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Department of Defense Strategic Evaluation  
Security Cooperation as a Tool for Strategic Competition (2016-2020)  
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) commissioned PBG Consulting, LLC, to conduct a strategic evaluation of security cooperation as a tool for strategic competition with China and Russia.

This summary, developed by ODASD(GP), provides unclassified primary findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the evaluation report.

The evaluation focused on three overarching questions:

1. According to DoD strategy and planning documents, and DoD security cooperation stakeholders engaged in competition-related security cooperation activities and programs, what are the current theories of change related to competition and security cooperation’s role in competition?
2. To what extent have security cooperation investments over the 2016–2020 period in select partner nations contributed to competition-related goals as defined in DoD policy and guidance documents (using the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy as a baseline)?
3. How can DoD improve its security cooperation theories of change, logical frameworks, security cooperation programs and activities, planning processes, and associated indicators to better integrate with partners’ shared security interests and align security cooperation with the Department’s strategic objectives as outlined in strategic guidance?

**Evaluation Scope and Methodology:** This evaluation focused on security cooperation activities from 2016-2020 in eight countries across three geographic Combatant Commands (CCMDs): Tonga, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea in the Oceania region of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; Georgia, Romania, and Ukraine in the Black Sea region of U.S. European Command; and Chile and Panama in U.S. Southern Command. The evaluation also utilized some limited evidence from Nigeria and Djibouti in U.S. Africa Command and United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan in the U.S. Central Command.

DoD selected case study countries based on its identification of those countries’ importance in strategic competition. The case studies identified a number of factors that could impact how U.S. security cooperation could affect achievement of U.S. strategic competition-related objectives, including the geography of the partner and its proximity to competitors, partner nation context (e.g., domestic interests, security challenges, absorptive capacity), physical presence of U.S. forces, and historical competitor-partner nation ties.

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Four categories of security cooperation activities were examined: engagement (including key leader engagements, joint exercises, personnel exchanges, subject matter expert exchanges); education and training (including International Professional Military Education [IPME], Mobile Training Teams, and Joint Combined Exchange Trainings); building partner capacity efforts, including Institutional Capacity Building [ICB], Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief [HA/DR]; and transfer of equipment and materiel (including Foreign Military Sales [FMS] and/or Section 333 programming).

PBG performed the evaluation using a mixed-methods comparative case study approach, using qualitative and some quantitative data collection methods and data sources, and conducting document review, stakeholder interviews, process analysis, and strategic outcome review. Gaps in data limited the evaluation teams' ability to fully assess the impact of security cooperation activities, outside of observations provided by stakeholders. After completion of the case studies, PBG analyzed its data to produce findings, conclusions, and recommendations. A review of policy and planning documents from after the evaluation period was conducted to inform recommendations and maximize their utility to stakeholders.

**Evaluating Strategic Competition Objectives:** The current legal requirement for assessment, monitoring, and evaluation was established in 10 U.S.C. 383, which was enacted via the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017. Prior to 2017, the Department did not have a comprehensive program of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation to measure security cooperation contributions to strategic objectives.

The evaluation team identified strategic-competition related objectives in Theater and Country Campaign Plans and proposed a general theory of change on the basis of those objectives. This implicit theory of change posited that more engagement, education and training, programs to build partner capacity, and equipment enhancement (inputs) would lead to strengthening the U.S.-partner nation relationship, improving partner nation capacity, and sustaining the United States as the primary security partner (intermediate outcomes). Achievement of these intermediate objectives was then expected to contribute to strategic outcomes (although during the relevant time period those objectives were rarely characterized explicitly in terms of strategic competition, i.e., the balance of regional or global military power or regional or global influence). The evaluation team then tested this implicit theory of change against the empirical evidence uncovered through the evaluation's case studies.

**Conclusions:** The evaluation team reached a number of conclusions, including the following.

**Adaptation to strategic competition requirements were ongoing during the evaluation period:** Many security cooperation authorities, programs, and activities were used effectively toward the achievement of strategic competition-related objectives, even though many activities were not originally planned or conceived for that explicit purpose. Over the course of the evaluation period (2016–2020), DoD instituted reforms to guide the enterprise in the use of security cooperation for strategic competition; however, at the time of writing, the concept of strategic competition by the security cooperation

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enterprise remained ill-defined and lacked specificity, which inhibited operationalization of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives. Security cooperation efforts often shared the vague intermediate objective of making the United States the “security partner of choice” or “primary security partner.” In addition, the majority of DoD policy and doctrine remained more narrowly focused on intermediate outcomes. Common definitions and measures of competition-related strategic outcomes, such as global and regional influence and military power, did not appear to exist during the evaluation period.

