



U.S. Army South Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 Security Force Assistance in the Western Hemisphere

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Exercise Southern Vanguard

“I thank God for allowing us to share this experience that enriches both of our nations’ capabilities. The defense integration alliance with the United States of America is acknowledged as one of the most successful in the region and this training has helped to increase the level of training and interoperability of our armies.”¹

—MG Luis Mauricio Ospina Gutierrez, commander of the Colombian Army at Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 during the closing ceremony
16 November 2022

“The safety of our homeland is directly linked to resilience, stability, and security of our Latin American and Caribbean partners. The U.S. and our regional partners are on the frontline of strategic competition, and we share crosscutting threats that we must confront together. As Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated, “Our allies and partners are a force multiplier and one of the greatest strategic assets we have in protecting our nation... we will act together... making us stronger as a team than the sum of our individual parts.” We at United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) believe this wholeheartedly, and we are committed to work shoulder to shoulder with our partners, maximizing our efforts where their priorities align with our own national interests. To meet these challenges, we are putting integrated deterrence into action, using all available levers—assets, resources, and authorities across the Department of Defense (DOD), interagency, allies, partners, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private industry to fulfill our *Enduring Promise* to be the region’s trusted partner—today, tomorrow, and always.”²

HISTORY

The United States Army South (USARSOUTH) Southern Vanguard series of exercises is built to enhance relationships, promote mutual military readiness, and increase interoperability between the United States and Western Hemisphere forces. This annual exercise is a cornerstone for USARSOUTH to establish the foundation for lasting integrated deterrence with select partner nations across the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR). Although executed at the tactical level, the exercise is proving to have an operational impact at the Army-to-Army level.

The first iteration, Exercise Southern Vanguard 21 (ExSV21), 11 to 31 August 2021, took place in Portillo, Chile. Designed as USARSOUTH’s pilot program, future rotations have built on what was learned. This included adjusting force structure, command and control, training objectives, doctrinal communication, and long-term funding procurement. During ExSV21, USARSOUTH established the exercise control group (ECG) and the Chilean Army formed the higher headquarters white cell. Participating units came from the U.S. Army’s 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, and Chilean Army’s 3rd Mountain Division. Combined forces at the company level conducted cold weather, survival, medical evacuation, movement and maneuver, and mountain warfare training under the tutelage of the Chilean Army Mountain School. A platoon leader assigned to Bravo Company, 2/87th Infantry Regiment who went through this training said afterward, “With training like this, we can take Soldiers with little to no experience with the snow and make them confident and competent in a winter environment.”³

The second iteration, Exercise Southern Vanguard 22 (ExSV22) command post exercise (CPX) was conducted 29 November to 5 December 2021, and took place in Lorena, Brazil, later moving to Resende, Brazil. USARSOUTH established the ECG and the Brazilian Army (BRAAR) formed the higher headquarters white cell. Participating units came from the U.S. Army's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and the BRAAR's 12th Infantry Brigade (Air Mobile). ExSV22 merged the BRAAR's Land Operations Command (COTR)-sponsored Combined Operations and Rotation Exercise (CORE) 21 with the USSOUTHCOM-sponsored ExSV22. A first of its kind, not only by committing the largest U.S. Army conventional force ever sent to train in Brazil, but also by integrating separate national exercises into one. The exercise established command and control under a battalion-level combined task force (CTF) headquarters (Task Force Brazilian Infantry Light [TF BIL]). Additionally, this rotation included the 1st Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) (Georgia Army National Guard [GAARNG]), keenly positioned across tactical echelons conducting their doctrinal security force assistance (SFA) mission to "assess, train, advise, and assist" the foreign security force.

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CHAPTER 2

Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 Overview

The Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 (ExSV23) command post exercise (CPX) was conducted 30 October to 18 November 2022, at Tolemaida Military Base, Colombia. Before the start of exercise (STARTEX), teams from the 1st Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) already positioned in Colombia supporting United States Army South (USARSOUTH) Operation Alamo Shield completed select training and advising with Colombian Army (COLAR) forces on multiple warfighting functions to be better prepared for ExSV23.

USARSOUTH established the exercise control group (ECG) and the COLAR formed the higher headquarters white cell. Participating units came from the U.S. Army's 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Illinois Army National Guard [ILARNG]) working shoulder-to-shoulder with COLAR partners formed under a battalion-level combined task force (CTF) headquarters (CTF Scorpion). See figure 2-1. The 1-54 SFAB's ever-expanding regional security force assistance (SFA) experience and mentorship proved invaluable to the CTF and down-trace units.



Figure 2-1. COLAR and USARSOUTH Soldiers after the ExSV23 closing ceremony (courtesy of USARSOUTH Public Affairs Office)

Colombian and U.S. forces executed weapon familiarization lanes and medical evacuation training, culminating in a combined maneuver exercise. See figure 2-2. Currently, along with Colombia, the countries of Brazil, Peru, and Chile have committed to and are scheduled to conduct this combined training event with the U.S. Army through fiscal year 2028. In the future, USARSOUTH may expand participation to include additional partner nations.



Figure 2-2. COLAR mortarmen providing indirect fire during a combined arms maneuver at Tolemaida Military Base, Colombia (courtesy of USARSOUTH Public Affairs Office)

USARSOUTH MISSION STATEMENT

USARSOUTH plans, coordinates, and executes ExSV23 Colombia in conjunction with the COLAR 30 October to 18 November 2022, to advance Colombian/U.S. strategic partnership by increasing Colombian/U.S. human, procedural, and technical interoperability and enabling crisis response capability and capacity.

COMMANDER'S INTENT

USARSOUTH will execute ExSV23 to advance the Colombian/U.S. strategic partnership by increasing Colombian/U.S. human, procedural, and technical interoperability and enable regional crisis response capability and capacity. Key tasks are the strategic deployment of the U.S. task force, formation of a combined Colombian/U.S. operations group, formation of a combined Colombian/U.S. task force, and the execution of a combined army maneuver exercise. Desired end state is U.S. forces successfully partner with the COLAR in order to strengthen hemispheric cooperation between regional military/security forces in the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) area of responsibility (AOR).

EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

- Train on and use the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seven-step operational planning process with multinational staff to build interoperability and identify planning gaps.
- Establish a Colombian led, U.S./Colombia CTF (CTF Scorpion) to conduct combined operations with U.S. and Colombia subordinate units to develop human and procedural interoperability.
- Develop a multinational integration training program in order to close interoperability gaps across the human, procedural, and technical domains.
- Conduct theater sustainment in support of multinational operations.

CTF SCORPION: 5 PHASES OF THE OPERATION

1. Planning
2. Air assault
3. Clearance
4. Neutralize (destroy)
5. Withdraw

CTF SCORPION: 7 KEY TASKS

1. Conduct air assault
2. Establish forward operating base (FOB)
3. Neutralize (destroy) enemy
4. Disrupt enemy anti-air assets
5. Coordinate artillery
6. Consider different means for extraction
7. Consider supplies

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: FOCUS ON INTEROPERABILITY

ExSV23 had an overarching objective to improve interoperability between the United States and Colombia. The exercise objectives across the human, technical, and procedural interoperability domains were considered. Interoperability observations were analyzed and assessed in the context of tactical, operational, and strategic operational environments across the warfighting functions and mission sets. This included the exercise's premier training event of a combined air assault operation. See figure 2-3.



**Figure 2-3. COLAR forces lifting off during a combined air assault
(courtesy of USARSOUTH Public Affairs Office)**

What was achieved during this rotation will help shape training for Exercise Southern Vanguard 24 (ExSV24) with the Brazilian Army (BRAAR) scheduled for 28 October to 19 November 2023, in Brazil. USARSOUTH and the BRAAR are already collaborating across the warfighting functions of command and control, fires, and sustainment to prepare for the CPX. This concentration of training and what will be learned will support exercise design for future partner-nation Southern Vanguard exercises.

