

# Department of Defense and Security Cooperation

## Improving Prioritization, Authorities, and Evaluations

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**The RAND Corporation**

**Department of Defense and Security Cooperation:  
Improving Prioritization, Authorities, and Evaluations<sup>2</sup>**

**Before the Committee on Armed Services  
Subcommittee on Emerging Threats  
United States Senate**

**March 9, 2016**

Chairman Fischer, Ranking Member Nelson, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the important subject of U.S. security cooperation. It's a pleasure to appear before you today along with my colleagues, Jeff Eggers and Melissa Dalton.<sup>3</sup>

The RAND Corporation has analyzed the costs and benefits of security cooperation extensively over the past 15 years. I've analyzed security cooperation challenges during that same period, both at the Pentagon and at RAND.

Make no mistake: Working with foreign militaries is more art than science. But it certainly shouldn't be abstract art. Security cooperation is most effective when it's based on coordinated

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<sup>2</sup> This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT454.html>.

<sup>3</sup> This testimony draws on the following reports: David E. Thaler, Michael J. McNerney, Beth Grill, Jefferson P. Marquis, and Amanda Kadlec, *From Patchwork to Framework: A Review of Title 10 Authorities for Security Cooperation*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1438-OSD, 2016 ([rand.org/t/RR1438](http://rand.org/t/RR1438)); Michael J. McNerney, Stuart E. Johnson, Stephanie Pezard, David Stebbins, Renanah Miles, Angela O'Mahony, Chaoling Feng, Tim Oliver, *Defense Institution Building in Africa: An Assessment*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1232-OSD, 2016 ([www.rand.org/t/RR1232](http://www.rand.org/t/RR1232)); Michael J. McNerney, Angela O'Mahony, Thomas S. Szayna, Derek Eaton, Caroline Baxter, Colin P. Clarke, Emma Cutrufello, Michael McGee, Heather Peterson, Leslie Adrienne Payne, Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-350-A, 2014 ([www.rand.org/t/RR350](http://www.rand.org/t/RR350)); Larry Hanauer, Stuart E. Johnson, Christopher Springer, Chaoling Feng, Michael J. McNerney, Stephanie Pezard, Shira Efron, *Evaluating the Impact of the Department of Defense Regional Centers for Security Studies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-388-OSD, 2014 ([www.rand.org/t/RR388](http://www.rand.org/t/RR388)); Christopher Paul, Brian Gordon, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Lisa Saum-Manning, Beth Grill, Colin P. Clarke, 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, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Beth Grill, Colin P. Clarke, Lisa Saum-Manning, Heather Peterson, 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)).

planning and informed by rigorous analysis. But ultimately, it must be tailored by the dedicated men and women serving overseas to meet the realities they face on the ground. Clear guidance and intensive training are crucial to ensure that they can overcome the many challenges that arise in this line of work.

Today, I will focus on three questions. First, how does the Department of Defense (DoD) prioritize its security cooperation investments? Second, how does DoD manage the current patchwork of relevant legislative authorities that have been pieced together in recent years? Third, how can DoD—and Congress—better evaluate the effectiveness of these activities?

## **Background**

DoD conducts about 3,000 to 4,000 security cooperation events each year in more than 130 countries, while total U.S. assistance to foreign militaries and police forces runs between \$15 billion and \$20 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> An activity can include a military chaplain exchange, a multinational exercise with thousands of troops, and everything in between. These activities touch tens of thousands of foreign security forces each year.

Observers might assume that security cooperation failures in places like Iraq, Mali, and Syria are the result of DoD having no strategy or no plan to manage this vast effort. But this assumption oversimplifies the problem. DoD produces thousands of pages of guidance, strategies, planning documents, and after-action reports. Hundreds of officials coordinate their plans and share information. Success stories abound concerning more-professional forces, successful counterterrorism missions, countries that can better protect their borders, and countries that can deploy on peacekeeping missions or in coalitions with the United States. But to what end? A true strategy aligns ends, ways, and means and links to detailed strategic plans. Strategy and planning documents should provide sufficient detail for senior leaders to understand what's working and what's not. In RAND's research on security cooperation planning, we have found that DoD has made great strides to add rigor to this type of planning through more-detailed guidance, Theater Campaign Plans, country cooperation plans, and extensive coordination processes. The scope and scale of these activities, however, make it extraordinarily difficult for civilian leaders in the Pentagon, at the State Department, and in Congress to play an effective role in fulfilling their oversight responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Security Assistance Monitor, "Data," web tool, undated ([http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/military/country/2010/2017/is\\_all/Global](http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/military/country/2010/2017/is_all/Global)).

