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Louisiana host to national counterdrug coordinators conference

At the same time historic war events were unfolding in the Middle East, an older established war was being examined by nationwide leaders from the National Guard's Counter Drug Program - the war on drugs.

Unlike conventional wars that have an end in sight, the war on drugs has been an ongoing battle for decades.

Army and Air Force counterdrug coordinators met in New Orleans, March 18-21, to discuss direction, funding and correlation to the nation's homeland security.

Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, Adjutant General of the Louisiana National Guard welcomed the military leaders to the conference and expressed his appreciation for their dedication to the mission, as well as, the men and women who comprise counterdrug task forces throughout the nation.

"This task force is the example of professional duty and commitment to a drug-free America by the men and women who serve in the National Guard," Landreneau said. "We are true partners with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies."

Christopher Gardner, Director of Joint Staff for the National Guard Bureau agreed with Landreneau on the ability of the National Guard to accomplish this mission.

"The National Guard has proven repeatedly that it is ready, willing and able to get the job done," Gardner stated, "a true partner integrated into the global defense," said Gardner.

It is this integration that was a topic of interest to many in attendance. How will the National Guard's counterdrug mission fit into the Department of Homeland Security?

"Homeland security has emerged as a national priority," said Gardner. "I see the National Guard's strengths and core competencies to be an extreme advantage toward this mission."

He explained the tools, techniques and policies that the Counterdrug Program has developed and refined are now models in other arenas, and specifically in what is now called homeland security. The new department has multiple agencies with multiple disciplines. They include several areas of interest, including counter narcotics. Gardner highlighted the fact that President Bush has said, "...When we fight drugs, we fight terrorism,"

The topic then turned to funding. With Washington focusing on new departments and directions, Kurt Schmid, director of the White House office on National Drug Control Policy explained it to the audience.

"Decisions are driven by money and many resources are now channeled toward counter terrorism," said Schmid. He acknowledged the shrinking funds are disconcerting, but this fact forces everyone to work smarter and be able to focus on the resources at hand.

"Even though the focus is changing, drug problems still exist," Schmid said. "People are still dying on the streets." He listed the national agencies in lead roles in counter narcotics. They are the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the National Guard's Counterdrug Program (CDP).

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Conference

"The National Guard plays a huge role nationwide, our domestic intelligence depends strongly on National Guard expertise," he stated. "We need to remember, terrorists are nothing but criminals, drug traffickers are nothing but common criminals, we need to look at them in the same light."

Schmid complemented the military in how it processes intelligence better than any other organization, "They are able to collect, analyze and get it where it needs to go," he concluded.

So with the direction apparent, when Mr. Andre Hollis, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense took to the podium, the atmosphere turned to one of inquiry and curiosity on whether or not the Department of Defense considers the counterdrug efforts important enough to continue funding and where the program's future lies.

Hollis immediately acknowledged the National Guard as the key to protecting and defending our nation's borders, as well as playing an important role in detecting and monitoring counterdrug and terrorism threats.

"Our plan is to allocate resources to most effectively deter or defend against those threats," said Hollis. He confirmed the guard as having a great deal of experience in many arenas, but the need is there to be careful about functions which are not military-specific being thrust on the Department of Defense.

"Future plans will have DoD phase-out funding for NG missions that are not military unique and utilize remaining funding to increase the National Guard missions that are," explained Hollis. "Some of these missions include intelligence analysts, translators, training for domestic law enforcement agencies, surface and aerial reconnaissance missions."

Hollis does see the National Guard as the primary force provider for domestic operations, but stressed the need to clarify what is military unique in these skills and capabilities.

He further explained that all of Washington is facing budget cuts and when budgets shrink, no one gets what they need.

"Once we have defended our homeland we can focus on other issues," Hollis said. "We will try and keep the top-line funding the same. It has come to what we have to do versus what we would like to do."

As the counterdrug conference came to a close, the war on Iraq came into fruition. National Guard personnel from across the nation were being broadcast alongside active forces on the front lines of war, defending the right for freedom in the Middle East.

National Guard personnel in the United States are also on the front lines of the drug war, defending the right to live free from illegal drugs that are damaging our nation and threatening the future of America's youth.

Story by Tech. Sgt. Suzanne Chaillot

Crack kitchen closed by authorities

Two Crowley residents has some unexpected visitors when members of the Acadia Parish Narcotics Task Force, the DEA Task Force and Emergency Response Team members raided an apartment where they were reportedly in the process of cooking cocaine into a rock state.

A surveillance of the apartment led agents to believe the location was being used primarily as a facility for cooking the cocaine into a rock product for street sales. Then the two

suspects were arrested, there were two small children in the apartment, there were no furnishing with the exception of a microwave, couch bed and an ice chest for drinks. Confiscated in the apartment were 59 grams of powder cocaine, 10 grams of crack cocaine a .45 caliber handgun and cooking paraphernalia for the processing of the cocaine. **Sgt. Peter Leger** supports Acadia Parish Narcotics.

Middle school kids meet DEA agents

Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agents Clyde McLaughlin, George Cazenavette and Louisiana National Guard **Sgt. First Class Melissa Vosberg** from the New Orleans Division Office of the DEA, visited Kate Middleton Middle School in Gretna, La. There they discussed decision-making skills and the importance of making good choices with the kids. The Middleton students enjoyed the discussion but were eager to try on some of the cool equipment that the agents brought to show them.

The Louisiana Counter Drug Task Force conference will be held in Lafayette, April 23-25.