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Department of Defense Strategic Evaluation  
of Security Cooperation as a Tool for Access (2020-2021)  
Public Summary

The Department of Defense (DoD) sponsors strategic evaluations of security cooperation programs and activities pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 383 and DoD Instruction (DoDI) 5132.14, “Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise.” The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships (ODASD(GP)) and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) initiated a strategic evaluation to determine how Security Cooperation (SC) programs and activities have contributed to access, basing, and overflight (ABO) and access-related DoD objectives.

PBG Consulting LLC (PBG), an independent evaluation company, conducted the strategic evaluation. The period of the evaluation spanned from 2020-2021, focusing on five country-specific case studies. This summary, developed by ODASD(GP), provides unclassified primary findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the evaluation report.

**Purpose:** The evaluation was designed to answer three main strategic evaluation questions (SEQs):

1. What are current theories of change (ToCs) and objectives related to SC’s contribution to ABO requirements?
2. How has SC (including cyber-SC) contributed to U.S. peacetime, competition, and contingency ABO in Partner Nations (PNs)?
3. What can DoD do to improve SC’s contribution to achieving peacetime, competition, and contingency ABO in PNs?

**Scope:** PBG performed the evaluation using a theory-driven, collaborative, and utilization-focused, mixed-methods comparative case study approach September 2020 and September 2021. DoD selected the five case study countries to ensure the evaluation included a diverse range of SC PN areas of responsibility (AORs) and relationships. The evaluation examined key systems, policies, and processes that govern SC programs and activities. The evaluation provided findings, conclusions, and recommendations intended to aid DoD in connecting its SC plans, programs, and activities to higher-level objectives related to access.

**Limitations:** PBG encountered some limitations during the evaluation including retrospective evaluation design, scarce and delayed SC program data, metrics, and indicators; and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These limitations caused additional strain on resources and personnel availability during the evaluation period. The evaluation team created a mitigation plan to eliminate, reduce, or offset the undesirable effects of such limitations.

**Definition of ABO and relationship types:** SC programs and activities play a key role for the United States, as they build relationships and facilitate increases in U.S. influence with allies and partners. The evaluation defined influence as the ability of the U.S. military to achieve its national strategic goals and objectives. ABO is defined as the approval for the United States to station, store, or transit troops, aircraft, ships, equipment, supplies, and/or resources through and/or in the sovereign territories of U.S. allies, partners, or willing host nations.

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To better understand SC programs that are most effective at contributing to PNs' willingness to grant ABO access, the evaluation provides three characterizations of U.S.-PN relationships:

- *Nascent relationships* are defined as a relationship where interests of the United States and the PNs have only recently aligned enough to begin conversations about limited access and assistance.
- *Transactional relationships* are characterized by PNs' opportunism, openness to external and/or internal domestic influence, and partnerships with U.S. strategic competitors, as well as a focus on near-term outcomes.
- *Enduring relationships* are characterized by conditions where trust exists implicitly, U.S. and PN interests align, and SC programs and activities are an essential pre-condition for successfully cooperating with and achieving broader access-related objectives.

**Key Findings:** After the data collection phase, PBG provided evidence that logically demonstrated the connection between findings, conclusions, and recommendations by SEQs.

**Evaluation Question 1:** During the relevant timeframe, what were current ToCs and objectives related to SC's contribution to ABO requirements?

*Findings:*

- There was an incorrect assumption that SC guarantees achievement or sustainment of ABO requirements. However, SC was an essential contributor to building positive relationships and trust between the United States and a PN. SC made critical contributions toward creating favorable conditions that may result in achieving ABO and access-related requirements.

*Conclusions:*

- Positive relationships and trust were necessary, but not sufficient conditions for gaining and sustaining ABO requirements.
- SC contributions may be limited if the U.S.-PNs relationship status is challenged by one or more moderating factors, such as PN domestic economic or political context, lack of alignment between interests, and/or influence of U.S strategic competitors.

*Recommendations:*

- Revise a ToC regarding SC being an essential contributor to pre-conditions for ABO requirements such as positive relationships and trust between the United States and PNs.

**Evaluation Question 2:** How has SC contributed to U.S. peacetime, competition, and contingency ABO in PNs? What are the factors that affected SC's contributions to these outcomes?

*Findings:*

- SC activities that centered on interpersonal relationship and trust-building between U.S. and PN professionals were particularly effective at initiating relationships and developing the requisite trust conditions for achieving ABO outcomes.