CHAPTER 3**Security Force Assistance During
Exercise Southern Vanguard 23**

**By CPT Micah R. Neidorfler, Assistant Operations Officer,
1st Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade**

The Security Force Assistance Command builds and sustains readiness by manning, training, and validating Total Army security force assistance brigades for employment by combatant commands.¹

—Security Force Assistance Command mission statement

OVERVIEW

Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 (ExSV23) paired elements of the Illinois Army National Guard's 130th Infantry Regiment and the Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) with the Colombian Army (COLAR) and took place at the Tolomaida Military Base in Colombia. As a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) "partner across the globe,"² the COLAR's goal during ExSV23 was to improve its interoperability with NATO militaries, with the long-term aim of having units certified to conduct operations as part of a NATO task force.

This chapter distills 1-54 SFAB's participation in ExSV23 into specific advisor team activities as outlined in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade* (2 September 2020) to show how SFAB advisor teams can have real-world effects during short-term multinational training exercises. See figure 3-1.³

	Ends (what/why)	Ways (how)	Means (with what)
SFA Functions	SFA Tasks	Advisor Team Activities	
Generating and Executive Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doctrine - Organization - Personnel - Policy • Train <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train - Leadership • Equip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Materiel - Equipment • Rebuild/Build <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational - Operational - Environmental - Institutional • Advise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coach - Teach - Mentor • Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactical Lethal - Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisor Teams • Warfighting Functions • Funding • Authorities • Unit Partnerships • Joint Exercises
Operational Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise and Assist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multinational - Interoperability 	

Figure 3-1. Security force assistance tasks and advisor team activities

54TH SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE BRIGADE

The 54th SFAB is the Army’s sole National Guard SFAB. Unlike the five Active Component SFABs, the 54th is not regionally aligned. The 54th provides advisor teams every six months to the Active Component SFABs’ overseas deployments to help fill mission requirements set by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and the Army’s geographic combatant commands. The 54th itself is spread across multiple states including 1st Battalion (Georgia), 2nd Battalion (Florida), 3rd Squadron (Florida), 4th Battalion (Texas), 5th Battalion (Ohio), 6th Battalion (Illinois), and the brigade headquarters (Indiana).

In the lead up to Exercise Southern Vanguard 22 (ExSV22) in Brazil, the organizing element, United States Army South (USARSOUTH), requested 1st SFAB (regionally aligned to the USARSOUTH area of responsibility [AOR]) to conduct security force assistance (SFA) tasks with U.S. and Brazilian Army (BRAAR) participants and assess the BRAAR capabilities and competencies. Because of multiple mission requirements, 1st SFAB turned to 54th SFAB to fill this mission, which in turn, tasked 1st Battalion. Following the successful execution of ExSV22, USARSOUTH specifically requested 1-54’s support for ExSV23.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1-54 SFAB began its multi-echelon planning process for ExSV23 by assessing ExSV22 results. 1-54 planners highlighted issues identified during the ExSV22 command post exercise (CPX) Joint Event Life Cycle (JELC) conferences to shape ExSV23 into a better exercise.

Additionally, by speaking with leaders from the COLAR, USARSOUTH, and 130th Infantry Regiment, 1-54 SFAB planners influenced training events in ExSV23 that were not originally planned by USARSOUTH. These included a NATO seven-step planning process (NATO's version of the U.S. Army's military decision-making process [MDMP]) block of instruction for the COLAR battalion staff and the inclusion of a mission command staff exercise, which combined the COLAR and 130th Infantry Regiment's battalion staffs into a joint staff to plan and control maneuver units during the culminating training event (CTE) of ExSV23. These added events better focused the exercise to meet COLAR training objectives and enabled 1-54 advisors to assess the COLAR's interoperability competence using NATO standards.

1-54 SFAB also contacted the 1st SFAB's task force, which was deployed in Colombia under Title 10, allowing 1-54 to receive current assessments before the exercise on COLAR units slated to take part in ExSV23. This enabled 1-54 to tailor its anticipated advising. Further, the Title 10 task force organized a training program for COLAR units focused on NATO tactical mission tasks to prepare for ExSV23.

Additionally, 1-54 contacted a U.S. special forces (SF) team conducting SFA near Tolemaida. The SF team provided 1-54 with its own assessment of COLAR capabilities and offered support to 1-54 during the execution phase of ExSV23.

Based on the mission requirements and available funding, 1-54 chose to employ an advisor package consisting of an augmented company advisor team (CAT) to support the exercise. CAT 6120 came from 1-54's Blackbird Company and the attachments from various 1-54 maneuver advisor teams, including the battalion advisor team.

As Southern Vanguard is intended to be a training event for all participants, 1-54 advisors used this opportunity to test the capabilities of and train on their own equipment in a training, yet real-world environment, outside the continental United States (OCONUS). For that reason, CAT 6120 packed multiple redundant communications and mission command systems that were not necessary to accomplish the anticipated mission.

ANTICIPATED ROLE

Ends

Based on the JELC conferences, CAT 6120 anticipated having one primary end. This was to grow the COLAR's knowledge of NATO mission command doctrine with a secondary end to grow the COLAR's knowledge of NATO combined arms movement and maneuver doctrine at the tactical level.

Ways

CAT 6120 achieved these ends by facilitating training on the NATO seven-step planning process for the COLAR battalion staff and training on NATO tactical mission tasks at the platoon level for the COLAR infantry company (advise activity), liaising between the 130th Infantry Regiment and the COLAR (liaise activity), liaising between all elements of the exercise training audience and support staff to ensure smooth exercise control (liaise activity), and assessing the COLAR's interoperability with a NATO unit during ExSV23 for USARSOUTH and NATO (assess activity).

Means

1-54's advising package accomplished this by task-organizing into four distinct sub-teams: (1) COLAR Staff, (2) COLAR company, (3) COLAR opposing force (OPFOR), and (4) exercise control group (ECG). The COLAR staff, the largest of the four teams, contained the organic CAT 6120 as the organic warfighting function aligned team, which was doctrinally best suited to advise a battalion staff. The COLAR company, COLAR OPFOR, and ECG teams were composed of attached 1-54 advisors.

EXECUTION

Initial Adjustments

Plans soon changed after CAT 6120 arrived at Tolemaida. While conducting initial assessments, the team quickly discovered there was not a plan for observer coach/trainer (OC/T) coverage for the training lanes or culminating exercise. Also, there was not a finalized plan for coordinating the timeline and execution of the exercise. The lack of an OC/T coverage plan posed several risks to the exercise. OC/Ts were needed to provide evaluations to the training audience, provide real-world control over each lane, and control real-world medical treatment and evacuation. 1-54's presence at the exercise was not to provide bespoke evaluations to each platoon that executed training, nor to control the exercise in the field. For these reasons, CAT 6120 adjusted the focus of one of its elements. The COLAR OPFOR team's primary mission shifted to advising the COLAR OC/Ts and liaising between the various exercise support elements from the COLAR and USARSOUTH. ExSV23's organization proved to be an ideal environment to train on SFA tasks as there were 12 distinct participants. See figure 3-2. This included the following:

- COLAR training audience, infantry company and battalion staff, and COLAR exercise support and control elements
- COLAR white cell
- COLAR OC/Ts
- COLAR OPFOR
- COLAR field artillery company
- COLAR medical support
- COLAR aviation company
- 130th Infantry Regiment's company and battalion staff participating in the training
- 130th Infantry Regiment's company providing real-world exercise support staff
- USARSOUTH
- Combined exercise support group (ESG)
- 1-54 SFAB advisor package. Consequently, the SFAB's liaison function was frequently leveraged throughout the exercise.

