Seize the Advantage: Three Models to Improve Security Cooperation Planning

Description

Winston Churchill famously quipped, â??There is only one thing worse than fighting with Allies, and that is fighting without them.â?• Nearly eighty years later, the Department of Defense echoed Churchillâ??s logic by declaring Allies and partners as the 2022 National Defense Strategy â??s (NDSâ??) center of gravity and Americaâ??s greatest advantage.

While fighting without allies and partners is undesirable, equally unfavorable is building a strategy around them without a comprehensive plan for their integration. Assistant Secretary of Defense Dr. Mara Karlin emphasized this point when speaking to Congress, saying, â??This advantage [allies and partners] is not a given. It requires active involvement by the entire U.S. Government.â?• The DOD must, therefore, rely on security cooperation to operationalize the capabilities and contributions of Americaâ??s greatest asymmetric advantage- its allies and partners. This article proposes three models to improve the planning and execution of security cooperation as a tool of statecraft and security policy.

Security cooperation is complex. The Joint Force definition for security cooperation describes a diverse and wide-ranging enterprise that crosses services, components, and sections of the United States Code requiring regular intergovernmental coordination. However, this article proposes three models that can aid planners in operationalizing allies and partners. The first model accepts that security cooperation, like war, is a political act requiring clearly defined objectives. The second model focuses on enhancing the understanding of the operating environment with a focus on the partner. The final model seeks to develop a campaign of integrated, coordinated, and sequenced efforts to avoid the tendency for security cooperation activities to become singular events. Integrating these three models into security cooperation planning can give the United States an advantage during strategic competition and help combatant and service component commands as well as embassies across the world achieve the goals of the 2022 NDS.

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Clearly Defined Objectives: A Three-Axis Political Act

Carl von Clausewitz famously defined warâ??s aim as forcing oneâ??s will onto adversaries to achieve a political objective. Just as war is policy by other means and a political act, so is security cooperation, and therefore it must be tied to tangible objectives. To reduce the complexity inherent to security cooperation, planners should focus analysis and efforts on understanding how it supports or affects three distinct but interrelated elements: the United Statesâ?? policy objectives, effects on recipient nations, and impacts on the international system. Understanding the interdependency between those elements improves the ability to define objectives for security cooperation, understand second and third-order effects, and integrate other elements of national power. Regardless of the model used, security cooperation efforts will not maximize their effectiveness without clear objectives tied to policy.

Objective is one of the nine traditional principles of war and is defined by Joint Doctrine as a mechanism to â??direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and achievable goal.â?• Combatant commands can use security cooperation to shape operational environments, enhance coalition interoperability, modernize partner militaries, and gain or maintain access and influence over key terrain. While security cooperation objectives are often associated with DOD activities, they can also enable interagency efforts beyond the military instrument of national power, especially during strategic competition.

The military will often be in a supporting role during strategic competition and can use security cooperation to empower diplomacy, amplify influence, or promote economic interests. The multifaceted nature of competition creates the added challenge of synchronizing and coordinating with other government agencies to integrate efforts across all elements of national power. The need to drive unity of effort also exists within a combatant command, as security cooperation should be joint. Just as the post-Goldwater-Nichols military emphasizes the Joint fight, combatant commands should clearly define capacity-building objectives each service can contribute to maximize effects.

Security cooperation effects expand horizontally beyond participating nations as other actors perceive, interpret, and react to them differently. The Armyâ??s 2013 manual for Security Cooperation specifically highlights how security cooperation can, â??send compelling regional and often global strategic communication message(s).â?• Compelling, deterring, inducing, assuring, and persuading other states to change or maintain their actions based on the interest of the United States can even be the objective of security cooperation. For instance, the United States extensively uses its partners to deter aggression by third parties. Horizontal impacts can also be negative, unintentionally escalating tensions or degrading bilateral relations due to external and internal factors.

Security cooperation within recipient nations impacts all strata of societies. A 2023 United States Institute for Peace report highlights that autocratic elites tend to capture security cooperation activities, allowing the ruling class to create militaries that protect their power and suppress opposition. This

outcome not only leads to internal instability but creates a security force unable to support state-centric combat. Internal impacts are regime agnostic as security cooperation has the potential to disrupt domestic supply chains, create microeconomies, enable adversarial disinformation campaigns, or disrupt societal and cultural norms. Domestic, or vertical, effects require planners to develop a complex understanding of a nation before executing security cooperation and continually assess activities as major divergences between U.S. and partner interests can require adjustment to the desired end state.

Picture
A visualization of the Three-Axis Model applied to the Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) Caucasus scenario where the United States has committed to defend Pirtuni, a neutral democratic state, against increasing Donovian aggression. To enable this policy goal, the Combatant Command that assesses Pirtuni must hold key terrain for 60 days to allow the United States to generate combat power. The command begins using security cooperation to overcome this gap by addressing deficiencies in the Pirtinuian Armed Forces. This leads to an aggressive Donovian response across the DIME. Security cooperation generates interconnected effects within Pirtuni and throughout the region affecting overall U.S. objectives that must be regularly assessed, understood, and accounted for. (Authorâ??s Work)

Defining the Operational Environment

Planners must first develop a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment they seek to modify to successfully achieve an objective that changes or preserves the geopolitical status quo. Security cooperation is no different. It requires an understanding of its primary output, how to improve capacity, and what the capabilities are of partner forces and supporting institutions. Specifically, planners must identify how a partner enables or can enable, U.S. objectives as well as how partner nationsâ?? defense institutions and society field, maintain, and employ military power. Failing to understand these factors leads to unsustainable or Faberge Egg security forces, political instability, and obfuscation of underlying objectives.

