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# What Works Best When Conducting Security Cooperation?

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***What Works Best When Conducting Security Cooperation?*<sup>2</sup>**

**Before the Committee on Armed Services**  
**United States House of Representatives**

**October 21, 2015**

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the committee thank you for inviting me here to testify today.

When we talk about security cooperation, we generally include a wide range of programs and activities that comprise some combination of working by, with, and through partners in pursuit of national security objectives, as well as helping others to help themselves.<sup>3</sup> By working with and helping others to be better able to deal with problems in their countries and regions, the United States seeks to avoid the costs of having to take a greater role in those resolutions or of letting various security or humanitarian problems go unresolved.

When security cooperation efforts are effective, they bolster our partners, contribute to long-term stability, and help resolve problems, crises, and conflicts without heavy investment or involvement by the United States. When these efforts are ineffective, however, security cooperation fails to do these things and appears to be a wasted investment that still leaves unresolved problems and partners unable or unwilling to help solve them. To get the most out of security cooperation in the future, we must understand when and why security cooperation works, and when and why it does not.

My remarks today draw from research on security cooperation that I have led at the RAND Corporation over the past several years.

In one analysis, we used case studies of security cooperation engagements with 29 countries over a span of 20 years to identify which conditions and actions have led to success in security

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

<sup>2</sup> This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT441.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Building partner capacity and security force assistance both fall under the broader security cooperation umbrella.

cooperation and building partner capacity, and which have not.<sup>4</sup> In a second study, we conducted additional deep-dive case studies of four cases, chosen because they all lacked certain characteristics identified as beneficial to success in the first study. This second study focused on how efforts might still succeed even when an assistance provider is forced by circumstances to work with partners in a situation not favorable to success.<sup>5</sup>

All this is to say that the findings and recommendations that I share with you today stem from a substantial foundation of empirical evidence.<sup>6</sup>

### **What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity?**

Let me begin with the subset of security cooperation focused on building the capacity and capability of partner nation security forces. Several factors are critical contributors in those efforts.

First, **matching matters**. Efforts to build partner capacity are most effective when what the United States offers aligns well with partner nation security forces' baseline capabilities and their ability to absorb provided training and technology. Such alignment requires an understanding of what training and equipment partner forces already have and what they are ready for. Too often, U.S. training and equipping efforts are predicated on mistaken assumptions and equipment provided is a poor match for the partner nation's environment or for the technological sophistication of their forces; as a result, training misses the mark, being either too basic and remedial or too advanced and rapid to be of much benefit to trainees. For example, in many instances, U.S. providers have painstakingly translated instructional materials into partner languages, only to later discover that partner troops, while literate, did not have sufficient levels of basic education to make any use of the translated manuals. While these sorts of mismatches are often recognized and fixed over time, they lead to wasted initial investments and can sour important relationships.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, Stephanie Young, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Joe Hogler, and Christine Leah, *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1253/1-OSD, 2013 ([www.rand.org/t/MG1253z1](http://www.rand.org/t/MG1253z1)).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Paul, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Beth Grill, Colin P. Clarke, Lisa Saum-Manning, Heather Peterson, and Brian Gordon, *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity in Challenging Contexts?* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-937-OSD, 2015 ([www.rand.org/t/RR937](http://www.rand.org/t/RR937)).

<sup>6</sup> Due to sensitivities associated with the data for specific case studies, I offer examples here without revealing names and places. Full details are contained in reports that are not available to the general public.

Second, the point about souring relationships is important because **relationships matter, and they can take time to establish**. Relationships support a necessary level of trust and understanding between the United States and the partner, as well as provide practical experience on how to work together. Personalities can play a significant role. Effective relationships require both the alignment of objectives between the United States and the partner (also a matching issue) and agreement across U.S. and partner nation stakeholders on specific objectives and approaches. Both are important to success.

Alignment of objectives includes both the extent to which the United States and the partner share broader security interests and the extent to which they share the specific security interest that is the object of the capacity-building effort. For example, in the early days of engagement with Colombia, U.S. objectives focused exclusively on counter-narcotics efforts, while Colombia was much more concerned with counterinsurgency and internal security. After 9/11, when U.S. policy shifted focus to include counterterrorism and support for counterinsurgency, the extent of overlap in interests with the Colombians was much higher, and capacity-building efforts became more successful.

