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2015-12-28 | **Military** ([/en_GB/keywords/topic/military](#)) | **Hacha Command Helps Fight Gangs in El Salvador**



Colonel Mario Romano Panameño, Commander of the FAES Special Forces Command, pins a wooden tab on the Hacha Command's 20 newest members. [Photo: Gloria Cañas]

By Lorena Baires

The Hacha Command, an elite group within the Salvadoran Armed Forces Special Operations Group (FAES-GOE, for its Spanish acronym) that specializes in attack operations, has conducted successful operations against the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (M-18) gangs, as well as other criminal groups and individuals.

“Our personnel operate in small groups, day and night, in any environment – land, sea, or air,” said Colonel Mario Romano Panameño, the commander of the FAES’s Special Forces Command. “They are capable of dealing with adverse situations and can perform long- and short-range reconnaissance, ambushes, surprise attacks, beachhead shots, infiltrations, and extractions.”

Hacha (Spanish for "axe") Command members are distinguished by their strong character, spirit of sacrifice and camaraderie, sense of honor, physical strength, and unwillingness to surrender, according to the Special Forces Command.

“The members are enlisted personnel, officers, and non-commissioned officers. The course teaches special tactics that will help them lead airborne, air mobile, and close-quarter combat missions aimed at decreasing the number of terrorist groups that threaten Salvadorans’ security and tranquility,” said one of the GOE's trainers who cannot be identified publicly for security reasons.

The Hacha Command's newest members received their wooden Hacha tabs for successfully completing several weeks of training in October.



Hacha Command members are deployed throughout El Salvador to conduct operations against drug traffickers, gangs, and other illegal armed groups. [Photo: Gloria Cañas]



The Hacha Command was ranked as the Western Hemisphere's best elite force during the "Fuerzas Comando" Military exercises in 2011 and 2012. [Photo: Gloria Cañas]

"[They'll] maintain the high international esteem that this particular military institution holds," said Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo González, GOE's commander.

FAES officials created the Hacha Command on December 11, 1983, with the goal of training FAES members to use all military weapons and equipment. Less than three decades later, the Hacha Command was ranked as the Western Hemisphere's best elite force during the international *Fuerzas Comando* Military exercises in 2011 and 2012.

Combating crime throughout the country

Once Hacha Command members have completed training, they are deployed throughout El Salvador as part of the Rapid-Response Special Forces (FER, for its Spanish acronym), a specialized group that combats the MS-13 and M-18.

In April, the FER dismantled gang cells in the departments of La Paz and San Vicente, where the Hacha Command captured two MS-13 gang members, injured two others, and seized an Uzi submachine gun. The FER had taken fire by gang members after converging on a makeshift range the MS-13 was using for target practice.

On September 5th, the Hacha Command captured three Colombians and seized 14 packages of cocaine after intercepting a boat speeding in Salvadoran waters.

“A team from the Hacha Command set out on four Naval vessels and stopped the suspicious boat,” Lt. Col. González explained.

The attack specialists use their training to survive perilous situations. For instance in March 2014, a Cessna O-2A Skymaster with Hacha Command members on board made an emergency landing on Ilopango Lake, about 23 kilometers from the Salvadoran capital of San Salvador. The Soldiers used their training to survive the incident without sustaining any injuries.

A joint training exercise

The special command members maintain their skills through ongoing training, nationally and with partner nations. For instance from May 1st to June 29, 2013, 13 Hacha Command officers

participated in the Joint Security Forces Assistant Course, which was administered by the U.S. Army's 162nd Infantry Brigade at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana. They learned how to provide expert advice to Afghanistan's Police and Air Force as part of the Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The training session introduced us to the latest technology and equipment available today. It also trained us in first-level operational procedures executed with special vehicles and weapons," said GOE Colonel José González, who commanded the Cuscatlán battalion deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in 2013.

"What's special about small countries like El Salvador is they do not really have much to fear in the way of terrorism," said SOUTHCOM Commander General John F. Kelly during his visit to the course at the Joint Readiness Training Center on June 24, 2013. "They are good and decent people who have stepped up to fight alongside good and decent people."

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[Chile's Armed Forces staged a series of air, sea, and land exercises as part of Huracán 2015, a joint training operation conducted November 8-13th in Region I of Tarapacá in northern Chile. \(http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/12/29/feature-05\)](#)



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The training the Armed Forces received during the joint military exercise will help them deal with the many contingencies that may result from the upcoming El Niño meteorological phenomenon. ([http://dialogo-](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/12/28/feature-06)

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The Brazilian Army provides a refuge for jaguars, monkeys, tapirs, sloths, birds, and Amazonian fish on 36,000 square meters of forest area in Manaus. ([http://dialogo-](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/12/24/feature-07)

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