Let me turn now to three of the most important issues relating to this oversight: prioritization, authorities, and evaluation of effectiveness.

### **Prioritization**

The military assistant to a former senior Pentagon official once told me that one of his jobs was to manage the memos and reports that arrived daily for his boss to read. Some would be tagged as red-hot, some as white-hot, and some simply as important. Every Friday, he would bundle the remaining hot items for the deputy's weekend work, while the rest—often a 2-ft high pile—were not read and subsequently disposed of. This revelation was quite discouraging to an eager Pentagon staffer like me, who authored many “important” memos in his day, but a good reminder of the tyranny of time. Senior leaders can play a role in prioritizing efforts for their organization only if their organization does some prioritization in advance.

Right now, different parts of DoD prioritize security cooperation efforts in different ways through their plans. It is extremely challenging for leaders to link these plans to resource priorities and thereby consider the implicit trade-offs being made. The result often puts secretaries and under secretaries in DoD and the State Department in a listening role rather than a decisionmaking role and likely affects members of Congress and their staff as well. Let's look more closely at this problem through two lenses: prioritizing countries and prioritizing security cooperation tools.

When traveling to a combatant command, it can seem as if every region of the world is like Lake Wobegon, where every partner country is above average. In many security cooperation plans, different countries are priorities for different objectives. This is logical but makes it extremely difficult to analyze trade-offs. Difficulties are acknowledged, but optimism—and a desire for more funding—abounds.

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. What if every combatant command had to identify three countries where they expected the greatest return on investment for the next two years? For these “bullish partners,” there would be a surge in security cooperation activities. On the flip side, the combatant command would also identify three countries where a strong return on investment is less likely for the next two years. For these “bearish partners,” activities would be reduced to offset costs to support increased investments in bullish partners. But what if bearish partners are central to achieving crucially important objectives? Continued investments might be warranted despite the risks, but sometimes it is foolish to continue a losing approach. Return on investment should take into account the importance of the objectives being pursued, expected benefits, relative costs, and risk. Of course, security cooperation funding comes through many

different programs using many different tools, so such an effort would be complicated and require extensive dialogue among stakeholders. But such a discussion might be more focused and action-oriented than the typical round-the-world reviews that take up so much staff and leadership time.

In addition to prioritizing countries, senior leaders have a role in prioritizing the security cooperation tools used to address partnership requirements. Matching the right tool to the right country for the right objective is perhaps the single most important aspect of security cooperation planning. RAND research found a statistically significant correlation between U.S. investments in security cooperation and reduced fragility around the world. This correlation, however, was stronger with certain types of countries (less autocratic, less fragile) and with certain types of tools—namely, those focused on building human capital and institutions. As such countries as Colombia, Georgia, Romania, and South Korea improved their own governance, for example, the United States seemed to find ever better returns on its security cooperation investments. Focused train-and-equip programs—such as the Section 2282 (formerly Section 1206) program<sup>5</sup>—have certainly been valuable in supporting U.S. counterterrorism objectives in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. But we must be wary of overvaluing these activities at the expense of longer-term efforts to create more-resilient, well-governed, and stable partners. After 15 years of intensive counterterrorism activities, I would argue that it is long overdue for the United States to prioritize long-term support to good governance over rapidly equipping tactical military units. Resilient partners are the best defense against terrorism, and resilience comes from strong institutions and professional security forces.

RAND's research on building defense institutions found that many of those involved in security cooperation had a poor understanding of institution-building tools and were inadequately trained in explaining relevant U.S. programs to officials from partner countries. The International Military Education and Training program, the Defense Institutional Reform Initiative, DoD's Regional Centers, and other professional military education programs should serve as the foundation of security cooperation and as a top priority for leadership attention and staff training, not as small-dollar efforts that can run themselves.

