U.S. Army North/5th Army: Building Relationships to Defend the Homeland and Meet Emerging Regional Challenges

By Amanda Merritt Cumti

A successful defense of the United States homeland is the preeminent requirement of the Global War on Terrorism. There is no “home game.” There is no “away game.” We are engaged in a global conflict. And in that global conflict, the defense of the U.S. homeland is the preeminent duty.

Paul McHale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense

Introduction

As the 11 September 2001 attacks on the U.S. homeland and natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina revealed, the United States cannot neglect to protect and defend its citizens against disasters—whether manmade or natural—on its soil. In a globalized world, nations have been forced to redefine their concept of security, looking beyond traditional military threats to the growing threats posed by unstable political, economic and social environments. The world is smaller and flatter—as Thomas Friedman suggests—and its threats are larger and more complicated.

To confront modern security challenges, the Army has adapted its operational and institutional structure, changing from threat-based to capabilities-based command structures. In this new Army structure, each regional unified combatant command will be assigned a theater army for its area of responsibility (AOR; see figure on page 2) that will also report to Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA). In addition to fulfilling their Title 10, U.S. Code responsibilities, theater armies will develop organic, deployable headquarters, giving the Army new capabilities and new options to act more effectively across the full spectrum of operations.

This National Security Watch discusses U.S. Army North/Fifth Army (USARNORTH) and its AOR, which includes the continental United States, Alaska, Canada and Mexico. USARNORTH is charged with Army homeland defense and civil support operations and army-to-army theater security cooperation with Canada and Mexico in order to “protect the American people and their way of life.”

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U.S. Army North/Fifth Army (USARNORTH)

The United States created U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) in 2002 as a new regional combatant command to handle homeland defense and civil support operations and theater security cooperation with support from dedicated Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force components.\(^5\) For the first time, the various existing homeland defense and civil support missions are now directed by a single unified command. USNORTHCOM became fully operational on 11 September 2003.

As the Army Service Component Command (ASCC) to USNORTHCOM, USARNORTH provides the USNORTHCOM commander with a single point of contact for all land domain security challenges across the AOR. In addition, establishing USNORTHCOM as the military focal point—and USARNORTH as the Army focal point—for homeland defense encourages and solidifies the interagency relationships critical to successfully responding to domestic crises. USARNORTH reports directly to HQDA for all doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel and facilities issues. This marks the first time a single numbered army is the ASCC to USNORTHCOM.\(^6\)

Headquartered at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, USARNORTH is a three-star command with 538 Soldiers, civilians and contractors. USARNORTH has no assigned forces—it is assigned forces when needed. With augmentation, USARNORTH can command and control deployed forces as a Joint Task Force (JTF) or Joint Forces Land Component Command (JFLCC).
Homeland Defense and Civil Support. According to the June 2005 “Strategy for Homeland Defense and Support,” protecting the United States from direct attack is the highest priority of the Department of Defense (DoD). Thus USARNORTH’s highest-priority mission is homeland defense, defined as the “protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population and critical defense infrastructure against external threats and aggression, or other threats as directed by the President.”

It is important to distinguish homeland security (which concerns terrorist attacks within the United States) from homeland defense (which concerns the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population and critical defense infrastructure against external threats and aggression, or
other threats as directed by the President). While DoD has the lead on homeland defense, homeland security is led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to which the military provides support at the direction of the President and the Secretary of Defense. The military’s operations on U.S. territory are limited by the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, which generally prohibits military involvement in law enforcement activities. However, there are a few legal exceptions to the prohibition against law enforcement; for example, the President can use the military to directly address sudden emergencies and protect government property, as well as to provide equipment and intelligence to civilian law enforcement. In the event of an attack, USARNORTH can assume tactical control for defending Army personnel and installations within the USNORTHCOM AOR.

Despite the restrictions of Posse Comitatus, the Army’s unique capabilities—such as situational awareness and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) expertise—make it an essential partner to federal, state and local civilian authorities. The Army can provide intelligence and logistical capabilities to assist U.S. law enforcement efforts against terrorism, illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Also known as Defense Support to Civilian Authorities (DSCA), civil support is provided by federal military forces and DoD civilian, contract personnel, agency and component assets for domestic emergencies and designated law enforcement and other activities. DoD provides civil support upon Secretary of Defense approval or Presidential direction.

