

TOWARD A STRATEGIC VISION:

A HISTORY OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2017 NATIONAL DEFENSE
AUTHORIZATION ACT SECURITY COOPERATION REFORMS



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TOWARD A STRATEGIC VISION:

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SECURITY COOPERATION is a core national defense mission that directly supports strategic objectives. Security cooperation programs and activities prioritize the development of ally and partner nation capabilities to create warfighting advantages and enhance burden sharing.¹ As a matter of policy, the United States is committed to building and expanding partnerships with willing and capable nations, regional organizations, and other actors. Security cooperation especially plays a crucial role in the Indo-Pacific, where leadership has prioritized fostering partnerships to neutralize threats to national security and reestablish deterrence, particularly in the face of Chinese aggression.² Effective security cooperation is the cornerstone of this effort.

While the United States has engaged in security cooperation activities since the Early Republic, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, sparked a major expansion of the Department of Defense's (DoD) role in security cooperation as well as the emergence of a "by, with, and through" strategy with partners to

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *DoD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, DoD Directive 5132.03, (DoD, 2016), <https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/>.

² U.S. Department of Defense, "Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force," DoD (January 25, 2025), <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4040940/secretary-hegseths-message-to-the-force/>.

address common threats.³ Prior to 9/11, the Department of State (DoS) primarily led U.S. security assistance efforts, authorized under Title 22 of U.S.C. (Foreign Relations), with DoD implementing security assistance programs in accordance with State’s guidance. DoD’s role in security cooperation, operating under Title 10 (Armed Services), included small, narrowly focused programming on counternarcotics, counterproliferation, humanitarian assistance, and assistance for training and equipping NATO and non-member countries.⁴ While the United States tailored these programs, such as Partnership for Peace and the Warsaw Initiative, to promote U.S. national security interests prior to 9/11, the Global War on Terror exposed the need for a more integrated and robust approach to building enduring, relevant capabilities to enable partners to collaborate in tackling mutual security threats.⁵

To address the demands of combating terrorism around the globe, as well as to support security force development in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States expanded Title 10 assistance programs and invested more resources into what was then termed “building partner capacity” (BPC).⁶ Many of the new

³ Bolko J. Skorupski and Nina M. Serafino, *DoD Security Cooperation: An Overview of Authorities and Issues* (Congressional Research Service, 2016), 1, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R44602>. On September 5, 2025, President Donald Trump released Executive Order 14347 “Restoring the United States Department of War” authorizing the secondary title “Department of War” to the Department of Defense. When referencing ongoing or future defense activities, this paper uses Department of War (DoW). When referencing past activities, prior to the September 2025 Executive Order, the paper uses Department of Defense (DoD).

⁴ The Security Assistance Act of 2000 defined security assistance as programs authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and Arms Export Control Act of 1976 to provide defense articles (22 U.S.C. § 2763), military education and training (22 U.S.C. § 2347), and defense-related services (22 U.S.C. § 2302). The Defense Reform Initiative of 1997 introduced the term security cooperation to include Department of Defense–funded international programs, such as armaments cooperation, that promote the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States. For more information, see Security Assistance Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-280, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/4919> and William S. Cohen, *Defense Reform Initiative Report* (DoD, 1997).

⁵ Cohen, *Defense Reform Initiative Report*, 46; William “Bill” Monahan (former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Regional Security and Security Assistance, Bureau of Political Military Affairs), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., December 20, 2024; Skorupski and Serafino, *DoD Security Cooperation*, 1; President George H. W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (White House, 1990), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1990.pdf>.

⁶ Monahan, interview, December 20, 2024; David E. Thaler, Michael J. McNerney, Beth Grill, Jefferson P. Marquis, and Amanda Kadlec, *From Patchwork to Framework: A Review of Title 10*

authorities were country specific or theater specific and limited to counterterrorism activities. Over the 2000s and 2010s, Congress approved dozens of new authorities for the DoD to address “urgent and emergent” needs, primarily related to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷

This rapid expansion resulted in a “patchwork” of more than one hundred authorities scattered across Title 10. The term “patchwork” referenced the “need to patch together multiple authorities and associated yet unsynchronized processes, resources, programs, and organizations to execute individual initiatives with partner nations.”⁸ One interviewee, who worked in both United States European Command (EUCOM) and United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), described it as a “house of cards” that needed to be properly configured to plan and implement a security cooperation activity.⁹

Recognizing the need to reform the patchwork to make it more manageable and to better align resources, programs, and authorities to strategic priorities, DoD undertook three related reform initiatives: legislative streamlining of authorities; issuance of a DoD Directive on security cooperation policy; and creation of the Department’s first Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation (AM&E) framework. A review of Title 10 security cooperation authorities identified redundancies, gaps, and irrelevant authorities. This review led to significant reforms in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, including the codification of authorities in a new Chapter 16 in Title 10 U.S.C. The reforms consolidated authorities, redesigned security cooperation planning processes, and enhanced DoD’s ability to work effectively with allies and partners in support of U.S. national security strategy.

While the reforms have had success in some areas, such as the consolidation of authorities, a more strategic approach to capacity building, and the professionalization of the security cooperation workforce, the enterprise still faces challenges in institutional capacity building (ICB) and AM&E. Security

Authorities for Security Cooperation (RAND, 2016), iii; Skorupski and Serafino, *DoD Security Cooperation*, 1–3.

⁷ Thomas “Tommy” W. Ross, Jr., (former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation), interview by Angela M. Riotto, November 13, 2024.

⁸ Thaler et al., *From Patchwork to Framework*, iii.

⁹ Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

cooperation professionals also noted that implementation of Significant Security Cooperation Initiatives (SSCIs) requires further attention and refinement.

Based on interviews with stakeholders across the security cooperation enterprise and a review of primary sources, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the FY 2017 security cooperation reforms. It examines the historical context leading to the reforms, the legislative process, implementation, successes, and challenges. It also offers recommendations for future improvements. This report equips the security cooperation workforce with relevant information about Title 10 authorities, their origin, purposes, and uses. The resulting authorities may still seem like a “house of cards,” but now that house comes with a blueprint and authorized building materials with which to build an effective security cooperation initiative.¹⁰

It is important to note that this report does not analyze *all* Title 10 security cooperation authorities since 9/11, nor does it evaluate their effectiveness. For more information on authority specifics, please visit the *Security Assistance Management Manual* or the *Transparency Handbook* on the Defense Security Cooperation Agency’s website.¹¹ Given the reforms’ focus on Title 10 authorities, this report also does not discuss Foreign Military Sales (FMS) or Title 22 reform efforts.

Leading Up to the Reforms

9/11 and the Global War on Terror

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 triggered a major shift in U.S. national security strategy, leading to significant growth of Title 10 security cooperation authorities. President George W. Bush’s administration prioritized working with allies

¹⁰ Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹¹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Security Assistance Management Manual*, DSCA Manual 5105.38, <https://samm.dsca.mil/>; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Transparency Handbook: Building Trust Through Transparency* (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2017), https://www.dsca.mil/Portals/157/Publications/DSCA%20Transparency%20Handbook/DSCA%20Transparency%20Handbook%202017.pdf?ver=WpTElWjcnBesfrZE_Buvvg%3d%3d×tamp=1736735984830.

and partners as part of the Global War on Terror. The administration perceived the existing security assistance framework, centered around the intentionally deliberate FMS system and the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) system, to be too slow and inflexible to meet the rapidly evolving threats.¹² Additionally, FMS and FMF tended to focus on what the recipient country wanted to buy or acquire, rather than the capabilities the DoD or combatant commander wanted the country to develop for the purpose of counterterrorism operations. The Department of State was more focused on the former, while the Department of Defense preferred the latter.¹³ As a result, DoD sought and received authorities from Congress with the intent to provide military assistance with greater flexibility and speed.¹⁴

The Bush administration also viewed security cooperation as key to its strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Declaring “as they stand up, we’ll stand down,” President Bush tied the U.S. exit strategy in Iraq to the efficacy of efforts to build the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces—and a similar approach guided coalition efforts in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Challenges in both conflicts, ranging from governance shortfalls to needs to jumpstart local economies and build domestic infrastructure, resulted in additional authorities for DoD.

Between 2001 and 2016, Title 10 authorities expanded in response to strategic and operational demands. By the time of the FY 2017 reforms, there were between 100 and 143 distinct security cooperation authorities.¹⁶ This rapid, piecemeal

¹² Christel Fonzo-Eberhard (former staff member in the Office of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Partnership Strategy and Stability Operations), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., August 1, 2025.

¹³ William Monahan (former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Regional Security and Security Assistance, Bureau of Political Military Affairs), conversation with Angela M. Riotto, June 2025; Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁴ Paul Wolfowitz to Donald Rumsfeld, “Train and Equip Authorities,” memorandum, May 2, 2004; Fonzo-Eberhard, interview.

¹⁵ President George W. Bush, interview by Jim Lehrer, *PBS News*, December 16, 2005, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/president-george-w-bush>.

¹⁶ A RAND Corporation report identified 123 DoD security cooperation authorities; a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found 143. The GAO study conflates authorities, budget lines, programs, and activities, leading to redundancy. For example, it counts at least seven different “security cooperation efforts” based on a single (now repealed) authority, 10 U.S.C. § 1051, based on the specific actors rather than the authority or type of engagement.



U.S. Army provides equipment to Iraqi Security Forces to enhance their lethality and readiness, May 19, 2016 (credit: SSG Joshua E. Powell).

expansion resulted in what one Congressional Research Service analyst called “a confusing, inefficient ‘patchwork’ of authorities.”¹⁷ For some, the increase of Title 10 authorities contributed to the perceived “militarization” of U.S. foreign policy.¹⁸ For others, the increase of DoD authorities emerged as a necessary response to address gaps in existing authorities and resources in meeting the needs of current operations. A former Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) staffer clarified, “We needed partners that were capable, militarily capable, and we needed partners that were interoperable with U.S. forces, and that was something that really had not been the focus of FMF up to that point. And so,

Thaler et al., *From Patchwork to Framework*, iii; GAO, *Building Partner Capacity: Inventory of Department of Defense Security Cooperation and Department of State Security Assistance Efforts* (GAO, 2017).

¹⁷ Nina M. Serafino, *Security Assistance and Cooperation: Shared Responsibility of the Departments of State and Defense* (Congressional Research Service, 2016), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R44444.pdf>.

¹⁸ Serafino, *Security Assistance and Cooperation*, ii.

really, the big push for the kind of remedial birth of DoD security assistance authorities was coming out of that.”¹⁹

To address these gaps, Congress approved a series of temporary DoD programs designed to provide more targeted and timely support.²⁰ Congress intended these programs to be short-term solutions for specific crises. Many in Congress “thought that this is a temporary problem that we need to address, that hopefully it will go away once we solve Iraq, once we solve Afghanistan, we will not have need for the Iraqi Security Forces Fund. We will not have need for the Afghan Security Forces Fund, or East Africa . . . this is not an authority that will stay on the books forever.”²¹ The result was a “patchwork of hope” because Congress hoped that these temporary authorities would achieve their objectives and not be required for the long term.²² Another SASC staffer offered an additional explanation; he shared that Congress approved new DoD authorities in deference to demands from combatant commanders.²³ Both of these explanations highlight the increasing demands of the Global War on Terror and the perceived inability of the existing security assistance system to respond to them quickly and sufficiently. While Congress may have assumed these were temporary authorities, there is ample evidence that the Bush administration sought to codify various authorities to meet threats to national security. This reveals early tension between DoD’s needs and demands to fight the Global War on Terror and congressional perceptions of the authorities’ temporality.

Section 1206

One of the first major authorities created to address the terrorism threat was Section 1206 of the FY 2006 NDAA. Initially, Congress provided DoD the authority to use up to \$200 million of the department’s operating budget to provide training

¹⁹ Interview with former Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

²⁰ Evelyn Farkas (former Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff member), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., August 6, 2025.

²¹ Monahan, interview, December 20, 2024.

²² Monahan, interview, January 17, 2025.

²³ Interview with former Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

and equipment to partner governments.²⁴ The need grew from early experiences working with partners to disrupt terrorist organizations. Former senior leader in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy (OSD(P)) Thomas “Todd” Harvey remembers one case that proved particularly instructive: “We’re trying to equip Georgia to respond to some of the CT [counterterrorism] challenges they had . . . and we had to draw on like nine different authorities and five or six different funding sources, and so that became sort of our case study of why we needed a 1206.”²⁵ Commonly referred to as “Global Train and Equip,” or simply “1206,” this authority enabled DoD to train and equip foreign military partners for counterterrorism and stability operations.²⁶ At the time, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained, “Section 1206 provides commanders a means to fill long-standing gaps in the effort to help other nations build and sustain capable military forces. It allows Defense and State to act in months rather than in years.”²⁷ DoD officials cited the importance of building capacity among partners to fight the Global War on Terror and believed that Section 1206 would provide greater flexibility to respond quickly to emerging threats and opportunities around the globe.²⁸

Early on, critics questioned the expansion of DoD’s role into the DoS’s traditional mission space.²⁹ Originally, 1206 was intended as a supplement to

²⁴ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/1815>.

²⁵ Thomas “Todd” Harvey (former Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., March 21, 2025; Donald Rumsfeld to Gen. Dick Myers, “Georgia Train and Equip,” memorandum, August 5, 2004.

²⁶ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206; Eric Thompson and Patricio Asfura-Heim, *Assessments of the Impact of 1206-Funded Projects in Selected Countries: Lebanon, Pakistan, Yemen, Sao Tome, and Principe* (Center for Naval Analyses, 2008), 1.