Finally, it is important to note that some of the most critical tools reside outside DoD, for example with the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). DoD and State have extensive mechanisms for coordinating security-related efforts, and this coordination

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<sup>5</sup> Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, and as amended in Fiscal Year 2015 as Section 2282, provided the Secretary of Defense with authority to train and equip foreign military forces for two specified purposes—counterterrorism and stability operations—and foreign security forces for counterterrorism operations.

warrants sustained Congressional attention. Fewer such mechanisms exist between DoD and USAID, despite USAID's important roles in areas such as security sector reform, peace-building, and preventing violent extremism. Any efforts to promote greater unity of effort between DoD and USAID also warrant Congressional attention.

## **Authorities**

Last week, RAND released a report analyzing the legislative authorities for security cooperation, which are under U.S. Code Title 10 or related public laws.<sup>6</sup> Through our research, we found 160 total authorities relevant to security cooperation, 123 of which are under Title 10. We identified 106 “core” statutes that directly authorize activities and 17 “supporting” ones that legislate the transfer of funds or mandate reports to Congress. These 106 core authorities included various limitations and levels of flexibility. Dozens of interviews and focus group sessions revealed frustration and confusion about perceived gaps, overlaps, and ambiguities surrounding these authorities, a need for greater flexibility in addressing multifaceted or emerging threats, and a desire to improve on this patchwork that has developed over many years.

So how does DoD sew together this patchwork of relevant legislative authorities into a nicely tailored coat of many colors? In our report, we create a framework to organize authorities into several categories: some authorities focused on particular activities (e.g., exercises), some on particular missions (e.g., counterterrorism), and some on particular partners (e.g., Pakistan).

We identified opportunities for consolidating authorities, starting by reducing the 106 core authorities to 91. While there were other opportunities for consolidation, we propose this initial step—a 15-percent cut of low-hanging fruit to serve as a pilot effort and a way to initiate a more structured dialogue among DoD, the State Department, and Congress.

We also found opportunities to revise authorities to improve flexibility for DoD while maintaining robust congressional oversight. For example, we identified ways to improve the ability of DoD to engage with partners on cyber issues, provide more flexibility to conduct military-to-military engagements, provide military advisors to support institution-building, and expand maritime security train-and-equip efforts globally. Finally, we identified the need for a new authority to improve DoD's ability to engage partners on ballistic missile defense.

There is certainly more to do to streamline the patchwork and improve the ability of DoD to efficiently and effectively engage in the security cooperation activities that Congress has

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<sup>6</sup> Thaler et al., 2016.

authorized it to conduct. Aside from seeking additional opportunities for consolidation and revision, much still needs to be done to better integrate Title 10 and Title 22 authorities, assess the effect of appropriations on security cooperation, and align notification and reporting requirements.

## **Evaluation**

The third major challenge I see in security cooperation is how DoD and Congress can better evaluate effectiveness. What is working and what is not?

Understanding effectiveness starts with understanding your objectives. We have been working with DoD to help them develop “SMART” security cooperation objectives. These are objectives that help a plan become specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-bound. Not every objective can meet every one of these criteria on its own, but rather must be supplemented with information about the tasks planned within each objective. When detailed objectives and tasks are combined with measures of effectiveness that will be used for future evaluations, an organization can create a SMART system. Such a system should help clarify for senior leaders exactly what an organization is trying to do, how it plans to do it, and how the leaders will know if it is making progress.

Addressing the challenges of evaluation also requires breaking down the process of evaluation into its component parts, which we think of as “AM&E”: baseline assessments, monitoring of performance, and evaluations of effectiveness. But before looking at AM&E—and this relates to my earlier point about prioritization—senior leaders must decide what is worth measuring. In command headquarters in Afghanistan, Germany, Iraq, Honolulu, and Tampa, I have seen massive slide presentations and spreadsheets analyzing various security cooperation activities until it all becomes a blur, and I surrender to the operations researchers and engineers who have designed them. How much more difficult is this process for congressional overseers who review an even greater scope of national security issues? These slides and spreadsheets may well be important for the organizations in which they reside, but evaluations must translate into something that can highlight a few key areas of progress and problems.

