

Foreign Sergeants Major gather, consider their role in the army



DANIELA VESTAL

The NCO Academy color guard stands while the national anthem is played during the opening ceremony of the Senior Enlisted Leaders Conference.

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Monitor Staff

Sergeants major from 27 Latin American and Caribbean nations gathered Monday at an opening ceremony for the Senior Enlisted Leaders Conference at the Wyndham Hotel.

The goal of the conference is for the countries of the western hemisphere to share knowledge and experiences on the relationship between commanders and noncommissioned officers. That relationship does not exist in many Latin American and Caribbean countries, said Brig. Gen. Jose S. Mayorga, deputy commanding general, U.S. Army South. NCOs play a very important role in the U.S. Army and that's why we have one of the most successful, if not the most successful, armies, he said.

"The relationship between their noncommissioned officers and commanders is not the same that we have here in the United States," he said. "They do have a commander and they do have a sergeant major, but sergeants major in foreign armies do not have the same authority and responsibility as the command sergeant major does here in the U.S. Army. They are treated as more of a worker than a leader."

In many Latin American and Caribbean countries the officer corps holds the fear that if the NCOs are given more authority and responsibility, the officers would become unnecessary, said Mayorga.

"It's obvious to us, it's not obvious to them, that they can coexist and there is nobody who is going to lose their job," he said. "We believe that the development of the noncommissioned officer corps in their countries is to their benefit and we want to help them if they are interested."

The Western Hemisphere is one of the most stable regions in the world, and the U.S. Army would like to keep it that way. The U.S. Army wants to share and partake in exercises with other countries in the western hemisphere so they can confront chal-

lenges together, said Mayorga.

"We want to maintain prosperity; we want to maintain democracy and stability in the area, so it's to our interest to share what we know with these countries," said Mayorga. "If there is a regional problem, then it requires a regional solution. If we understand each other and how we each operate, we can find a solution that is mutual for all of us to resolve [regional] problems. If we can share with them how we are successful and we can help them be successful then I think we all gain from that."

Since the first conference on the role of senior enlisted leaders, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 2003, Colombia has established five sergeants major academies and Ecuador has conducted two. The development of these academies was a direct result of that conference and the second hosted by El Salvador, said Mayorga. This is the third.

If a NCO corps is going to be developed like the one in the U.S., then it must be top driven, the emphasis must come from the commanders, said Mayorga.

"It can not be bottom driven," said Mayorga. "The noncommissioned officers can't go telling their commanders 'I need more authority, I need more responsibility.' The commanders at the highest level have to say 'we need to give these noncommissioned officers more responsibility and more authority.' Here in the U.S. Army, [the development of] the noncommissioned officer corps was top driven and that's why we have a successful noncommissioned officer corps."

"This year, unlike what we did in the first two conferences, we are inviting their army commanders for what we call a Distinguished Visitors Program," said Mayorga. "We are inviting the commanders to show them what we are doing here with this conference so that maybe we can get the commanders of their armies to push it down."

The conference continues through tomorrow.

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