²⁷ *Building Partnership Capacity and Development of the Interagency Process, Hearing Before the H.R. Committee of Armed Services*, 110th Cong. (2009) (statement of Hon. Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg45514/pdf/CHRG-110hhrg45514.pdf>.

²⁸ Jeffrey “Jeb” Nadaner (former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Partnership Strategy and Stability Operations), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Peter Venoit, October 16, 2024; Monahan, interview, December 20, 2024; Alan Gorowitz (Senior Strategy Advisor, Defense Security Cooperation Agency), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., December 16, 2024.

²⁹ GAO, *Section 1206 Security Assistance Program—Findings on Criteria, Coordination, and*

FMF—a way to address urgent needs within the broader framework of long-term security cooperation. Authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, FMF is the primary program for providing grant assistance to foreign countries to purchase U.S. defense articles, services, and training. While FMF provides significant financial assistance, fosters long-term relationships, and supports the U.S. defense industry, it can be slow to implement due to the lengthy letters of offer and acceptance (LOA) process, congressional notification, and procurement timelines. While the DoD and Congress intended for 1206 to expedite this process by using already appropriated FMF funds to address critical defense needs, some in Congress and the State Department expressed concerns over its circumvention of congressional oversight and encroachment on the Department of State’s traditional role.³⁰ Initially, DoS was to have a strong voice in determining whether assistance should be provided to ensure alignment with broader U.S. foreign policy goals. The process required that State “concur” with DoD’s proposal.³¹ While in theory this permitted DoS some control, in practice its ability to “non-concur” was often limited. DoD often presented packages as urgent and essential for national security, putting pressure on State to concur. The speed requirement of 1206 also did not lend itself to lengthy State Department review processes.

Congress seemed to predict these tensions between the Defense and State Departments in the FY 2006 NDAA Conference Report: “The conferees believe it is important that any changes in statutory authorities for foreign military assistance do not have unintended consequences for the effective coordination of U.S. foreign policy writ large, nor should they detract from the Department of Defense’s focus on its core responsibilities, particularly the warfighting tasks for which it is uniquely suited.”³² The Conference Report further stressed that 1206 was a temporary, two-year pilot program that should be reviewed before being reauthorized. Two years later, in 2008, a congressionally led task force on nontraditional security assistance reported “a number of legislators on Capitol

Implementation (GAO, 2007).

³⁰ Farkas, interview.

³¹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206(d).

³² House of Representatives, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 1815,” H. R. Rep. 109-360, <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/109th-congress/house-report/360/1>; National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-163.

Hill have expressed fear that Section 1206 could undermine the coherence of U.S. foreign policy, by allowing combatant commanders to assist foreign security forces without taking account of broader U.S. considerations at stake in bilateral and regional relationships.”³³ Despite these concerns, Congress extended and expanded 1206.

Others also expressed concerns that Section 1206 was not meeting its original intent. Jeffrey “Jeb” Nadaner, who served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Partnership Strategy and Stability Operations at the time, admits that ambassadors and other senior leaders increasingly sought to use 1206 for “deliverables”—tangible announcements of relationship augmentations that can be made public for broader political purposes.³⁴ One former SASC staffer expressed similar concerns about the authorities, recalling, “They always seem to be like basically deliverables for senior people that were visiting these countries . . . I sort of saw 1206 like a piggy bank for combatant commanders to have deliverables for them and for the senior civilians.”³⁵ DoD intended 1206 to “combat terrorists,” not as a source of deliverables.³⁶

Some in the U.S. government also raised concerns about the program’s effectiveness. While proponents of 1206 argued it delivered security assistance more quickly than the existing system, government watchdogs, including the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and Government Accountability Office (GAO), questioned whether it was *actually* faster and whether it was achieving its objectives. In 2014, CRS queried “whether timelines are shortened compared with other foreign assistance programs, whether programs are sustainable and sustained, and whether the purposes of the assistance are most often met.”³⁷ A series of GAO reports additionally identified challenges with sustainment and

³³ Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Integrating 21st Century Development and Security Assistance: Final Report of the Task Force on Nontraditional Security Assistance* (CSIS, 2008), https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/080118-andrews-integrating21stcentury.pdf.

³⁴ Nadaner, interview.

³⁵ Interview with former Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

³⁶ Fonzo-Eberhard, interview.

³⁷ Nina M. Serafino, *Security Assistance Reform: “Section 1206” Background and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, 2014), 12, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RS22855>.

interagency coordination.

Even with these considerations, DoD continued to champion 1206 as playing a “useful role in addressing security concerns before they develop into active threats.”³⁸ They repeatedly stressed the authority’s usefulness and effectiveness in building partner capacity to counter terrorism and to conduct stability operations.³⁹ Also recognizing 1206’s benefits, Congress extended 1206 consistently and, in 2014, broadened and permanently codified the legislation under Title 10, Section 2282.⁴⁰

Security Cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq

Experiences with security cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq were similar, with various policymakers raising concerns even while Congress extended and expanded authorities. In both countries, the United States sought to build security forces that could take responsibility for each nation’s respective security as an important element of the U.S. exit strategy.⁴¹ In both cases, observers questioned the success of U.S. training and capacity building efforts. By June 2008, the GAO found that though the United States had spent over \$10 billion to develop the Afghan National Army (ANA) to that point, “less than 2 percent (2 of 105 units) of ANA units are assessed as fully capable of conducting their primary mission.”⁴² Likewise, a 2007 report by the Democratic Staff of a House

³⁸ Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric S. Edelman to House Armed Services Committee, letter, January 16, 2009; Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric S. Edelman to House Foreign Affairs Committee, letter, January 16, 2009; U.S. Department of Defense, “Text for Use in Speeches on Advancing U.S. National Security Through Partnerships: Building Global Partnerships,” 2007.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on Section 1206 Assessments*, December 2012.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of Defense Efforts to Build Counterterrorism and Stability Operations Capacity of Foreign Military Forces with Section 1206/2282 Funding* (DoD, 2017); Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Appendix 8—Section 1206—Global Train and Equip,” in *Security Assistance Management Manual* (DSCA, 2016), <https://samm.dsca.mil/program/S1206>; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Appendix 8—Section 2282—Global Train and Equip,” in *Security Assistance Management Manual* (DSCA, 2016), <https://samm.dsca.mil/program/S2282>.

⁴¹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Appendix 8—Afghanistan Security Forces Fund,” in *Security Assistance Management Manual* (DSCA, 2016), <https://samm.dsca.mil/program/ASFF>.

⁴² GAO, *Further Congressional Action May Be Needed to Ensure Completion of a Detailed Plan to Develop and Sustain Capable Afghan National Security Forces* (GAO, 2008), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-08-661.pdf>.



A California Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from Company B, 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, on mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Army, May 20, 2016 (credit: SSG Ian M. Kummer).

Armed Services Subcommittee found that “the United States has invested more than **\$19.0 billion** in the organization, training, and equipping of **346,500 Iraqi military and police personnel**. This effort has yielded mixed results . . . the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have not developed as fast as the Coalition planned and, as a result, are not yet ready to take full responsibility for their nation’s security.”⁴³ Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan served as proving grounds for a number of experiments and emerging best practices in security cooperation and highlighted numerous challenges in DoD’s approach to capacity building and security cooperation more generally.

⁴³ HASC, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Stand Up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces* (HASC, 2007), https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GOVPUB-Y4_AR5_2-PURL-LPS90780. (Emphasis in the original).

Combatant commanders identified inconsistencies between their desired approaches and available authorities. They sought and obtained several new, niche authorities that remained temporary and in flux as national security priorities shifted. For example, Congress temporarily extended the Commander’s Emergency Response Program, authorized in the FY 2005 NDAA, fourteen times and substantively modified ten times during the seventeen years from its authorization through the 2022 withdrawal of U.S. forces. Another reason for these expanded authorities was the U.S. government’s realization that the “terrorism threat [was] spreading out geographically beyond Afghanistan.”⁴⁴ DoD required new and expanded authorities to handle this growing threat.⁴⁵

As the patchwork grew, U.S. government leaders recognized they needed to change how they planned, resourced, and executed security cooperation programs to meet combatant commanders’ needs. Even as early as 2007, OSD(P) proposed security cooperation reforms to “transform the existing medley of security cooperation into a strategy-driven, integrated, and agile U.S. government system.”⁴⁶ Several of these, like the need for aggregation of security cooperation data, were addressed in follow-on efforts, but others, such as the

Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)

Authorized the DoD to train, equip, and provide related assistance to Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) from FY 2006 to FY 2022, but is in the process of reconciling all actions due to program shutdown, with estimated completion in FY 2025. ASFF contributed to the DoD mission in Afghanistan by supporting the overall ANDSF force structure and operational tempo with the intent to enable the Afghan government to combat a resilient insurgency and be a reliable counterterrorism partner with the United States. DoD provided \$81 billion in assistance to the Afghan forces in the form of training, equipment, supplies, sustainment, infrastructure, advising, and capability development. ASFF was the single largest security cooperation program since the Vietnam War.

⁴⁴ Monahan, interview, December 20, 2024.

⁴⁵ Some examples of expanded authorities include the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund as well as the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund (22 U.S.C. § 8424) and Section 1205 of FY 2011 NDAA, which authorizes the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of Secretary of State, to provide assistance during FY 2011 to the Yemen Ministry of Interior Counter Terrorism Forces, which Congress expanded to include East Africa in the FY 2013 NDAA.

⁴⁶ “Security Cooperation: Reform Roadmap,” 2007.

need for better strategic guidance for security cooperation planning, would not be addressed until the FY 2017 NDAA reforms.

With a range of efforts, including Presidential Policy Directive 23 (PPD-23) on Security Sector Assistance, the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF), and the Security Cooperation Reform Task Force (SCRTF), the U.S. government sought to make the planning and implementation of security cooperation more strategic and efficient.⁴⁷ Additionally, policymakers sought answers for how to provide the security cooperation workforce with the training, education, and assignments that would enable better strategic outcomes.

Presidential Policy Directive 23

The interagency security sector assistance review emerged from a March 24, 2009, meeting between President Barack Obama and geographic combatant commanders (GCCs), in which the commanders expressed the need for more security cooperation tools. In June 2009, the National Security Council established an Interagency Policy Committee to investigate best practices for security sector assistance.⁴⁸ That effort eventually resulted in the 2013 release of PPD-23, which directed agencies providing security sector assistance to prioritize investments, undertake AM&E, and adopt a more holistic approach to capacity building. PPD-23 mandated that DoD and DoS *together* “continue to implement and refine existing authorities permitting the United States to respond to urgent and emergent priority partner security sector needs . . . and consider new authorities as necessary.”⁴⁹ Although PPD-23 is no longer an operative policy, one State Department official acknowledges that it continues to provide a useful framework, especially for interagency coordination and AM&E.

⁴⁷ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

⁴⁸ “Talking Points for Security Cooperation Steering Group (SCSG),” memorandum, September 23, 2009; Interview with Department of State staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

⁴⁹ Presidential Policy Directive/PPD-23, “Security Sector Assistance,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency Archives (April 5, 2013); The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy,” White House (April 5, 2013), archived on February 23, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250222200409/https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/05/fact-sheet-us-security-sector-assistance-policy>; U.S. Department of State, “Implementation of Security Sector Assistance (SSA) Presidential Policy Directive (PPD),” Defense Security Cooperation Agency Archives (2013); U.S. Department of State, “Plans and Policy Division (PPD),” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/ppd/index.htm>.

PPD-23 provided the foundation upon which subsequent reforms, including the FY 2017 reforms, have been built.⁵⁰

Global Security Contingency Fund

Interagency discussions in support of PPD-23 also birthed the GSCF, a new model for security cooperation that aimed to generate truly collaborative DoD-DoS planning and execution. In 2009, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)) Michèle Flournoy proposed a new authority modeled on the United Kingdom’s “pooled funding” approach. It included “pooled funding mechanisms for (1) Security Capacity Building, (2) Stabilization, and (3) Conflict Prevention. Each department would seek funding within its budget to contribute to the funding pools. Each pool would operate with joint formulation requirements in the field and dual-key concurrence in Washington, D.C.”⁵¹ Congress transformed this idea into the GSCF, an authority that maintained the “dual-key” approval requirements but lost some of the envisioned flexibility for both State and DoD.⁵² Ultimately, though both departments sought to implement the authority in a variety of cases, it proved too onerously bureaucratic to be effective.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ross, interview, November 13 and 15, 2024; Leslie Hunter (former Principal Director, Office of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., January 31, 2025; Interview with Department of State staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

⁵¹ Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy to the Secretary of Defense, “Options for Remodeling Security Sector Assistance—The United Kingdom’s Conflict Prevention Pool (CPP),” memorandum, Defense Security Cooperation Agency Archives (December 11, 2009).

⁵² Joseph Rixey (former Director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., November 18, 2024; Anna Nelson (former Chief of Staff of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., December 3, 2024.

⁵³ HASC, Report of the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives on H.R. 1960 Together with Additional and Dissenting Views, H.R. Rep. No. 113-102 (2013), <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/113th-congress/house-report/102/1>; Nina M. Serafino, *Global Security Contingency Fund: Summary and Issue Overview* (Congressional Research Service, 2014), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42641.pdf>; GAO, *Building Partner Capacity: State and DoD Need to Define Time Frames to Guide and Track Global Security Contingency Fund Projects* (GAO, 2014), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-75.pdf>; Alan Gorowitz, email message to Angela M. Riotto, September 2, 2025.