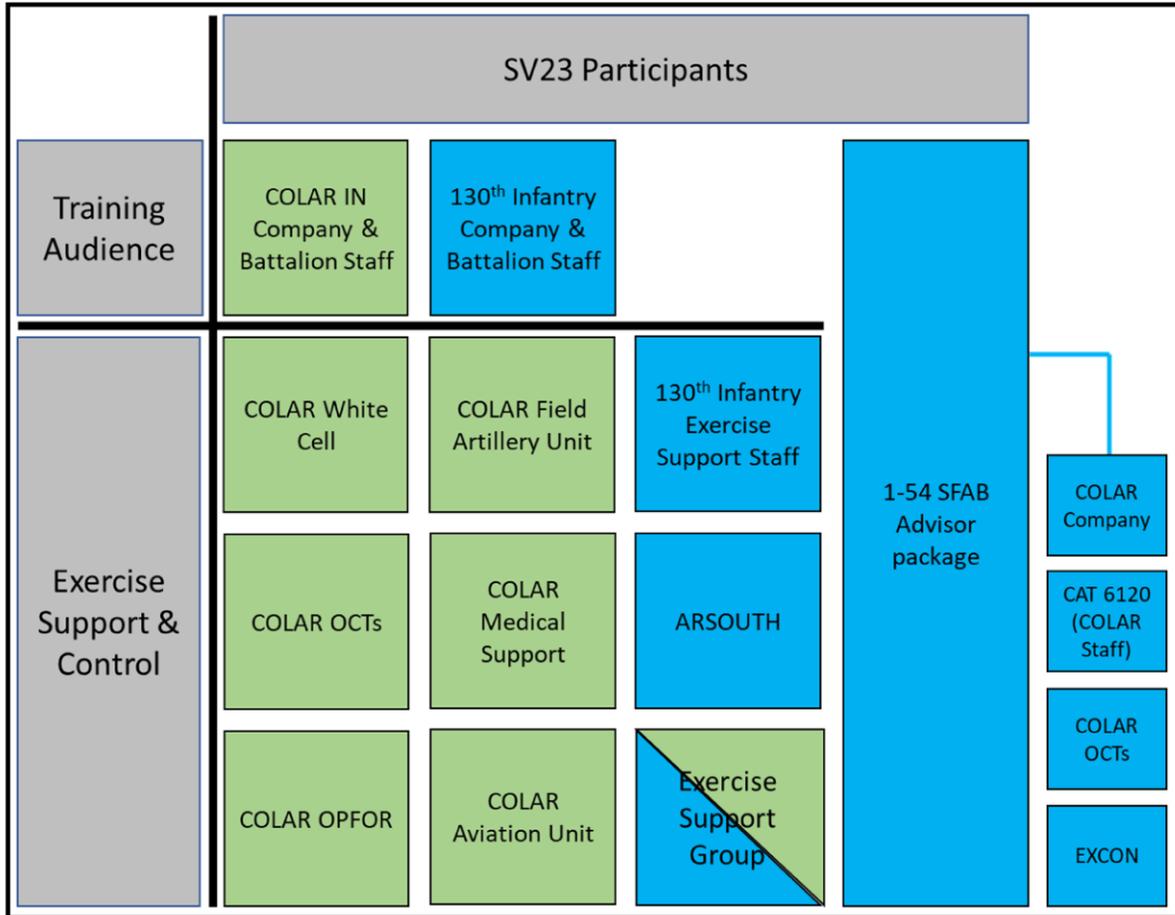


Figure 3-2. ExSV23 participants and relationship to the exercise (Green denotes Colombian and Blue American) (provided by 1-54 SFAB)

Exercise Phase I: Staff and Platoon Academics

The primary training audience received classroom instruction during the first portion of the exercise. CAT 6120 taught, coached, and mentored COLAR battalion staff members on the NATO seven-step planning process. The COLAR company team integrated into the COLAR company participating in the exercise and accompanied it during its preparation training, while also advising on interoperability with NATO infantry tactics. The refocused COLAR OC/T team conducted an OC/T academy and advised OC/Ts on mission command as they wrote tactical operation orders (OPORDs) for the training lanes. They also liaised between the OC/Ts, OPFOR, and white cell to ensure shared understanding on upcoming training. The ECG team liaised between the COLAR white cell and the combined ESG and managed real-world requirements for the advisor package. CAT 6120 leadership worked closely with COLAR, 130th Infantry Regiment, and USARSOUTH leadership to finalize ExSV23’s execution plan. See figure 3-3.

D-8 30 OCT	D-7 31 OCT	D-6 01 NOV	D-5 02 NOV	D-4 03 NOV	D-3 04 NOV	D-2 05 NOV
U.S. ADVON	54th SFAB ARRIVAL	COLAR Staff Academics		U.S. MB 1 ARRIVAL	ARSOUTH Staff	U.S. MB 2 ARRIVAL
PLT Academics		COLAR CTF ACADEMICS		PLT Academics		US/COLAR CTF ACADEMICS
D-1 06 NOV	D 07 NOV	D+1 08 NOV	D+2 09 NOV	D+3 10 NOV	D+4 11 NOV	D+5 12 NOV
PLT Academics		OPENING CEREMONY	START EX	CTF Issues OPORD		AMB
BDE OPORD		Troop Leading Procedures Recon PLTs receive OPORDs for STX LANES		PLT STX LANES		
COLAR CTF ACADEMICS		OPORD Back Brief to Higher HQ		CO Backbrief		
D+6 13 NOV	D+7 14 NOV	D+8 15 NOV	D+9 16 NOV	D+10 17 NOV	D+11 18 NOV	D+12 19 NOV
AVN Rx	DV Day		BOX Breakdown/ Weapons Maintenance	AAR	RE-DEPLOYMENT MB 1	
CO-AASLT Rx CO TLPs	CO ATK LANE (ASLT) H-Hour	CO ATK LANE Consolidate/ Reorganize	WPS Event	ARSOUTH/SFAB Staff Return to US		
			CLOSING CEREMONY	RE-DEPLOYMENT PREP		
			AAR PREP			
			ENDER EX			

Figure 3-3. ExSV23 schedule with phase I highlighted in yellow, phase II in blue, and phase III in red (provided by 1-54 SFAB)

Exercise Phase II: Platoon Situational Training Exercises and Staff Exercise

The primary training audience conducted three situational training exercise (STX) lanes during the second portion of the exercise. These lanes included a platoon attack, movement to contact, and platoon raid. At the same time, the combined 130th Infantry Regiment and COLAR battalion staff conducted an exercise where they executed the NATO seven-step planning process in preparation for the CTE. See figure 3-4.



Figure 3-4. CAT 6120 and COLAR battalion staff conducting an intelligence preparation of the battlefield practical exercise (provided by 1-54 SFAB)

Each of the advisor elements shifted their emphasis as field training began. CAT 6120 continued advising the COLAR battalion staff on the NATO planning process but refocused on coaching and mentoring instead of teaching. See figure 3-5.



Figure 3-5. Combined joint staff members conducting a brief during the planning process cycle (courtesy of 1-54 SFAB)

The COLAR company team accompanied and advised each COLAR platoon during their training lanes and provided remote advise and assist (RAA) cellular mobile networking devices to the COLAR and 130th Infantry Regiment companies. This greatly increased their situational awareness, mission planning, and mission command capabilities.

The COLAR OC/T team coached and mentored the OC/Ts through the initial lane repetitions before breaking off and assisting the various COLAR exercise support elements with preparing for the culminating exercise.

The ECG team continued liaising between the COLAR white cell and the joint ESG. It also managed real-world requirements for the advisor package and provided a digital common operational picture (COP) to the ESG by building operational graphics based on the STX lane concepts onto the tactical wireless network and displaying them on a Windows Team Awareness Kit (WinTAK) used by CAT 6120. The tactical units then populated the COP via the Android Team Awareness Kit (ATAK) devices used by the embedded advisors and the RAA devices operated by the COLAR platoons. CAT 6120's leadership split their time between advising the COLAR battalion command team and liaising between the ESG, 130th Infantry Regiment, and USARSOUTH.

Exercise Phase III: Culminating Training Event

The exercise culminated with the COLAR and 130th Infantry Regiment's company conducting an air assault, dismounted ground tactical movement, and a simultaneous attack on an OPFOR-controlled village. They executed using the plan developed by the joint staff during phase II.

Each advisor element's focus remained relatively unchanged during the CTE. The COLAR company team accompanied its partners during the operation. In addition to advising during mission planning, it also assisted by facilitating communication between the COLAR company and the 130th Infantry Regiment's company during execution. Support via the RAA kit was likewise sustained during the CTE.

