

# Building International TRUST

## NATO BENEFITS FROM THE PIONEERING WORK OF THE U.S. NATIONAL GUARD'S STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

By Maj. Brian Smith, Florida Army National Guard  
Photos provided by USEUCOM

In 2012, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) conducted 271 events designed to build the defense capabilities of European partners and allies through the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP). Constituting nearly a quarter of the 1,281 total EUCOM events, at a modest cost of \$2.8 million (2.2 million euros), the SPP is arguably one of the most cost-effective security cooperation tools ever implemented by the U.S. military. "The State Partnership Program is, dollar for dollar, my best EUCOM investment," said Adm. James Stavridis, EUCOM commander.<sup>1</sup>

Some would argue that it's also the best NATO investment, for as it has the past two decades, the SPP continues to deliver a relatively scarce commodity not easily transported across borders – trust. Despite its humble beginnings, the SPP helped create an environment of cooperation in which NATO has thrived. And despite the disappearance of the de facto adversary for which NATO was conceived, NATO's future is bright due in no small part to this unique program that builds enduring and committed partnerships.

### BACK IN THE USSR

In July 1987, American rock music icon Billy Joel made history by traveling to the Soviet Union and performing six concerts for audiences in love with Western pop culture. At the time, Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost, a policy of greater openness and transparency, was barely a few years old and tensions between the two world superpowers remained

high. Joel's trip marked the first time an American musician toured the Soviet Union with a fully staged show, and no one knew what the consequences of his visit would be.<sup>2</sup>

For Soviet music lovers who had grown up on bootlegged Beatles and Elvis music, Joel's trip seemed like an encouraging step toward greater artistic expression and cultural exchange in an area previously considered taboo and strictly controlled. His performances delighted the crowds, and by the time he returned to the United States, Joel was a household name throughout the Soviet Union. Soviet officials allowed him to tour because he held no political aspirations, seemed little threat to their political will and personally footed the \$2.5 million needed to pull off the trip. In short, he gained the Soviets' trust.

After the concerts, glasnost and the related policy of perestroika, which Gorbachev called upon to reduce corruption and bring about political reform, went into hyper drive and created unintended consequences. Within the Baltic Republics of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 – glasnost paved the way for regional elections in which nationalists swept the board.<sup>3</sup> Calls for greater independence from Moscow's rule grew stronger within these constituent republics, and within two years of Joel's visit, the Berlin Wall fell. Two short years after that historic event, the Soviet Union collapsed.

To say Joel brought down the Wall or the Soviet Union would be a stretch. To say he accelerated their demise might stimulate a debate. To say he made an indelible impression

on millions of Baltic citizens and gave many of them their first glimpse of American good will is undeniable. More importantly, Joel's trip was a building block in creating a foundation of trust. And the world soon witnessed that a small amount of trust among former enemies would pave the way for the greatest expansion in NATO history and the creation of the enduringly successful National Guard State Partnership Program.

## STARTING SMALL, THINKING BIG

Because of history-defining moments such as Joel's visit to the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, by late 1989 most Soviet citizens were no longer afraid to show their support of glasnost. Ironically, they were willing to trust their former "enemy of the state" to help encourage the movement. So when the Baltic States began to break free of Soviet influence in December 1989, the U.S. government looked for ways to increase stability and encourage democracy in the event the impossible scenario of Baltic independence materialized. Little did anyone realize just how quickly the impossible would occur.

On March 11, 1990, just four months after the Berlin Wall fell, Lithuania became the first Soviet republic to declare independence.<sup>4</sup> Latvia and Estonia followed, and by September 1991, the Soviet Union granted all three Baltic States full independence, just two months before the USSR's complete dissolution on December 25, 1991.

By the time the Soviet Union dissolved, NATO had added only one member (Spain in 1982) since the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> The organization desired new members and a new mandate. Wanting to seize the opportunity to work with these three young democracies and bring them into NATO, members needed a solution that would satisfy NATO's strict membership requirements and not scare candidate countries away or provoke retaliation from Russia. For NATO, how to work with these three former Soviet Republics and the others that would soon follow their lead became perhaps the greatest political question of the 1990s. Furthermore, the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991-1992) demanded even greater NATO attention to developing a clear plan for dealing with these new, fragile democracies.

Although many NATO countries first believed that the best way to deal with these new states was to treat them as if they were undergoing humanitarian crises, it soon became apparent that this was not possible. The sheer number and size of the countries in question made humanitarian efforts impractical and unsustainable. These new states needed

instruction in democracy and economic self-reliance.