Security Cooperation Reform Task Force

One major line of effort internal to the DoD, the SCRTF, aimed to identify reforms to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of security cooperation initiatives.⁵⁴ The SCRTF was especially interested in improving DoD's ability to provide needed capabilities to partners and allies quickly.⁵⁵ The SCRTF found that "standard security cooperation processes have proven to be too reactive, too fragmented, and too slow to deliver needed equipment and related capabilities urgently and reliably in response to crises, opportunities, and operational contingencies."⁵⁶ It further exposed that "security cooperation planning at the country level—in particular, FMS planning—is too often oriented toward responding to, rather than anticipating, the capability requirements of Allies and partners."⁵⁷

The SCRTF recommended that the security cooperation enterprise shift from a reactive posture to a "deliberate and 'anticipatory' posture" and adopt a system of "fast-track processes" to address urgent requirements. These recommendations promised to increase the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of delivering FMS and providing training, education, equipment, and sustainment to allies and partners.⁵⁸ Between the first report (2011) and the second report (2012), DoD made progress implementing the recommendations. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), for example, implemented twenty-four out of the thirty-three assigned recommendations. However, other efforts stalled due to a lack of ownership among the various organizations and the need for legislation to implement reforms.⁵⁹ These reforms largely targeted Title 22 assistance but laid the groundwork for the FY 2017 security cooperation reforms by generating discussions across DoD about potential improvements.

⁵⁴ Pete Verga to Secretary of Defense, "Security Cooperation Reform," memorandum, Defense Security Cooperation Agency Archives (October 29, 2010).

⁵⁵ Security Cooperation Reform Task Force, "Update to Secretary Gates," PowerPoint Presentation, December 22, 2010.

⁵⁶ Security Cooperation Reform Task Force, *Security Cooperation Reform Phase I Report* [hereafter cited as SCRTF I] (U.S. Department of Defense, July 2011), 1.

⁵⁷ SCRTF I, 5.

⁵⁸ SCRTF I, 7.

⁵⁹ Security Cooperation Reform Task Force, *Security Cooperation Reform Phase II Report: Implementation* (U.S. Department of Defense, March 2012), 2 and 5.

The Path to Reform

Between 2010 and 2016, parallel discussions about the future path of security cooperation unfolded. Policymaker discussions brimmed with an energy of reform, even while Congress continued to extend and expand authorities at the request of DoD. In 2016, RAND expert Michael McNerney testified that “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.”⁶⁰ A developing consensus that the patchwork was broken failed to stop additions to the fragile house of cards.

The strategic shift away from U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan toward the Indo-Pacific and Europe in the 2010s highlighted the need for DoD to reconfigure its authorities to address emerging mission areas. But, just as in the aftermath of 9/11, DoD pursued piecemeal, niche solutions rather than a comprehensive strategic framework. For instance, Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea required a shift from supporting military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to engaging in strategic competition with Russia and reassuring European allies. The European Reassurance Initiative in the FY 2015 budget included funding for capacity building. Senator John McCain later created the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative in the FY 2016 NDAA to support the expanding mission in Europe.⁶¹ Concurrently, in 2015, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter worked with Congress on the DoD’s Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative, a five-year, \$425 million annual maritime capacity-building program

⁶⁰ Michael J. McNerney, *Department of Defense and Security Cooperation: Improving Prioritization, Authorities, and Evaluations* (RAND, 2016), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT454.html>.

⁶¹ The White House, “Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners,” White House (2014), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support->; Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1535, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/3979>; National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 [hereafter cited as NDAA FY 2016], Pub. L. No. 114-92, § 1251, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-114publ92/html/PLAW-114publ92.htm>; National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 Report, S. Rep. No. 114-49, <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/114th-congress/senate-report/49>.

focused on the South China Sea region—adding yet another regionally specific capacity-building authority to a growing list.⁶² The rapid changes in the security environment made it difficult for DoD and Congress to consider these proposals in a strategic, deliberate way. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation (DASD(SC)) Thomas “Tommy” W. Ross recalls, “There were so many different ways in which the security cooperation bureaucracy was organized so as to prevent senior decision-makers from being able to align resources to their strategic priorities.” He describes, “If we wanted to shift security cooperation resources meaningfully to the Asia-Pacific region from other regions in support of the President- and Secretary of Defense–announced policies of rebalancing to Asia, we really didn’t have much ability to do that. We didn’t have enough control of the bureaucracy to be able to align those resources and strategy.”⁶³ Reform was needed if the patchwork of authorities was to transform into a framework.

Some other attempts to streamline security cooperation information to allow for more transparency and better alignment of resources to strategic priorities include the Global Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System (G-TSCMIS) and SOCIUM. G-TSCMIS was a computing system that assisted decision-makers and analysts to evaluate activities, plan effective engagements, and identify gaps and opportunities for developing capable partners. It was intended to increase the value of security cooperation activities through shared situational awareness of past and future activities as well as facilitate resource decisions through standardized data to assess the efficacy of security cooperation activities across programs, regions, and countries. Although used for almost a decade, G-TSCMIS did not meet enterprise-wide needs.⁶⁴ SOCIUM

⁶² Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation (ODASD(SC)) developed a legislative proposal, which the Senate Armed Services Committee adopted in their markup shortly before the speech, creating an authority for the initiative. The authority sparked the first meaningful DoD capacity-building activities in the Asia-Pacific region outside Special Operations counterterrorism initiatives in the Philippines. Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic & International Studies, “Shangri-La Dialogue 2015,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (June 2, 2015), <https://amti.csis.org/shangri-la/>.

⁶³ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

⁶⁴ James Schear, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Partnership Strategy and Stability Operations to Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, Low-Intensity Conflict, and Irregular Conflict (SO/LIC&IC), “Global Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System (G-TSCMIS) Concept of Operations (CONOPS) Request,” memorandum, Defense

replaced G-TSCMIS in 2019. Like its predecessor, SOCIUM is intended to provide a comprehensive view of the security cooperation life cycle, including planning, budgeting, design, AM&E, and reporting.⁶⁵

Workforce Professionalization

Another longstanding shortcoming of the security cooperation system was the inadequate training and education of the security cooperation workforce.⁶⁶ A SASC-mandated GAO review of DSCA’s implementation processes for security assistance in 2012 identified workforce professionalization to be a major challenge in effective delivery of security assistance. Interviews with focus groups at each geographic combatant command revealed that “training or staffing of SCOs [security cooperation organizations] was insufficient, limiting SCO effectiveness as they develop assistance requests, build relationships in-country, and track assistance agreements through to delivery.”⁶⁷ The SCRTF, likewise, had acknowledged the deficiency of workforce training. Indeed, its establishing mandate tasked the SCRTF with considering options for creating a certification program for the security cooperation workforce.⁶⁸ However, at the time, the

Security Cooperation Agency Archives (December 10, 2010); Thomas “Tommy” W. Ross, Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation to the Global-Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System Governance Council, “G-TSCMIS Vision Statement,” memorandum, Defense Security Cooperation Agency Archives (June 1, 2015); Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Budget Estimates,” in *Defense-Wide Justification Book Volume 5 of 5: Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation, Defense-Wide* (DoD, June 2025), 3.

⁶⁵ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Chapter 13: Security Cooperation Information Technology Systems,” *Security Assistance Management Manual*, DSCA Manual 5105.38, <https://samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-13>.

⁶⁶ Theresa Baginski, Francis Donovan, Richard A. Lacquement, and Simon Don Roach, *A Comprehensive Approach to Improving U.S. Security Force Assistance Efforts* (U.S. Army War College Press, 2009), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/354>; U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, *Special Report: Lessons Learned from Security Cooperation Activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa* (DoD, 2022), <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/3177119/special-report-lessons-learned-from-security-cooperation-activities-in-afghanis/>.

⁶⁷ GAO, *Security Assistance: DoD’s Ongoing Reforms Address Some Challenges, but Additional Information Is Needed to Further Enhance Program Management* (GAO, 2012), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-13-84>.

⁶⁸ SCRTF I.

SCRTF concluded that “a workforce certification program akin to DAWIA [Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act] was not needed.”⁶⁹

The training and education system was insufficient for the increasing demands on the growing security cooperation workforce because it failed to train the right skills, to develop professionals over the course of their careers, and to assign personnel to the right billets based on their skills. Discussing the lack of training across the security cooperation workforce, former DASD(SC) Tommy Ross recounts, “SCOs [security cooperation officers] tended to be FAOs [foreign area officers] . . . who had really good training in sort of cultural, cross-cultural diplomacy, which is one part of being a good SCO. But when you think our whole orientation in that office was trying to become more strategic with security cooperation, and that means figuring out how to engage partners on building capabilities that are most relevant to U.S. national security interests . . . the cross-cultural engagement training that FAOs receive isn’t all that relevant there.” Ross also recalls the inadequate education provided through the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM): “We had seen the DISAM curriculum and were extremely unimpressed with what DISAM was teaching at the time.”⁷⁰ Similarly, former DSCA Director Vice Admiral Joe Rixey recalls having an epiphany about the need for education, training, and career progression. Rixey, as career acquisitions officer, saw what the Defense Acquisition University offered and thought, “You got to have training. You got to have career progression.”⁷¹ Rixey also briefed HASC about the shortcomings of the security cooperation training and education system and recommended a major reform effort.⁷²

The security cooperation infrastructure—including the workforce—supporting the FMS system had not kept up with growing demands. The SCRTF noted in 2011 that “vastly increased demand resulting from today’s strategic environment

⁶⁹ SCRTF I, 15.

⁷⁰ Ross, interview, November 15, 2024.

⁷¹ Rixey, interview.

⁷² *Assessing the Department of Defense’s Execution of Responsibilities in the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives*, 114th Cong. (2016) (opening statement of VADM Joseph Rixey, USN, Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency), <https://www.congress.gov/event/114th-congress/house-event/LC45062/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22rixey%22%7D&s=8&r=1>.

has greatly increased pressure on the FMS process. In recent years, the total value of FMS cases annually has grown dramatically, increasing from \$16 billion in 2004 to over \$30 billion today.⁷³ It was becoming clear that DSCA required a professionalized workforce to keep up with rising demand.

Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Along with concerns about the security cooperation workforce, as early as 2009 Congress raised concerns about insufficient AM&E for some security cooperation programs.⁷⁴ Best practices and lessons learned for capacity building indicates that AM&E is inseparable from the security cooperation planning process. Assessments inform, or *should* inform, objective development and program design, and effective monitoring and evaluation are impossible without well-developed objectives. Noting that the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires federal government agencies to develop objective performance measures and monitor progress toward goals, GAO concluded, “DoD and State have conducted little monitoring and evaluation of the Section 1206 and Section 1207 programs. DoD and State have not carried out systematic program monitoring for the Section 1206 program, and reporting has generally consisted of anecdotal information.”⁷⁵ In short, both DoD and DoS “lack a monitoring and evaluation system.”⁷⁶

To address mounting concerns about DoD’s lack of impact assessments, in 2010 Under Secretary of Defense for Policy proposed the creation of the Office of Security Cooperation Assessments—eventually authorized as the Security Cooperation Assessments Office.⁷⁷ The FY 2012 SASC Committee Report states, “The budget request also included \$2.3 million for the DSCA’S Security Cooperation

⁷³ Just thirteen years later, FMS cases surpassed \$117 billion/year in value. SCRTF I, 5; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “Fiscal Year 2024 U.S. Arms Transfers and Defense Trade: Fact Sheet,” DoS, January 24, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/fiscal-year-2024-u-s-arms-transfers-and-defense-trade/>.

⁷⁴ Fonzo-Eberhard, interview.

⁷⁵ Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, Pub. L. No. 103-62, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/senate-bill/20/text>; GAO, *International Security: DoD and State Need to Improve Sustainment Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation for Section 1206 and 1207 Assistance Programs* (GAO, 2010), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-10-431>.

⁷⁶ GAO, *International Security*.

⁷⁷ Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, “Security Cooperation Assessments Office,” 2010.

Assessment Office (SCAO). The SCAO is a new initiative by DSCA to gather, analyze, and assess the impact of the Department's security cooperation programs and initiatives. The committee believes such an assessment of DSCA's programs is necessary and in a different section of this report directs the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct such an audit of DSCA's programs and develop recommendations on how, if necessary, to improve DSCA's current model.⁷⁸ However, although they acknowledged the importance of effective AM&E for BPC programs, both the HASC and SASC chose to not fund the office for FY 2012.⁷⁹ The following year, DoD made a stronger push in the justification materials, arguing that "the SCAO will directly support other key DoD assessment efforts, especially COCOM [Combatant Command] Theater Campaign Assessment and the Chairman's Comprehensive Joint Assessment, by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing impact data from DoD's security cooperation activities."⁸⁰ This justification worked, and the office was funded in FY 2013 but received no funding afterward. As such, the timeline for DoD security cooperation AM&E is not a linear one.

In 2016, RAND Corporation argued for the establishment of a strategic DoD security cooperation planning and AM&E framework, asserting that "failure to create a DoD-wide [AM&E] system will result in security cooperation planning that lacks sufficient feedback mechanisms and rigorous, evidence-based analysis."⁸¹ Another RAND report determined, "DoD does not yet have a sufficiently standardized and integrated approach to security cooperation planning—particularly in the areas of objective development and [AM&E] that would enable DoD leaders, the administration, and Congress to gauge the extent

⁷⁸ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 Report, S. Rep. No. 112-26, <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/112th-congress/senate-report/26>.

