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R E P O R T

Adding Value to Air Force Management Through Building Partnerships Assessment

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Summary

The USAF, along with other DoD elements, has worked for many years with allies and friendly nations to build strong and enduring partnerships, reinforce other nations' capacity both to defend themselves and to work in coalitions, and ensure U.S. access to foreign territories for operational purposes. The activities conducted by the Air Force range from the very visible—training, equipping, and exercising with others—to those that are less obvious, such as holding bilateral talks, workshops, and conferences and providing education.

Since 2006, DoD has placed a higher priority on these security cooperation activities, which collectively are viewed as being central to U.S. efforts to shape international relations in ways that are favorable to U.S. interests and equities.¹ As the demand for security forces continues to outpace the supply, the United States needs partners to improve their own capabilities and be better prepared to confront both internal and external security challenges. As a result, U.S. efforts to build partnerships with foreign countries have evolved from the “nice to do” category to the “necessary” one.

However, it is often challenging to specify how much and what ways these activities have contributed to U.S. security policy objectives—whether at the national, department, combatant command (COCOM), or service levels. Given this challenge, the Air Force is seeking ways to assess the effectiveness of its security cooperation efforts in order to make the best use of its resources in initiatives that are intended to enhance partner capabilities and achieve U.S. security objectives.

In pursuit of this goal, PAF has been working with the Air Force to develop an assessment approach designed to ensure that Air Force security cooperation programs and activities are closely aligned with operational and strategic objectives, adequately authorized and resourced, carefully sequenced and packaged, and efficiently and effectively executed. To be successful, this effort must overcome skepticism among some in the Air Force security cooperation community regarding the need for added and more rigorous assessments, the capacity of the Air Force to perform additional assessments given existing resource constraints, and even the goal of pursuing assessments that go beyond the current short-term, process-oriented assessments, despite the often long-term, unexpected, and indirect effects of security cooperation activities.

For this study, RAND was asked by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force for Operations, Plans and Requirements, Headquarters USAF (AF/A3/5), to help the Air Force implement the comprehensive assessment framework developed by PAF for the Office of

¹ Security cooperation comprises all DoD interactions with foreign defense and security establishments, including all DoD-administered security assistance that builds defense and security relationships, develops allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provides U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations. See Department of Defense Directive 5132.03, *DoD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, October 24, 2008.

the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs (SAF/IA) in FY 2008, particularly but not exclusively with respect to security cooperation programs directly managed by the Air Force.²

In fashioning this comprehensive framework for implementation by the Air Force, the RAND team

- tested and refined the elements of the assessment framework through structured Assessment Day focus group discussions with a variety of Air Force officials and senior leaders involved in security cooperation with foreign militaries (see Chapter Two)
- conducted a detailed survey of stakeholders in the Operator Engagement Talks (OET)³ and the Military Personnel Exchange Program (MPEP) to gauge the Air Force’s ability and capacity to conduct security cooperation assessments (see Chapter Three)
- proposed a practical approach to implementing a security cooperation assessment framework based on the Air Force’s legal authorities, policy guidance, organizational responsibilities, and assessment capabilities (see Chapter Four).

RAND’s 2009 study will enable the Air Force to better meet its security cooperation assessment challenges because this approach is rooted in three key assumptions:

1. Assessment benefits the things assessed.
2. Air Force efforts to build foreign partnerships can benefit if there is a common understanding of security cooperation assessment.
3. Security cooperation assessments can support DoD and Air Force decisionmaking if they are available, current, accurate, and configured appropriately.

While the first assumption is affirmed in Chapter One of the report through examples from non–security cooperation USAF endeavors, Chapters Two, Three, and Four reaffirm that assessments can benefit security cooperation efforts and support Air Force decisionmaking. The following sections explore these findings and recommendations.

Findings and Recommendations

Our second assumption states that focused, integrated security cooperation assessments will benefit the Air Force only if there is a common understanding among Air Force stakeholders of the rationale behind security cooperation assessment. Unfortunately, the results of our “Assessment Day” focus group discussions, which included Air Force security cooperation planners and executors from a variety of Headquarters U.S. Air Force (HAF), major commands (MAJCOMs), and regional component organizations (see Chapter Two, pp. 13–20), confirmed that no consensus exists within the Air Force on four fundamental issues pertaining to security cooperation assessments: Why assess? What to assess? How to assess? And who should assess?

² That assessment framework is described in Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Joe Hogler, Jefferson P. Marquis, Christopher Paul, John E. Peters, and Beth Grill, *Developing an Assessment Framework for U.S. Air Force Building Partnerships Programs*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-868-AF, 2010a.

³ This initiative was previously called the Operator-to-Operator Program or Operator-to-Operator Staff Talks.

Consequently, we recommend that SAF/IA, as the leader within the Air Force for building foreign partnerships, pilot the development of a capstone instruction to guide assessment efforts across the full range of security cooperation functions, organizations, programs, and countries in which Air Force personnel operate, either as managers, implementers, or observers. This instruction could build on the security cooperation assessment foundation outlined and illustrated in Chapter Four, which answers the four assessment questions as follows:

- **Why Assess?** The Air Force should conduct security cooperation assessments to improve partnership design and prioritization,⁴ force employment, force development, and overall force management decisions (pp. 34–36).
- **What to Assess?** The Air Force should assess security cooperation events, activities, and programs, as well as their combination and interaction in the context of particular countries and multinational initiatives (p. 37).
- **How to Assess?** The Air Force should choose appropriate assessment types, objectives and effects, quantitative and qualitative measures, and relevant data (pp. 37–39).
- **Who Should Assess?** The Air Force should assign department, MAJCOM, numbered air force (NAF), wing and below, and joint elements⁵ to appropriate assessment roles and clearly articulate supporting-supported relationships (pp. 39–40).

