

Strategy Research Project

Shifting State Partnership Program Resources to the Asia-Pacific Region

by

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Class of 2013

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<p>The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</p>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-03-2013		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Shifting State Partnership Program Resources to the Asia-Pacific Region				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey C. Dickerson United States Army National Guard				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Thomas P. Galvin Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 6,266					
14. ABSTRACT The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) has proven itself to be an efficient and economical program for developing partner capacity. The SPP includes a "whole of government" approach to engagement that includes state level military, diplomatic, and economic engagement and partnership with the partnered country to develop its capacity and capabilities. The SPP's original focus was aiding the development of partner capacity in Central and Eastern Europe, facilitating several former Warsaw Pact member countries' entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and created lasting partnerships across Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas. Unfortunately, SPP resources are heavily invested in relationships in theaters other than the Asia-Pacific, causing them to be misaligned with the required rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. As a component of the U.S. strategy to rebalance in the Asia-Pacific Region, the U.S should allocate additional SPP resources in order to expand the SPP within U.S. Pacific Command.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Building Partner Capacity, Theater Security Cooperation Plan					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 36	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

Title: Shifting State Partnership Program Resources to the Asia-Pacific Region

Report Date: March 2013

Page Count: 36

Word Count: 6,266

Key Terms: Building Partner Capacity, Theater Security Cooperation Plan

Classification: Unclassified

The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) has proven itself to be an efficient and economical program for developing partner capacity. The SPP includes a “whole of government” approach to engagement that includes state level military, diplomatic, and economic engagement and partnership with the partnered country to develop its capacity and capabilities. The SPP’s original focus was aiding the development of partner capacity in Central and Eastern Europe, facilitating several former Warsaw Pact member countries’ entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and created lasting partnerships across Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas. Unfortunately, SPP resources are heavily invested in relationships in theaters other than the Asia-Pacific, causing them to be misaligned with the required rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. As a component of the U.S. strategy to rebalance in the Asia-Pacific Region, the U.S should allocate additional SPP resources in order to expand the SPP within U.S. Pacific Command.

Shifting State Partnership Program Resources to the Asia-Pacific Region

The [State Partnership Program] is the kind of program that very directly has an impact on the large amounts of money that we do have to spend on national security,...the ability to ultimately reduce the billions of dollars that we are now spending on conflict engagement. ... We're investing seed money in conflict prevention.

—Doug Wilson, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs¹

Of the many Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) sponsored programs, one program, the State Partnership Program (SPP), has proven itself to be an efficient and economical program for developing partner capacity. The SPP includes a “whole of government” approach to engagement that includes state level military, diplomatic, and economic engagement and partnership with the partnered country to develop its capacity and capabilities.² The SPP's original focus was aiding the development of partner capacity in Central and Eastern Europe, facilitating several former Warsaw Pact member countries' entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and created lasting partnerships across Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas. Many SPP participants later joined the U.S. in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, despite the dynamics of the strategic environment, the greatest number of SPP participants remains in the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) area of responsibility (AOR).

In the National Security Strategy of May 2010, President Obama outlined the need to promote a just and sustainable international order.³ He indicated that a true test of the successful efforts of this order is the ability of nations to come together to fight the challenges of the 21st century: “violent extremism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, and a changing global economy.”⁴ In late 2011, President Obama also announced that the United States would rebalance from Europe and the Middle East towards the Asia-

Pacific region. A Congressional Research Service report suggests that this rebalancing represents a shifting of the U.S. foreign policy and national security, as well as its economic center of gravity; therefore, U.S. strategy and priorities must also be adjusted.⁵

As the second decade of the 21st Century progresses, the U.S. seeks to maintain its dominant position within the world's diplomatic, military, and economic domains while addressing significant economic challenges. With the likelihood of an extended period of fiscal austerity, the U.S. government will be forced to make difficult choices in funding priorities. As the United States rebalances national strategic interests and efforts toward the Asia-Pacific region, it will do so while simultaneously reducing or eliminating various programs. Within the DoD, these choices will affect a variety of programs from manning, equipping, training, and operations that support the Theater Security Cooperation Plans (TSCP) within all of the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC). Many of these programs directly support national strategic goals, especially the strategic goals of building and maintaining partnerships and building partner capacity. In the National Defense Strategy of January 2012, Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Leon Panetta declared that the U.S. will expand its "networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests."⁶ Additionally, he stressed the importance of continuing to "[build] partnership capacity elsewhere in the world...for sharing the costs and responsibilities of global leadership,"⁷ through "innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives."⁸