For the first year since 2003, the National Interagency Fire Center—a civilian organization—requested a military battalion to aid civilian firefighting efforts during the busy 2006 fire season. In response, USARNORTH established Task Force Blaze, comprising 550 active duty Soldiers from Fort Lewis, Washington, who worked with civilian firefighters to control wildfires that burned more than 83,000 acres in Washington state. USARNORTH helped organize the military support that brought in needed logistical planning, equipment and boots on the ground.

In addition, USARNORTH manages the training and oversight of the 55 National Guard Weapons of Mass Destruction Civilian Support Teams (WMD-CSTs)—full-time 22-person teams composed of state National Guard members dedicated to both WMD and other disaster-response missions. USARNORTH also administers DoD’s “Defense Support to Civil Authorities” course to train military personnel (for their civilian support role in response to attacks or disasters) and civilians (to assist them in obtaining a better understanding of DoD).

Unity of Effort: Civil-Military and Military-to-Military. General Omar Bradley once observed, “Wars are won by the great strength of a nation, the Soldier and the civilian working together.” Now more than ever, success in the 21st century security environment requires cooperation. As the lead Army organization in homeland defense, one of USARNORTH’s most important responsibilities is to develop partnerships with international, federal, state and local authorities.

To maintain robust relationships, USARNORTH assigns and oversees dedicated Defense Coordinating Officers (DCOs) who serve as liaisons between DoD and state and federal authorities in emergencies. One senior officer and a six-person coordinating element are located in each of the ten Federal Emergency
Management Agency (FEMA) regions. These officers are subject-matter experts for state and federal emergency response plans and have operational control over Army emergency preparedness liaison officers. In the event of a catastrophic event, they can deploy to other FEMA regions to augment USARNORTH support.

USARNORTH also participates in various exercises with joint, civilian and international participants, in line with the Army’s goal to “train like we fight.” In April and May 2006, USARNORTH took part in Ardent Sentry, a USNORTHCOM exercise with Canada designed to test response capabilities in such diverse crises as a hurricane, an avian flu outbreak and a bioterrorist attack. U.S. and Canadian civilian and military and international participants included FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Coast Guard, Navy and Air Force personnel. In the simulation, USARNORTH set up a Joint Task Force to manage DoD assets assisting the lead civilian agencies in response to a fictional “Hurricane Xena”—based on actual data from Hurricane Katrina to increase the reality. USARNORTH also participates in state-level exercises such as Golden Guardian, California’s emergency response exercise. The portion of the November 2006 event in which USARNORTH partook simulated a response to a massive earthquake.

Major Regional Issues

Because USARNORTH’s AOR includes the neighboring countries of Mexico and Canada, it is no surprise that many of the bilateral security issues are also homeland security issues. For Mexico, the United States’ southern neighbor, principal security concerns include political instability/democratization, low levels of economic development, immigration, drug trafficking and terrorism. These issues have significant overlap.

Mexico. Overall, U.S.-Mexican relations are strong, despite some differences over border issues and lingering mistrust from the United States’ inattention to Mexico after 11 September 2001. Following a long period of sporadic relations, improvement began when the Institutional Revolutionary Party’s (PRI’s) 71-year one-party rule ended in 2000. The election marked the beginning of a period of significant democratization—despite continuing corruption—and economic opening. However, drug-related violence, social and political unrest and poverty still plague the country of 107 million. These issues, along with illegal immigration, remain top U.S. concerns.

With Mexican per-capita income one fourth that of the United States, and with even more impoverished Central American countries below Mexico’s porous southern border, the principal U.S.-Mexico security issue is illegal immigration. Although illegal immigrants contribute to the U.S. economy, the United States sees the unsecured border as a security threat, particularly a terrorism one. To mitigate the problem, the United States deployed the National Guard and has begun constructing a security fence along the border; unfortunately, these moves have negatively impacted bilateral relations, particularly because they were not followed by U.S. legislation to increase legal migration and grant amnesty to some illegal immigrants already residing in the United States.

The second largest bilateral issue is drug trafficking. Mexico is the largest supplier of marijuana and methamphetamines entering the U.S. market and serves as the entry point for about 90 percent of the cocaine, despite a marked improvement in Mexico’s counternarcotics operations. The drug trade also poses an increasing threat to Mexico; in fact, some observers suggest that Mexican drug cartels are reaching the strength and size of the Colombian cartels of the 1980s.