Third, **context matters. Certain characteristics or features of partners improve prospects for security cooperation success**. Specifically, partners with relatively robust governance and relatively strong economies have historically been more successful participants in security cooperation. Having a functioning ministry of defense (or equivalent) and having sufficient resources (and willingness) to invest in the sustainment of capacity built are particularly useful.

Fourth, **consistency and sustainment are key**. By *sustainment*, I mean the provision of logistics and personnel services necessary to keep something going, including maintenance, spare and replacement parts, and manning in the face of rotations, retirement, or attrition. In historical cases in which the United States provided consistent funding and effort toward capacity building over several years and some kind of sustainment effort was in place (either as part of the U.S. security cooperation effort or from partner investment), capacity was much more likely to be built and maintained. In too many of the historical cases, short-term successes were undermined when delivery of security cooperation was interrupted or dropped off, or because of atrophy of capability either for want of refresher/continuation training or for lack of parts and maintenance.

For example, in one instance, the United States provided small boats for a partner's coast guard that led to a dramatic increase in operating capability and effectiveness. However, the engine compartments for these small boats required a peculiar and distinctive wrench to gain access, and these wrenches were not provided. Even though partner forces were keen to maintain their

craft, they were unable to do so. In other cases, partner forces completely lack a culture of maintenance and treat all equipment, even vehicles, as disposable. In the first instance, provision of unique needed maintenance equipment and spare parts would have been sufficient for sustainment. In the second type of case, a much more robust sustainment process is required, involving either enduring maintenance contracts with a third party or considerable maintenance training for partners.

### **What Keeps Security Cooperation from Working?**

There have been a number of recent instances that appear to be less-than-successful security cooperation efforts, in which the United States has invested a great deal with little to show for it, or partner forces believed to be relatively capable proved to be inadequate to the threats they faced. In light of these instances, I offer two sets of observations from our research. The first concerns the difficulty of defining success for security cooperation efforts, and the second addresses challenges to effective security cooperation.

#### *Success Is Sometimes Difficult to Define*

What does it mean to “succeed” in security cooperation? When there are clear national security goals, stakeholders can easily see whether they have succeeded or failed in meeting them. But if the United States is undertaking security cooperation to support broader national security goals and the efforts fail to meet those broader goals, does that mean security cooperation has failed? I would argue that it does not. For example, if broader national security goals seek to prevent a regional conflict from spilling over into a partner country, security cooperation efforts might focus on improving border security forces and internal security forces. Those security cooperation efforts might be entirely successful, with the partner’s border and internal security forces dramatically improving their capability, but the adjacent conflict might still spill over into the partner country, exceeding the capacity of those forces.

Part of the challenge to identifying success stems from the lack of connections between the goals. Often, national security goals are multiple or ambiguous. Equally often, even if the goals and objectives of supporting efforts (like security cooperation) are themselves clear, they are not clearly nested with and connected to the higher-level goals, or they are not sufficient by themselves to achieve the higher-level goals. (In the example begun above, improved border and security forces alone were not enough to prevent conflict spillover.)

In addition, it is worth noting that goals at all levels tend to change over time. We should not be surprised, for example, if the United States initially sets out to help a partner build border security forces and those forces later prove to be ineffective when asked to perform counterterrorism missions.

Besides clarity and nesting in goals, another part of the problem is in defining success itself. In our research on building partner capacity, we used a scale developed by other RAND colleagues to score changes in partner capabilities.<sup>7</sup> Under that framework, each security area is represented by a number of subordinate factors, each scored from 1 (very low capability) to 5 (very high).

If a security cooperation effort takes a partner's capability in an important security area (say, internal security forces) from 2 to 4 on this scale, this would be an outstanding success at building partner capacity. However, it is by no means a guarantee that those forces will be up to the challenge posed by an insurgency backed by a transnational violent extremist organization, which could mean failure to deal with that threat and thus failure to meet broader U.S. national security objectives.