In the Defense Budget Priorities and Choices of January 2012, DoD considered five major tenets of the President's strategic guidance when assessing the risks associated with making necessary budgetary decisions. One tenet, "rebalance force structure and investments toward the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions while sustaining key alliances and partnerships in other regions",⁹ directly supports a strategy of realigning programs to support strategic objectives within the Asia-Pacific region. Unfortunately, SPP resources are heavily invested in relationships in theaters other than the Asia-Pacific, causing these resources to be misaligned with the required rebalance. The question could be asked, does the SPP remain an effective tool for GCCs, and can the program be realigned to support the new strategy? This paper will first address how the SPP evolved to its 2012 configuration, and then demonstrate that realignment without sacrificing existing partnerships is possible and desirable.

Origins and Expansion of the State Partnership Program

The SPP originated in July 1992 when the Office of the Secretary of Defense tasked the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to develop and execute a program in support of Latvia's request for U.S. assistance in enhancing its civil-military affairs capabilities. The pairing of the National Guard of the state of Michigan with the Latvian Army became the first partnership. Soon thereafter, other former Warsaw Pact nations sought similar arrangements, and, in 1993, the SPP was formed. In the twenty years since, the program has grown to 65 active partnerships on five continents. As of March 2013, USEUCOM was the GCC with the largest number of partnered countries with twenty-two in Europe. Many of these partnerships went beyond military-to-military and included other government agencies and private enterprise. SPP thus represented a "whole of government" approach to engaging partnered countries and bridges the gap between

military, diplomatic, and economic elements of power. As outlined in the National Guard State Partnership Program Goals for 2008-2013, the SPP had 4 goals: (1) “build partnership capacity to deter, prevent, and prepare” to respond to natural and man-made disasters while emphasizing inter agency cooperation; (2) “build partnership capacity to respond and recover...from attack and man-made disasters”; (3) “support partners’ defense reform and professional development” in order to “assist nations in transforming their defense structures and personnel to meet 21st century challenges” while enabling them to accomplish “coalition operations, civil-military and interagency cooperation, civilian control of the military, reserve component and officer and NCO professional development”; and (4) “enable and facilitate enduring broad-spectrum security relationships” in order to “cooperate and collaborate regionally and globally in support of DoS and other lead agencies in regional peace/stability operations, health, education, culture, economics, [and] agriculture.”¹⁰

As a component of a GCC’s Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP), SPP activities support security cooperation and assistance, which include security cooperation and development, conflict deterrence, access and assistance during conflict, and shaping opportunities to help pursue alternatives to conflict.¹¹ This was how SPP contributed to the effective development of stable and secure partnerships within Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, it evolved beyond the former Warsaw Pact countries and supported partner capacity building capabilities across a broader spectrum, such as countering illicit drug trafficking and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Some GCCs, such as U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), more rapidly began incorporating the SPP into their

TSCPs over the course of the last two decades, while, others, such as U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), and U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) used the program less extensively.

Expansion of SPP in some theaters has been limited by political or diplomatic factors beyond the control of the military, despite the overwhelming strategic interests that SPP might serve. A good example of this is USCENTCOM. Of the twenty countries within the USCENTCOM AOR, as of March 2013 only five were SPP countries. The SPP was likely not an appropriate fit for some of the other nations within the USCENTCOM AOR due to poor diplomatic relations, regional conflicts and threats, and political instability. The SPP expanded within USCENTCOM in 1993 when it added the Kazakhstan and Arizona partnership. Kazakhstan is strategically juxtaposed between Russia and China and had access to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) while a member of the former Soviet Union. That strategic geographic location and WMD access likely contributed to USCENTCOM's efforts to quickly and comprehensively develop security partnerships with Kazakhstan, to include establishing a state partnership with Arizona as a component of its TSCP.¹² Partnerships stemming from operations in Afghanistan facilitated the enrollment of former Soviet republics Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1996 and 2003, as well as Uzbekistan in 2012. Meanwhile, the U.S.'s strong relationship with Middle Eastern partner Jordan allowed for its partnership to begin in 2004.¹³ However, although other countries such as Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait could be potential SPP candidates, conditions have not been sufficiently favorable to warrant initiation.