Security cooperation assessments can provide a range of specific benefits depending on U.S. and partner interests, security cooperation objectives, and force development requirements. Assessments can also inform decisions regarding the establishment, continuation, expansion, or transference of programs and activities designed to build partner capacity, foster partner relationships, or guarantee U.S. access to partner countries. Additionally, assessments can provide information relevant to generating Air Force units to perform security cooperation activities, such as training additional airmen to train, advise, and assist or expanding U.S. Air Force schools to accommodate more foreign students.

However, according to our third assumption, assessments cannot provide these benefits unless they are available, current, accurate, and appropriately configured.

Although the results of our “Assessment Day” focus group discussions and security cooperation program survey are not definitive, they point to significant problems with the Air Force’s current security cooperation assessment process. Below is a brief list of our assessment process findings from Chapters Two and Three, along with a recommended course of action for the Air Force.

Assessment data are often unavailable. The Air Force should make security cooperation data collection and assessment a duty responsibility for Air Force personnel working in the field. It also should request data from joint organizations that could be used for various assessment purposes, such as the need for Air Force security cooperation resources and the efficiency and impact of Air Force security cooperation activities (pp. 17, 29).

⁴ Partnerships design involves selecting the appropriate combination of security cooperation events, activities, programs and resources to meet the end states articulated in U.S. Air Force, *Air Force Global Partnership Strategy: Building Partnerships for the 21st Century*, 2008, pp. ii–iii. The prioritization of partnerships involves selecting and ranking foreign partners for different missions and objectives of importance to the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. government more generally.

⁵ For the purpose of this report, “joint” is defined as Air Force personnel serving in assignments outside the Air Force, in particular, on regional COCOM staffs and in U.S. embassy country teams (e.g., air attachés and security assistance officials).

Security cooperation guidance is not consistently available or well enough understood. The Air Force should incorporate assessment guidance in security cooperation planning documents, including specific program or country objectives, measures, and data requirements. In addition, security cooperation officials should be held accountable for meeting assessment requirements (pp. 17, 30).

Assessment skills could be improved. The Air Force should consider offering a security cooperation–related online assessment course that would be available to all Air Force personnel should they wish to take it (pp. 17–18, 31).

Assessment resources may be inadequate. The Air Force should conduct an in-depth resource analysis after determining appropriate security cooperation assessment roles and supporting-supported relationships (p. 18).

Security cooperation officials lack data needed for effective program advocacy. The Air Force should ensure that data necessary for managing and advocating for security cooperation program resources are analyzed by HAF officials and used to inform management and budgetary recommendations and decisions (pp. 28–29).

Officials are often unable to compare programs. The Air Force should educate airmen and civilians working on security cooperation issues on the broader universe of Air Force Title 10 security cooperation programs by creating a handbook of Air Force security cooperation programs and activities. Alternatively, the Air Force should incorporate this information into the Air Force Campaign Support Plan as an appendix (pp. 28–29).

Implementing a New Approach to Security Cooperation Assessment

Creating a more integrated approach to security cooperation assessment should not be a burden for the Air Force. Much of the information necessary for security cooperation assessment is available, or could be available if the Air Force only ordered its collection and managed its dissemination, analysis, and integration into Air Force and DoD decisionmaking processes. The authorities seem to exist, and additional Air Force instructions could fill in certain gaps. The Air Force has forged cooperative relationships across disparate communities in the past when prudence dictated; there is no reason to believe similar relationships could not be developed in support of security cooperation assessment.

However, there are certain hurdles impeding the establishment of a new approach to security cooperation assessment. These include the doctrinal and organizational (i.e., why, what, how, who) issues, as well as the procedural, educational, and resource issues detailed above.

Those responsible for security cooperation in the Air Force need to more fully understand the dimensions of the assessment capacity problem and communicate capacity requirements to senior Air Force and DoD leaders. Toward this end, we suggest that stakeholders in Air Force–managed programs take RAND’s security cooperation assessment survey and provide the results to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Plans and Requirements, Directorate of Operational Planning, Regional Affairs Division, Headquarters U.S. Air Force (AF/A5XX); SAF/IA; and Air Education and Training Command (AETC) for security cooperation planning, programming, and force development purposes.

In addition, Air Force security cooperation officials need to decide on a strategy for implementing a new assessment approach. We suggest the following four-part strategy:

1. Achieve a consensus among security cooperation stakeholders on the elements of the overall security cooperation assessment approach.
2. Codify this vision in a capstone Air Force instruction.
3. Systematically implement the new assessment approach, focusing first on Air Force–managed programs and activities that are well established, clearly defined, and adequately resourced.
4. Collaborate with other DoD and Department of State stakeholders regarding assessment policy affecting security cooperation programs and activities in which the Air Force participates but does not manage.

The question is no longer whether the Air Force should assess its efforts to build partnerships. Rather, it is how to do so in an integrated way that takes into account the evolving nature of security cooperation policy, as well as Air Force constraints with respect to assessment capacity and authority.