



Research Agenda

June 2023

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) emphasizes the importance of close collaboration with our network of alliances and partnerships as “foundational for U.S. national security interests and for our collective ability to address the challenges that the [People’s Republic of China] and Russia present, while responsibly managing the array of other threats we face” (2022 NDS, 14). The important role of Security Cooperation in collaborating with this network provides an opportunity for Security Cooperation professionals to learn from extensive experience in partnering with foreign nations on shared security challenges. Improving the practice of Security Cooperation involves not only enhancing programmatic efficiency and effectiveness but also understanding—at a theoretical level—why different phenomena occur, from decisions on how governments invest in, develop, and employ military instruments of power to how security sectors govern security force behavior, adopt professional military capabilities, and generate combat power.

The Defense Security Cooperation University (DSCU) strives to be the center of intellectual life for the Security Cooperation enterprise; we prepare a global network of professionals to achieve outcomes that enhance the security of the United States and its partners and allies. The purpose of DSCU’s research agenda is to build knowledge that improves the practice of Security Cooperation. The intent is not to prescribe research activities but to spark dialogue, debate, evidence-gathering, and theory development in the field of Security Cooperation. The primary audience is researchers within and outside the Security Cooperation workforce, including students at professional military education institutions, who seek to contribute to the field of Security Cooperation. The knowledge generated serves to professionalize the U.S. Security Cooperation workforce, including military and civilian officials of the Department of Defense (DoD), and to inform stakeholders across the federal government and industry engaged in international cooperation. Ultimately, this research agenda advances our national security by strengthening our network of alliances and partnerships.

The vision for these research efforts is to produce a connected Security Cooperation community that uses evidence-based knowledge to continuously learn and improve. This vision responds to a Congressional mandate to “incorporat[e] lessons learned from prior Security Cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense” (Section 383(b)(1) of Title 10, United States Code), and it aligns with Office of Management and Budget standards and best practices for evidence-based policymaking. The research produced will respond to recent Secretary of Defense guidance to build intellectual capital for Security Cooperation success in support of professionalizing the workforce.

This research agenda identifies the most urgent knowledge gaps in the Security Cooperation community, and it aligns with the five-year [Learning and Evaluation Agenda for Partnership \(LEAP\)](#) framework from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities, as well as the [Department of State Learning Agenda, 2022–2026](#). The document itself identifies key debates in three areas of Security Cooperation: strategy, practice, and enablers. The combination of these efforts provides an opportunity to learn from past Security Cooperation experience and the breadth of scholarship on these issues.

Strategy

What are effective strategies for using Security Cooperation as an instrument of statecraft to advance national defense and foreign policy priorities?

In the introduction to the 2022 NDS, the Secretary of Defense states that “the Department of Defense owes it to our All-Volunteer Force and the American people to provide... a clear and rigorous strategy for advancing our defense and security goals.” Additionally, the NDS serves as “a call to action for the defense enterprise to incorporate Allies and partners at every stage of defense planning” as we anchor our strategy in Allies and partners and advancing regional goals (2022 NDS, 14). Not only does DoD owe a *national defense* strategy for advancing our defense and security goals, DoD also owes *Security Cooperation* strategies that contribute to implementing the NDS. Historically, our Security Cooperation efforts have lacked the strategic clarity to drive planning, programming, budgeting, and execution for Security Cooperation. Further evidence-based research and critical inquiry—led by DSCU’s Security Cooperation Research and Lessons Learned Institute in collaboration with key stakeholders—will help the Department better understand how best to make choices on strategies informed by a body of knowledge, because the cost of failure is too high for global security and for our armed forces.

Some of the key debates around this topic include (list is illustrative, not comprehensive):

- Understanding the extent to which deterrence can be achieved through Security Cooperation
- Conditions that have led to Security Cooperation failures and successes in history
- Approaches to strategy formulation that yield better (more successful) strategies
- Coordination with international partners and regional actors on strategy development
- Institutional barriers that prevent effective strategy development
- Accounting for unintended effects, negative or positive, of strategy choices
- Prioritizing limited resources to buy down risk and/or build stronger partnerships
- Addressing crisis response and preparedness across strategies and approaches
- Avoiding dependency while enabling solutions
- Promoting and enabling like-minded Security Cooperation exporters
- Extent to which contested logistics inform Security Cooperation strategic choices
- Coordinating and balancing across foreign assistance considerations in the security sector
- Barriers to effective intelligence cooperation with partners when developing strategies
- The effects of extended lines of communication on Security Cooperation
- Logistics coordination and defense industrial base organization

Evidence-building activities conducted in support of the DoD *LEAP* framework and the Department of State *Learning Agenda, 2022–2026* will inform and contribute to research and critical inquiry on these topics. In particular, learning questions focused on deterrence, campaigning, capacity building, and crisis response preparedness are most relevant to this line of inquiry.

