

Transformation of Peruvian Airpower During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Humanitarian Aid Under the Tayta Plan

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Introduction

In March 2020, Peru was one of the first countries in Latin America to declare a health emergency and ordered the closure of its international borders. It also, as per its constitution, imposed a “National State of Emergency” with mandatory social distancing, because of the declaration of the global pandemic of COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, despite having these measures in place, the SARS COVID-2 virus spread in the ensuing months, placing the country among ten nations with the highest number of infections and the highest mortality rate due to COVID-19.

Article 165 of the Political Constitution of Peru establishes that the armed forces are made up of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Their primary purpose is to guarantee the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Republic. Their secondary objective is to assume control of internal order, following the declaration of a state of emergency or a siege of the state.¹

Thus, within the framework of the state of emergency declared, the Peruvian Armed Forces, in support of the National Police, began to perform tasks related to the verification and intervention of people, goods, vehicles, and establishments. They also enforced travel restrictions at the national level by various means of transportation and the number of people allowed in commercial establishments.

In April 2020, the Executive Power, to intensify surveillance and assistance to individuals affected by COVID-19, established a multisectoral working group called “Te Cuido Perú.” It was led by the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF) and directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces under a strategy called “Plan Tayta.” In it, the Peruvian Air Force (FAP) was to play a leading role, not only to guarantee the transfer of equipment and medicine to the most remote corners of the country but also to provide humanitarian aid to subordinate units.

This article describes the changes that the FAP has undertaken to confront COVID-19 and its strategy to impede the pandemic’s progress.

Transformation of Peruvian Airpower

Traditionally, airpower has been used as a military instrument to represent national power. Over the years, the emergence of fourth-generation wars (guerrilla warfare, low-intensity wars, asymmetric warfare, non-international armed conflicts, etc.) has established the notion that air superiority and control of space are fundamental to using airpower to destroy the will of the enemy or adversary to fight, thus reducing casualties and freeing nations from total war.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Peru's aviation served to enhance national development, bringing citizens closer together through the service of couriers, both in the extensive coastal strip and in the thick and inhospitable jungle. Correspondence, food, and medicine were taken to the most remote places, to the Amazonian people, and the indigenous peoples settled in the deep valleys of our Andes.

From 1980 to 2000, Peru waged a bloody internal struggle against two armed terrorist groups, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the Communist Party of Peru-Sendero Luminoso (PC-SL). The terrorist remnants of the second group settled in the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (VRAEM), becoming allies with illicit drug traffickers. The government's response was to create a Special Command in that area, with components from all the armed forces.

In 2010, the Air Component in VRAEM carried out the first night combat rescue, and in the following years, extraction schemes have been perfected. Airpower in this area is carried out with more precision and less collateral damage as aircraft make it possible to escort, support, and cover special forces on the ground in one of the most challenging terrains in the world.²

However, the pandemic caused by COVID-19 forced a transformation in Peruvian airpower. Then, it was mainly focused on carrying out air operations for the pacification of the VRAEM. By 2021—a date that coincides with the bicentennial of Peru's independence—priority is now given to the planning and execution of military actions to combat COVID-19.

In what Type of Operation is COVID-19 Framed?

The Operational Doctrine of Military Operations Other than War (DOFA 1-6) establishes that military operations other than war, are those military actions not substantially associated with large-scale combat operations. Their main objective is to achieve national policy goals, avoid or contain potential threats that affect the security or interests of the country, alleviate suffering, promote peace, or assist civilian authorities.

Of course, these types of operations can involve combat³ and non-combat operations⁴, even in the case of COVID-19. According to the doctrine, air operations to combat this virus are operations other than war and classified as humanitarian aid (OAH). They are further defined as operations intended to provide aid, social relief, and improve living conditions of populations affected by natural disasters with fewer resources and significant deficiencies. These operations act in coordination with regional and local authorities, the Joint Command of the Armed Forces (CCFFAA), and the armed institutions (IIAA) to provide relief for essential and urgent needs. For this reason, they are planned, coordinated, and supervised by the MINDEF.

OAHs are also known as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations (HADR). According to the WHO, disasters are “unforeseen situations that represent serious and immediate threats to public health or any public health situation that endangers the life or health of a significant number of people and demands immediate action.” Therefore, it is evident that operations carried out by the armed forces against COVID-19 are OAH.