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- Higher cost SC programs and activities, such as those authorized under 10 U.S.C. 333, along with security assistance activities such as Foreign Military Sales/Foreign Military Financing, were likely to yield higher positive returns for ABO in more enduring U.S.-PN relationships in which the PN looks to the United States as its primary security partner.
- SC programs and activities (e.g., Building Partner Capacity [10 U.S.C. 333]; Institutional Capacity Building [10 U.S.C. 332]; State Partnership Program [10 U.S.C. 341]; Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, including activities funded with Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster Assistance, and Civic-Aid appropriations under 10 U.S.C. 2561; education and training associated with the Irregular Warfare Center and Regional Defense Fellowship Program [10 U.S.C. 345], , and others) were important contributors to interpersonal relationship- and trust building between U.S. Government and PN officials, which in turn contributed to bilateral relationship and trust building.
- There was a lack of DoD guidance for planning and programming to align SC initiatives that may contribute to or set favorable conditions for achieving ABO-related outcomes/objectives.
- There is no guidance on SC options for contingency programming and activities under strained and limited engagement conditions, such as those brought by military coups, which may trigger U.S. policy and statutory restrictions.

*Conclusions:*

- Three categories of SC programs with PNs focused on relationship and trust building at different levels tended to yield higher returns for ABO and access-related objectives: (1) programs that built relationships with PN security professionals; (2) programs that solidified organizational relationships, including the bilateral relationship; and (3) programs that built a positive image of the United States among the PN population.
- Three types of U.S.-PN relationships affected the extent to which SC programs contributed to achieving ABO objectives in a given PN: enduring, nascent, and transactional relationships. Each type of relationship affects the establishment of the conditions necessary for SC programs and activities to contribute to achieving ABO and other access-related objectives.
- Additional factors affecting the extent to which SC contributes to ABO outcomes included: (1) knowledge and information management systems; (2) U.S. interagency coordination; (3) strategic analysis to inform SC investments in peacetime, contingency, and competition contexts; and (4) equipment procurement and delivery issues, challenges, and/or delays.

*Recommendations:*

- Optimize SC planning based on status, or anticipated status, of U.S.-PN relationship. To better ensure SC contributions to ABO objectives in a resource-constrained environment, U.S. SC planners could prioritize the most appropriate and impactful SC programs when interacting with PNs. SC planners should take into account the

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length and nature of the U.S-PN relationship (including whether that relationship is nascent, transactional, and/or enduring).

**Evaluation Question 3:** What could DoD do to improve SC's contribution to achieving peacetime, competition, and contingency ABO in PNs?

*Conclusions:*

- Higher cost equipment deliveries/sales and their generally longer delivery timelines were more likely to become an impediment in U.S.-PN relationships that were nascent and/or transactional. In more established and enduring partnerships, equipment delivery delays had a negative impact but were more likely to be mitigated by the quality and holistic way that U.S. SC programs and equipment are designed and executed.
- Delays in providing SC equipment to partners provided an "opportunity space" for strategic competitors to fill gaps where the U.S. procurement/acquisition process has lagged due to long multi-year procurement timelines from submission of requests to delivery of equipment. Building efficiencies into the process ~~for quicker decisions~~ to provide PNs equipment in a timely manner should help build PNs' confidence in the U.S. commitment to PN capacity building, furthering the ability for SC programs and activities to create opportunities for the United States to obtain and maintain critical access in PNs.
- Assessing U.S.-PN relationships could enhance SC planning efforts by identifying appropriate indicators and metrics to advance U.S. interests regarding access in key geostrategic locations.

*Recommendations:*

- Build further acquisition procurement efficiencies. Granting partners distinct levels of pre-approval for certain types of support/aid would help expedite delivery by fulfilling most of the lead-in requirements in advance.
- Enhance knowledge and information management systems. There should be improvements and evolution toward high-quality, multi-functional knowledge and information management systems for SC program data, Professional Military Education (PME), and key leader engagement activities to support high-quality, strategic SC decision making.
- Expand significant security cooperation initiative (SSCI) planning and allied coordination. A revision of the SSCI programming process could benefit U.S. Government planning and coordination. Allowing the coordination focus towards the development phase, rather than the implementation phase, of the SSCI programming process.
- Develop SC playbook. By developing an SC playbook, the Department could identify options for contingency programming and activities under strained and limited engagement conditions such as those that may be brought about by military coups.

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- Conduct SC steady-state planning. DoD should determine the best process to synchronize steady-state SC programs and activities with posture requirements across Geographic Combatant Commands. Aligning SC with posture requirements will provide DoD with greater fidelity and synchronization of resources in the reemerging era of strategic competition. This process should be a component of the Joint Planning & Execution Community process.

**Evaluation Results:** In accordance with DoDI 5132.14, the Department is considering recommendations and lessons learned from this evaluation to make adjustments to policy, programs, and resource allocation decisions, including the following:

- *Implementing Recommendations:* The Department is developing an internal action plan in coordination with primary stakeholder organizations to consider and implement useful recommendations from this and other evidence-building activities on similar topics.
- *Contributions to security cooperation Performance Management Framework:* DoD disseminated the evaluation teams' findings across the Department to support learning and process improvement. Content of the evaluation will be entered into a security cooperation activity database.