To the delight of the United States and NATO, in early 1992 the Latvian government requested their help in using the U.S. National Guard's citizen-soldier model to develop its military.<sup>6</sup> Estonia and Lithuania immediately followed suit. U.S. Army generals Colin Powell, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and John Shalikashvili, then-EUCOM commander, welcomed such a partnership building tool to aid non-NATO countries in establishing democratic governments and market economies.<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. proposed joint military-to-military exercises to promote the idea that militaries should be subordinate to civilian authority, respect human rights and maintain a defensive posture. At the time they declared their independence, these new states possessed Soviet-based militaries that focused on countering threats from NATO countries. EUCOM led by establishing the Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP) in 1992.<sup>8</sup> The Pentagon insisted that the

National Guard and Reserve spearhead operations in the Baltic countries. Such a move catered to those governments' desires that their militaries be "reserve-centric" and helped placate Russian fears that the U.S. was expanding into their former republics. "The U.S. was trying to engage with the former communist nations that were in the Warsaw Pact, and using active duty troops might have been a little too offensive to the Russians or the folks that were in there, so the idea was to use the small footprint of National Guard troops," said Air Force Col. Joey Booher, chief of



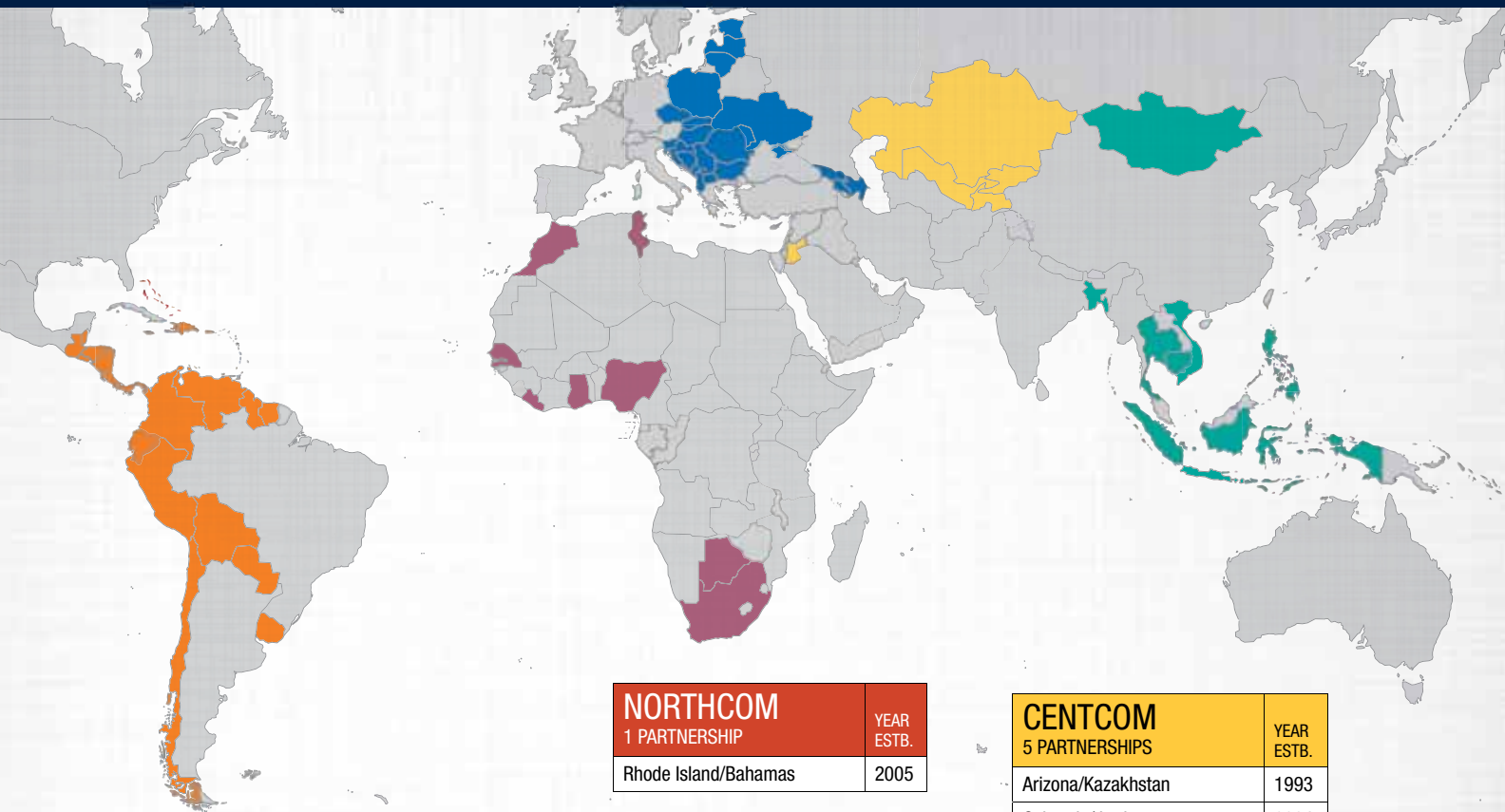
Maj. Gen. Deborah A. Ashenurst, left, Ohio adjutant general, and Gen. Miloje Miletic, Serbian chief of general staff, speak to the media in September 2011. Both leaders emphasized working together as part of an ongoing National Guard State Partnership Program.