⁷⁹ U.S. House Armed Services Committee, "Framework for Building Partnership Capacity Programs and Authorities to Meet 21st Century Challenges," Hearing 113-5 (February 14, 2013), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg79493/pdf/CHRG-113hhrg79493.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Department of Defense, "Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Estimates: Defense Security Cooperation Agency," February 2011, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2013/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PARTS/O_M_VOL_1_BASE_PARTS/DSCA_OP-5.pdf.

⁸¹ Jefferson P. Marquis, Michael J. McNerney, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Merrie Archer, Jeremy Boback, and David Stebbins, *Developing an Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Framework for U.S. Department of Defense Security Cooperation* (RAND, 2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1611.html.



U.S. Marines train with the Mauritanian Logistics Battalion to assist in building its capacity to counter terrorism and provide sovereign security, February 16, 2016 (credit: Cpl. Olivia McDonald).

to which global security cooperation resources are being appropriately targeted and effectively employed.”⁸² Current Senior Strategy Advisor for DSCA Alan Gorowitz similarly observes that DoD faced the challenge of articulating desired outcomes for its security cooperation activities: “That was the number one problem . . . if you don’t articulate what your desired outcomes are, what does success look like? How do you do oversight? How do you know whether you’re making a difference or not?”⁸³ Policymakers in both the executive and legislative branches were increasingly striving to measure the returns on security cooperation investments, but the absence of a strategic AM&E framework rendered such measurement impossible.

⁸² Michael J. Mc Nerney, Jefferson P. Marquis, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, and Ariel Klein, *SMART Security Cooperation Objectives: Improving DoD Planning and Guidance* (RAND, 2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1430.html.

⁸³ Gorowitz, interview.

Capacity Building

In addition to these concerns, policymakers in both DoD and Congress increasingly recognized that providing equipment and tactical training did not consistently produce durable partner capabilities. Former DSCA Director Charles Hooper describes an “epiphany” he had while examining U.S. security assistance to a partner in the Sahel: “The Africans don’t need one more rifle. What they need is paymasters, administrators, engineers . . . What they need is administration. They need governance.”⁸⁴ One DSCA staff member frames the challenge of producing enduring capability in terms of thinking through the inputs described in the U.S. military’s DOTMLPF-P framework: doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy. He explains, “You need all those elements of DOTMLPF, not just a piece of equipment . . . and a lot of people fixate on equipment.”⁸⁵

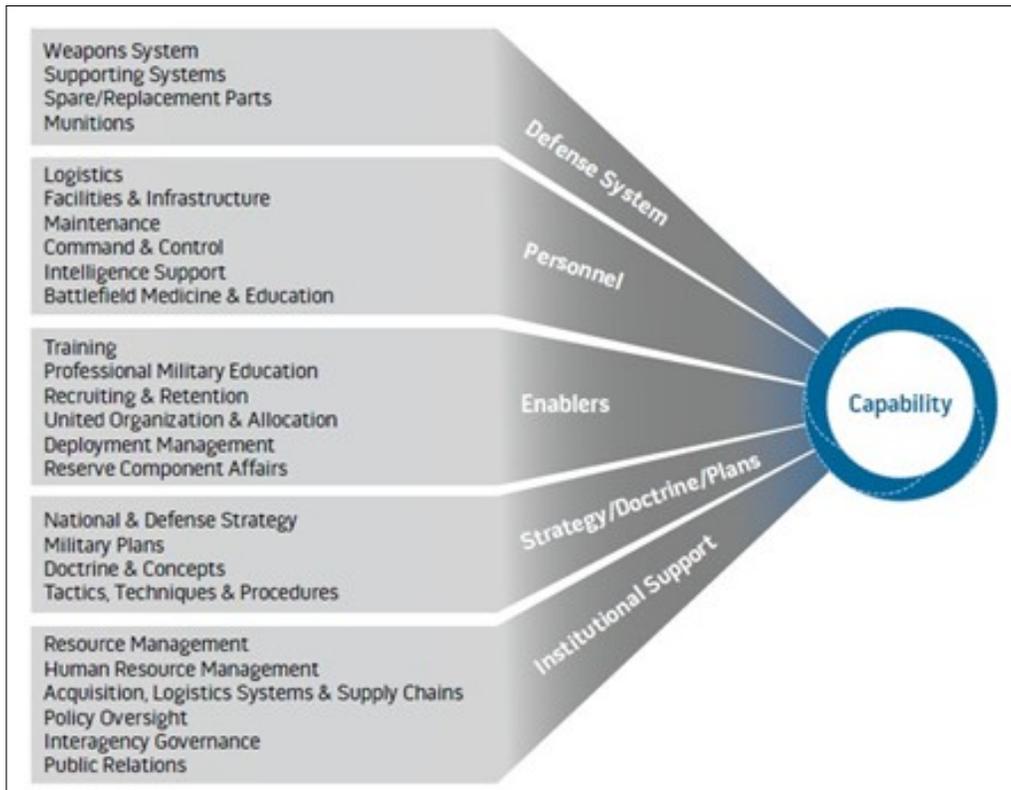
This observation echoes earlier discussions of “capability package planning.”⁸⁶ In 2011, the SCRTF found that “there is no standard DoD-wide methodology or formal process for ‘capability package planning’—planning that organizes and synchronizes the procurement of defense articles and defense services with related security cooperation activities to account for production timelines, availability of forces, the availability of resources, the construction of necessary infrastructure, training requirements, and sustainment of the capability being developed.”⁸⁷ In January 2016, DASD(SC) Tommy Ross explored this concept further as a way of increasing security cooperation effectiveness. He argued for “full spectrum capability,” which would ensure a partner nation possesses all the necessary and sufficient elements to utilize and sustain a defense capability effectively. He called for implementation of a “Capability Package Planning Model” intended to “address capability requirements across all necessary dimensions and ensure that U.S. security cooperation investments are more closely linked

⁸⁴ Charles Hooper (former Director of Defense Security Cooperation Agency), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., January 22, 2025.

⁸⁵ Interview with Defense Security Cooperation Agency staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

⁸⁶ SCRTF I, 8.

⁸⁷ SCRTF I, 8.



Inputs to Full-Spectrum Capability Development, in Thomas W. Ross, Jr., “Enhancing Security Cooperation Effectiveness: A Model for Capability Package Planning,” Joint Force Quarterly 80 (2016).

to priority objectives derived from national and defense strategic guidance.”⁸⁸ This concept—essentially a holistic approach to capacity building—would be a guiding light of the FY 2017 NDAA reforms and a cornerstone of how DSCA would approach institutional capacity building.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Thomas W. Ross, Jr., “Enhancing Security Cooperation Effectiveness: A Model for Capability Package Planning,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 80 (2016), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/643090/enhancing-security-cooperation-effectiveness-a-model-for-capability-package-pla/>.

⁸⁹ Rixey, interview.

The Reform Process: Internal DoD and Interagency Negotiations

Establishment of ODASD(SC)

The strategic shift from counterterrorism to great power competition with China in the Indo-Pacific and with Russia in Europe, along with growing concerns about the strategic effectiveness of the security cooperation enterprise, resulted in DoD's establishment of the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation (ODASD(SC)) in summer 2014. During a reorganization of OSD(P), the new ODASD(SC) recognized the need to align security cooperation policy and programs with national security strategy. Leslie Hunter, former Principal Director for ODASD(SC), describes that even with the shift to great power competition, "we were still spending most of our train and equip Title 10 authorities on CN [counternarcotics] and CT." Moreover, many authorities remained regionally specific, prompting Hunter and others to ask, "How might we better sync all these up? There's got to be a better way to manage all of this." She describes her perception of its mandate at the time: "I think the reforms were a key enabler of changing and using security cooperation in a more strategic way . . . the hypothesis was if we could streamline these authorities and make them easier to use, then we would use them in a more effective, strategic manner."⁹⁰

Tommy Ross arrived as the DASD(SC) after the office had already been created and after the two leaders responsible for creating it—USD(P) James N. Miller and his Principal Deputy USD(P) Kathleen Hicks—had moved to other positions. However, Ross recalls speaking to both leaders about the intent for the office. Specifically, "What Jim Miller told me was that, he said, 'You know, we created this office because I want you to go out and sell F-35s to India.' And I think his point was that we needed to be able to step back and look at how we might use security cooperation strategically to change the nature and strength of our alliance infrastructure around the world in ways that would be maximally beneficial to our broader national security interests."⁹¹ These observations reflect

⁹⁰ Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

⁹¹ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

the increasing recognition in DoD and Congress that security cooperation was not being employed in full alignment with U.S. national security priorities.

Evaluating Authorities Consolidation

The first step to reforming the patchwork was identifying the existing security cooperation authorities. David Radcliffe recalls that, when he arrived at ODASD(SC) as an action officer in 2015, his first task was to inventory the existing Title 10 security cooperation authorities.⁹² ODASD(SC) also commissioned a study from the RAND Corporation to catalogue the security cooperation authorities, identify redundancies and gaps, and make recommendations for consolidation. RAND identified 123 authorities and found that, due to their piecemeal evolution, “major inefficiencies have developed in planning, executing, and overseeing security cooperation activities.”⁹³ Even though many of the authorities they identified were legacy authorities intended to address niche or antiquated requirements, Radcliffe found that “there’s somebody who knew about, you know, each and every one of these little, small authorities and depended on it in some way, form, or fashion.”⁹⁴ As such, it was imperative that ODASD(SC) proceed with caution in seeking consolidation of these authorities.

Simultaneously, ODASD(SC) worked on the FY 2016 NDAA, which included several provisions that set the stage for the FY 2017 reforms.⁹⁵ Recognizing the need for strategic alignment, Section 1202 of the FY 2016 NDAA established a requirement that DoD produce a “strategic framework” for security cooperation that outlined the strategic goals of the department and how they aligned with broader national security goals.⁹⁶ It also required DoD to determine primary objectives, priorities, and desired end states of Title 10 programs; identify challenges to achieving these objectives; and articulate a methodology for evaluating their effectiveness. Congress required the framework to be updated, at minimum, on a biennial basis.⁹⁷ The legislation also established a dedicated

⁹² David Radcliffe (former Action Officer in the Office of Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., December 13, 2024; Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

⁹³ Thaler et al., *From Patchwork to Framework*, x.

⁹⁴ Radcliffe, interview.

⁹⁵ NDAA FY 2016.

⁹⁶ NDAA FY 2016, § 1202.

⁹⁷ NDAA FY 2016 required the first report in 2016 and included a sunset clause that this

authority for ICB—a core element of the holistic approach ODASD(SC) was striving toward—and reform of the National Guard State Partnership Program intended to enable its more strategic use.⁹⁸ Once the initial review of authorities was complete and the FY 2016 NDAA passed, ODASD(SC) turned its attention to more significant security cooperation reforms.

Based on their internal review and the RAND report, ODASD(SC) developed legislative proposals to create a new chapter in Title 10 (Chapter 16) that consolidated authorities, repealed redundant authorities, and codified some of the recurrent temporary authorities. David Radcliffe and office intern Kelsey Henquinet worked closely with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) and congressional staffers to draft, review, and modify proposals.⁹⁹ Radcliffe credits OGC with the idea for consolidating security cooperation authorities into a single chapter. He judges that OGC saw an opportunity to obtain considerable “benefits to the department in terms of streamlining authorities, but also framing the authorities in ways that were more helpful to the secretary and to the organization as a whole.”¹⁰⁰

While drafting the proposals, ODASD(SC) organized feedback sessions with stakeholders across the security cooperation enterprise.¹⁰¹ Predictably, the State Department was invested in the proposals, and, though they were supportive of individual reforms, they were concerned about DoD encroaching on their responsibilities. Working as an Adviser for Strategy and Policy for the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) at the Department of State at the time, Anna Nelson characterizes State’s position as supportive of the general intentions—to create modern security assistance authorities, to advance AM&E, and to train the

action would cease after six years. DoD submitted the first report in 2016. DASD(SC) delayed the second report due in 2018 to work on multi-year security cooperation guidance. DoD completed the 2020 report. Principal Director, Strategy, Plans, and Policy to Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Report to Congress on the Strategic Framework for Department of Defense Security Cooperation,” memorandum, September 11, 2019.

⁹⁸ NDAA FY 2016, § 1055 and § 1203.

⁹⁹ Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Radcliffe, interview; U.S. Department of Defense Office of the General Counsel, “Fourth Package of Legislative Proposals Sent to Congress for Inclusion in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017,” DoD (April 1, 2016), <https://ogc.osd.mil/Portals/99/1April2016.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Ronald Meyers (former Director for Partnership, Policy, and Strategy at ODASD(SC)), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., March 10, 2025.

workforce—but questioned the reforms on philosophical grounds. She clarifies, “I think all along the things, the content of the reforms we agreed with. They’re the types of things that I would have loved to reform FMF with . . . the reforms themselves are sorely needed. The only substantive issue, which is fundamental at the end of the day, was which agency is most appropriate to oversee it?”¹⁰²

ODASD(SC) informally negotiated with the State Department, including several meetings between the DASD(SC) Tommy Ross and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Regional Security and Security Assistance Gregory Kausner.¹⁰³ Radcliffe recalls that DoS in almost every instance demanded Secretary of State concurrence on DoD authorities. In some cases, concurrence made sense or was at least unavoidable as the price for getting the proposal through the interagency process. In other cases, DoD pushed back. However, the prospect of concurrence also chilled DoD’s ability to seek some reforms. Radcliffe cites the Section 1208 special operations authority, which authorized the Secretary of Defense to spend money “to support foreign forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing military operations by U.S. special operations forces to combat terrorism,” as an example of where potential consolidation was abandoned because the DoD made a decision that adding Secretary of State concurrence was too great a risk for the benefit of consolidation.¹⁰⁴

In fall 2015, after months of coordinating with congressional staffers and the State Department, ODASD(SC) submitted eleven legislative proposals to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs’ Legislative Review Panel (LRP). The LRP invited sponsors to present to a group of voting members on legislative proposals, and USD(P), in this case Brian McKeon, then the Principal Deputy USD(P), presented the proposals to the LRP.¹⁰⁵ ODASD(SC) eventually

¹⁰² Nelson, interview.