In the AM&E construct, *assessments* mean that senior leaders must have a baseline assessment. What is the security environment in which these activities will take place? What are the partner’s existing capabilities, and what does the United States want to improve? How well aligned are the partner’s interests and values with those of the United States? DoD has made some improvements in analyzing partner capabilities and is planning to do more. For example, the



Office of the Secretary of Defense has designed a Capability Package Planning Model to guide assessment of capability requirements and programmatic risks, identify key inputs comprising a military capability, and develop comprehensive capability packages that address capability requirements across all necessary dimensions. This effort should help ensure that security cooperation investments are more closely linked to priority objectives.

*Monitoring* means that priority efforts must be closely tracked to determine whether inputs (e.g., money and effort) are translating into outputs (e.g., equipment, training, education, and information). These outputs then serve as the basis for evaluating progress toward objectives (i.e., outcomes). The U.S. effort to train fighters in Syria last fall is an important example of a failure in monitoring, when only a handful of Syrians had been trained despite the expenditure of millions of dollars. While most monitoring of security cooperation is a relatively straightforward program management task, senior leaders need a system that alerts them much faster to significant system breakdowns.

*Evaluation* is the ultimate goal of AM&E and requires that all other components work well. Providing a piece of equipment or training a military officer is not an end unto itself. Investments require following up to make sure that they yield the full potential benefits that were expected. Many organizations inside and outside the U.S. government have put a heavy emphasis on the ability to evaluate progress toward objectives. The Gates Foundation and World Bank have been trailblazers in this field. The Millennium Challenge Corporation, U.S. Agency for International Development, and State Department have all found at least some success in evaluations, even in areas that are not amenable to quantifiable metrics. Within DoD, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict oversees a promising evaluation process for its Section 2282 Train and Equip program.

In the case of the Section 2282 program, DoD uses a small team of independent outside evaluators who have established reasonable, common standards of capability and performance for the types of missions supported by this authority. These standards are applicable to all partner nations that receive assistance. The team visits the recipient partner organizations about one year after training and equipment is provided, both to monitor use of the assistance and to evaluate the effects of that assistance. Results—the good, the bad, and the ugly—are consolidated into an annual report that highlights key points for the Secretary of Defense to transmit to Congress. The teams have been to 20 countries in the past four years and have documented their approach in a handbook to ensure consistency of application.

RAND is working with DoD to help it apply lessons from various organizations and create a framework that can be applied across the entire department to establish roles and responsibilities for managing AM&E more effectively. We hope this will support Congress's requirement in Section 1202 of the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act for DoD to issue a strategic framework prioritizing security cooperation resources and activities.

## **Recommendations**

The eight recommendations that follow could help set the stage for more productive, analytically-based discussions between DoD and Congress and ultimately more effective security cooperation.

1. Congress might consider requiring a regular dialogue focused on three countries in each region of the world where a strong return on security cooperation investments are expected and three countries in each region where activities will be reduced. Senior DoD leaders and Members of Congress are flooded with more information than they can manage. A more focused dialogue on priorities and tradeoffs would likely be a better use of everyone's time than current efforts to review every detail of every activity around the world, regardless of priority.
2. Given RAND's findings about the value of institution-building and human capital investments, Congress might consider ways to encourage DoD to consistently prioritize activities that strengthen a partner's institutions and the professionalization of their security forces.
3. Congress might consider ways to support DoD and USAID unity of effort, for example, through an authority to allow DoD to transfer funds to USAID in support of programs like those to prevent violent extremism.
4. Congress—working with DoD—might consider RAND's proposals for consolidating, revising, and adding Title 10 security cooperation authorities. Doing so would likely increase operational effectiveness on the ground while maintaining robust oversight for Congress.
5. Congress might consider reviewing security cooperation roles, interests, and coordination between DoD and the Department of State, as well as how their respective authorities can be better integrated.
6. Congress, DoD, and other stakeholders could use the SMART criteria described earlier to evaluate the utility of DoD security cooperation objectives.
7. Given last year's problems monitoring security force training in Syria, Congress might review DoD's system for alerting senior leaders to significant system breakdowns in providing security sector assistance.

8. When DoD provides its strategic framework for security cooperation, Congress might focus part of its review on how DoD's AM&E system will help improve congressional oversight, particularly through prioritized, analysis-based evaluations.

Chairman Fischer, Ranking Member Nelson, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to offer this testimony, and I look forward to assisting the committee in its vital work.