The COLAR OC/T team advised the OC/Ts up to the point of execution and then shifted its focus to the final objective to liaise between the ESG, white cell, and OPFOR.

The ECG team continued its previous liaison tasks and continued to support the ESG by providing a digital COP with the WinTAK computer. This digital COP was achieved by transferring the analog operational graphics created by the joint battalion staff onto the wireless tactical network used by the advisor package. The tactical units then populated on the COP via the ATAK devices used by the embedded advisors and the RAA devices operated by the COLAR platoons.

The OPFOR was also populated onto the separate COP shared with the ESG via the CAT 6120 OC/T team, which was located at the final objective. CAT 6120's leadership fluctuated between the combined staff's tactical command post and the ESG, ensuring key leaders of all participating formations were updated and speedily resolving any issues arising during execution. See figure 3-6.



Figure 3-6. CAT 6120 advisors updating the COLAR brigade commander at the tactical command post during the CTE (courtesy of 1-54 SFAB)

TRAINING OUTCOMES AND REAL-WORLD EFFECTS

The 1-54 SFAB's participation in ExSV23 provided valuable training for the advisor package, while also achieving real-world effects with the partner force.

Training Outcomes

- **Command and control systems training.** CAT 6120 achieved training effects with its communications suite that cannot be replicated at home station-training or a combat training center rotation. Operating many of the SFAB-specific communications systems in an OCONUS operating environment with OCONUS sim cards, unfamiliar weather, and geographic effects provided 1-54 advisors with an unparalleled training experience that can normally only be replicated in real-world operations. Moreover, the digital COP built for the STX lanes and the CTE enabled a successful validation of CAT 6120's ability to integrate not only partner forces, but multiple communications and tracking systems (ATAK devices, RAA devices, WinTAK devices, and tactical wireless networks) into one COP for USARSOUTH and COLAR exercise directors.
- **Operations at echelon.** The 1-54 SFAB's role during the exercise was multifold. Advisors were task organized into multiple smaller teams and integrally involved in every facet of the exercise. This ranged from being part of the training audience to assisting with execution. Additionally, 1-54 advisors liaised between multiple partner forces and U.S. elements during the exercise with some advisor elements going more than one day without face-to-face contact. This forced CAT 6120 to expertly use communications equipment and mission command techniques.

Real-World Outcomes

CAT 6120 achieved real-world effects with the partner nation force by leveraging the multiple advisor team activities of assessing, advising, supporting, and liaising while operating in a training exercise. The exercises demonstrated the following significant real-world outcomes:

- **NATO interoperability.** The COLAR enhanced situational understanding on mission planning techniques, operations processes, and combined arms small-unit tactics necessary to train it units to align with NATO standards.
- **Aviation mission planning.** The COLAR aviation unit assigned to transport the infantry companies during the air assault conducted a coordination meeting while preparing for the CTE that NATO militaries would consider similar to an air mission brief. However, the ground tactical plan was not taken into significant account, resulting in a plan that did not satisfactorily account for the ground tactical plan or operational environment. This occurred because COLAR does not normally train to conduct large-scale combat operations (LSCO)—not because COLAR aviation lacks competence. During this exercise, COLAR could see and appreciate larger-scale combined arms operations. Through coaching and mentoring, the NATO air assault concept of an initial planning conference, followed by an air mission coordination meeting, then by an air mission brief, was introduced to the participating aviation unit and aviation OC/Ts. The COLAR aviation representatives readily understood and acknowledged the need for these planning events. After analysis, they identified a requirement to update Colombian aviation doctrine. Additionally, COLAR aviators who were present at the exercise plan to bring up the issue with their COLAR aviation school.

- **U.S. forces integration.** The 1-54 SFAB's pre-execution planning brought together multiple U.S. formations already operating in Colombia and incorporated them into the exercise design. This included the SFAB and an SF element training in the area. Bringing together and coordinating efforts of multiple separate elements in the SFA community enhanced training and resulted in a more successful exercise. Perhaps more significantly, this demonstrated that integrating SFA efforts increases U.S. and partner-nation readiness and interoperability. See figure 3-7.



Figure 3-7. 1-54 SFAB advisor package following the successful completion of ExSV23 (courtesy of 1-54 SFAB)

The following are lessons and best practices:

- **Exercise design, training, setup, integration, and simulation**
 - Provide more training during academics on the U.S. MDMP steps and NATO operations planning process (OPP) planning steps.
 - Ensure there is a counterpart from each participating nation in any combined army staff section.
 - Send at least one representative from the unit represented in the simulation, but not participating to the exercise (i.e., engineers who will know their capabilities).
 - Establish more control procedures on who is authorized on the training lanes.
 - Assign more personnel to direct the fires exercise and equip them with more adequate communications devices.
 - Identify and assign more bilingual liaison officers to improve interoperability.
 - Consider using the Army Tactical Command and Control System to improve the ability to share operational information and to establish a COP.

- **Combined task force across warfighting functions**

- **Command and control.** Develop combined task force (CTF) standard operating procedures (SOPs) and battle drills.
- **Command and control.** Standardize procedures to ensure unity of command to face potential contingencies during joint operations.
- **Command and control.** Use the same doctrine and procedures in the aviation and air assault briefings.
- **Movement and maneuver.** Improve COLAR aviation branch proficiency through courses at Fort Rucker, AL.
- **Movement and maneuver.** Improve combined night-fighting training.
- **Movement and maneuver.** Ensure the U.S. and partner nation have fires and aviation staff members assigned at the CTF.
- **Movement and maneuver.** Train in multiple operational environments to be prepared for different contingencies.
- **Fires.** Improve fires synchronization during mission planning.

- **Interoperability at the company and platoon levels**

- Establish an interoperability directorate within the COLAR.
- Provide sufficient detail between the U.S. Army and COLAR to execute the plan when abbreviating the planning process.
- Develop ways to further integrate both armies in this type of exercise.
- Assign more interpreters to perform liaison functions.

ENDNOTES

1. Security Force Assistance Command Mission Statement, U.S. Army Fort Bragg, Security Force Assistance Home Page, <https://home.army.mil/bragg/index.php/units-tenants/SFAC>, 13 March 2023.
2. Partnerships: projecting stability through cooperation, NATO Official Website, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm, 6 December 2022.
3. ATP 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, page 4-9, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN30336-ATP_3-96.1-000-WEB-1.pdf.

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ANNEX A

Key Leader Interviews

The following are interviews from five key U.S. Army and COLAR leaders regarding Exercise Southern Vanguard 23, covering subjects including, but not limited to missions, training, interoperability, challenges, successes, and areas for possible improvements for future iterations of the exercise:

**BG Hernando Garzon Rey (Colombian Army),
Deputy Commanding General-Interoperability, U.S. Army South**

Interview conducted 13 December 2022

1. How did we improve interoperability between Colombia and the United States during Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 (ExSV23) and where is there work still to do?

First, I would like to recognize the great efforts that both countries, the United States and Colombia, have made. And, to acknowledge the emphasis that both armies' leadership placed on interoperability, so that everything in this exercise worked like clockwork. Certainly, everything is perfectible, but excellence is enough. I think we have moved forward in the last year in terms of interoperability. Something that is very important is the seed of interoperability has been planted from both armies. As you know, the path for interoperability is a long and constant path. Every day, there are changes in the way each army operates and manages operations. The challenges and threats are sometimes similar, and in other cases, different. We all must prepare our forces for the next mission. Each nation must train hard to keep us ready to face future threats.

In this global context, interoperability gains in importance every day. With this context, we must continue to move forward to achieve interoperability level 2 (compatible) and eventually interoperability level 3 (integrated), according to U.S. doctrine. This requires a lot of work across the human, procedural, and technical domains.