Security cooperation and trade are two bright points in bilateral relations. Since 11 September 2001, security cooperation—particularly information sharing—has increased, and bilateral trade has tripled since 1994 due in large part to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Currently, the United States is Mexico’s largest trade partner and Mexico is the United States’ second largest. An important part of the trade relationship involves oil: with 88 percent of Mexican oil exported to the United States,
Mexico is the second largest source of U.S. oil imports. Bilateral cooperation occurs mainly through the Partnership for Prosperity, a public-private, binational initiative founded in 2001 to encourage economic growth in areas with high migration rates, and the U.S.-Mexico Binational Commission, a cabinet-level forum founded in 1981 for issues requiring high-level attention.\textsuperscript{15}

President Felipe Calderón—newly elected in 2006—has pledged to continue economic reform, expand antipoverty programs and fight rampant drug-cartel crime and social unrest. But Calderón faces his own political problems because his election opponent, former Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and his supporters vow to disrupt Calderón’s government, claiming the election was rigged. Although Obrador may not be a significant threat in the long run, the income inequality and disenfranchisement that helped his political rise will remain a threat to Mexican stability until they are addressed. The 31 January 2007 national demonstrations—when between 50,000 and 100,000 people took to the streets to protest rising food prices—are a sign of this growing unrest.

U.S.-Mexico military-to-military relations have been very limited but have recently improved to some extent. The United States military has trained some Mexican soldiers and officers, but military interaction is limited by history, technology and law. First, beginning with the U.S. accession of Texas and the 1846 Mexican-American War, Mexico has long observed U.S. actions toward it with mistrust. Second, the Mexican military is several generations behind U.S. technology. Third—and most important—Mexico membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its refusal to sign an “Article 98” agreement (which exempts U.S. military personnel from ICC prosecution) legally obstructs the United States from selling U.S. military equipment to Mexico to help modernize Mexican forces.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Canada.} The U.S. Department of State says in its background notes on Canada: “The relationship between the United States and Canada is probably the closest and most extensive in the world.”\textsuperscript{17} As is the case with Mexico, the 3,958-mile U.S.-Canada border—the longest unfortified border in the world—is at the heart of the relationship. And for good reason: 90 percent of Canada’s population of 33 million lives within 160 kilometers of the border. Not surprisingly, the United States and Canada are each other’s largest trade partners. Canada is the largest foreign source of U.S. energy imports; according to the Department of Energy, almost all of Canada’s energy exports—principally oil, natural gas and electricity—go to the United States.

Since the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, cross-border traffic has dramatically increased—which has in turn increased both bilateral cooperation and the threat of cross-border terrorism. Due to the large amount of cross-border traffic, the United States is concerned about illegal third-country immigration\textsuperscript{18} and the potential for terrorists to exploit the relatively lax Canadian immigration laws. Canada also worries about terrorists using the shared border to enter the United States; the 12 September 2001 closure of the U.S.-Canadian border rattled its economy. Therefore, the two nations cooperate closely on border policing and policy.

Canada is an important U.S. ally in counterterrorism and homeland defense matters both in various bilateral security forums and on the ground in Afghanistan. The Permanent Joint Board on Defense—a strategic-level defense forum founded in 1940\textsuperscript{19}—is the oldest, while the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD, a binational command established in 1958 to monitor and defend continental air space) is one of the most important. Through these and other mechanisms, the two countries conduct intelligence sharing, military exercises and crisis response planning. In Afghanistan, 2,300 Canadian troops fight under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alongside U.S. forces, and a Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team helps with stability operations in the Kandahar province. Canada has been an active proponent of democratization and has long been praised for its contributions to peacekeeping and peace-building around the world.
Part of the motivation for close bilateral military cooperation on the part of the Canadians is that they fear their sovereignty will be eroded by the United States’ more assertive role in world affairs since 11 September 2001. At the same time, this concern also makes Canada hesitant to cooperate. Before NORTHCOM was founded in 2002, the United States invited Canada to consider joining a binational version of the command as well as expanding NORAD. For various reasons—one of which was a fear that the new arrangement would erode their sovereignty—Canada failed to join NORTHCOM by the end of May deadline and the United States proceeded to unilaterally found the command as USNORTHCOM. In February 2006, Canada founded Canada Command, which is responsible for the conduct of all routine and contingency domestic operations and will partner with USNORTHCOM on continental issues.