Further SPP expansion occurred along two separate strategies – expansion tied to the strategy of partnering with emerging democracies after the end of the Cold War, and expansion as an economy of force. The most recent SPP expansions seemingly occurred as a result of an economy of force strategy as active component forces were drawn down within their GCCs in order to support Global War on Terror (GWOT) efforts within the USCENTCOM AOR, or simply as a result of a significant lack of assigned ground forces to the GCC. For example, the SPP expanded further when it established its first partnership on the continent of Africa between New York and South Africa in August 2003.¹⁴ The newest GCC, USAFRICOM, which was established in 2008 and now has eight partnered countries, initially had no permanently assigned Army forces with which to execute a comprehensive TSCP within its AOR. Therefore it relied heavily upon the National Guard's SPP to execute a large portion of its TSCP, which included engagements in Tunisia following the Arab Spring¹⁵ to help develop methods for teaching democratic ideals to Tunisian youth, as well as teaching aircraft refueling operations to the Moroccan Air Force.¹⁶ USAFRICOM will likely continue to rely upon the SPP to build partner capacity even after the assignment of a regionally aligned force (RAF) from the U.S. Army's First Infantry Division.¹⁷ The United States Army Africa Commander, Major General Patrick J. Donahue II, recently commented, "[t]he RAF brigade won't be able to conduct all of U.S. Army Africa's planned activities, and we will continue to count on the support from the National Guard to fulfill the majority of our missions."¹⁸

During the past twelve years, SPP expansion within the GCCs averaged one per GCC every other year, and SPP expansion within USPACOM has mostly kept pace with

expansion within USAFRICOM, USCENTCOM and USEUCOM, while lagging slightly behind USSOUTHCOM. In 2000, USPACOM began including SPP in its TSCP by establishing SPPs with Hawaii and Guam and the Philippines¹⁹, and recently expanded its partnerships to eight when it formalized a partnership between Vietnam and Oregon in November 2012. The other partnered countries within USPACOM include Mongolia, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Cambodia.²⁰ Considering that expansion of the SPP within the other GCCs appears to be inversely proportionate to the allocation of active component forces to the GCCs, it is likely that the number of SPPs within USPACOM remained at a low level as result of the permanent assignment and presence of significant active component forces within USPACOM with which to execute the USPACOM TSCP through September 11, 2001. Therefore it is likely that the rapid expansion of the SPP within USPACOM since 2001 (six of the eight SPPs were established since 2001) resulted from the commitment of more USPACOM active component forces to the GWOT in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001-2012, thereby reducing the number of available forces with which to execute the USPACOM TSCP.

SPP Success Stories

SPP countries demonstrated success in reforming their defense sectors and enabling and facilitating enduring broad-spectrum security relationships. The outcomes have been dramatic, with partners supporting U.S. and international security objectives through training received and transformation performed through SPP.

SPP partners made significant contributions to collective defense efforts in NATO by supporting peace and stability operations in the Balkans and uniting in a fight against violent extremism through support to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003. For example, Slovenia assisted the U.S. and NATO in its efforts to stabilize and bring peace

to the Balkans by providing troops in support of Stabilization Force (SFOR) in the 1990s.