In the human domain, we have moved forward a lot. You have to understand and have a shared vision of the problem at all levels. Strong leadership in both armies is increasing interoperability. I observed and saw how leaders in this exercise quickly adjusted a number of things to make it successful. The language barrier is still there. However, we advanced and moved forward every day for two reasons. First, as time passes, there are more Spanish speakers in the U.S. Army. Second, in the Colombian Army (COLAR) there are more officers, noncommissioned officers, and Soldiers who speak English as a second language.

In the procedural domain, we have a common language, which is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) doctrine. However, in technical staff procedures, there are subtle differences in our organizations.

In the technical domain, there are a lot of similarities between the U.S. and Colombian armies. But there are also some gaps in technical capabilities. Overall, we are doing well and progressing quickly, but the road is long.

2. What were the challenges and successes across the three interoperability domains (human, procedural, and technical)?

We looked at the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) previous commentaries and at the ExSV23 after action review (AAR). These products are very focused on the process for the exercise. This includes logistical planning in the comments. Also, gaps in the functioning of the exercise including tactics, doctrine, and execution of the exercise. There are valuable recommendations from experts in both countries, across the warfighting functions in CALL publications and AARs. Looking across the U.S. and COLAR, we have to continue refining exercise and interoperability processes. I was very motivated by the interest that personnel in both army organizations had that led the interoperability process.

3. How can we make the next Exercise Southern Vanguard an even better exercise?

An army can spend a whole century without fighting, but not a day without training. The answer for this exercise on how to improve it is simple—train more. Repeat training objectives over and over again. There will always be challenges, but repetition establishes standardization. Standardization will ensure the training gets better with results benefitting the combined force.

ExSV23 demonstrated and advanced the good will of leaders to work together. We proved we could master any operation. We did not let the operation itself distract from achieving our interoperability focus between leaders and Soldiers. Both of our armies share a culture of being “qualified by fire.” This has incalculable value. Experience versus just being trained, but not in combat, provides the force with many advantages.

CPT Micah R. Neidorfler, Assistant Operations Officer, 1st Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade and U.S. Advisor to the Colombian Observer Coach/Trainers and Security Force Assistant Brigade Liaison Officer to the White Cell, Red Cell, and Opposing Force

Interview conducted 16 November 2022

1. What was your mission and what did that entail?

We had one primary mission during ExSV23 and that was to train on our unit’s mission-essential task list (METL) while conducting overseas deployment training (ODT) at ExSV23. The three tasks we primarily trained on were (1) conduct expeditionary deployment operations, (2) advise foreign security forces, and (3) train foreign security forces. However, because we were in Colombia conducting a real-world exercise with a foreign partner force, we were also able to execute real-world METL tasks. We were able to conduct our doctrinal advise, support, liaise, and assess tasks in a real-world environment by attending this exercise.

Secondary to executing our own training was assisting in building interoperability between the U.S. Army and Colombia Army (COLAR) against NATO standards. We were able to educate the COLAR on the NATO seven-step planning process and NATO battalion-level operations, and advised the COLAR staff who were part of the combined battalion task force headquarters during planning and operations. Additionally, we advised the COLAR infantry company on NATO tactics and were able to liaise between the American training unit, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, and the COLAR battalion staff and COLAR infantry company.

This was not a validating exercise for us. For our security force assistance (SFA) teams to be validated as deployable, they must go through a formal validation exercise facilitated by our brigade headquarters. The ODT in ExSV23 was used to train on METL tasks, which helps us be more ready for validation, but is not an official validation to deploy. ExSV23 is a different type of training from a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation because we are working with a real foreign partner and in a real outside the continental United States (OCONUS) environment.

2. What does SFA in competition look like?

During the last over 20 years in the Global War on Terror, SFA was trying to build Afghan and Iraqi military forces and their governments. As we have transitioned away from this focus and onto great power competition, SFA has become an ancillary method of achieving our national strategic goals. It is an important part of the U.S. overall strategy, but it is now also a part of many other lines of effort. SFA in great power competition fulfills strategic, operational, and tactical requirements at all stages across the conflict continuum, ranging from competition all the way to conflict. In competition specifically, SFA allows U.S. forces to train, equip, rebuild, and advise foreign security forces. Further, these interactions allow the United States to engage with partners we view as strategic and where U.S. assistance may result in improving our overall global position. Building capacity and capabilities of foreign partners enables them to handle security issues in their regions without the need for U.S. or NATO involvement. That, in turn, helps decrease the threat of escalation with our strategic adversaries because U.S. and NATO forces will not be required to interact with these issues in a large-scale way.

In addition to that, SFA helps the United States be the “partner of choice” for foreign governments. Other great powers are competing for this recognition. Examples are the Chinese with their “Belt and Road Initiative” and the Russians with their “Wagner Group” who are also providing SFA to foreign governments through their own methods. They are an option for nations throughout the world and we want to provide a preferable alternative to that. SFA allows us to posture U.S. strategic influence against our adversaries across the world. Ideally, this occurs regionally with partners wanting the United States to work with. SFA garners the good will of partner nations, enabling U.S. collaboration, access, and cooperation, not only in the military realm, but in the whole of government. SFA also allows the United States and NATO to relay commitments to our partners, reassuring them that the United States is on their side and is backing up what it says in the diplomatic realm.

Finally, deploying SFA military formations and other governmental elements into strategic regions serves as a deterrence to our adversaries but on a very small, scalable level. The United States then does not have to deploy an infantry brigade combat team to a partner nation to conduct SFA. We can deploy smaller-scale elements. A security force assistance brigade (SFAB) team, U.S. State Department representatives, and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can assist a partner nation on a small scale with great effects. The worldwide message is there are U.S. Service members and government representatives in that nation or region. Having U.S. personnel in a partner nation is a deterrence to adversaries who may want to conduct malign actions there.

3. How did you train and prepare?

The 54th SFAB, as an element of the U.S. Army National Guard, and not one of the five Active Component SFABs, has a slightly different training model than the Active Component SFABs. We conduct collective training every four months. Additionally, there is one longer annual training period. Essentially, we have five collective training events in a calendar year.

We know our force package requirements up to three years out. When we man a team, we put that team in our training model, which sees the team trained on its Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) 350-1 and METL tasks in a progressive fashion. Drill periods are tiered to bring the team from individual military occupational specialty (MOS) and advisor task proficiency to collective proficiency. The culminating training event (CTE) occurs just before their deployment. This means they are trained up, validated, then employed to a real-world operation. The way the employment model works is an SFA team scheduled for deployment conducts a core series of six collective drills, which are broken into three pairs. Each pair are what we call “Small Unit Tactics (SUT) Week” and “Operation Greenhorn.” SUT Week focuses on educating each advisor on how their MOS- specific skills and proficiencies translate to advising a foreign partner, as well as cross-training other team members on critical skills that their teammates have. Operation Greenhorn puts this training into a field training exercise (FTX), which sees the team patrol and conduct key leader engagements. The second pair of drills are “Advisor Week” and “Operation Handshake.” Advisor Week educates advisors on SFA/SFAB doctrine as well as working with a U.S. State Department country team and embassy. Operation Handshake is an FTX that has the team advise a partner-force battalion staff during planning. The third set of drills are “Mobility Week” and “Operation Partnership.” Mobility Week allows the team to prepare all their team equipment for packing and take care of most of the administrative requirements for deployment. Operation Partnership has the team advise a partner-force brigade staff during planning and execution, using role players and the Virtual Battlespace 3 simulation.

Outside of these core six training events, each advisor team participates in additional drills and training events. ODTs like Exercise Southern Vanguard (ExSV) or Exercise Noble Partner are important events that we try to involve as many advisor teams in as possible. Obviously, interspersed in all that are Soldiers going to their normal officer education system (OES) and noncommissioned officer education system (NCOES) schools, as well as the Combat Advisor Training Course and other SFAC/MOS required schools. The primary team from the 1st Battalion, 54th SFAB is here for ExSV23 in Colombia. The majority is part of the company advisor team (CAT). They have conducted their deployment training, and this is their annual training event going out conducting some sort of advise, assist, liaise, and assess training in a real-world environment yet still considered a training environment.