¹⁰³ Gregory Kausner left the position in December 2015 and Bill Monahan succeeded him in January 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Radcliffe, interview; Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, H.R. Rep. No. 110-652, § 1208, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/5658>.

¹⁰⁵ The Legislative Review Panel meets during the legislative cycle to review proposals submitted by the components. A legislative proposal will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget only with the approval of the LRP (unless otherwise directed by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary). The LRP is chaired by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA)) and consists of the ASD(LA), the Director of the Joint Staff, representatives from the front offices of the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense, and senior-

cleared the legislative proposals through the internal DoD process, and these were then provided to the Office of Management and Budget to facilitate an interagency review.¹⁰⁶

With the most significant challenges having already been addressed through informal negotiations, the ODASD(SC) proposals, with one exception, cleared the interagency process and were submitted to Congress in April 2016 for consideration.¹⁰⁷ In total, they proposed—for the purposes of recodifying authorities into a new Chapter 16 of Title 10, “Security Cooperation”—consolidating nine authorities, modifying a total of seven authorities, and repealing or allowing to expire twenty-eight authorities.¹⁰⁸ The ten proposals primarily addressed consolidation of existing authorities. DoD also sought to consolidate six separate reporting requirements into a single annual report. In submitting its proposals for a major consolidation of legislative authority, DoD asserted, “Arranging security cooperation authorities under a single security cooperation chapter will provide greater clarity about the nature and scope of Department of Defense (DoD) authorities to those who plan, manage, and implement security cooperation programs . . . The resulting clarity will lead to improved effectiveness of DoD security cooperation authorities.”¹⁰⁹

level representatives of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and the Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation. Office of the General Counsel, “Guidelines for Preparation of Legislative Proposals for the DoD Legislative Program,” OGC (n.d.), 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ One focus point of interagency negotiation was DoD’s proposal to expand the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program to allow the program to address partner nation professional military education needs in relation to emerging threats. This proposal was not submitted to Congress after it failed to achieve interagency approval. The State Department objected to this proposal on the grounds that it was duplicative of International Military Education and Training.

¹⁰⁸ Title 10 consolidated nine authorities (10 U.S.C. Sections 1051b, 2166, 2249a, 2249d, 2249e, 2350m, and 9415 and Sections 1081 of Pub. L. No. 112-81 and 1268 of Pub. L. No. 113-291); modified, for the purposes of consolidating and revising existing authorities, a total of seven authorities (10 U.S.C. Sections 127d, 184, 341, 1082, 2011, and 2282, and Section 1205 of Pub. L. No. 113-66); and repealed or allowed to expire twenty-eight authorities (10 U.S.C. Sections 168, 1050, 1050a, 1051, 1051a, 1051c, 2562, 4344, 4345, 4345a, 4681, 6957, 6957a, 6957b, 9344, 9345, 9345a, 9381, 9382, 9383, 9681 and Sections 8073 of Pub. L. No. 107-248, 1306 of Pub. L. No. 103-337, 1065 of Pub. L. No. 104-201, 1234 of Pub. L. No. 110-181, 941(b) of Pub. L. No. 110-417, 1207 of Pub. L. No. 111-84, and Section 1203 of Pub. L. No. 113-66).

¹⁰⁹ DoD Office of the General Counsel, “Fourth Package of Legislative Proposals.”

The Reform Process: Legislative Deliberations

The first step in the legislative deliberations over ODASD(SC)'s proposals was the House Armed Services Committee's (HASC) markup process for the FY 2017 NDAA. The legislative proposals were submitted in early April, less than three weeks before the HASC began subcommittee markups of the bill, leaving the committee little time to consider them. The committee thus proceeded cautiously. It accepted the DoD's proposal to consolidate reporting requirements. It also supported creation of a new security cooperation chapter in Title 10, though it only reorganized existing codified Title 10 authorities into that chapter without any consolidation or codification of temporary authorities. Nevertheless, HASC signaled its support for DoD's direction, noting that it "supports such efforts that contribute to improved security cooperation planning and intends to continue to review additional measures that may be taken to improve the transparency of the Department of Defense's security cooperation program budgeting, planning, implementation, and outcomes. The committee also intends to continue to review the Department's development and implementation of effective assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of security cooperation programs."¹¹⁰

The SASC had more time to consider the proposals with its markups not scheduled until mid-May 2016. SASC staff largely supported the proposed consolidation and developed several of their own proposals for reform. Most notable—and controversial—was a new "Section 333" consolidating train-and-equip authorities. It also included proposals to create a "Security Cooperation Enhancement Fund" and to consolidate DoD Regional Centers for Security Studies from five centers to three.¹¹¹ Once published following the markups,

¹¹⁰ HASC, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, H.R. Rep. No. 114-537 (2016), <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/114th-congress/house-report/537/1>.

¹¹¹ SASC, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, S. Rep. No. 114-255 (2016), <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/114th-congress/senate-report/255/1?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22FY17+NDAA+mark+up%22%7D&s=6&r=6> [hereafter cited as S. Rep. No. 114-255.]

the SASC version of the bill immediately sparked vigorous discussions between agencies.¹¹²

Though the Department of State had tentatively supported ODASD(SC) legislative proposals, Section 333 changed that posture, and some DoS staff raised significant concerns on Capitol Hill regarding the new authority. William “Bill” Monahan, then serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regional Security and Security Assistance, recounts advocating for State’s position with the Foreign Relations *and* Armed Services committees. Monahan recalls that the State Department’s number one priority in reaction to the SASC’s version of the bill was preserving the requirement under both 1206 and 2282 authorities for Secretary of State concurrence in the proposed new Section 333, and there was a “big fight” on Capitol Hill about that.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, DoS was seeking to preserve its role under the pre-existing standards of 1206 and 2282.

Military commanders also expressed concerns about the new Section 333. Leadership at SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM (U.S. Northern Command) argued that Section 333’s proposed consolidation of the CN capacity-building authority with other capacity-building authorities would dilute funding available for the two historically under-resourced commands. To express their concerns, ADM Kurt Tidd from SOUTHCOM and Gen. Lori Robinson from NORTHCOM wrote an “8-star letter” to Congress.¹¹⁴ In the letter to SASC Chairman John McCain, they expressed concerns that several provisions in the Senate bill would cripple their efforts “to stem the flow of drugs into the United States as well as our countertransnational organized criminal (CTOC) activities.” They were particularly concerned that State concurrence on “all country-illicit drug trafficking and counter transnational organized crime operations” would only add an additional and unnecessary administrative burden and “jeopardize the

¹¹² Interview with former Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹¹³ Monahan, interview, December 20, 2024; Rebekah Williams (former Department of State staff member), interview by Angela M. Riotto, September 25, 2024.

¹¹⁴ Kevin Staley (Chief of Security Cooperation, U.S. Southern Command), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., March 24, 2025.



U.S. Army paratroopers assigned to 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, training with the Italian Army, October 18, 2016. The brigade routinely trains alongside NATO allies and partners to build stronger relationships and strengthen the alliance (credit: Massimo Bovo).

timely execution of CD [counterdrug] and CTOC activities.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, SOUTHCOM was concerned that it would lose their main funding source if it had to compete with EUCCOM, CENTCOM (Central Command), and INDOPACOM (Indo-Pacific Command). The former Legislative Liaison for SOUTHCOM summed it up by saying, “That was our biggest concern with the reform.”¹¹⁶

The 8-star letter notwithstanding, the legislative negotiations were almost entirely void of senior-level engagement. One former SASC staffer reports, “There was no member that was engaged” in the reform effort, and no senior DoD leaders were involved in the negotiations above the level of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs. The reform effort was a staffer-level engagement that succeeded because of deliberate strategizing and negotiations between staffers, ODASD(SC), and State PM. For instance, one former SASC staffer strategically placed what he termed “landmines” into the legislation as bargaining chips. He mentioned one landmine in particular: a proposal in the Senate language to eliminate two of the five Regional Centers. This strategy apparently worked. When the actual draft of the Senate’s version of the NDAA became public, Leslie Hunter recalls that less attention was given to the main set of reforms because attention was drawn to that proposal. Hunter remembers “when the draft NDAA came out and there’s an opportunity to provide feedback, most of the feedback was about the Regional Centers . . . the GCCs were like, ‘I need my Regional Center. I love my Regional Center. We need the Regional Centers.’”¹¹⁷ That piece of the legislation was dropped in favor of other reform elements.

One perhaps unintended consequence of the ploy is that it actually helped crystallize support for the Regional Centers as a critical part of the Defense Department’s security cooperation enterprise. It prompted an internal review of the value of the centers and the ramifications of the Senate’s proposed consolidation. The review validated their important role in engaging partner defense-sector leaders at the strategic level and resulted in full-throated DoD support for main-

¹¹⁵ Gen. Lori J. Robinson and ADM Kurt W. Tidd to The Honorable John McCain, letter, July 11, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Staley, interview; Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹¹⁷ Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

taining their activities. Ultimately, this strategic role would be codified with legislation stating that “the Secretary of Defense shall administer the Department of Defense Regional Centers for Security Studies in accordance with this section as international venues for bilateral and multilateral research, communication, exchange of ideas, and training involving military and civilian participants.”¹¹⁸

In its June 7, 2016, Statement of Administration Policy, the Obama administration welcomed some of the Senate’s provisions on security cooperation, including its incorporation of most of DoD’s requested proposals.¹¹⁹ The administration, however, cautioned against the risk of unintended harm to current security cooperation and force readiness efforts, as well as to the State Department’s lead role in security sector assistance and foreign policy. The administration also expressed a desire to maintain DoS oversight mechanisms, including joint formulation of programs with DoD.

Conference negotiations on the FY 2017 NDAA proceeded from mid-July until a final agreement—which included most of the Senate’s reform provisions—was filed on November 30, 2016. In its conference report accompanying the FY 2017 NDAA, Congress stated:

The number and complexity of authorities and associated funding provided to the Department to conduct security cooperation programs has expanded, resulting in security cooperation authorities being dispersed throughout title 10 and public law. This architecture has led to a confusing and unwieldy security cooperation enterprise that undermines the ability of the Department—particularly its senior civilian and military leaders—to prioritize, plan, synchronize, execute, allocate resources, and oversee activities. The current situation has also resulted in frequent changes for the security cooperation professionals attempting to implement security cooperation programs and activities. This has contributed to suboptimal outcomes and missed opportunities.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 342 (2016).

¹¹⁹ The White House, “Statement of Administration Policy on S. 2943—National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017,” White House (2016), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/114/saps2943s_20160607.pdf.

¹²⁰ House of Representatives, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017

The reforms aimed to mitigate these challenges and improve strategic outcomes. Congress passed the FY 2017 NDAA in December 2016.

Ultimately, former DASD(SC) Tommy Ross believed three factors contributed to DoD's success in navigating the reforms through Congress: focusing on only those problems that required legislative solutions, doing sufficient homework to demonstrate the validity of the problem and proposed solutions, and their inclusive approach to seeking input and incorporating views. He explains, "Legislation is a tool that you should be using when those other means like writing internal DoD policies, DoD directives, or DoD instructions can't accomplish what you're trying to do." He further elucidates, "We really tried to narrow in on those things that truly required legislative action, number one. And number two, we did the homework to demonstrate that . . . we really do have a problem here that can only be fixed with legislation." He also credits the inclusive approach ODASD(SC) took "to make sure that every feasible stakeholder had an opportunity to provide input and help us shape the proposals" for the legislation's success. He explains that they hosted roundtables with stakeholders from across the security cooperation enterprise as well as "engaged with practitioners on the ground trying to understand what the challenges were . . . and how we could form real solutions to real problems."¹²¹ These three tactics contributed significantly to their success in legislating the reforms.

Former Principal Deputy in the ODASD(SC) Leslie Hunter echoed Ross and credits the collaborative relationship between ODASD(SC) and SASC for the legislative success. She also recognized the political top cover from within OSD(P), and more broadly from the administration at the time, as major factors that led to the successful passage of legislative reforms through Congress. She recalls that SASC staffers were integral to the reforms' success: "They were willing to get involved and spend a lot of time on this." For her, "the stars kind of aligned in terms of where the administration was, where our Policy leadership was, and in the willingness of the Hill to work with us."¹²²

Conference Report, H. R. Rep. No. 114-840 [hereafter cited as H. R. Rep. No. 114-840], <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/114th-congress/house-report/840/1>.

¹²¹ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

¹²² Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

FY 2017 NDAA Outcomes

The final legislation codified dramatic changes to the security cooperation authorities house of cards, centered on a new legal framework for security cooperation. It established Chapter 16, “Security Cooperation,” in Title 10 and transferred, modified, and codified numerous security cooperation–related provisions from elsewhere in Title 10 and public laws. Congress acknowledged that, since 2001, the DoD’s engagement with national security forces of friendly partner nations had expanded to meet changing strategic requirements and the number and complexity of authorities had expanded in parallel. Chapter 16 consolidated this complex patchwork of authorities to provide “greater clarity and consistency about the nature and scope of DoD’s security cooperation programs and activities.”¹²³ While Chapter 16 contains several key requirements and authorities that have drastically improved the implementation of security cooperation, others continue to pose challenges and require further exploration and refinement.

