambert said that if another partner nation wished to engage with Malaysia, for instance, officers and NCOs from that partner nation should speak with Singapore's army before entering Malaysia or as soon as they arrive to find out as much as they can to help them be effective.

“Noncommissioned officers can only influence so much,” Lambert said. “We know that we have to look at policies and the ambassadors of particular nations. There’s a lot involved that we as noncommissioned officers, when we go and engage, that we must understand. We must understand lines of authority, we must understand policies, and we must understand executive agents.”

Agueda noted that before country plans can be developed effectively, some countries may require exposure to the role of NCOs from the United States and nations with similarly structured armies.

“I think when we talk about country plans and putting it in writing, especially in CENTCOM, it’s very important that command teams show up together and participate together because the role of the officer in those countries usually is what drives authorities and what happens.”

NCO roles and responsibilities are well-understood in Jordan, for instance, he said, “but other countries require a lot more layers.”

Jordan is considered an NCO success story in USCENTCOM for a number of reasons, but its decade-plus relationship with the Colorado National Guard as part of the U.S. State Partnership Program may have helped lay much of that groundwork.

Jordan is one of only five countries inside USCENTCOM that participates in the SPP and the only one from the area of the Mideast known as the Levant.

Worldwide, 70 nations have state National Guard partners, with the biggest concentrations — more than 20 each — in the U.S. military’s Europe and Southern commands.

With the SPP’s limited application in the USCENTCOM, Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher K. Greca, senior enlisted leader of the command, wondered whether the program should be re-evaluated.

Command Master Chief Mark W. Rudes, senior enlisted advisor to U.S. Pacific Command, which has eight nations with state partnerships, shared some of Greca’s concerns.

“There are elements of that state partnership that I don’t necessarily know are communicated clearly with our Title X forces, specifically Army Pacific having a good understanding of what goals and objectives” align with USARPAC and the theater campaign.

“There’s a lot of capacity, everybody wants to do good,” Rudes said. “But the problem with some of the efforts is that we all go in and either duplicate or we step on each other’s lines and it crisscrosses communication and we actually cause, indirectly, more harm than good.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Houten is the command sergeant major for CENTCOM’s joint force development and serves as the command’s senior enlisted National Guard advisor.

Houten said that in the eight months he has been in his position, “There are some great staff



Houten said that in the eight months he has been in his position, “I’ve seen some great stuff going on between Jordan and Colorado.”

But, he acknowledged, “whether or not those sync with the CENTCOM commander’s line of effort, I honestly couldn’t answer that. I know they have a large number of engagements in both Colorado and Jordan, but whether those line up? I couldn’t tell you.”

In his previous position at USSOUTHCOM, though, he was heavily involved in the state partnership between New Hampshire and El Salvador and said the combatant commander and the country teams worked closely together to coordinate their efforts and training.

If there are struggles in USCENTCOM or USPACOM, Houten said, “I think we need to get better at synchronizing the efforts, because I truly believe state partnership plays a critical role.”

The partnerships “have longevity, they have relationships, they’ve been in some countries – not necessarily CENTCOM – but some of those AORs, they’ve been in those countries long before Regionally Aligned Forces, long before we had a *need* to go in there,” he said.

Some U.S. Soldiers who first visited as sergeants or staff sergeants are now sergeants major and have been traveling to those partner countries for 20 years, Houten said.

“We should leverage that,” he said.





Warrant Officer Class 1 Mark Mortiboy, the equivalent of the sergeant major of the army for New Zealand, noted that his country and Australia work closely with Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. "There is an appetite from all those three nations to professionalize their NCOs," he said during a breakout session focusing on PACOM and CENTCOM. He recommended deeper information-sharing on the NCO profession of arms through courses operated in each country. (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

Master Sgt. Khalykov-Temyrbek Myrzakhanovich, the senior enlisted leader of Kazakhstan's land forces, pointed out that in developing countries' NCO corps, the U.S. and other nations should leverage their own officer-NCO relationships, as well.

"That officer-NCO relationship is something that can be taught," Khalykov-Temyrbek said. "It can be practiced."

A one-hour "theoretical" brief won't change an army's culture, he said, but practical exercises can go a long way in showing how a healthy and vibrant NCO corps functions with its officers.

Lambert agreed and encouraged participants to leverage existing exercises to interface with partner nations, both to facilitate greater shifts of responsibilities to NCOs and to better explore what each countries' needs are.

Command Sgt. Maj. Edward W. Mitchell is the command sergeant major of the 2nd Infantry Division/Republic of Korea-U.S. Combined Division. Although it's a combined division, Mitchell said no Korean NCOs are part of the staff, only officers.

Still, the ROK army is beginning to see how important NCOs can be, he said.

He took a ROK battalion through the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, recently, and he said that in the beginning, everything was "officer-centric."

"When they started going through NTC, the officer was trying to do everything. It lasted one day," Mitchell said. "He had to empower every last one of his noncommissioned officers in order for him to accomplish his mission at the National Training Center. When it got back to the ROK army, they realized that when you go to war, you're going to have to empower your noncommissioned officers in order to accomplish the mission. You can talk it all day long, but sometimes you have to show them. When they have to execute, they'll see why it's important to empower them. Sometimes training together is a big asset to get to where you need to get to."

## **State partnerships**

## **USCENTCOM**

- Kazakhstan-Arizona (1993)
- Jordan-Colorado (2004)
- Kyrgyzstan-Montana (1996)
- Tajikistan-Virginia (2003)
- Uzbekistan-Mississippi (2012)

## **USPACOM**

- Bangladesh-Oregon (2008)
- Cambodia-Idaho (2009)
- Indonesia-Hawaii (2006)
- Mongolia-Alaska (2003)
- Philippines-Hawaii/Guam (2000)
- Thailand-Washington (2002)
- Tonga-Nevada (2014)
- Vietnam-Oregon (2012)