4. What is the SFAB strategy for Colombia? How did the COLAR contribute?

The SFAB builds its strategy for a nation based off of the titles and authorities it operates under in that nation. At this exercise in Colombia, we are temporarily deployed under Title 10. Teams that are deployed under Title 10 take their mission guidance from the U.S. State Department and written country strategy. Before coming here, we reviewed the U.S. State Department’s integrated country strategy (ICS) and focused the SFAB mission to achieve those ends at the strategic level. Additionally, we made sure what was conducted fell within the left and right limits of what United States Army South (USARSOUTH) directed for the exercise itself. Finally, because this exercise was primarily meant to aid Colombia in becoming more interoperable with NATO, we also focused our efforts on aligning NATO’s goals for the COLAR.

We took the U.S. State Department's ICS, USARSOUTH guidance on what they wanted at ExSV23, and NATO's policy on Colombia and combined all three of those to ensure what we did at the exercise contributed to each of those lines of effort. The ICS for Colombia has four mission goals. What was pertinent to us was number three, which is to improve Colombian resiliency in efforts to counter external malign state actors' ability to undermine stability and gain access to Colombia.

From the NATO side of things, since 2019, Colombia has been, by written agreement, an official partner of NATO with NATO supporting their efforts to build COLAR forces capacity and capabilities. This matches well with the U.S. State Department's goal number three in their ICS. Finally, USARSOUTH guidance was for SFA teams to assist and liaise between all elements of the exercise to help ensure the exercise ran fluidly.

Colombians contributed to all of these efforts. primarily by showing a great desire to strengthen their capabilities and capacity of their army. This matched our goals for them. COLAR pulled resources, including troops and equipment from their operational force to allocate to this exercise. This was huge because the COLAR is very operationally involved in daily real-world operations. They provided leaders and Soldiers who cared about the exercise and its outcomes. They were invested in making sure this exercise was executed to standard and getting something out of it.

One of the NATO interoperability requirements was that the exercise must be conducted in a NATO-approved language of either English, German, or French. The COLAR put in a lot of effort making sure their battalion staff executed their planning process in English. Additionally, all of the real-world exercise support elements (i.e., observer coach/trainer [OC/Ts], red cell, white cell, and real-world medical support) made a tremendous effort to operate in English. If someone in a particular cell was unable to speak English, they had interpreters from the COLAR on hand to ensure the exercise overall was conducted in English, thereby meeting NATO language requirements for interoperability.

Finally, the COLAR went into this exercise with the desire to create a future combat training center. This is something they have not historically had because their army is so tied up in real-world missions. They plan to continue this pursuit, leveraging what was learned out of ExSV23.

5. What lessons and best practices do you have that went well and not so well?

What went well

- Brought a majority of modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) communications equipment, enabling validation of the tactical voice network in an OCONUS real-world operational environment in accordance with SFAB capabilities.
- Coordinated with other Army component elements before arriving in Colombia, including with deployed SFA teams already in country, which facilitated COLAR training on NATO tactical tasks and doctrine before ExSV23 start of exercise (STARTEX). Provided situational understanding on identified tactical NATO training deficiencies and what COLAR needed upon STARTEX.
- Reached out and worked with in-country U.S. special forces (SF) operational detachment alpha (ODA), who provided real-world support medics and other resources, which increased SFAB capabilities.

- Established relationships with USARSOUTH by attending other training events in the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), which promoted a better exercise.

What to improve

- Bring upper tactical internet, not necessary to conduct training and mission in this instance but would have been excellent to have for validating network in an OCONUS operational environment.
- Coordinate months earlier with COLAR infantry company to promote better proficiency on NATO tasks at day 1 of the exercise. This would have enabled 1-54 SFAB to be better postured when we showed up.
- Bring tactical, scalable, mobile (TSM) ad hoc network (self-contained Wi-Fi internet not connected to the outside internet) to use and validate with tactical radios to increase the range. Without this, witnessed some standard FM radio distance challenges; however, did not prove to be a significant issue for exercise.

6. What more support does the SFAB need from USARSOUTH?

For ExSV23 and future facilitated USARSOUTH multinational exercises, recommend USARSOUTH, as the proponent, do a better job of following up with all the different elements of the exercise before execution. There were multiple planning conferences and formal agreements made before STARTEX. However, once 1-54 SFAB hit the ground, it appeared several of the agreements previously made at the conferences were not disseminated from the people at the conferences to people executing those decisions and driving previous agreements. This affected 1-54 SFAB as many of the anticipated conditions (based on the conferences) were not set when we arrived. This caused us to have to replan and re-agree upon portions on how the exercise would be run. We executed with personnel on the ground from the SFAB, USARSOUTH, 2nd Battalion/130th Infantry Regiment, and the COLAR. An example is what the OC/T cell, comprised mainly of the COLAR, was told, and expected to do versus what they were later asked to do. They were tracking different requirements. This indifference created a lot of last-minute scrambling. Most notably, this surfaced at the platoon situational training exercise (STX) lanes where the COLAR OC/T cell and I, at the last minute, had to write the company operation order (OPORD) given to platoon elements going through the lanes. Orders were completed and mission accomplished, but a lot of friction could have been avoided.

USARSOUTH needs more military Service members on the ground to facilitate these type exercises. I observed only four to five “green suiters” from USARSOUTH. A consequence of this is a lot of real-world exercise control and facilitation of the exercise’s roles and responsibilities ended up spilling over to the SFAB plate because we were here acting in our liaise role. Picking up and executing real-world requirements was not our role at this exercise. We were supposed to be part of the training, not facilitating the exercise.

**LTC Castano Gomez Genaro (Colombian Army),
Exercise Director/Exercise Division Commander**

Interview conducted 16 November 2022

1. From the COLAR perspective, what were the greatest successes in ExSV23?

One of the greatest successes was planning and executing a combined exercise. As far as I know, we have not conducted this type training before. We in the COLAR are good in individual training, but not at higher-level unit training. We evolved with the United States in training units as a whole. We normally train up to platoon level. In ExSV23, with multiple companies, we went up to battalion level. To me, this was the most important benefit we got.

2. How did you establish and how effective was our common operational picture (COP) between armies?

We wanted to have a system that was readable by everyone in a COP. Most of the time we used NATO templates and graphics to communicate. We had to train our units in how to read maps using the military grid reference system (MGRS). Normally, we read maps using geographic coordinates in degrees, minutes, and seconds. In ExSV23, we used military degrees, which we were not accustomed to. Currently, we do not have the capability to produce MGRS maps. However, USARSOUTH brought these. Displayed information between the two types of maps is not quite the same. In our military academy, we actually receive training on the MGRS, but we do not commonly use it. We rely on latitude and longitude. After using MGRS, I think this system is easier. I would like to see our army moving in that direction.

To establish and maintain a COP, we conducted a daily briefing at 1600 to keep everyone informed. This type of staff meeting is good for the COLAR because we are not accustomed to this type of formal staff meeting. The quad chart slide used routinely at briefings is easy to understand, provided a lot of needed information, and quickly displayed it. We will use it at higher-staff-level briefings in the future. It was good that the younger staff officers saw and used this quad chart. When they provided information, we asked them the “so what” questions such as, “What does this information mean? How does this affect the exercise or operation? Is your information timely?”

3. How did we improve interoperability between Colombia and the United States and where is there work still to do?

We improved interoperability during this exercise in the combined task force (CTF) staff planning process. This was demonstrated while conducting the military decision-making process (MDMP) in a multinational operating environment. Our MDMP is the same. Moreover, doctrine between COLAR and the U.S. Army is quite similar. We gained a lot of knowledge by working together. But applying that knowledge in a practical way is another thing. For example, seeing another way to conduct mission analysis and the multiple steps involved. Making it practical enables you to discover appropriate ways to get what is needed.

For the COLAR as a whole, we learned a lot on how to plan and conduct an exercise. It enhanced our ability to focus more on the strategic level. We need to move in that direction to identify and establish an organization, or office, with the sole responsibility to develop operational and strategic exercises. We did not have this for ExSV23, and just brought a lot of people together trying to make it happen. Sometimes we got stuck and had to find people to do certain things.