SPP countries' support of the war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly demonstrated the ability of partners to provide military forces to operations. After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, thirty-eight other countries joined this "coalition of the willing" to help depose Saddam Hussein and topple his regime.²¹ Twenty-five of the troop-contributing states were SPP partners, which made up 65.7% of the troop contributing countries to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).²²

For example, Thailand, partnered with the state of Washington, and the Philippines, partnered with Hawaii, provided military support for reconstruction efforts in Iraq while other SPP countries provided combat brigades. When the country of Georgia deployed one of its brigades to Iraq in 2007, several Soldiers from the Georgia Army National Guard deployed along with them and served with them throughout their deployment.²³ This Georgian brigade's capability to deploy and fight stemmed from a concerted SPP effort to develop their sustainment capabilities during the year prior. After returning from a deployment to Iraq in 2006, a fortuitous visit by the Brigade Commander of the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) of the Georgia Army National Guard on a training visit to Tbilisi, Georgia, in early 2007 led to the development of a four month training program from April through July 2007 to improve the combat service support capabilities of the Georgian Army. In conjunction with the Georgia Security and Stability Operations Program (GSSOP II), the 48th IBCT deployed teams of National Guardsmen to Georgia to train the Georgians in supply and maintenance operations.²⁴ In addition to the country of Georgia, Poland also provided

combat units to support the war effort in Iraq. In both instances, the brigades from these countries deployed along with embedded Soldiers from their partnered states in the form of Bilateral Embedded Support Teams (BEST). In these two cases, Illinois and Georgia each deployed Soldiers alongside their partnered countries.²⁵ In several instances, the troop-contributing SPP countries would only provide troops if their SPP partners from the U.S. accompanied them.²⁶ Opportunities like this enabled the U.S. military to be reinforced with troops from an unexpected source, and these sources were even more heavily relied upon during the war in Afghanistan.

As of 2012, fifty separate countries contributed combat forces to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan,²⁷ and SPP countries made up a significant percentage of the overall troop contributing nations to ISAF – twenty-three out of the forty eight troop contributing nations.²⁸ Collectively, SPP countries provided over 8,200 troops to ISAF.²⁹ For example, Poland, partnered with Illinois, provided an entire Battle Group that served and fought as a battle space owner in Afghanistan. Other countries participating in the SPP, such as Jordan, Macedonia, and Mongolia, also provided troops in support of ISAF for purposes such as force protection.³⁰ Several other SPP countries provided troop support to ISAF in the form of Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs), which made up a large percentage of these SPP country troop contributions. The OMLTs were responsible for embedding with and training and mentoring the Afghan National Army (ANA).³¹ Latvia, the very first SPP country, along with its partnered state, Michigan, deployed the first BEST OMLT to Afghanistan in support of OEF in 2008.³² In all, twenty-four separate countries provided OMLTs to Afghanistan in support of ISAF

efforts to develop and train the ANA, and of those twenty four OMLT providing countries, ten are countries participating in the SPP.

The contemporary historical examples of partnership extended beyond the war fighting role and also included examples of supporting partner capacity to build and recover, developing professional forces, and facilitating enduring relationships. These contemporary examples of SPP partnership activities and outcomes are much more representative of civilian diplomacy and the whole of government approach to partnering. These examples include port security, humanitarian assistance, defense support to civil authorities (DSCA), government and economic development, and combating transnational criminal activities in support of the four SPP goals. “The unique civil-military nature of the National Guard allows the SPP to engage in a wide range of Security Cooperation activities, such as: Disaster Preparedness, Humanitarian Assistance, Defense Support of Civil Authorities, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear, Cyber, Reserve Component Reform, Counterdrug, Border/Port Security, and Public/Private Partnerships.”³³

Serbia provides an example. In 1999, the United States and NATO conducted offensive air operations against Serbian forces as a part of Operation Allied Force in order to deter Serbian aggression in Kosovo.³⁴ Over a decade later, the relationship between Serbia and the United States evolved into a much more peaceful one. Serbia has since entered into an SPP agreement with the National Guard in the state of Ohio. In 2010, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from the Serbian Army graduated from the Ohio National Guard NCO academy, and these partners’ military-to-military engagements recently included humanitarian missions to rehabilitate several schools

damaged during a powerful 5.3 magnitude earthquake in November 2010.³⁵ This partnership, which began in 2006, is more than just a military to military partnership. Their goals are also to further develop the cultural bonds between the United States and Serbia through enhanced engagements between universities and youth programs. In September 2010, Ambassador Mary Burce Warlick, U.S. Ambassador to Serbia, praised the SPP for playing a critical role in improving U.S. and Serbian relations.³⁶