The foundational step to developing an understanding of a partner force is to define the U.S.-related interests of a partner. A parsimonious concept to define this requirement is dividing forces into a *with*, *through,* or transitional categorical relationships with the Joint Force.

With-partners are those the United States expects to fight side-by-side in coalition warfare. With-partners are normally professional militaries from developed nations with established governance

structures. They include NATO militaries and Indo-Pacific treaty allies. Security cooperation efforts for with-partners emphasize building procedural, technical, and human interoperability and improving situational awareness. Inversely, through-partners are those that the United States projects power through to achieve objectives in areas where the deployment of U.S. forces might not be feasible due to political or force management restrictions.

Through-partner security cooperation centers around advising and capacity building to improve a partnerâ??s ability to conduct internal and external security functions. An example of through-partners is U.S. support to developing Djiboutian Rapid Intervention Battalions to promote internal and regional security.

The final grouping within this model are the transitional partners. These partners are those that the United States wants to convert from a â??throughâ?• to a â??with partner.â?• For example, the United States may assist a country executing a NATO membership action plan as a transitional partner.

Picture
THROUGH and WITH Forces (Authorâ??s Work)

The second aspect of understanding the security cooperation environment is assessing a partner nationâ??s security institutions beyond just the operating force. At the strategic level, the Joint Staff divides a nationâ??s defense institution into four mutually supporting functions: governance, executive, generating, and operating (GEGO). GEGO can be imagined as an iceberg. The operating forces are the easily identifiable and visible structures above the waterline. Directly at and below the waterline are generating functions, such as training and doctrine. These support the operating force and are partially visible to external observers. Further below the waterline are the deep structures of executive and governance functions. These exist at ministries and legislatures that fund, equip, organize, and authorize militaries to conduct a certain set of missions.

Picture
The GEGO Construct (Authorâ??s Work)

As Renanah Miles Joyce noted, U.S. security cooperation has a historical preponderance of focusing on operational forces while ignoring supporting institutional capabilities which results in short-term gains at the cost of long-term impacts. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities Dr. Mara Karlin deemed this â??short-term-itis.â?• While it is easy to focus U.S. security cooperation at visible structures within operating functions, sustainable change requires efforts across all four functions regardless of partner type and must include deep structures.

Elements that constitute deep structure include organizational interests, bureaucratic systems, palace politics, and military culture, which can lead to friction and potentially require the United States to adopt a coercive and transactional approach to security cooperation, as outlined by Rachel Tecott Metz . Executive or ministerial-level capacity building is overseen by a military agency rather than combatant commands, and the Department of State is the lead agency on most governance-level programs. Therefore, there is an even greater requirement for coordination and synchronization across elements of national power to successfully influence, shape, and change while avoiding competing or redundant efforts. When security cooperation overly focuses on tactical operational forces, the United States creates unsustainable forces with no foundation.

Aligning the Tools: Operational Art

The DODâ??s security cooperation success revolves around organizing and synchronizing capabilities, authorities, and funding sources to achieve a defined effect in support of the objective. Security cooperation planners should look to operational art to develop both country-specific and regional security cooperation plans in which efforts are arranged, executed, and assessed as part of a campaign. The Joint Force uses operational art to, â??develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, means, and risks.â?•

Within security cooperation, the DOD has various means ranging from globally deployed Security Force Assistance Brigades to CONUS-based Naval Special Warfare training facilities. Combatant command executes security cooperation through statutory authorities. From authorizing and funding mil-to-mil exchanges (T10 Ch. 16 Â§ 311/312) to long-term partner capacity building, efforts requiring Secretary of State concurrence and congressional appropriations (T10 Ch.16 Â§333) commands have a diverse set of methods available to plan and execute security cooperation. To achieve enduring effects toward the objective, planners must sequence and organize both authorities and units logically to achieve the desired end state.

Authorities must learn to weave a complex tapestry of security cooperation operations, activities, and investments due to their complexly different approval processes and funding timelines. Security cooperation activities must be a part of larger campaigns towards an objective, never singular events. Furthermore, security cooperation authorities are not limited to Title 10 nor are security cooperation implementers limited to the DOD. Using all available authorities and resources in a campaign increases the effectiveness of security cooperation but requires additional work in coordination and synchronization. Operational art facilitates organizing security cooperation activities to generate effects in support of theater strategic objectives, thereby linking the tactical to the operational and strategic levels of warfare. planners simply must start with the objective and work backward.

Picture
The sequencing of Title 10 and 22 authorities with periodic State Partnership Program (SPP) events allows the United States to incrementally increase coalition interoperability and improve a partner forceâ??s capacity to deter a competitor nation. (Authorâ??s Work)

Closing

Statistician George Box wrote, â??All models are broken, some are useful.â?• The three proposed models above emphasize the need for clearly defined objectives, an understanding of the operating environment that revolves around the partner, and a planned campaign of unified actions. These models are by no means a silver bullet for effective security cooperation. What the proposed models offer instead is a way to ensure that security cooperation supports and achieves political objectives, maximizes limited resources, and accounts for wide-ranging second and third-order effects. The days of discrete security cooperation are gone. The United States is facing a decisive decade, as outlined in the current National Security Strategy. Our network of allies and partners, built over eighty years, must be operationalized, optimized, and maintained. Or, as Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz simply stated during the Second World War, â??If we canâ??t use our Allies, weâ??re God damn fools.â?•

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Main Image: A U.S. Army advisor assigned to 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade participates in a formation run with Colombian Army counterparts, April 27, in Colombia. U.S. Army advisors are employed in the region building interoperability with security force counterparts. Photo courtesy of 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade.

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