In our case studies, we defined successful partner capacity-building efforts as those that yielded an overall increase of 0.8 on this scale for the security area in which improvements were sought.<sup>8</sup> Based on this criterion, 23 of 29 cases we examined realized some kind of success. However, as noted, a modest level of success at capacity building does not necessarily equate to overall policy success. Nor does it guarantee a durable increase in capacity. Too often in our research, we observed evidence of successful capacity built, only to see that capacity atrophy and fall back toward baseline because neither the United States nor the partner took the steps necessary to sustain it.

Finally, even when goals are properly nested from top to bottom and security cooperation unambiguously supports national security objectives and successfully creates formations of trained and equipped forces that should be adequate to the challenges they will face, we can still find surprising security force collapses. Willingness to fight is one of the hardest things to measure prior to actual battle. Further, will to fight can be highly situationally dependent. Some forces will fight one foe but flee before another; some forces will fight if stationed in their home

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<sup>7</sup> Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lynn E. Davis, Ely Ratner, Molly Dunigan, Jeremiah Goulka, Heather Peterson, and K. Jack Riley, *Developing a Defense Sector Assessment Rating Tool*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TR-864-OSD, 2010 ([www.rand.org/t/TR864](http://www.rand.org/t/TR864)).

<sup>8</sup> See Paul, Clarke, Grill, Young, et al. (2013) for details.

region but desert if called to battle in a different region of their country. Some forces will not fight unless they clearly and completely overmatch their opponent.

Thus, defining success may require setting more-realistic expectations, settling for incremental progress, and recognizing the inherent risks of failure in such complex environments.

### *Challenges to Security Cooperation Success*

Our research also highlights various challenges that can reduce prospects for success in security cooperation. Some of these aspects can be controlled by the assistance provider and can (and should) be improved upon; others are inherent in or under the control of partners and are things the United States needs to keep in mind when managing its expectations for future security cooperation efforts.

First among these challenges relates to a previous section of my testimony today: **partner willingness**. One of the findings of our research is that **you can't want it more than they do**.<sup>9</sup> Lack of partner willingness can disrupt security cooperation at many levels, any of which can result in delay, diminished success, or outright failure. Examples include partners unwilling to participate in security cooperation (and this can be at the ministerial level, command level, or level of individual troop trainees), partners willing to participate but unwilling to focus their efforts in areas of U.S. strategic interest, partners unwilling to use the capacity built for the intended purpose (often because they would prefer to use it for something else), and partners unwilling to respect human rights while benefiting from and using the capabilities provided by security cooperation.

**Many of the challenges to security cooperation success stem from shortcomings in U.S. practices.** Because of funding and budgetary cycles and changing priorities, **the United States funds and delivers security cooperation inconsistently, and that decreases effectiveness.** This problem is exacerbated with partners who face significant contextual challenges. *When the United States drops the ball with a robust partner, either that partner picks it up or the ball floats to some extent. When the United States drops the ball with a partner that faces significant contextual challenges, the ball sinks.*

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<sup>9</sup> Paul, Clarke, Grill, Young, et al., 2013, p. 85. See also Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-291/1-OSD, 2013 ([www.rand.org/t/RR291z1](http://www.rand.org/t/RR291z1)), where partner commitment and motivation was found to be essential to success in expeditionary counterinsurgency, too, independent of the commitment and motivation of the expeditionary force.

**Inadequate sustainment planning hurts security cooperation effectiveness**, too. As noted, unless they are sustained, forces and capabilities built through partner capacity-building efforts rapidly atrophy. Some partners have resources to dedicate to sustainment, as well as forces with backgrounds and training that support maintenance, and some do not. Even where sustainment support from the partner is possible, it needs to be an integrated part of the overall security cooperation plan. When partners lack the resources necessary for sustainment, sustainment needs to be *provided* as part of the security cooperation package.

Similarly, **a lack of flexibility in security cooperation constrains its effectiveness**. The administrative requirements of security cooperation often prevent executors from wielding necessary flexibility. For example, in one country, the commander of the partner formation designated for security cooperation refused to allow his troops to participate. U.S. personnel located a similar formation in the same municipality whose commander was enthusiastic about the planned activities, but program procedures prevented U.S. personnel from making the needed shift and engaging with the willing formation. In another case, partner stakeholders were delaying participation in planned activities, but materiel and resources were still being delivered to the partner. U.S. personnel were extremely frustrated that they could not control the flow of resources sufficiently to use that as an incentive for better partner participation.