The below list, though not exhaustive, highlights several important elements of the FY 2017 NDAA reforms.

Sections 321 and 322: Training with Friendly Forces

DoD submitted and Congress adopted a legislative proposal to combine two existing authorities into a single authority, Section 321, to pay expenses of foreign forces to enable their training with U.S. forces. DoD had considered including 10 U.S.C. 2011 (Joint Combined Exchange Training) in its consolidation proposal, but the Special Operations community objected.¹²⁴ Seeing the similarities of the authorities but responding to Special Operations community objections, Congress moved 10 U.S.C. 2011 into Chapter 16 but maintained it as a separate authority, Section 322. Section 322 does not require Secretary of State concurrence to pay these expenses.

Section 332: Institutional Capacity Building

In codifying Section 1081 of Public Law 112-81 (Institutional Capacity Building), Congress noted its concern “that insufficient attention and resources have been provided for building institutional capacity at higher echelons, particularly

¹²³ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹²⁴ Ross, in conversation with Angela M. Riotto, July 7, 2025.

the generating force (e.g., those with ‘man, train, and equip’ responsibilities) and at the strategic level (e.g., ministerial and general staff levels).” Congress expressed its expectation that DoD increase its emphasis on strengthening the defense institutions of friendly foreign nations as it builds security cooperation programs.¹²⁵

Section 333: Foreign Security Forces—Authority to Build Capacity

As part of its proposal to consolidate existing security cooperation authorities under Chapter 16, DoD submitted a legislative proposal to transfer the existing 10 U.S.C. 2282 authority into Chapter 16. The proposal included no expansion of the authority but proposed revising the authority to allow funds obligated in a given year to be executed in subsequent years. The proposal acknowledged that “the inability to use 10 U.S.C. 2282 funds for sustainment is creating an unsustainable burden on FMF and reduces the State Department’s ability to use FMF strategically to achieve foreign policy or diplomatic objectives as more and more FMF is allocated to sustain equipment purchased through Section 1206 and 10 U.S.C. 2282. Moreover, absent FMF funding, investments made through Section 1206 and 10 U.S.C. 2282 are at risk of disrepair, misuse, and ultimately inoperability because partner nations often lack the capability to sustain such investments themselves.”¹²⁶

Congress agreed to authorize funds for use over two fiscal years instead of one, but it also went further. It created Section 333 within Chapter 16 for a capacity-building authority that combined 10 U.S.C. 2282 with four other existing capacity-building authorities: counternarcotics authority (Section 1033 of the FY 2014 NDAA), counter-weapons of mass destruction (WMD) authority (Section 1204 of the FY 2014 NDAA), authority to support Jordan’s border security (Section 1207 of the FY 2014 NDAA), and the Maritime Security Initiative (Section 1263 of the FY 2016 NDAA).¹²⁷

Congress saw the enumerated purposes of assistance under Section 333 as a restatement of existing authority: “The conferees note that the functional

¹²⁵ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹²⁶ DoD Office of the General Counsel, “Fourth Package of Legislative Proposals.”

¹²⁷ Section 1263 of the FY 2016 NDAA was extended and modified to include “with the primary goal of increasing multilateral maritime security cooperation and maritime domain awareness of foreign countries in the area of responsibility of the United States Indo-Pacific Command” in Section 1241 of the FY 2021 NDAA.

areas in which the Department is authorized to provide assistance under this provision are consistent with existing focus areas of the Department’s ‘train and equip’ programs. The conferees also note authority to provide assistance to build the capacity of friendly foreign countries to conduct military intelligence operations already exists, because the Department’s existing authorities include support functions, and intelligence operations frequently act in that capacity. The inclusion of intelligence operations is intended solely to clarify that the Department may conduct such activities either as a supporting activity for other operations or as a stand-alone operation.”¹²⁸

In response to State Department pressure, Congress amended the legislation to circumscribe DoD authority from addressing strictly internal security concerns. The Senate version of Section 333 had included two additional purposes, “humanitarian and disaster response” and “national territorial defense,” under the authorized purposes of the authority that Congress removed in the final version of the bill. Congress believed that humanitarian and disaster response activities were carried out best under existing authorities, and national territorial defense was removed due to State Department objections. Section 333 does, however, expand DoD authority to work with non-military security forces and provide various material assistance, such as small-scale construction.¹²⁹ The final bill also created requirements that every program implemented under the capacity-building authority should be accompanied by ICB and human rights training activities.¹³⁰ Though some capacity-building authorities had carried human rights training requirements previously, this legislation expanded their coverage and created the new ICB requirement, both of which led to implementation challenges at DoD.

Section 381: Consolidated Budget

Congress mandated that DoD submit, as part of the President’s annual budget submission, a budget exhibit that sets out “by budget function and as a separate item the amounts requested for the Department of Defense for such fiscal year for all security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense.” Congress explained, “This provision is intended to enhance the ability of the

¹²⁸ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹²⁹ Foreign Security Forces: Authority to Build Capacity, 10 U.S.C. § 333.

¹³⁰ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

congressional defense committees to conduct oversight of the Department’s security cooperation programs and activities, including those undertaken by the military services; to understand better how the Department plans, programs, and prioritizes its security cooperation programs and activities.”¹³¹

Section 382: Execution and Administration of Programs and Activities

In response to DoD’s consistent demand for more strategic policy and guidance, Congress added legislative requirements that (1) a single responsible official be designated for security cooperation policy oversight and resource allocation, and (2) the Director of DSCA be solely responsible for the execution and administration of DoD security cooperation activities, except in instances in which the Director may designate another organization to exercise those responsibilities.¹³² In justifying the first requirement, Congress specified that “In addition to the cumbersome, confusing, and complex patchwork of authorities and funding sources, the Department’s organizational structure for the security cooperation enterprise has undermined the ability of senior Department officials to adequately oversee, prioritize, and synchronize security cooperation programs and activities to support strategic priorities. Currently, there is no individual or office below the Deputy Secretary of Defense with responsibility to oversee strategic policy and resource allocation for the security cooperation enterprise.”¹³³ The required designation of a single responsible official was intended “to better synchronize planning and programs across the regional and functional components of the Department and ensure that such activities and resources are appropriately aligned with strategic priorities. Further, the conferees expect that this arrangement will empower the Department to prioritize resources and consider trade-offs across the full range of security cooperation programs and funding sources.”¹³⁴ The second requirement, centralizing program administration at DSCA, “is meant to help the Department overcome the distortions, lack of coordination, and duplication that occurs across the Department’s security cooperation enterprise, arising from narrowly-focused [sic] program offices found throughout the Office of the Secretary of Defense,

¹³¹ S. Rep. No. 114-255.

¹³² “Security Cooperation: Reform Roadmap,” 2007; H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹³³ “Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference,” H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹³⁴ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

the Joint Staff, Military Departments, Combatant Commands, and the defense agencies.”¹³⁵ As this report will show, neither of these mandates would be fully implemented.

Section 383: Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Congress codified a requirement that DoD maintain an AM&E program in support of security cooperation programs and activities, finding that “despite the marked increase in DoD security cooperation programs and activities over the last 15 years, the Department has not applied sufficient emphasis and resources to develop a comprehensive framework to assess, monitor, and evaluate its security cooperation programs and activities from inception to completion . . . Sufficient attention must be given to the implementation of programs with continuous robust evaluation to gauge whether programs and activities are meeting or have met defined objectives.”¹³⁶ These actions occurred in parallel with the department’s development of what would become DoD Instruction 5132.14, *Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*.¹³⁷

Section 384: Department of Defense Security Cooperation Workforce Development

Though DoD did not submit a workforce reform legislative proposal, former DASD(SC) Tommy Ross and former DSCA Director VADM Joseph Rixey collaborated to develop and informally provide language to congressional staff. Ross states, “Admiral Rixey, the Director of DSCA at the time, was the single driving force for that reform.”¹³⁸ Based on his evaluation of the state of the security cooperation workforce and the challenges in getting the right leaders in the right places, Rixey decided that legislative reform, modeled on DAWIA, was needed. He spoke to Ross about the need for the legislation. Ross then introduced him to the two professional staff members on the SASC covering security cooperation. Together they conducted visits to other staff in Congress

¹³⁵ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹³⁶ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*, DoD Instruction 5132.14 (DoD, 2017).

¹³⁸ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.

to persuade them to include workforce legislation in the FY 2017 NDAA.

Ross describes his understanding of the intent behind the workforce reform effort and what made it different from previous reform efforts. He explains, “I think what was unique . . . was really the notion that the security cooperation workforce should be designated and professionalized as an entity, as a defined group within the DoD human resource world. I think prior to [those] reforms around training and education, we’re trying to improve content and maybe delivery mechanisms, but without the ability to get at making sure that the right people got the right training at the right time in their careers . . . a lot of the workforce reforms have been kind of tinkering at the margins because they’re inherently constrained by the previous lack of definition around what the workforce is and what the requirements for the workforce ought to be.”¹³⁹

Congress expressed its concern that DoD, whether in implementing DoS programs or its own programs, had not devoted sufficient attention and resources to the development, management, and sustainment of the security cooperation workforce. As a result, security cooperation initiatives were not always planned and implemented effectively to advance national security objectives. Congress provided explicit implementation instructions. Specifically, implementation of this authority should (1) ensure the development and rational allocation of qualified and experienced personnel in order to support high-priority security cooperation initiatives and partners; (2) ensure the appropriate sizing, organization, and chain of command for the security cooperation workforce within the Military Departments; (3) ensure

The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA)

Amid concerns about skyrocketing acquisition costs, Congress passed DAWIA in November 1990 (Pub. L. 101-510). DAWIA introduced several reforms designed to standardize and strengthen the acquisition workforce, including requirements to

- *designate and categorize acquisition workforce positions;*
- *create educational and training standards tied to those positions;*
- *cultivate education, training, experience, and assignments necessary for career progression of civilian and military members of the workforce; and*
- *establish the Defense Acquisition University.*

Security cooperation reform in the FY 2017 NDAA mirrored each of these elements of DAWIA.

¹³⁹ Ross, interview, November 13, 2024.



U.S. Capitol Building, December 10, 2025 (credit: Sgt. Eli Baker).

the appropriate skills and capabilities are developed within the workforce and that there are standard and viable career paths; and (4) ensure sufficient size of the Title 10 workforce to enhance program management and administration, as well as to strike a more appropriate balance with the Title 22 workforce.¹⁴⁰ Much like DAWIA, security cooperation workforce reform would prove to be a long-term initiative requiring further adjustments by Congress.

Section 386: Annual Report

Prior to the FY 2017 NDAA, Congress had put in place several reporting requirements. These reports asked for different information about similar activities and left gaps in terms of programming details for certain security cooperation activities. Congress adopted a DoD proposal to consolidate multiple reporting requirements into a single annual requirement with standardized reporting items. DoD argued that the proposal “would make report preparation more efficient, result in a product that is more useful for congressional oversight

¹⁴⁰ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

and aid the Department in becoming more transparent about its security cooperation activities.”¹⁴¹ Congress also added three sections that produced both far-reaching ramifications for the security cooperation enterprise and significant implementation challenges.

DoDD 5132.03 and DoDI 5132.14

While ODASD(SC) developed and advanced legislative proposals for reform, it also worked on two internal DoD policies to complement and augment the reforms—an overhaul of the DoD Directive (DoDD) on security cooperation roles and responsibilities and a new DoD Instruction (DoDI) on AM&E for security cooperation.

The DoDD aimed to define the security cooperation enterprise in a manner that applied the same processes and standards to the numerous programs across DoD components. That task required determining which programs should be included as security cooperation programs versus military operations or other types of activities and, more significantly, which programs would be required to adhere to the centralized governance envisioned by the DoDD instead of operating independently. It was a contested space. Former ODASD(SC) staff Ronald Meyers remembers “there were a number of different offices that were trying to exclude their programs from being considered . . . from the CN folks that I think at first didn’t want to be part of it, to the Afghan Security Forces Fund . . . that didn’t want to be a part, there were a whole bunch of people that just didn’t want to be constrained under that.”¹⁴² The push by many program offices for exclusion from the broader security cooperation governance architecture continued to reverberate during implementation of the reforms.

While the DoDD established how security cooperation planning and governance processes and standards applied across the enterprise, the DoDI articulated the guidelines for designing, executing, and evaluating security cooperation. It established standards and requirements for conducting assessments of partner capability gaps and political-economic dynamics to inform design of security cooperation activities, monitoring of those activities during execution, and evaluation of security cooperation initiatives to inform future planning and identify

¹⁴¹ DoD Office of the General Counsel, “Fourth Package of Legislative Proposals.”

¹⁴² Meyers, interview.

lessons learned. The DoDI established an expectation that AM&E resources would focus on SSCIs, though monitoring would occur across all activities. Moreover, additional guidelines underpinned the AM&E practices to inform design of security cooperation programs, such as the development of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) objectives and theories of change necessary for AM&E. The DoDI built on best practices adopted by other agencies that had experience with capacity building in other contexts.

