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# International Cooperation with Partner Air Forces

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## Summary

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This monograph outlines ways to enhance the Air Force’s approach to building the capacity of partner air forces around the world. It reviews the U.S. Air Force’s approach to managing security cooperation, suggests the key elements that may enhance this approach, and provides five focus areas to guide its implementation. Several factors, including aging systems, high operational tempo (OPTEMPO), and the prospect of shrinking budgets, have combined to create a challenging environment for the Air Force. At the same time, the important mission of countering terrorist and insurgent groups abroad requires that the United States work with allies and partner countries to strengthen security. Accordingly, current U.S. defense strategy emphasizes that the U.S. armed forces should prepare to do more to work “by, with, and through partners” to accomplish their missions.<sup>2</sup>

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report recognized that enhancing the capabilities and capacity of U.S. allies and partners is a critical mission of the Department of Defense (DoD).<sup>3</sup> In response, DoD developed the Building Partnership Capacity Roadmap

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., March 2005, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to clarify two key terms in this study, specifically, the difference between capability and capacity. Simply put, capability is the ability to perform a function (e.g., flying an F-16); capacity is the extent to which a capability is present (e.g., employing a flight of F-16s). These definitions were developed specifically for Jennifer D.P. Moroney, Nancy E. Blacker, Renee Buhr, James McFadden, Cathryn Quantic Thurston, and Anny Wong, *Building Partner Capabilities for Coalition Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-635-A, 2007.

and created new offices for security cooperation and coalition-building within OSD. The geographic COCOMs were also directed to refocus efforts to increase partner capacity. In turn, the Office of the SAF/IA, which has a global perspective on security cooperation, adopted the Air Force Security Cooperation Strategy, which aims to support OSD and COCOM objectives through its security cooperation efforts. This has led the Air Force to place added emphasis in recent years on building relationships with partner air forces. This monograph offers suggestions to SAF/IA to help it build on its achievements in this area.

In support of these new DoD and COCOM requirements, the U.S. Air Force could benefit from an enhanced process for identifying appropriate capabilities, as well as the ability to match these capabilities to candidate partner air forces and, where appropriate, build these capabilities into capacity through focused security cooperation. It is also important to identify other useful activities from other services and key allies to enhance capacity-building, and synchronize efforts to collectively pursue U.S. objectives.

## **Enhancing the Air Force's Approach to Security Cooperation**

This monograph describes the key elements of an enhanced approach to security cooperation and provides five focus areas for implementing it. It has three specific objectives:

1. Identify and analyze ongoing Air Force security cooperation efforts around the world as a snapshot in time. (See pp. 21–26.)
2. Outline the key elements of an enhanced approach that builds on SAF/IA's accomplishments and is responsive to U.S. strategic requirements. (See pp. 26–29.)
3. Recommend ways to implement the approach.

The monograph begins with a detailed description of current and historical Air Force efforts to build the capacity of partner air forces in a

two-level analysis: an experimental macro-level analysis (see pp. 19–28) that focuses primarily on security assistance and a micro-level analysis (see pp. 31–65) focused on six case studies that includes both security assistance and other DoD security cooperation efforts. The analysis suggests that although some types of activities have been responsive to strategy, others could be more strongly linked. (See pp. 64–65.) We found that Air Force planners are acting in ways that they believe are consistent with strategic guidance but that they sometimes make decisions based on incomplete and inconsistent information. The result is that some efforts could have been more strongly linked to U.S. strategic guidance and policy in all cases.

The monograph suggests five focus areas for enhancing the effectiveness of the Air Force's security cooperation efforts (see p. 108): increasing visibility into activities; strengthening processes for planning, evaluation, and resourcing; and creating institutions that treat security cooperation the same as other major Air Force priorities.

## **Recommendations for the U.S. Air Force**

The Air Force should consider measures that can enhance the effectiveness of its security cooperation efforts. These fall into two categories: those that can be implemented in the near term and those that might require more time and resources.

### **Near-Term Options**

- Enhance Knowledgebase, the Air Force's security cooperation database, by adding to it information regarding other organizations' security cooperation-related programs and by participating in their forums. (See pp. 109–110.)
- Consider placing greater emphasis on security cooperation topics in discussions with allies and partners to better understand their activities with other countries. (See pp. 111–112.)

- Assign responsibility for security cooperation programs to specific offices, and identify “champions” for specific security cooperation programs. (See pp. 112, 121.)
- Consider holding an annual security cooperation conference with key Air Force stakeholders and geographic COCOMs and organize staff talks with other services to better leverage existing security cooperation resources. (See p. 115.)

### **Longer-Term Options**

- Establish a more systematic process for evaluating the effectiveness of security cooperation programs and activities and include it in appropriate plans and guidance documents, such as the Air Force Annual Planning and Programming Guidance, in addition to the Air Force Security Cooperation Strategy. (See p. 122.)
- Take further steps to embed Air Force security cooperation programs in formal resource allocation processes so that they can better compete for budget and program objective memorandum shares. (See p. 122.)
- When conducting security cooperation planning conferences, consider including selected allies and partners. (See pp. 117–118.)

Collectively, these actions can help the Air Force to manage security cooperation more like other important activities. Finally, we suggest that the Air Force consider long-term alternatives for establishing a more permanent institution for training airmen to participate in training and advisory roles with partners. These options require additional analysis.

The Air Force, in particular, SAF/IA, has made significant improvements to its approach in recent years. Collectively, these recommendations for further enhancing the Air Force’s approach to security cooperation can help to enable the Air Force to be even more responsive to COCOM, OSD, and other partners’ needs and priorities and to use limited resources more efficiently in the most effective ways.