Establishing an office to do this will make the next exercise easier. We did have the COLAR G-7, who established an interoperability office, but they are not adequately resourced yet. The COLAR G-7 had to borrow personnel for this exercise. Plus, they were not involved in the exercise's planning process. This resulted in separated efforts. If combined, it would result in better effects. Recommend sharing USARSOUTH G-7 experience with our developing COLAR G-7 section.

Submit the COLAR needs to be more present in multinational exercises. We have participated in exercises like the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) biannual PANAMAX command post exercise (CPX). The COLAR needs more information on other scheduled multinational exercises to determine if we should participate and what contributions can be made.

An area in interoperability needing improvement is in English proficiency. There are a lot of smart guys, but if they are not able to communicate, it makes things quite hard. We can improve interoperability with more personnel deciding to learn English. Being together on a multinational exercise, many saw the importance of speaking English. One time during the exercise, someone came to me and asked if they should speak in Spanish or English at the planning meeting. I told him to do it in English to be in accordance with NATO standards. If more English language training is available, believe this would motivate both officers and noncommissioned officers to learn.

It may be productive to have U.S. instructors come to Colombia to help us translate COLAR doctrine into English. This will make things easier for interoperability. Also, believe we need to create standard operating procedures (SOPs) in English, so they are understood by both armies. To be interoperable, it is essential for the COLAR to be familiar with U.S. doctrine, specifically with ADP 5.0, *The Operations Process* and ADP 3.0, *Operations*.

4. What did the 54th SFAB bring to the fight and are there areas they can provide additional support?

The 54 SFAB helped a lot in the planning process and scenario development and shared a lot of experiences from places like the JRTC. Their coaching was very helpful and much appreciated. The SFA already in Colombia supported exercise planning and trained with COLAR forces well over a year before ExSV23. This really helped the COLAR companies participating in ExSV23. It was good to have this U.S. force validate how we did and encourage us to speak in English. Both the SFA teams already in Colombia and the ones who came in for the exercise were very supportive. They all are professionals.

The SFAB fires and engineer teams advised and participated with us at our NATO exercise this past September in Tolemaida, Colombia. To prepare, the SFAB conducted training with the COLAR, in July, before the NATO exercise commenced. This helped a lot as we went into this NATO exercise.

Additionally, 54 SFAB provided training and mentored the COLAR staff on the NATO seven-step planning process when they came in for ExSV23. This process is quite similar to the U.S. Army MDMP. The COLAR in the CTF staff belongs to the unit conducting training with NATO and under their evaluation process. So, we gained training for those personnel. Those guys have to continue this process and integrate with NATO. This is a process that will last at least three years and has just begun.

In my previous job, it was my goal to establish a company-level “JRTC-like school” in Colombia. I believe the SFAB could help us establish this. They are familiar with planning, operations, developing SOPs, and with opposing force (OPFOR) requirements, etc. In ExSV23, the COLAR had two platoons (60 personnel) who played the OPFOR. One of these is a permanently assigned OPFOR unit and the other tasked to perform this mission during the exercise. What really helped is 54 SFAB advised the COLAR OPFOR and did planning with them using maps and graphics. If we stand up our own JRTC, we can use this school to support the whole army, especially COLAR Lancero (Ranger) and SF training for future real-world operations. Additionally, this type of school would enable OPFOR and others to train year-round. My goal remains to stand up a permanent JRTC in Colombia.

5. What processes and procedures were used to demonstrate the COLAR operational capability concept for NATO certification?

We used NATO doctrine and established an SOP in order to communicate. For example, we used the NATO “nine-line” medical evacuation request not normally used by the COLAR.

As many people do not speak English yet, we ensured that personnel put at the radios could speak English and were familiar with NATO reports to guarantee better communications. As NATO sent planning and execution products in English, we had to make sure we were ready to receive and read them and react accurately. Working with NATO, we learned we must be able to communicate and react fast. But, in operations everyone takes the time to do the right planning and contribute to the mission. All followed the prescribed framework and NATO seven-step planning process.

6. What can make the next Southern Vanguard an even better exercise?

Continue to train COLAR battalion-level staff and make them a part of future international exercises. Also, conduct training on specific exercise positions. I do not know if the United States has specific training on planning exercises. I took a course on exercise planning on the NATO website. The course helped me better organize things. This may be something to discuss at the next COLAR-USARSOUTH bilateral staff talks. We have already received some training on planning at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).

Exchanging officers between Colombia and the U.S. military schools will ensure we both do better on exercises. Applying knowledge received will ensure better training.

I believe sending COLAR junior officers (lieutenants and captains) as both OC/Ts in JRTC rotations and to be a part of the JRTC cadre, for a set amount of time to learn and see the JRTC training model, would be very helpful and enable continuity. Additionally, it would be cheaper to send a few select COLAR officers to JRTC than sending a COLAR platoon or company to a rotation at a tremendous expense. Sending one or two captains to JRTC could have a strategic impact. As a personal example, in 2015, I was in WHINSEC as an instructor. What was learned there, in that exchange program, I was able to apply later as the director of our platoon leader training in Colombia.

In the future, if we exercise at a brigade CTF level, we will need to improve our communications network. This includes getting the right compatible equipment and hands on training to establish such a network.

**LTC Jorge Ocampo (Colombian Army),
COLAR Lessons Learned Center (DILEA) Director and
Officer in Charge of COLAR Observer Coach/Trainers**

Interview conducted 16 November 2022

1. How did you establish collection operations in support of ExSV23?

I was in charge of all the COLAR OC/Ts during ExSV23 as well as being the COLAR Lessons Learned Center (“Dirección de Lecciones Aprendidas [DILEA]) director.

First, selection was made to get the right personnel to be field observers. Second, I directed the lessons and best practices to be provided to the OC/T teams. Third, I gave all the observer teams specific responsibilities, so everyone was tracking on what to do. We integrated with the U.S. Army OC/Ts to plan and analyze based on three major objectives: organization and planning, training, and execution of the exercise.

2. What were your greatest challenges?

One of the main challenges was to make everything happen between both observer teams from the United States and Colombia and to find a way to integrate them effectively. The second challenge was finding a way we could receive all information to improve interoperability. The last big challenge was to make all personnel within the COLAR to report on significant activities across the warfighting functions on interoperability. Our main goal right now is to be NATO certified.

3. What were your greatest successes?

Enabling all COLAR OC/T personnel to have good synchronization with the U.S. Army during the training. We were able to record a lot of improvements and recommendations from the U.S. Army to improve COLAR capabilities. Also, we made stronger relationships—mainly between the CALL and the COLAR Lessons Learned Center (DILEA).

4. Where did we achieve interoperability and where did we not?

We achieved interoperability during planning and in accomplishing the main ExSV23 objectives. We realize we need more training in order to enhance our overall capacity and capabilities. We gained interoperability while conducting maneuver and fires operations and across the other warfighting functions. This included, at echelon, at both upper and lower levels of leadership. All in the exercise demonstrated proper ethics, professionalism, and a positive attitude performing well during the training.

We did not immediately achieve interoperability for those not able to adapt once they arrived in Colombia. For example, the U.S. Army National Guard unit came in and went right out to training. They experienced some challenges in adapting to a new environment, specifically the Colombian weather and terrain. We also did not have interoperability between the people in charge of creating the scenario and both participating-nation armies executing the exercise. They did not consider the real-world operational environment. We did not have true communications interoperability because of encryption restrictions. Also, there were interoperability challenges between Soldiers of both nations who were not able to interact while conducting operations. Some did not understand very well the scenario’s operational environment during the whole exercise.

Within warfare, a key point to understand is all the factors across the operational environment, including the weather and terrain. We analyzed all of that and knew this could cause some negative impacts such as heat injuries, twisted ankles on uneven terrain, etc. This did occur and there were several heat-related injuries. Some leaders at the company level did not adequately take this into account and did not relay these conditions in Colombia to lower-unit formations. Thus, several individual Soldiers were not aware. This reduced the unit's efficiency during the final operation, which was the air assault. To counter, units must execute proper troop-leading procedures.