The DoDI is notable for its establishment of SSCIs as an organizing concept for planning major security cooperation efforts. The DoDI defines SSCIs as “the series of activities, projects, and programs planned as a unified, multi-year effort to achieve a single desired outcome or set of related outcomes. GCCs usually plan such initiatives and involve the application of multiple security cooperation tools over multiple years to realize a country- or region-specific objective or functional objective as articulated in the country-specific security cooperation sections of a theater campaign plan.”¹⁴³ ODASD(SC) intended SSCIs to involve the application of multiple security cooperation tools and programs over multiple years to realize a country- or region-specific objective or functional objective. ODASD(SC) also intended SSCIs to link security cooperation activities and programs to strategic DoD objectives, as outlined in the National Defense Strategy, through SMART objectives.¹⁴⁴ Leslie Hunter explains, “The SSCI was originally supposed to be some sort of documentation that supported continuity of effort” between security cooperation professionals’ assignments. Since SCOs’ tours are not usually long enough to implement multi-year programs, SSCIs provide “something for them to fall in on to understand . . . This is what we’re trying to do in this country.”¹⁴⁵ It also provided a strategic framework through which to understand and implement authorities across Title 22 and Title 10 and track how other partners engage with a particular country. It was intended to be expansive and inclusive. However, interviewees admit that SSCIs as a planning tool have largely failed to match intent and have become narrower in scope

¹⁴³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ Alan Gorowitz to Combatant Commanders, “Defense Security Cooperation Agency Policy Memorandum 22-38, Revision of the Program Execution Requirements Under 10 U.S.C. § 333 and Section 1263 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016,” memorandum, September 30, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Hunter, interview, February 21, 2025.

around Section 333.

The DoDD and DoDI closely paralleled the FY 2017 NDAA reforms in their focus on centralizing security cooperation governance, improving security cooperation outcomes, developing more holistic approaches to capacity building, enhancing transparency, and implementing AM&E. Because they were in development while DoD was engaged with Congress on the NDAA, conversations overlapped, and each policy informed the other. As a result, success in implementing one often bred success with the others, but challenges likewise plagued implementation across all three reform efforts.

Implementation

Congress signed the FY 2017 NDAA into law on December 23, 2016. Work on implementation began immediately, but less than one month later, a new president was inaugurated, generating the usual upheaval in political leadership. The DASD(SC) left, and the new administration never appointed a replacement.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, few political appointees within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy were confirmed in the first few months of 2017. It took nearly a year before the new Under Secretary, John Rood, was confirmed.

In the meantime, OSD(P) recognized the need to take quick action on FY 2017 NDAA implementation, and Theresa Whelan, who was performing the duties of USD(P), established a cross-functional “tiger team.”¹⁴⁷ The tiger team reached a few conclusions. First, ODASD(SC) would prioritize publication of implementing guidance for the newly created or consolidated authorities under Chapter 16. Second, ODASD(SC) would take responsibility for high-level budget allocation across these programs. Third, adopting a proposal by Alan Gorowitz, OSD(P) would transfer personnel to DSCA to set up a “program design” shop with the intention that it would work with COCOMs or SCOs to refine draft

¹⁴⁶ In 2021, OSD(P) combined ODASD(SC) with other functions into the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships (ODASD(GP)). In 2025, OSD(P) created the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Security Cooperation (ODASW(SC)).

¹⁴⁷ Theresa Whelan (former Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, current Director, Defense Intelligence for Sensitive Activities and Special Programs), interview by Angela M. Riotto and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., August 6, 2025.

security cooperation initiatives into stronger, more coherent proposals.¹⁴⁸

Even with this tiger team, DoD struggled to implement the reforms. Rather than focusing on Title 10 grant assistance and implementation of the FY 2017 NDAA reforms, the new administration prioritized FMS reform. Lieutenant General Charles Hooper, DSCA Director at the time, states, “I went in right as the 2017 NDAA was promulgated. And it was made very clear to me that I had a mandate to, quote, ‘fix FMS.’ That came from the senior-most leaders in the Department of Defense.”¹⁴⁹ He emphasizes that the FMS focus distracted from or competed with DSCA’s ability to implement the congressionally mandated reforms. One former ODASD(SC) staffer recalled that the White House and the Secretary of Defense were “breathing down our throats on FMS, like, you tell me where the priority is going to lie?”¹⁵⁰

Another important dynamic in implementation was the power imbalance between Policy and GCCs in relation to Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis. Hunter recalls, “I think four of the [combatant] commanders at the time were also four-star Marines who, you know, were pretty close to him. And if they didn’t like what they were getting out of Policy, they would just call him up, right? And so, I remember SOUTHCOM in particular, there was an issue where Policy had said no on some funding for CT training and equipping for a Caribbean island. And so, the four-star called and Policy was directed to find the money and make it happen. And we weren’t even allowed to make a case for, like, OK, well, here’s the trade space. This is what we’re not going to fund if we have to fund this. Or, you know, provide an explanation of why we said no.”¹⁵¹

To help “adequately oversee, prioritize, and synchronize security cooperation programs and activities to support strategic priorities” and avoid these very exchanges, the FY 2017 NDAA included a provision requiring a single official to be designated to lead security cooperation policy. Legislation required “the Secretary to assign responsibility for the oversight of strategic policy and guid-

¹⁴⁸ Interview with former U.S. Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁴⁹ Hooper, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁵¹ Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025.

ance and responsibility for overall resource allocation for security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense to a single official and office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the level of Under Secretary or below” to “better synchronize planning and programs across the regional and functional components of the Department and ensure that such activities and resources are appropriately aligned with strategic priorities.”¹⁵² On February 3, 2017, Deputy Secretary Robert Work signed a memo delegating all responsibilities for security cooperation to the USD(P), with the expectation that some responsibilities would be further delegated. The memo stated, “The authority to approve all programs and activities, to obtain the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to make all determinations, certifications, and notifications, and to submit reports required for programs and activities authorized under chapter 16.” It further assigned the Under Secretary “responsibility for the oversight of strategic policy and guidance and responsibility for overall resource allocation for security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense” and assigned to the DSCA Director responsibility “for the execution and administration of *all* security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense involving the provision of defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, loan, cash sale, or lease.”¹⁵³

Meanwhile, DSCA faced a challenge in implementing the FY 2017 NDAA provision requiring that DSCA bear sole responsibility for management and administration of all security cooperation activities, unless the Director grants a specific waiver. At the time of the legislation, several security cooperation programs—counter-WMD capacity-building, counternarcotics, and several military service-specific programs—were administered by offices or contractors independent of DSCA, diminishing organizational efficiency and increasing the potential for conflicts or duplication of effort. Lieutenant General Hooper explains, “Of course, there were huge demands to exercise waiver authority on just about everything, because . . . nobody wanted to lose control.” He remembers “enormous pressure on granting waivers that essentially sent the authorities back to the people from which they were taken.” Facing resistance

¹⁵² H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹⁵³ Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, “Delegation of Authority and Assignment of Responsibility Related to Security Cooperation,” memorandum, February 3, 2017. (Emphasis added.)

from the COCOMs, Hooper started to keep a copy of Chapter 16 on his desk, so “in the early days when my own people were saying, you can’t do that, I go, ‘See what it says right here. Says here that I can do it and I’m going to.’”¹⁵⁴

There was also substantial resistance in the early days to the newly consolidated authorities under Chapter 16. One interviewee notes that, in the first few years following the FY 2017 NDAA, there was a lot of pushback from the CN and counter-WMD communities because they were used to having their own processes. Combining their authorities into Section 333 brought additional oversight, transparency, State Department concurrence requirements, etc., and they were quite frustrated by that.¹⁵⁵ One former DoD staff member points out that no matter how clear and well-drafted legislation may be, there are dozens of points requiring interpretation during implementation, and he details how complex and laborious it was to work through some of these points, often against internal resistance. He cites as an example the application of income thresholds for U.S. assistance to other nations to support their participation in exercises—COCOMs pushed against tighter standards to avoid losing latitude to extend assistance to certain countries, particularly in South America and Caribbean nations.¹⁵⁶

Opportunities for Improvement

Even though the FY 2017 reforms have been in place for several years, some parts are not yet fully implemented.

Institutional Capacity Building

One of the priorities of both Congress and DoD was the emphasis on ICB as an element of broader capacity building initiatives. Congress bolstered authorities for ICB (Section 332), mandated that ICB be conducted in support of capacity

¹⁵⁴ Hooper, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Defense Security Cooperation Agency staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with former U.S. Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

building (Section 333), and directed DoD “to increase its emphasis on strengthening the defense institutions of friendly foreign nations as it builds security cooperation programs and activities.”¹⁵⁷ Yet the practice of ICB remains underdeveloped. One reason for this is that the definition of ICB remains murky. The Defense Security Cooperation University’s Lessons Learned Team Lead Robert Timm traces this challenge back to the issuance of the Department’s first directive on “Defense Institution Building” (DIB), DoDD 5205.82, and action by Congress to codify DIB authorities under the heading of ICB. He notes, “ICB was used in law and gave the Department new and broader authorities, but ICB was not defined in Doctrine or Policy. The Department had to decide what ICB was, how it was different from DIB, and what, if anything, was going to change about how it was planned, funded, and implemented.”¹⁵⁸

Confusion also arose from the FY 2017 NDAA’s Section 333 ICB requirement. In 2017, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy David Trachtenberg issued a memo establishing criteria for ICB programming to meet those requirements. The memo states that “DoD is taking a holistic, deliberate approach to country planning that seeks to build capacity across the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.”¹⁵⁹ DSCA’s Deputy Assistant Director for ICB Steven Peterson argues that the memo “led to pushing the ICB programs that historically had been sort of a Ministry of Defense, three-star agency equivalent, service headquarters level work . . . into like what was, what DSCA internally referred to as this missing middle”—more tactical-level capacity-building.¹⁶⁰ Timm believes that the memo “was helpful in that it set parameters for what the Department wanted to see from DSCA and the GCCs in terms of ICB . . . in practice though, it never really had any teeth.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, David Cate, former Director for Defense Governance, noted that the memo issued by Trachtenberg “aimed to establish standards which now no one enforces,” rendering it

¹⁵⁷ H. R. Rep. No. 114-840.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Timm, email message to Angela M. Riggio, May 15, 2025.

¹⁵⁹ David J. Trachtenberg, “Guidance on Meeting Certification Requirements for 10 U.S.C. 333, Foreign Security Forces: Authority to Build Capacity,” memorandum, November 13, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Steven Peterson (Deputy Assistant Director for Institutional Capacity Building Directorate, Defense Security Cooperation Agency), interview by Angela M. Riggio and Thomas W. Ross, Jr., January 24, 2025.

¹⁶¹ Timm, email message.

“essentially meaningless.”¹⁶² This “missing middle,” paired with the opaqueness of the ICB definition, has led to concerns that activities being termed ICB are too often targeted at the tactical level, out of step with doctrine, and used as a “check-the-box” exercise rather than employed to build durable, strategic military capabilities.

A second challenge has been the lack of clear policy direction. Although ODASD(SC) provided guidance to support AM&E, interviewees claimed that there have been issues with quality of the proposals. Cate cited OSD(P)’s failure to enforce quality standards in proposals for ICB programming.¹⁶³ Steven Peterson notes that 332 and 333 “work well as authorities. What they haven’t had is great guidance around them . . . They need planning guidance.” He recommends that security professionals “use 332 to start developing institutions a year or two before you start your 333 program so you could get after things like sustainment, planning, logistics, whatever institutional elements might need to be built up a little bit to help the partner be ready to absorb the capability that they’re going to acquire.” But he explains that, “what’s happened in reality is the reverse.”¹⁶⁴

Implementation of AM&E Requirements

The implementation of Section 383 also faced obstacles. Difficulties with implementing AM&E may result from the imprecise language and guidance in the DoDI as well as unreconciled perspectives about the intent and meaning of assessments and evaluations. For example, the DoDI made assessment and monitoring responsibilities of the GCCs. However, each GCC may take a slightly different approach to AM&E in terms of who is responsible for initial assessments, SSCI design, and monitoring. Hunter regrets that “when we wrote the AM&E and we kind of thought through how assessment should work, I think it was a mistake that we didn’t say that assessments had to be done *with* the partner.”¹⁶⁵

Differing perspectives on assessments and evaluations and how they should be executed and applied have also resulted in a lack of clarity and a delay

¹⁶² David Cate, email message to Angela M. Riotto, May 7, 2025.

¹⁶³ Cate, email message.

¹⁶⁴ Peterson, interview.

¹⁶⁵ Hunter, interview, January 31, 2025. (Emphasis added).

in execution.¹⁶⁶ Overall, one interviewee believes that, though DoD’s AM&E program can be salvaged, up to this point it may not have met its intent.¹⁶⁷ Former DSCA Chief of Staff Anna Nelson offers a more positive evaluation. She remarks, “I do think there’s been a big kind of organizational/cultural shift in terms of how we think about security cooperation. You know, even that there should be monitoring, evaluation, when I started that was a controversial point . . . but the reforms enabled that and institutionalized it in many ways.” She states that even though there are “continued challenges with all this, it actually has, I think, come a long way in not a very long amount of time.”¹⁶⁸

Significant Security Cooperation Initiative

According to several interviewees, the SSCI process has veered far from original intent. It has become a “check-the-box” exercise in support of proposals rather than a holistic, country-level plan for assistance. Three interrelated challenges plague SSCIs: (1) though SSCIs were intended to define the major efforts within a region, the framework has instead been applied to nearly all capacity-building programs; (2) the template for developing SSCIs is long and complex, and therefore creates too much burden on planners; and (3) SSCIs do not, as intended, capture robust, well-crafted, cross-programmatic strategic plans for security cooperation initiatives.