- **Competitor approaches vary:** Russia and China took different approaches to strategic competition in the case studies, and they tailored their approaches for each country and region. Generally speaking, China led with economic, diplomatic, and informational tools to expand its influence in key regions across the globe.; Russia acted aggressively with all elements of national power in its near abroad; globally, it leveraged its well-developed arms industry to position itself as a clear alternative to the United States in discreet areas of military cooperation and seized on opportunities to undermine U.S. influence where the United States and partner nations had differences.
- **Partner nation context matters:** Partner nations’ interests and domestic priorities drove relationships with competitors. The partner nations that were the subject of the case studies generally resisted exclusivity with any one competitor, instead choosing to engage and balance through diplomatic, economic, informational, and even military relationships with multiple competitors. Additionally, contextual factors—including the geography of the partner nation and its proximity to competitors, partner nation absorptive capacity, physical presence of U.S. forces or embassies, and historical competitor-partner nation ties—affected the ability of security cooperation programs to contribute to competition-related goals. In most case studies, security cooperation planners were aware of these factors, but it was at times unclear as to how these considerations entered into security cooperation planning and programming decisions about what activities would be effective and what objectives could realistically be achieved.
- **Certain low-cost security cooperation programs were more effective for competition-related objectives:** Despite lack of robust data, security cooperation authorities, programs, and activities seemed to make measurable contributions towards strategic competition–related intermediate outcomes (e.g., building capacity, strengthening relationships). This was especially so in the Black Sea Region, where strategic competition was intense. Security cooperation stakeholders in these case studies emphasized the importance of IPME, SPP, and HA/DR programming, stressing that these programs often enhanced relationships (and therefore influence) across multiple levels of the partner nation civilian and military leadership, security forces at the organizational level, and the partner nation population.

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- **Other elements of security cooperation were perceived as slow and less responsive to partner nation security, prompting partner nations to seek out competitor alternatives:** There were several factors that impacted this, including that some critical partner nation security concerns (illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, climate change) did not specifically fall under DoD authorities. It was also challenging to apply DoD authorities to address unconventional threats (cyber, misinformation, military information support operations, psychological operations, resilience or resistance). Restrictions on certain security cooperation authorities for only “developing countries” appeared to adversely affect competition-related security cooperation programming in some partner nations studied. While partner nations often viewed U.S. security assistance and security cooperation as qualitatively better than that of competitors, the perception of a lack of responsiveness and timeliness at times prompted partner nations to seek out competitor alternatives.
- **Data management issues affect the quality of evaluations and learning:** Limited systematic data collection of security cooperation program inputs, outputs, and outcomes during the evaluation period reduced DoD’s ability at the time to fully characterize security cooperation activities’ impact on strategic competition objectives.

**Recommendations:** The evaluation team crafted the following recommendations to inform future (i.e., post-2020) DoD decision making on security cooperation as a tool for strategic competition. Some of these recommendations have subsequently been implemented, in whole or in part:

- Update key documents and concepts. DoD could improve security cooperation as a tool for strategic competition by updating key directives and doctrine while more clearly defining “strategic competition,” including creating measurable indicators.
- Integrate and coordinate Department of State (DOS) and DoD planning and evaluations. Given strategic competitors’ effective leveraging of all elements, including non-military elements, of national power, DoD and DOS might consider a similar approach, collaborating earlier in the security cooperation process to develop integrated strategic objectives and then using the planning process for increased collaboration. Collaboration on monitoring and evaluations would also contribute to shared theories of change and understanding of effective approaches in order to achieve whole-of-government or whole-of-society efforts needed for competition.
- Set realistic goals and maximize security cooperation effects. In some cases, the United States could seek to support a capable ally in being the partner of choice. Likewise, accounting for and adjusting security cooperation programming in response to partner nation context has the potential to improve its impact.
- Expand or enhance low-cost, high-impact programs. DoD could consider ways to build on existing low-cost, high impact programs—such as IPME, SPP, and HA/DR—and expand its information/intelligence-related and maritime domain awareness-related, as well as irregular warfare programming, to better focus on countering the strategies of PRC and Russia.

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- Update authorities for strategic competition. DoD could consider examining several initiatives related to authorities that might improve existing tools for competition. These might include a strategic competition-specific authority that could allow the Secretary of Defense to fast-track activities to assist countries targeted by strategic competitors, as well as regional funding authorities to address similar challenges of geographically adjacent partners.
- Enhance data collection and management. DoD could take additional steps to improve data management to improve security cooperation planning and execution. These may include:
  - Establishing a security cooperation data governance board that could determine, mandate, and centralize the input, output, and outcome data that must be collected and entered into Socium.
  - Incorporating both negative and positive incentives for data collection and management into DoD Directives to ensure stakeholders adhere to the data collection requirements established by the governance board.
  - Coordinating with DOS to build assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) into Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) planning and execution.
  - Taking full advantage of the artificial intelligence and data acceleration (AIDA) efforts to mine and clean existing data at the CCMDs and U.S. country teams.
  - Leveraging open-source and internally-sourced data that can provide outcome indicators for measurable strategic competition objectives based on the concepts of influence and integrated deterrence.

**Evaluation Results:** In accordance with DoDI 5132.14, , the Department is considering recommendations and lessons learned from this evaluation to adjust 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. A number of evaluation recommendations are being implemented within the design and review of ongoing security cooperation efforts and the Department's first learning agenda for security cooperation, the 2022-2026 Learning and Evaluation Agenda for Partnerships (LEAP). For example, ODASD(GP) and DSCA are working with State on ways to collaborate earlier in the security cooperation process, such as the country assessment and strategy development phase, and to integrate and streamline monitoring and evaluation approaches. In addition, DoD has added security cooperation efforts under Title 10, U.S. Code to address irregular and non-conventional challenges.
- *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.