All of this is a matter of readiness. To illustrate, someday we may get an order to deploy somewhere far away like Russia. Preparations for something like this must begin right away. Analysis of the operational environment effects of weather, temperature, terrain, and what type of equipment is necessary will be key considerations for a unit to conduct this mission.

5. What can make the next Southern Vanguard an even better exercise?

The exercise would be improved by sending an advanced party with COLAR OC/Ts and COLAR G-7, and each battalion commander arriving to the exercise location during the academics phase to organize the training before the STARTEX. This would ensure they have a general idea of the exercise in order to conduct planning and to see what they may need for the exercise.

6. What else can CALL do for you and DILEA in the future?

Keep up the momentum between our two lessons learned centers. Keep talking about future projects to improve interoperability between our armies. Right now, one of the main goals of the COLAR is operating with other nations. Specifically, showing us how the world's threats are constantly changing so we can be better prepared to face those threats.

The other point is to receive exercise data related to interoperability and future CALL publications so DILEA can use these as references. Also, to continue coordinating with CALL on what the COLAR can do better on this exercise in the future. With this information, we can start working future projects and conduct training based on CALL lessons learned recommendations.

LTC Andres Catano (Colombian Army), Commander, Combined Task Force – Scorpion

Interview conducted 16 November 2022

1. What were the benefits of establishing a combined battalion task force headquarters to conduct multinational operations versus one nation in charge and what were the challenges?

The main benefit was integrating all combined arms to ensure adequate coordination in structuring all warfighting functions. That allowed both armies to measure the level of interoperability and to strengthen both armies with the integration of new elements. This knowledge enabled us to integrate effects into one offensive action.

The main challenge during this exercise was the language barrier. The language barrier caused all procedures to get done more slowly. Also, other challenges existed impacting the interoperability between communications. Even though we have the same communications equipment, we were not allowed to integrate them encrypted for national security reasons.

One of the other main challenges is the COLAR troops are just operational troops. Not knowing the process of simulated training and the techniques, like the simulator located at USARSOUTH, caused our troops not to understand how it operated in the real-world area of operations (AO) and in the scenario. However, I do not call this a challenge or limitation. I would call it something to keep moving slowly and work through it.

2. How did you conduct integrated MDMP and what was learned that you will continue to use in future combined operations?

To be honest, the United States, NATO, and Colombia's MDMP we have in our doctrine are very similar. It is familiar and very close. What we did was integrate COLAR tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) into the NATO planning process and put it together with our U.S. Army partners. We integrated all those planning steps with U.S. partners in order to operate against a hybrid threat, in this environment, for this exercise. A hybrid threat is what Colombia is always facing. An enemy that employs both conventional and irregular, or guerrilla, forces. A true asymmetric fight.

The decision-making was easier for the commander having all the recommendations from both nations integrated into the courses of action (COAs). This enabled better and more detailed planning for both nations.

3. How did we establish and how effective was our COP?

The COP enabled us to have control of all contingencies during the exercise and during the development of the military operation. This enabled us to maintain control of all resources. The U.S. Army had leaders, across echelon, with a Global Positioning System (GPS) device that could send their current and updated locations, messages, terrain updates, and target acquisition data, and could transmit orders to small-unit leaders. We have these type devices with some of our SF units, but not across the conventional army. We integrated these devices and used some unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which allowed the staff to make decisions in real time.

The COP was available at all levels of command. From the company commander to the individual Soldier in the company. This allowed me to have control of all my troops during the exercise at any time. Plus, the UAV images provided details on the operational environment.

On this exercise, the information I received was very organized. I received it straight from the company commanders and employed aircraft. If I identified any risk or limitation, I could immediately help the company commander solve whatever issue he or she faced at that moment. Based on feeds, I was also able to adjust operations at the right time, and at the right location, to support leaders. It also enabled the ability to plan and anticipate future actions and requirements.

4. Where did we achieve interoperability and where did we not by warfighting function?

I think we cannot talk right now about achieving 100 percent interoperability in this exercise. This is because of the language barrier at all levels. The language barrier did not allow us to have good, fast, and effective communication. This was true especially at the lowest levels in the unit—between the private and another private. This was shown at the STX lanes where we needed better communication between the teams and squads

But, in context of the development, planning, and training for military operations, I would say we achieved 100 percent interoperability. We conducted detailed training with the troops and followed a detailed planning process with the combined battalion staff, resulting in achieving one of our main goals for the exercise—a combined air assault operation. This is one of the hardest operations

for any army. We were also able to conduct the needed maneuver to support and achieve our main goal for the exercise. So, although we had the noted communication barrier, we worked through the challenges to achieve our mission. Bottom line, if we did not have a good level of interoperability, we would not have been able to conduct that successful air assault operation. If we did it with no training or without interoperability, it would have been a disaster.

5. What more can the U.S. Army do to be more interoperable with COLAR?

I think we have to definitely keep conducting these types of exercises with the U.S. Army. We both learn a lot. We can train together, not only in Colombia, but can also train in other nations. It could be a regional exercise with multiple mutual partners.

We could conduct virtual war gaming and MDMP together between now and the next Southern Vanguard exercise. To be honest, the best we may be able to do it right now is to gather the staffs from both nations to continue planning and make improvements to our planning process. Perhaps we could do this annually. Whatever we recommend for these future planning events must be submitted for approval in upcoming U.S.-Colombia bilateral staff talks to make it happen.

6. What can make the next Southern Vanguard an even better exercise?

Obviously, the first thing is to improve is our language skills by sending more personnel from both armies to language training. I emphasize that the COLAR must be proficient in the English language because this makes us deployable in almost every part of the world and for NATO missions.

Another thing we could do is for both of us to discuss with our upper-level leadership to take out that communications encryption firewall. Even though we were both working for the same CTF in this exercise, we were not able to communicate effectively due to this encryption constraint. We used to have the capability to make a specific secure key for an exercise, but for this particular exercise this was not authorized by our upper-level leaders.

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GLOSSARY

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	after action review
AO	area of operations
AOR	area of responsibility
ATAK	Android Team Awareness Kit
ATP	Army techniques publication
BRAAR	Brazilian Army
CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CAT	company advisor team
COA	course of action
COLAR	Colombian Army
COP	common operational picture
CORE	Combined Operations and Rotation Exercise
CPX	command post exercise
CTE	culminating training event
CTF	combined task force
DILEA	“Dirección de Lecciones Aprendidas
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
ECG	exercise control group
ESG	exercise support group
ExSV	Exercise Southern Vanguard
ExSV21	Exercise Southern Vanguard 21
ExSV22	Exercise Southern Vanguard 22
ExSV23	Exercise Southern Vanguard 23
ExSV24	Exercise Southern Vanguard 24
FOB	forward operating base
FTX	field training exercise
GAARNG	Georgia Army National Guard
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICS	integrated country strategy
ILARNG	Illinois Army National Guard
JELC	Joint Event Life Cycle
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
LSCO	large-scale combat operations
MDMP	military decision-making process
METL	mission-essential task list
MGRS	military grid reference system
MOS	military occupational specialty
MTOE	modified table of organization and equipment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCOES	noncommissioned officer education system
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OCONUS	outside the continental United States
OC/T	observer coach/trainer

ODA	operational detachment alpha
ODT	overseas deployment training
OES	officer education system
OPFOR	opposing force
OPORD	operation order
OPP	operations planning process
RAA	remote advise and assist
SF	special forces
SFA	security force assistance
SFAB	security force assistance brigade
SFAC	Security Force Assistance Command
SOP	standard operating procedure
STARTEX	start of exercise
STX	situational training exercise
SUT	small unit tactics
TF BIL	Task Force Brazilian Infantry Light
TSM	tactical, scalable, mobile
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
USARSOUTH	United States Army South
USSOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
WinTAK	Windows Team Awareness Kit



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