Practice

What approaches work best to execute Security Cooperation strategies and achieve defense and foreign policy objectives?

The saying, “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results,” credited to Sir Winston Churchill, is a reminder that a well-developed strategy alone does not yield results. Strategy needs to be executed effectively. The history of Security Cooperation is fraught with both successes and failures, resulting from actions or realities both within and outside our control. DSCU welcomes the opportunity to evaluate and collect lessons learned from decades of DoD Security Cooperation application. Security Cooperation reforms since 2017 have sought to improve the assessment, planning, monitoring, execution, evaluation, and administration of Security Cooperation programs and activities. While progress is being made, more evidence-based research is needed to improve the practice and enable more effective “ways” to achieve the “ends” identified in Security Cooperation strategies. Experienced Security Cooperation practitioners recognize the centrality of the partner, and that the “ways” and the “means” cannot only refer to U.S. efforts. We must also incorporate partner efforts and contributions to achieve shared Security Cooperation objectives.

Some of the key debates around this topic include (list is illustrative, not comprehensive):

- Understanding readiness and will to fight of foreign partner forces
- Analyzing institutional realities to inform relevant and achievable Security Cooperation plans
- Effective methods for co-creation of Security Cooperation approaches with partners
- Understanding conditions that have led to Security Cooperation failures and successes
- Encouraging responsible and effective employment of capabilities by foreign partners
- Enabling foreign partner institutional reforms relevant to achieving shared objectives
- Supporting absorption, integration, and sustainment of defense capabilities
- Readiness of U.S. defense industrial base in a competitive Security Cooperation environment
- Enabling and exercising interoperability for combined operations and planning
- Promoting defense reforms consistent with international norms, values, and behaviors
- Methods for estimating partner will and absorptive capacity, and applying that knowledge
- Cooperation on new or emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence
- Interagency coordination on economic development; security sector assistance; democracy, rights, and governance assistance; and diversity, equity, and inclusion assistance programs
- Transition from interoperability and access to adopting norm and values
- Institutional prerequisites for building cyber institutional capabilities
- Improving crisis response preparedness and operational planning
- Piggybacking on existing partner reform efforts
- Recognizing political, economic, societal, cultural, and security conditions that partners face

Evidence-building activities conducted in support of the DoD *LEAP* framework and the Department of State *Learning Agenda, 2022–2026* will inform and contribute to research and critical inquiry on these topics. Learning questions focused related to capacity building, partner centric approaches, leveraging institutional capacity building, sustainable effectiveness, and governance are most relevant to this line of inquiry.

Enablers

Are existing Security Cooperation tools fit for purpose and sufficient for performing the task?

For decades, the Department exercised means-based planning—strategy defined by the allocation of available resources, or means, as opposed to a theory of success—to develop and justify Security Cooperation activities. National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs) since 2016 have emphasized a demand for strategy-based planning in Security Cooperation. The decentralized and distributed nature of the Security Cooperation enterprise, despite efforts in law to centralize oversight, management, and resource prioritization, presents barriers to coordinated and aligned resource planning driven by strategy. Just like defense reforms with our Allies and partners, the DoD faces its own unique challenges in implementing the changes necessary for effective strategy formulation and execution. The resources devoted to Security Cooperation continue to be based on prior year execution rates, rather than a rigorous analysis of what is needed to implement the breadth of activities necessary for effectively executing Security Cooperation strategies. Additionally, the 2022 NDS focuses attention on building enduring advantages, recognizing that people execute the strategy, and directs the Department to “attract, train, and promote a workforce with the skills and abilities [needed] to creatively solve national security challenges in a complex global environment” (2022 NDS, 20). Major changes underway within the Security Cooperation workforce begin to address what is needed, but more evidence-based research would support improved decision-making by DoD on key enablers.

Some of the key debates around this topic include (list is illustrative, not comprehensive):

- Real scale, scope, and composition of the Security Cooperation workforce according to law
- Defense industrial base forecasting and stockpile management
- Capturing lessons from security sector assistance reforms
- Addressing capacity constraints of providers within a Security Cooperation planning process
- Use of evidence by policymakers and practitioners to improve Security Cooperation decisions
- Review and accessibility to a knowledge base on Security Cooperation
- Interagency cooperation and planning around security sector assistance
- Strategy-based resource planning incentives and disincentives
- Exploration of new methods or use of repurposed old methods to learn and improve
- Consultation with Congress on authorities and appropriations needed for Security Cooperation
- Coordinating between Title 10 and Title 22 activities
- Professionalizing the Security Cooperation workforce
- Managing evidence to inform decision-making and implementation

Evidence-building activities conducted in support of the DoD *LEAP* Framework and the Department of State *Learning Agenda, 2022–2026* will inform and contribute to research and critical inquiry on these topics. In particular, learning questions focused on resource and workforce planning, sustainability of effectiveness, and methods and evidence are most relevant to this line of inquiry.