International Affairs for the National Guard Bureau.<sup>9</sup>

Lt. General John Conaway, chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Brig. Gen. Thomas Lennon, head of the JCTP, visited the Baltics in November 1992. A few months later, in April 1993, the first partnerships officially began by pairing U.S. states with different countries: Maryland/Estonia, Michigan/Latvia and Pennsylvania/Lithuania. By the end of that first year, 11 additional partnerships were proposed with the following countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. Although the partnership with Belarus never materialized, the U.S. currently enjoys highly successful partnerships with 13 of the 14 (not including Russia) former Soviet republics.<sup>10</sup>

Today, 65 nations partner with 50 U.S. states, two territories and the District of Columbia.<sup>11</sup> The program also includes two bilateral relationships, between the National Guard Bureau and Israel as well as between Minnesota and Norway. What was once just a small pilot program to test the

# Membership in the U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program



<b>SOUTHCOM</b> 22 PARTNERSHIPS	YEAR ESTB.
Arkansas/Guatemala	2002
Connecticut/Uruguay	2000
Delaware/Trinidad-Tobago	2004
District of Columbia/Jamaica	1999
Florida/Venezuela	1998
Florida/Guyana	2003
Florida/Virgin Islands/Eastern Caribbean	2006
Kentucky/Ecuador	1996
Louisiana/Belize	1996
Louisiana/Haiti	2011
Massachusetts/Paraguay	2001
Mississippi/Bolivia	1999
Missouri/Panama	1996
New Hampshire/El Salvador	2000
New Mexico/Costa Rica	2006
Puerto Rico/Honduras	1998
Puerto Rico/Dominican Republic	2003
South Carolina/Colombia	2012
South Dakota/Suriname	2006
Texas/Chile	2008
West Virginia/Peru	1996
Wisconsin/Nicaragua	2003

<b>NORTHCOM</b> 1 PARTNERSHIP	YEAR ESTB.
Rhode Island/Bahamas	2005

<b>EUCOM</b> 22 PARTNERSHIPS	YEAR ESTB.
Alabama/Romania	1993
California/Ukraine	1993
Colorado/Slovenia	1993
Georgia/Georgia	1994
Illinois/Poland	1993
Indiana/Slovakia	1994
Iowa/Kosovo	2011
Kansas/Armenia	2002
Maine/Montenegro	2006
Maryland/Estonia	1993
Maryland/Bosnia	2003
Michigan/Latvia	1993
Minnesota/Croatia	1996
New Jersey/Albania	2001
North Carolina/Moldova	1996
Ohio/Hungary	1993
Ohio/Serbia	2005
Oklahoma/Azerbaijan	2002
Pennsylvania/Lithuania	1993
Tennessee/Bulgaria	1993
Texas/Nebraska/Czech Rep.	1993
Vermont/Macedonia	1993

<b>CENTCOM</b> 5 PARTNERSHIPS	YEAR ESTB.
Arizona/Kazakhstan	1993
Colorado/Jordan	2004
Mississippi/Uzbekistan	2012
Montana/Kyrgyz Republic	1996
Virginia/Tajikistan	2003

<b>AFRICOM</b> 8 PARTNERSHIPS	YEAR ESTB.
California/Nigeria	2006
Michigan/Liberia	2009
New York/South Africa	2003
North Carolina/Botswana	2008
North Dakota/Ghana	2004
Utah/Morocco	2003
Vermont/Senegal	2008
Wyoming/Tunisia	2004

<b>PACOM</b> 7 PARTNERSHIPS	YEAR ESTB.
Alaska/Mongolia	2003
Guam/Hawaii/Philippines	2000
Hawaii/Indonesia	2006
Idaho/Cambodia	2009
Oregon/Bangladesh	2008
Oregon/Vietnam	2012
Washington/Thailand	2002



waters of political trust with three Baltic States, turned into one of the most successful programs in U.S. military history and a valuable tool for NATO's future. When the SPP first began, few could have predicted that, eventually, most partner countries would be capable of taking on NATO tasks on their own without heavy external support.