Current Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s pledge to strengthen the U.S.-Canadian relationship bodes well for the future, although Canada has always followed an independent foreign policy. One notable example: Canada did not support the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

**Trilateral Relations.** Canada, Mexico and the United States have historically conducted relations with a “dual-bilateral” approach, as exemplified by the bilateral border agreements between the United States and Mexico and the United States and Canada. The Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP)—founded in March 2005 and led in the United States by DHS—is a noteworthy exception. Based on the premise that security and economic prosperity are mutually reinforcing, SPP’s declared aim is to “establish a common approach to security to protect North America from external threats, prevent and respond to threats within North America, and further streamline the secure and efficient movement of legitimate, low-risk traffic across our shared borders.” SPP’s various working groups have focused on emergency response and infrastructure protection; aviation, border and maritime security (especially regarding the threat of terrorism); and economic cooperation. To date, SPP work has provided guidelines and recommendations to increase aviation safety, streamline trade, target and prosecute smugglers and boost counterterrorism cooperation.

**Implications for the United States and the Army**

U.S. relations with the region focus on trade, counternarcotics, counterterrorism, migration and democratization. According to the U.S. Department of State, the major U.S. objective in the Western Hemisphere is the “strengthening of the Inter-American community.”

**Mexico.** U.S.-Mexico relations should remain largely positive under President Calderón. However, the United States’ lack of attention to Mexico—and the Western Hemisphere at large—in its foreign policy after 11 September 2001 remains a sore point in bilateral relations. The U.S. construction of a border fence combined with an unchanged U.S. migration policy has only added to this disappointment. As a result, Mexico may move away from the close relationship it had with the United States under President Vincente Fox to focus attention on Latin America. This would not be a huge change, as Mexico’s foreign policy has always been more independent than the United States would like. But the overall picture is positive; Mexican interests are too tied to the United States—and vice versa—for these issues to drive a significant wedge between the countries.

The prospect for continued, limited military cooperation exists. The Mexican military is moving beyond its historical focus on internal order and the policing of its rural areas to focus on transnational issues, such as drug trafficking and migration. The United States would greatly benefit from a strong partner on these issues, to ensure the law is enforced on both sides of the border. However, the Mexican army’s progress is limited by poor resources and the lack of transparent and corruption-free local law enforcement and governance. Given that counternarcotics and migration are two top U.S. concerns, the United States would be well advised to expand cooperation between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement and military officials. The President was correct to partially exempt Mexico from the legislative ban on
providing U.S. military assistance to International Criminal Court members—some observers speculate this was due to U.S. concern about losing influence in the region to China, which was filling the void left after the suspension of U.S. military training with its own programs and equipment. But the October 2006 waiver applied only to the provision of military education and training assistance, leaving in place the ban on programs that would finance the purchase of U.S. military equipment by Mexico or allow Mexico to purchase excess U.S. defense items. A full lifting of the prohibitions would help modernize the Mexican armed forces and bridge the interoperability gap between the U.S. and Mexican militaries.

Canada. Despite some differences in policy, the U.S.-Canada relationship will remain strong in the future because of geography and shared interests in counterterrorism, border security, trade and democratization. Differences do exist: Canada declined to collaborate with the United States in ballistic missile defense and did not support the U.S. invasion of Iraq or the U.S. isolation of Cuba. However, Canada’s proven track record in supporting peace and democratization around the world with both money and troops makes Canada a good ally for achieving U.S. goals of creating stability and democratization. As with Mexico, the United States should be careful not to act like an older sibling to Canada—that is, simply assuming that Canada will always fall in line behind the United States.

The U.S.-Canada military-to-military relationship will also remain important. Within Canada, the military is the strongest advocate of U.S.-Canadian cooperation. Canada has committed to staying in Afghanistan until 2009 and will fight alongside U.S. forces in NATO units there. As to future possibilities for military cooperation, the U.S. military could benefit from Canadian expertise in peacekeeping and stability operations, especially since the U.S. military predicts these missions will remain in the forefront in the international arena. However, Canadian military capabilities have declined since the end of the Cold War to the point that the United States is now raising questions about interoperability. It remains to be seen whether Canadian Prime Minister Harper’s pledge to strengthen the military will lay to rest these questions.

Trilateral Relations. Cooperation among Mexico, Canada and the United States holds the brightest future with regard to trade; interoperability problems and a lack of trust restrict the level of security collaboration that is possible. Over the last decade, trilateral relations have become more institutionalized than ever before through mechanisms such as NAFTA. Since 1981, Mexican, Canadian and U.S. forces have interacted under the auspices of the North American Defense Agreement (as well as under NATO). USNORTHCOM itself is interested in ways to work with Mexico, which might create increased opportunities for army-to-army collaboration for USARNORTH.