At first, the Peruvian government decided to create the “COVID-19 Operations Commands” to implement, execute, control, and evaluate the support actions of COVID-19 cases at the national level.⁵ Representatives from the health sector within these commands led the Armed Forces, the National Police, and private health clinics. The Air Force ensured the delivery of medical supplies and equipment considered as strategic. This included delivery of clinical and epidemiological research to all regions of Peru and the transfer of doctors to the most critical regions affected by the pandemic

Although COVID-19 is an adversary that many declare as “invisible,” such a qualifier is not the most appropriate one given that its genomic data is already known to the medical community. The modes of infection and prevention methods are known. That is why, parallel to the Operations Commands, the multisectoral working group called “Te Cuido Perú”⁶ was created. It provides tracking and assistance to people affected by COVID-19 during mandatory social isolation. This working group is led by MINDEF and directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces. In this group, the armed forces play a crucial role. Specifically, the FAP has demonstrated its capabilities in each humanitarian aid operation it leads.

The difference between the work carried out by the Operational Commands and the “Te cuido Peru” working group is that the former’s actions are directed to face COVID-19 after the population is already infected. Conversely, the working group emphasizes the early detection of the virus in high-risk areas, especially among the most vulnerable people. “Te cuido Peru” finds its inspiration for work

in Sun Tzu's motto "avoid what is strong, attack what is weak" because it is easier to detect the adversary and minimize it, than fight it when it is already well-established.

It is evident that military forces have become a crucial part of the response given by the Peruvian government in preventing, controlling, and managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Their preparation and professionalism enables them to accomplish their assigned humanitarian missions.

Within the group "Te Cuido Perú", a "Tayta Plan" was developed as a territorial operation to help the treatment and isolation against COVID-19 in areas of high risk. It aided the most vulnerable populations, such as people over 60 and/or those with preexisting conditions (obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, etc.).

The word "Tayta" is an indigenous Quechua term that means "father" and refers to how General Andrés Avelino Cáceres, of the resistance army, was called to as he headed towards the Pacific War. This term was adopted again to standardize the resistance of Peruvians against COVID-19.

The Tayta operation has three tasks. First is to deliver triage and medicines house to house. This occurs after registering the vulnerable population by local municipalities for early treatment of COVID-19. Second is to establish fixed points in multiple locations within the district where the infection level is the highest. The most vulnerable population receive triage by taking rapid tests and receiving early treatment kits. Third is delivering supplies and services to people who have tested positive for COVID-19 while they quarantine for 15 days,

The desired end state is that the most vulnerable population be provided with both early medical attention and adequate nutrition to avoid the possibility of being infected with COVID-19. It also aids in avoiding the collapse of health services and subsequent serious health crises or death.

In the beginning, it was believed that the Tayta Plan would cover only the districts of Lima, the capital of Peru; however, because of favorable results, it was decided that the same plan would be used in the nation's 23 departments. Therefore, the COVID-19 Operations Commands became part of the overall action plan.

Within the Tayta Plan, the FAP was assigned an operation in southern Peru as its area of responsibility (AOR).⁷ Their mission was to ensure the effective participation of FAP units under the leadership of the Commander of the Air Operations Command (COA). This included planning, preparation, and execution of military actions for security, assistance, protection, promotion, prevention, and attention to those identified as most vulnerable.

The FAP concentrated on providing forces, such as Air Wings, Air Groups, Air Squadrons, Squadrons, and other Specialized Units, to fulfill air operations as or-

dered by superiors. This was required under the Command Operations Directive (COMOP) 20-86 “Organization” of Air Wings, dated 15 August 2018.

Air transport is subject to the same fundamental principles governing aerospace power, under the Air Transport Operational Doctrine (DOFA 1-15). During this pandemic, the FAP has been carrying out three types of operations: Logistics operations (for the transportation of passengers and cargo), Aeromedical Evacuation Operations (MEDEVAC), and Transport Operations of Very Important People (VIP).