Alan Gorowitz sees the DoD policy organizing security cooperation planning around SSCIs as a good concept, but ultimately a failure due to wayward implementation. His understanding of the intent of the SSCI was that it would be a “deep dive” conducted just for a handful of major initiatives each year—maybe one or two per combatant command. However, “eventually, SSCI became synonymous with, every time I do a program, any program for whatever country, I’ve got to do this whole thing out there.” He argues that SSCIs have since grown to lengthy, onerous requirements that combatant commands do not have time to complete. He attributes this accretion to a changeover in leadership after the

¹⁶⁶ Alan Gorowitz, email message to Angela M. Riotto, July 29, 2025; Thomas W. Ross, Jr., email message to Angela M. Riotto, August 4, 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁶⁸ Nelson, interview.

leaders of the original ODASD(SC) departed and new leaders came in with a different vision.¹⁶⁹

The burdensome paperwork combined with overwrought bureaucracy creates maddening execution delays. SOUTHCOM's Chief of Security Cooperation Kevin Staley notes, "It goes through so many different chops now that it takes sometimes over a year . . . We had funding expire last year because they didn't get their notification on time. That's ridiculous that it takes two years to get something done. And State's not the problem. State turns them pretty quick. And notification's not the problem. We're the enemy. DoD is. We built a monster."¹⁷⁰

Former DASD(SC) Tommy Ross has been disappointed in the lack of progress in centering strategy in the planning, design, and execution of security cooperation. He comments, "There is no doubt that security cooperation figures really prominently in how we approach our strategic objectives, but people don't bring any sort of strategic thinking to how to achieve them. When I was there, I was always very concerned that people did not bring enough strategic thinking into how security cooperation was designed, planned, and executed. And I think that is largely still the case." He caveats, "I do think it's too early to declare failure or anything else at this point. Because, you know, these were not intended to produce overnight change. These are really things that are intended to produce culture change, which just takes some time." He stresses, "I told people at the time that it would be ten years before we knew whether they're successful or not, and it still has not been ten years. I do truly think that a lot of the reforms that we put in place are generational in nature. That said," he continues, "my definition of success has always just been that I want to see the department take security cooperation seriously, as both an approach to building effective strategies and as a discipline that requires infrastructure, that requires investment. And I have not seen either of those two things yet."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Gorowitz, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Staley, interview.

¹⁷¹ Ross, in discussion with author, November 13, 2024.

Successes

Even with these challenges, the FY 2017 NDAA achieved historic security cooperation reforms that consolidated security cooperation authorities, integrated ICB into military capability development, and established an AM&E program.

Consolidation of Authorities

One of the major successes of the reforms was the consolidation and codification of authorities. Multiple interviewees noted that the consolidation has made the “patchwork” more intelligible and thus more accessible to practitioners. One interviewee judges that the shift to permanent authorities, not time-bound authorities, allowed for security cooperation practitioners to grow and refine their approaches.¹⁷² Also, focusing the authorities more strategically, rather than being regional or country specific, has enabled DoD to apply them to emerging areas of concern, such as great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁷³

Though many hoped the establishment of Chapter 16 would establish a durable framework that might obviate the perceived need for creating, modifying, or extending additional authorities, that hope has proven unfounded. Brian McKeon notes that, during his time at the State Department in 2021 and 2022, he encountered COCOMs seeking new authorities, which he found troubling. He identified SOUTHCOM as pushing to expand its authorities to compete for resources against COCOMs like CENTCOM and INDOPACOM that enjoy more advantages in resource competitions. Bill Monahan argues that, despite consolidation, an appetite for new authorities driven by resource competition remains strong. He contends, “The impulse still exists for every combatant commander to want his or her own special fund that they don’t have to compete for with other commanders . . . but that’s been solved by just keep adding more dollars to the defense budget each year, above the president’s request.”¹⁷⁴ The legislative record bears out these concerns. Despite the termination of U.S. military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan—major drivers of Congress’s actions up through FY 2022—Congress added, modified, or extended twenty

¹⁷² Interview with Department of State staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁷³ Gorowitz, in discussion with author, December 16, 2024.

¹⁷⁴ Monahan, in discussion with author, December 20, 2024.

authorities in the FY 2025 NDAA alone. Thus, though the consolidation was largely a success, further engagement with Congress is needed to prevent the reemergence of the messy, challenging patchwork that plagued practitioners before the reforms.

Capacity Building to Address Strategic Priorities

Another success cited by interviewees is DoD's improved ability under Section 333 to conduct capacity building in support of strategic priorities. Alan Gorowitz points to three major impacts of the establishment of Section 333: (1) the reforms expanded DoD's focus from counterterrorism to a global, holistic focus on addressing military risk, helping to open up opportunities to address issues, such as China's aggression in the South China Sea via the Maritime Security Initiative, that DoD previously had been unable to address; (2) as a result of this shift, there has been a concomitant growth in emphasis on ICB because more serious attempts to build more significant or complex partner capabilities demands attention to institutions; and (3) as a result of the shift, capacity building has expanded from primarily a Special Operations activity to involving general-purpose forces across the military enterprise.¹⁷⁵ The security cooperation experience at SOUTHCOM confirms Gorowitz's analysis. A former DoD staff member concludes, "That's the goodness in the way the authorities were written . . . and it includes all the different categories, and so it does give you that flexibility." They note, jokingly, "At one point there's a terrorist behind every tree. Now there's a Chinese military, PLA, behind every tree. But it is true . . . there's a huge uptick in Chinese incursion in Latin America." They also acknowledge, "I think this pushed us into thinking more corporately, if that makes sense . . . I think it puts some discipline into it and broadened it . . . it brought in the entire enterprise. It wasn't stovepiped."¹⁷⁶

Workforce Professionalization

One of the more visible reform successes is the establishment of DSCU as part of the security cooperation workforce professionalization efforts. Vice

¹⁷⁵ Gorowitz, interview.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with former Department of Defense staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

Admiral Rixey worked with Secretary of Defense Mattis and Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work to conceive a system in which highly qualified, experienced officers could promote and fill a “billet on each of the COCOM staff for export control or export for whatever international sales that was coming up.”¹⁷⁷ Key to this effort was the establishment of a university—not just a school. The Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management already existed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to provide training to SCOs, but more was needed. DoD and Congress determined that DSCA needed a university and a workforce certification program.

DSCA took the lead on workforce reform. Even before the FY 2017 NDAA, Rixey strived to professionalize the workforce and revive DSCA headquarters. Rixey’s successor, Lieutenant General Charles Hooper, continued this initiative, bolstered by the FY 2017 NDAA mandate to establish a security cooperation workforce and an education system to underpin that workforce. Hooper emphasized the need for a university with a holistic, career-long education focus rather than a school more focused on skill-specific training. He argues that “once you have a university that’s focused on the study and practice of [security cooperation], anything is possible.” Though he admits that he “received huge resistance to establishing the university. Everybody thought I was going to try to build Harvard on the Potomac, and I had to convince them that, number one, we had the money to do it and, number two, this was a good thing . . . I was able to convince the leadership.” When asked about the reforms’ successes, Hooper exclaimed, “DSCU . . . I am proudest of that.”¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

The FY 2017 NDAA reforms sought to make security cooperation more strategic, easier to plan and execute, and more centrally governed to enable a close alignment between security cooperation resources, activities, and national security objectives. Though still a work in progress, these reforms in many ways delivered upon this promise. Yet, in the intervening years, both the security environment and the security cooperation enterprise have undergone momentous

¹⁷⁷ Rixey, interview.

¹⁷⁸ Hooper, interview.

changes that will continue to shape the future direction of the discipline. As the Department looks toward the future, its past experience in navigating and reforming the security cooperation patchwork provides important guidance.

Even though challenges still present themselves, the FY 2017 reforms have largely been a success in improving security cooperation programs. These reforms consolidated authorities, mandated AM&E, and resulted in workforce professionalization developments. Overall, the FY 2017 NDAA reforms were a significant step forward in improving security cooperation programs. When asked for his judgement of the reforms, one interviewee concluded that reform was “the right thing to do. It’s probably time for a relook to see if there is anything else to do.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Defense Security Cooperation Agency staff member. Interview was conducted by Angela M. Riotto in confidentiality, and the name of interviewee is withheld by mutual agreement.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Description
AM&E	Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ASFF	Afghan Security Forces Fund
BPC	Building Partner Capacity
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CN	Counternarcotics
COCOM	Combatant command
CD	Counterdrug
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CT	Counterterrorism
CTOC	Countertransnational organized crime
DASD(SC)	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DIB	Defense Institution Building
DISAM	Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management
DoD	Department of Defense
DoDD	Department of Defense Directive
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
DoS	Department of State
DOTMLPF-P	Doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, facilities, and policy

Continued on next page

Abbreviation	Description
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
DSCU	Defense Security Cooperation University
EUCOM	United States European Command
FAO	Foreign area officer
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FY	Fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commander
GSCF	Global Security Contingency Fund
G-TSCMIS	Global Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System
HASC	House Armed Services Committee
ICB	Institutional Capacity Building
INDOPACOM	United States Indo-Pacific Command
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
LOA	Letter of Offer and Acceptance
LRP	Legislative Review Panel
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
ODASD(SC)	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation
OGC	Office of the General Counsel
OSD(P)	Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy
PM	Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State
PPD	Presidential Policy Directive
SASC	Senate Armed Services Committee
SCAO	Security Cooperation Assessment Office
SCO	Security Cooperation Organization / Security Cooperation Officer
SCRTF	Security Cooperation Reform Task Force

Continued on next page

Abbreviation	Description
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound
SOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
SSCI	Significant Security Cooperation Initiative
USD(P)	Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
WMD	Weapon of mass destruction

GLOSSARY

Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation (AM&E). A comprehensive framework required by the FY 2017 NDAA to assess, monitor, and evaluate security cooperation programs. Assessments inform program design, while monitoring and evaluation are used to gauge whether programs are meeting their defined objectives.

Building Partner Capacity (BPC). A term used to describe security cooperation and security assistance activities funded with U.S. government appropriations and focused on developing the capabilities of partner nations to address mutual security threats.

Chapter 16 (Title 10 U.S. Code). A chapter in Title 10 of the U.S. Code established by the FY 2017 NDAA. It consolidates numerous security cooperation authorities into a single legal framework to provide greater clarity, consistency, and strategic oversight.

Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). An agency that directs, administers, and provides Department of Defense-wide guidance for the execution of security assistance and security cooperation programs over which DSCA has responsibility.

Defense Security Cooperation University (DSCU). An educational institution established as part of the security cooperation workforce reforms. It provides holistic, career-long education and professional development for the security cooperation workforce, replacing the former Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM).

Foreign Military Financing (FMF). The primary Department of State (Title 22) program for providing grant assistance to foreign countries to finance their acquisition of U.S. defense articles, services, and training.

Foreign Military Sales (FMS). A form of security assistance authorized by the Arms Export Control Act and a fundamental tool of U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. government may sell defense articles and services to foreign countries and international organizations when the president finds providing defense articles and services will strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace.

Government Accountability Office (GAO). An agency of the legislative branch, responsible solely to Congress, which functions to audit all negotiated government contracts and investigate all matters relating to the receipt, disbursement, and application of public funds. The GAO determines whether public funds are expended in accordance with appropriations, and recommends to Congress various policies and procedures to be enacted into law to provide oversight and governance of government spending. Formerly the General Accounting Office.

Institutional Capacity Building (ICB). A core component of security cooperation focused on strengthening a partner nation's defense institutions, such as ministries of defense and general staffs. The goal is to build enduring capabilities in areas like administration, logistics, governance, and resource management.

Section 1206. A landmark authority from the FY 2006 NDAA, also known as "Global Train and Equip." It gave the Department of Defense greater flexibility and speed to use its own funds to train and equip foreign partners for counterterrorism and stability operations, bypassing the slower FMF/FMS process.

Section 333. A key authority created by the FY 2017 NDAA that consolidated several previous "train and equip" programs into a single, global authority. It allows the Department of Defense to build the capacity of foreign security forces for specific purposes, such as counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and maritime security.

Security Assistance. A group of programs authorized by federal statutes by which the United States provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, lease, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives, and those that are funded and authorized through the Department of State to be administered by Department of Defense / Defense Security Cooperation Agency, which are considered part of security cooperation.

Security Cooperation. Activities undertaken by the Department of Defense to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives. It includes all DoD interactions with foreign defense and security establishments, including all DoD-administered security assistance programs, that: build defense and security relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, including all international armaments cooperation activities and security assistance activities; develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations; and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations.

Security Cooperation Organization (SCO). A Department of Defense element that is part of the United States diplomatic mission located in a foreign country to carry out security assistance and security cooperation management functions under the supervision and coordination authority of the senior defense official/defense attaché.

Significant Security Cooperation Initiative (SSCI). A planning concept intended to be a strategic framework for major, multi-year security cooperation efforts.

U.S. Code (U.S.C.). A consolidation and codification of the general and permanent laws of the United States arranged according to subject matter under fifty title headings. The U.S.C. sets out the current status of the laws, as amended. It presents the laws in a concise and usable form without requiring recourse to the many volumes of the Statutes at Large containing the individual amendments.

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Thomas W. Ross, Jr. is Head of Global Public Policy at Alteryx, adjunct professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, and a member of the congressionally appointed U.S. Commission on the Future of the Navy. Previously, he served as Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation, in which capacity he led significant reforms to Department of Defense security cooperation policy, resources, and implementation. He served in Congress as senior intelligence and defense adviser to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and as legislative director for Representative David Price, advising each on national security policy.