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Major General William L. Thigpen, U.S. Army South commanding general. (Photo: Marcos Ommati/Diálogo)

By Marcos Ommati/Diálogo
December 13, 2021

U.S. and Brazilian army soldiers kicked off exercise Southern Vanguard 22 in Lorena, São Paulo, Brazil on December 6. Southern Vanguard — called CORE 21 in Brazil — is a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored, U.S. Army South-conducted exercise at the operational and tactical levels designed to increase interoperability between U.S. and Western Hemisphere forces. *Diálogo* spoke with Major General William L. Thigpen, U.S. Army South commanding general, about this combined exercise.

Diálogo: Why is it important to train with Brazilian troops?

Major General William L. Thigpen, U.S. Army South commanding general: Southern Vanguard 22 builds upon a partnership between Brazil and the U.S., and we aim to continue this exercise until at least 2028. It is important that we execute this mission, because in the event of a humanitarian crisis or natural disaster, we'll already have the experience working alongside Brazilian forces, and we'll have that established trust and respect. It is a privilege for me to be here as we build upon a partnership between Brazil and the U.S. The evolution of this exercise began two years ago, so I extend my deepest appreciation to everyone who has worked hard to get us here today.

Diálogo: What is the most important benefit of this exercise for U.S. troops?

Maj. Gen. Thigpen: The collaboration and partnership that comes with an exercise like this is extremely important to us. It builds interoperability. It also allows us to understand each other's capabilities. But most importantly, it builds camaraderie down at the tactical level, as well as readiness for both countries, and partnership.

Diálogo: Can you provide more details on the U.S. participation in the exercise?

Maj. Gen. Thigpen: These exercises vary in scale. This one is conducted at the company level, where we have 152 soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division participating. We also have 31 soldiers from Army South who are facilitating some of the support structure to make it happen.

Diálogo: Do you think the exercise will benefit one country more than the other?

Maj. Gen. Thigpen: The exercise is really about both countries learning from each other and building readiness. And again, it all comes back to interoperability, really understanding how we conduct operations and do it as part of a training, so, in the event that there's a crisis or a humanitarian disaster, we already know how to work together.

Diálogo: Is there a plan to add a cyber piece to this exercise between now and 2028?

Maj. Gen. Thigpen: No, this exercise currently, as it exists, is for tactical air mobile air assault operations, which is a means of deploying soldiers into an operation by helicopter. And then, of course, they would go on to ground tactical execution of a ground tactical plan. So right now, we are not focused on the cyber aspect of warfare.

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