Air units have performed the transfer of authorities, health personnel, stranded citizens, medical supplies, and equipment (field hospitals, oxygen generators, oxygen cylinders, respirators, medicines, tests and reagents, coffins, etc.) to fulfill logistical operations. Through Air Group No. 8, Air Group No. 42, Air Group No. 3, and the Air Surveillance and Reconnaissance Directorate to date, logistics operations have been carried out with the following results:

Aircraft	No. of passengers	Hours flown	Amount of cargo
Learjet 45XR	103	33 hrs 30 min	689 kg
Antonov AN-32B	190	45 hrs 42 min	32,188 kg
L-100-20 Hércules	281	95 hrs 12 min	280,118 kg
Boeing 737-500	457	51 hrs 30 min	28,563 kg
C-27J Spartan	1,138	499 hrs	698,666 kg
Twin Otter DHC-6-400	151	100 hrs 36 min	10,228 kg
Other aircraft (ALAR2 and 8th Air Group)	5,525	533 hrs	97,648 kg
Total	7,845	1,358.3 hrs	1,448.1 tons

Table 1. Logistics Operations carried out by the Peruvian Air Force

Source: Author's elaboration with data from the web portal of the Peruvian Air Force (as of 23 August 2020)

The logistical commitment of the FAP to combat COVID-19 across borders was enacted via Ministerial Resolution No. 274 DE/FAP. This resolution authorized Learjet 45XR FAP 526—belonging to the FAP’s 8th Air Group—to fly to the city of Sao Paulo in Brazil to collect 10,000 Viral Acute Retinal Necrosis (ARNA) extraction kits manufactured by Bioclin. These were required to process the COVID-19 molecular tests.

As is illustrated in the following table, the FAP has made most of the flights, mainly to deliver and test medical samples for possible cases of COVID-19,

Armed Forces	Number of flights
Peruvian Air Force	23
Peruvian Army	17
Peruvian Navy	8
Total Flights	48

Table 2. Flights to transfer medical samples

Source: Author's elaboration with Andina data (17 March–16 April 2020)

As part of the logistics operations, flights occurred via social action platforms (*PLAS Aéreas*). This brought health services closer, and facilitated the distribution of economic support vouchers to the native communities of the Peruvian Amazon. Over one hundred ninety-five hours were flown transporting five hundred and eighty-nine people and 22.3 tons of cargo in equipment and medical supplies in support of this mission.

It is worth highlighting at this point the joint work carried out by the FAP, with the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS) and various officials in the region, to carry out medical evacuations of patients with COVID-19 to provide timely care in the capital. Aeromedical Evacuation Operations (MEDEVAC) objective is to ensure that the patient is evacuated quickly and directly to specialized health centers for definitive care. The table below is an illustration of this initiative:

Types of MEDEVACs	Nº of MEDEVACs
MEDEVACs due to COVID-19	175
MEDEVACs due to comprehensive health insurance (SIS)	121
Other MEDEVACs	37
Total number of MEDEVACs	333

Table 3. Aeromedical Evacuations

Source: Author's elaboration with data from the web portal of the Peruvian Air Force

For MEDEVAC—per the Operational Doctrine of Medical Support (DOFA 1-9)—specially qualified aeromedical members accompanied the patients. The FAP aircraft were duly equipped with intensive care equipment and altitude and pressurization systems suitable for patients.

Since the beginning of the emergency declaration, VIPs such as the President of the Republic, the President of the Council of Ministers, and the Ministers of State have been transported by air to the areas with the most significant outbreak of infections to supervise the actions of their respective personnel. The Tayta Plan

increased the number of these transports, especially for the President of the Council of Ministers.

With the 21 March 2020 Directive ALAR 55-2, “Air Operations,” the support of the FAP was established through humanitarian flights from Callao Air Base as per table 4.

Type of Flight	Number of Flights	Number of Flights
International humanitarian aid	767	78099
Regional humanitarian aid	86	9381

Table 4. Humanitarian Flights within the Country and Overseas

Source: Author’s elaboration with data from the web portal of the Peruvian Air Force

Through the COA, aerospace control operations were carried out, allowing the entry of 27,039 nationals repatriated worldwide. Similarly, the FAP repatriated foreign citizens, taking extreme biosecurity measures to avoid infections. Peru’s 2nd Air Wing received accolades from the Australian and the United Kingdom ambassadors when a charter flight from the 8th Air Group repatriated Australian and British citizens. Both ambassadors highlighted the professionalism of the FAP staff during passenger processing.