Appendix: Existing Learning Questions

U.S. Department of State

Learning Agenda, 2022–2026

The Department of State’s leadership convened a team of internal, multidisciplinary experts from across the Department to launch the Department’s first Learning Agenda process. This process resulted in eight priority questions, the second of which relates to Security Cooperation:

2. How can the Department improve the effectiveness and sustainability of its foreign assistance efforts?

One of the Department’s most critical functions is to plan for and oversee the use of approximately \$40 billion in annual State and USAID programs paid for with foreign assistance funds. U.S. foreign assistance advances U.S. values and strategic interests globally with allies and partners, strengthening security; supporting democracy and human rights; and promoting an inclusive international economic system that provides opportunities for all. The USAID Learning Agenda promotes the generation and use of evidence as USAID advances the Administration’s highest priorities, including responding to the climate crisis, building resilience to shocks including COVID-19, combatting authoritarianism and corruption, addressing the root causes of migration, and strengthening operational effectiveness to catalyze inclusive and locally driven development. The State Department’s Agency Learning Agenda also includes a study of foreign assistance, given the Department’s role in directing, managing, overseeing, and improving foreign assistance efforts worldwide. The Department decided to scope its study of the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance to four sub-sectors of assistance where foreign policy shifts and changing global landscapes over the past decade have necessitated shifting foreign assistance strategies: economic development; security sector assistance; democracy, rights, and governance assistance programs; and diversity, equity, and inclusion assistance programs.

Sub-Questions

- 2.1. What types of State Department and USAID foreign assistance programs that seek to enhance partners’ economic growth have made a sustainable effect in a partner’s economic development between 2014 and 2019? Where and under what conditions?
- 2.2. What factors have contributed to the success or shortcomings of State Department efforts to help partners advance the capacity, accountability, and professionalism of their security forces? How can the Department improve the effectiveness of its security sector assistance programs?
- 2.3. Where and under what conditions has the State Department’s foreign assistance led to short-term gains and longer-term effects in democracy, rights, and governance? What types of approaches have had lasting effects and could be replicated or refined in future foreign assistance strategies and programming?
- 2.4. What policies and practices can be most effective in strengthening the role of underserved and underrepresented groups—at the intersections of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, ability, and age—in the formulation and implementation of foreign assistance programs?

U.S. Department of Defense

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategies, Plans, and Capabilities

Learning and Evaluation Agenda for Partnerships (LEAP)

The *LEAP* framework builds on existing DoD processes and guidance, streamlining Security Cooperation learning and evidence building under a common framework to increase coordination, collaboration, and deconfliction across the Security Cooperation community. Robust Security Cooperation evidence will inform key decisions to improve Security Cooperation practice, impact, and return on investment, factoring into employment of DoD resources at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

The learning questions listed below—formulated from existing DoD guidance and in consultation with key DoD and other national security stakeholders—support decision-making on leadership priorities related to strategy and policy formulation, Security Cooperation planning, improving DoD capacity, as well as understanding “what works.” For example, the answers to these learning questions could assist in the development of updated guidance for NDS implementation, updated DoD Directives and Instructions, development of theater strategic plans for Security Cooperation, resource allocation of SC activities, and revisions to curriculum and approaches to develop the Security Cooperation workforce.

Deterrence

How does Security Cooperation contribute to integrated deterrence approaches tailored to specific adversaries and scenarios, and help build enduring advantages with allies and partners?

Campaigning

What approaches to active campaigning and burden sharing enable improved access and influence with partners for effective deterrence?

Capacity Building

How effective are defense capacity building programs at expanding and enabling a network of like-minded, capable, and interoperable allies and partners to perform desired roles and achieve regional security objectives?

Crisis Response Preparedness

How is Security Cooperation enabling preparedness for crisis and disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and emerging transboundary challenges?

Partner-Centric Approaches

To what extent does partner nation political will, absorptive capacity, and institutional analysis influence Security Cooperation strategy, planning, and resource decisions?

Leveraging Institutional Capacity Building

What approaches work best to leverage institutional capacity building in support of the NDS and other national security objectives, including military effectiveness, rule of law, anti-corruption, and human rights?

Resourcing and Workforce Planning

What approaches work best to plan and resource multi-year Security Cooperation strategies, bridge gaps, and deliver a professional, diversified, and right-sized Security Cooperation workforce?

Methods and Evidence

What approaches work best to improve Security Cooperation assessment, monitoring, and evaluation methods, access to and use of data, and to build a sufficient evidence base to inform Security Cooperation decision-making?