**These last three problems stem in part from weaknesses in the authorities**. While the patchwork of authorities available to fund and support security cooperation enables a wide range of activities, the authorities rarely support an activity for more than a year or two at a time, resulting in uncertainty about their continuation. Programs under Title 10 authorities are short duration; some Title 22 authorities (such as Foreign Military Sales and Foreign Military Financing) can be more enduring but have fairly limited scope and application. There are few authorities that allow for sustainment support, and none that I am aware of can support sustainment of capabilities built as part of some other effort. While needs, objectives, and the situation on the ground can change fairly quickly, once an effort is launched and funded by a program, it is difficult to change important execution details.

### **The Benefits of Assessment and the Need for SMART Objectives**

Many of the available benefits from matching and context can be realized and many of the challenges avoided or overcome with better planning and assessment. To begin with, objectives in both security cooperation and broader national defense strategy development (which security cooperation is intended to support) need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and

time-bound (SMART).<sup>10</sup> With SMART objectives in place, assessment of prospects, process, and outcomes becomes possible. A thoughtful assessment framework can then support important inquiries at three points in the broader security cooperation process that could help improve ongoing and future efforts.<sup>11</sup>

- Prior to execution, ask: What could go wrong with the planned effort?
- During execution, ask: Is everything going according to plan? If not, why not? What can be done about it?
- After execution ask: Were all objectives achieved? If not, why not? What could be done about it in the future (either in this context or elsewhere)?

## Recommendations

To support progress in this area, this research suggests six recommendations.<sup>12</sup>

First, **reform legislative authorities to improve flexibility, and simplify procedures.** Currently, many authorities are inflexible. In addition, while there are a wide range of authorities with diverse application, using this patchwork of authorities requires considerable experience and bureaucratic expertise.<sup>13</sup>

Second, **revise (or add new) authorities to support a wider range of activities over longer periods of time, and sustain them.** This may need to entail new authorities specifically to add a sustainment “tail” to existing authorities.

Third, consider (and insist that U.S. security cooperation stakeholders consider) whether **partners have the attributes, characteristics, or behaviors that are associated with effective security cooperation.** Manage expectations accordingly.

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<sup>10</sup> See Christopher Paul, Brian Gordon, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Lisa Saum-Manning, Beth Grill, Colin P. Clarke, and Heather Peterson, *A Building Partner Capacity Assessment Framework: Tracking Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, Disrupters, and Workarounds*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-935-OSD, 2015 ([www.rand.org/t/RR935](http://www.rand.org/t/RR935)), and Christopher Paul, Jessica Yeats, Colin P. Clarke, Miriam Matthews, and Lauren Skrabala, *Assessing and Evaluating Department of Defense Efforts to Inform, Influence, and Persuade: Handbook for Practitioners*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-809/2-OSD, 2015 ([www.rand.org/t/RR809z2](http://www.rand.org/t/RR809z2)).

<sup>11</sup> For an example of such a framework, see Paul, Gordon, et al., 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Recommendations are all drawn from Paul, Clarke, Grill, Young, et al., 2013, and Paul, Moroney, et al., 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See Jennifer D. P. Moroney, David E. Thaler, and Joe Hogler, *Review of Security Cooperation Mechanisms Combatant Commands Utilize to Build Partner Capacity*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-413-OSD, 2013 ([www.rand.org/t/RR413](http://www.rand.org/t/RR413)).

Fourth, regardless of the partner or context, review how well **security cooperation goals and activities correspond with what the partner wants or needs and what it is capable of using and absorbing**. We have summarized this recommendation elsewhere as “find the right ladder, find the right rung,” and it remains good advice for security cooperation planners.<sup>14</sup>

Fifth, review the extent to which security cooperation plans **identify possible challenges within the context and plan accordingly, and include assessment**. Theater security cooperation plans should include measurable (SMART) objectives, and plans for executing security cooperation should include plans to collect assessment data not only on objective attainment but also on process inputs and outputs and possible disrupters.

Sixth, **emphasize sustainment when reviewing security cooperation programs**, and ask whether Department of State and Department of Defense planners have identified means at the outset for the sustainment and maintenance of any capabilities to be built.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul, Clarke, Grill, Young, et al., 2013.