## TRUST IS EVERYTHING

Currently, 22 partnerships exist with former Soviet, Yugoslav, and Warsaw Pact countries in the EUCOM Area of Responsibility, making it the largest (tied with SOUTHCOM) and longest running program. With two decades of experience, EUCOM has taken the lead in developing long-term, enduring and committed partnerships that build capacity and trust. The value placed on this trust by the American state Guards and their European counterparts is immeasurable but reflected in every event conducted and in comments made at all levels. Although SPP exercises span military, political, economic and social realms, the program is most aptly characterized by personal and enduring relationships.

During a visit to EUCOM in August 2010, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen remarked, "I love the SPP Program and I support it fully. Every Chief of Defense and Minister of Defense who visits me, always talks about their SPP program. These relationships have been built over many years."<sup>12</sup>

This trust took time to establish. Of the 22 EUCOM partnerships, 12 began in 1993, giving each of these relationships the benefit of a long development period. Many of the career soldiers who were junior enlisted personnel and officers when the programs began now fill the senior ranks and can exert real change. Any animosity or hard feelings left over from the Cold War years have all but retired along with the soldiers who held them, so real change becomes more feasible with each passing year of successful partnering.

The SPP's impact on NATO and European Union accessions are arguably the greatest contribution of the SPP. Of the 12 partnerships initiated in 1993, 10 of the partner countries have joined NATO and the EU. Two additional countries have joined just NATO, benefiting from SPP partnerships begun in 1996 and 2001, respectively. Six other countries partnered for a shorter period, most recently Kosovo (2011), have not yet joined either organization. Given time and the benefit of the partnership, NATO membership is possible.

Looking toward the future, the National Guard's dual federal and state missions make the SPP the ideal vehicle to facilitate NATO efforts. To borrow NATO language, the SPP

strives "to promote democratic values, encourage consultation and cooperation on defense and security issues to build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict."<sup>13</sup> The unique civil-military nature of the National Guard makes this possible because it routinely engages in a wide range of security cooperation activities, many of which parallel NATO activities. They include disaster preparedness, cyber security, anti-drug efforts, border security and humanitarian assistance.

## CONCLUSION

The State Partnership Program is a proven, cost-effective security cooperation tool instrumental to NATO's efforts in preventing conflict and securing long-term peace. In many ways, the SPP paved the way for nearly every NATO accession in the last three decades and it continues to help aspiring nations work toward NATO membership.

The program demonstrates, perhaps more than anything else, the importance of trust in international relations.

By linking U.S. states with designated partner countries, the SPP promotes access, increases military capabilities, improves interoperability and enhances the principles of responsible governance. It helps to prevent states from failing and contributes to a stable Europe. It supports the broad national interests and international security cooperation goals of the U.S. by engaging partner nations through military, socio-political, and economic conduits at the local, state and national levels. All of these functions support NATO efforts.

None of this would be possible without the creation of enduring relationships. Soldiers at all levels and on both sides of each partnership consider their counterparts an extended family and treat them with the same respect they treat soldiers of their own country. They train together and deploy side by side in combat. With 20 years of success, the program shows that with trust, anything is possible. □

1. "National Guard State Partnership Program," [www.eucom.mil/spp](http://www.eucom.mil/spp)
2. "Billy Joel's historic Soviet concert tour," <http://historyofrussia.org/billy-joels-historic-soviet-concert-tour/>, Dec. 1, 2009.
3. "Baltic Independence from the Soviet Union," [http://www.historyorb.com/russia/baltic\\_independence.php](http://www.historyorb.com/russia/baltic_independence.php)
4. "Lithuania Declares its Independence," <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lithuania-proclaims-its-independence>
5. "A Short History of NATO," <http://www.nato.int/history/nato-history.html>
6. "EUCOM's State Partnership Program Becomes Global Model," <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=116355>
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8. "National Guard State Partnership Program," [www.eucom.mil/spp](http://www.eucom.mil/spp)
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10. "National Guard State Partnership Program," [www.eucom.mil/spp](http://www.eucom.mil/spp)
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12. "National Guard State Sponsorship Program: The Case for Expansion," <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA543397>
13. "What is NATO?" [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/what\\_is\\_nato.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/what_is_nato.htm)



Maj. Gen. William L. Enyart, adjutant general of the Illinois National Guard, meets students from the Krakow School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in November 2011.