The three countries have discussed the prospect of creating a trilateral security zone, which Mexico is eager to do. For the United States, the zone would extend the view of security beyond U.S. borders, to ensure that the Mexican and Canadian borders were also secure. Given the nature of a globalized world, its creation might make sense for ensuring homeland defense. However, concerns over sovereignty issues and the technological interoperability of the three militaries have precluded a more serious consideration. Mexico’s refusal to sign an Article 98 agreement is a major impediment to the zone’s creation. Also, the U.S. administration’s recent preference for unilateralism further dims the zone’s prospect. All of these issues diminish the trust among the three countries that is necessary for security collaboration. Given the United States’ historical preference for a “dual-bilateral” approach, trilateral cooperation is likely to remain only ad hoc.

Conclusion

Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared the development of the new North American defense and security arrangement “the most significant reform in our nation’s military command structure within the last 50 years.” USNORTHCOM’s—and USARNORTH’s—development has unified the
defense of the United States, thereby strengthening the military’s ability to defend the homeland and cooperate with its North American neighbors. Now there is a single military partner for civilian authorities to depend upon for military support in crises, whether manmade or natural, and a single point of Army contact for Canadian and Mexican military relations.

As a part of USNORTHCOM, USARNORTH is a model for the type of cooperation required for U.S. security in the uncertain and unpredictable 21st century security environment. Without assigned forces yet with a mission that demands excellence, USARNORTH must effectively leverage its relationships—whether joint, interagency, civilian-military or military-to-military—to succeed. The consequences of failure are severe: U.S. citizens depend more on USARNORTH than on any other Army command for their immediate security.
Endnotes

1 Honorable Paul McHale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Statement Before the 109th Congress Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives, 15 March 2005.


3 See “U.S. Army South and Its Transition to 6th Army: Rising to Face New Challenges in Central and South America and the Caribbean,” AUSA National Security Watch 06-5, 1 September 2006, available online at http://www.ausa.org/pdfdocs/NSW06-6.pdf, for a discussion of another numbered theater army; AUSA National Security Watch papers on each of the numbered theater armies and regional Army combatant commands will be forthcoming.

4 USARNORTH was initially developed in 2004 and became fully operational in October 2006. In Canada and Alaska, USARNORTH is charged only with defense support to civilian authorities. U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) is assigned to U.S. Army Pacific and serves as the Joint Force Land Component Command (JFLCC) to Alaskan Command—a sub-unified command of U.S. Pacific Command. U.S. Army Pacific is responsible for Hawaii; U.S. Army South is responsible for Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

5 In addition to its homeland defense and civil support missions, USNORTHCOM also coordinates joint security cooperation with Canada and Mexico. USNORTHCOM assumed homeland defense responsibility from U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) in 2002, becoming fully operational in 2003.

6 Prior to USARNORTH, FORSCOM was the ASCC to USNORTHCOM.


9 It is important to emphasize that DoD is not the lead agency in this role; it provides support to the lead agency.


11 Congress has authorized a total of 55 teams—one for every U.S. state and territory and the District of Columbia. Currently, there are 42 certified WMD-CSTs.

12 Due to a change in the Unified Command Plan in the past year, Cuba is no longer assigned to USARNORTH. However, given its geographic proximity to the United States, Cuba is an essential part of U.S. homeland defense strategy.

13 Roughly half of the illegal immigrants to the United States are Mexican nationals. Central and South Americans make up most of the remainder.


15 More information on the Partnership for Prosperity is available online at http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/mx/c7980.htm; more information on the U.S.-Mexico Binational Commission is available online at http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/mx/c10787.htm.
As of the signing of a presidential waiver on October 2006, the United States can give international military education and training assistance to Mexico, but Mexico is still barred from buying U.S. military equipment because Mexico has not signed an Article 98 agreement. The American Servicemembers’ Protection Act prohibits the provision of military aid to member countries of the International Criminal Court who have not signed an exclusionary agreement or been given a presidential waiver, with the exceptions of a NATO member country; a major non-NATO ally (including Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Argentina, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand); or Taiwan. Text of the American Servicemembers’ Protection Act of 2002 is available online at http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/othr/misc/23425.htm.

“Background Note: Canada,” United States Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, November 2006, available online at http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2089.htm.

I.e., when illegal immigrants from other nations use the Canadian border to enter the United States.

More information on the Permanent Joint Board on Defense is available online at http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=298.

The deadline was U.S.-imposed.


More information is available online at http://www.spp.gov/.


Ibid.


Amanda Merritt Cumti is a National Security Analyst with AUSA’s Institute of Land Warfare.