As of this date under the Tayta Plan, approximately 25 thousand people were served in a month. From 30 July to 29 August, five operations were carried out, the results of which are illustrated in the following figure.



Figure. Operation TAYTA

Source: Web portal of the Peruvian Air Force (31 August 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to be long-term and exhausting. This is why 50 mega-operations are planned throughout Peru until the end of 2020. It will benefit around 100,000 families and 500,000 Peruvians.⁸ The objective is to attack

the COVID-19's center of gravity by preventing infections early on. Assuming most of the vulnerable population is vaccinated and isolated, the virus may lose its hold and decrease the rate of infection curve that, to date, has been increasing.

The FAP responds immediately to every region, making it the country's most extensive logistics support organization. It has focused on applying speed, flexibility, and versatility to succeed during assigned air missions. Focus on speed allows the deployment, projection, and operation of its forces in minimal time and ensures missions are completed quickly. Focus on flexibility allows for changes to the configuration of passenger-cargo transport, VIP transport, tactical transport, patient transport, and patient evacuation. Focus on versatility allows the FAP to adapt to any scenario to respond at any time.

Since the beginning, the use of Peruvian Air Force assets has always been based on the optimal use of its personnel and the economic and material resources assigned for operations and military actions in which it has been involved. There is no doubt that the Tayta Plan has demonstrated that airpower is extraordinarily flexible and cost-effective instrument during crises (Lombo, 2002). The Peruvian course of action is to continue FAP's humanitarian aid. Peru must continue to demonstrate that its airpower has been transformed to efficiently cope with any type of operation in any scenario. It will continue to transform to face any threat, COVID or otherwise, to national security. □

Notes

1. Article 137 of the Political Constitution of Peru establishes that the President of the Republic, with the agreement of the Council of Ministers, can decree, for a specified period, throughout the national territory, or in part of it, and reporting to Congress or the Permanent Commission, two states of emergency: 1. State of emergency, in case of disturbance of the peace or internal order, of catastrophe or of serious circumstances that affect the life of the Nation; and, 2. State of siege, in case of invasion, foreign war, civil war, or imminent danger of their occurrence.

2. RESCOM operations, in addition to making it possible to recover people alive, make it possible to rescue valuable military resources.

3. According to DOFA 1-6, combat operations are: counter-insurgency operations, operations against terrorism, operations against illicit drug trafficking (TID) and peace operations.

4. Non-combat operations are: Support to the National Disaster Risk Management System (SINAGERD), social development operations, humanitarian aid operations, civic actions, and peace operations.

5. The Operational Commands were created by Ministerial Resolution No. 155-2020/ MINSA, of 1 April 2020.

6. Through Supreme Decree No. 068-2020-PCM, of 14 April 2020, the Multi sector Work Group called "Te Cuido Perú" was created. The following participate in this group: The Armed Forces: Air Force, Navy and Army, as well as other public institutions such as: The Social Security

of Health (EsSalud), the National Institute of Civil Defense (INDECI), the Ministry of Health (MINSA), the Directorate of Integrated Health Networks (DIRIS), the Regional Health Directorate (DIRESA), and the civilian society, among others.

7. The FAP was assigned to lead operations in the district of Omate, province of General Sánchez Cerro, in the department of Moquegua, said province is a restricted area and has airport limitations

8. Defense Minister announces 50 Tayta mega-operations until the end of the year. Andina, retrieved from <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-ministro-defensa-anuncia-50-megaoperativas-tayta-hasta-fin-ano-810653.aspx>

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Special operator graduated from the Special Operations Course of the Peruvian Air Force, Master of Jump and Operational Paratrooper. Graduated from the Joint Command and Staff Course in South Korea. Master in Doctrine and Aerospace Administration from the Peruvian Air War College. Lt Col Sigüeñas taught at the Officer School and the Air War College of the Peruvian Air Force. He was the second commander at the Santa Clara Air Base, Deputy Director of the School of Survival in the Jungle and the FAP’s Command School, Operations Officer of the Peru Company in Haiti, and is currently the Section Chief of the General Staff Psychological Operations, Special Operations, and the Accident Prevention Officer in ALAR3. Among the decorations received decorations such as the War Cross for Valor, the Peruvian Cross for Aeronautical Merit, and the United Nations Medal.