SPP also facilitated private organizations and business engagements as well as government to government engagements as it developed enduring relationships. The SPP effectively built relationships at the local level and linked local U.S. leaders with national leaders from other countries, such as Senegal. After expressing a desire to develop their country's ability to conduct crisis management and search and rescue operations, as well as improve the professionalism of their NCO corps and develop family support programs, Senegalese leaders entered into a SPP agreement with the State of Vermont in 2009.³⁷ In September 2010, President Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal, visited Burlington, Vermont, and remarked that he will take back to Senegal a better understanding of the state's economic model as well as a better understanding of the relationship and interaction between business, services, and tourism and their contributions to quality of life.³⁸

SPP built partner capacity to deter, prevent, and prepare for threats to trade and commerce. Thailand and its partner state, Washington, conducted several port security exercises between 2003 and 2012. These exercises focused on responding to hazard material and WMD incidents, crisis management, port security, and disaster planning and included participants from the Royal Thai Army, Navy, and Marine Department, as

well as the Thai National Security Council and other civilian agencies along with members of the Washington Air and Army National Guard and other U.S. civilian participants.³⁹ This partnership improved port security operations at the Port of Tacoma in Tacoma, Washington, which handles a significant amount of cargo exported from port at Leam Chabang in Thailand every year.⁴⁰

These examples clearly demonstrate the SPP's ability to achieve success in the goal of building partnership capacity to deter, prevent, and prepare for natural/man-made disasters with emphasis on civil-military and interagency cooperation while also building partnership capacity to respond and recover from attack and man-made disasters. It also clearly develops the ability to support partners' defense reform and professional development, as well as enabling and facilitating enduring broad-spectrum security relationships in support of the DoS and other lead agencies. While each of these examples provides far more concrete evidence of the SPP's effectiveness, military and civilian leadership testimony provides additional support to the effectiveness of the program.

During a speech delivered on July 17, 2012, at a National Guard Symposium on Mutual Security Cooperation, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, stressed the imperative for major powers to develop partnerships that work within a "competitive fiscal and security environment" in order to confront the decentralized threats of the 21st century. He went on to praise the SPP for its ability to provide continuity in relationships among the leaders of the partnered states and countries. He also remarked, "the State Partnership Program has reaped benefits far

beyond what was initially conceived” and added that it was “a modest investment for a pretty substantial return.”⁴¹

During recent testimony regarding their GCC Defense Posture Statements before the Senate Armed Services Committee, several GCC Commanders testified regarding the effectiveness of the program. They praised the value of the SPP within their respective GCCs, and requested additional SPP support. For example, in 2009, General Brantz Craddock, Commander, USEUCOM, testified that the SPP “continues to be one of our most effective [build partner capacity] programs...the unique civil-military nature of the National Guard allows it to participate actively in a wide range of security cooperation activities and help bridge the gap between DoD and DoS responsibilities...”⁴² His successor, Admiral James Stavradis, also testified in 2012 that the program is “one of European Command’s most unique, cost effective, and essential international engagement tools...that support key Theater Security Cooperation objectives and preserve and develop these important strategic partnerships...”⁴³ The Commander of USAFRICOM, General Carter F. Hamm testified in 2012 that the SPP was an “important component” of USAFRICOM’s “efforts to strengthen defense capabilities of African partners”.⁴⁴ He further added that he had asked NGB to add two additional partnerships and consider further expansion of the program.⁴⁵

U.S. civilian leadership also provide testament to the success of the SPP. “In a 2010 survey of Ambassadors to USEUCOM SPP nations: 6 said SPP is their most significant program; 14 said SPP is a significant program that adequately supports their objectives; and 1 said SPP adequately supports their objectives, but would like to see increased engagements.”⁴⁶

Criticisms of SPP

The above examples show that SPP has been generally successful in pursuing its goals. It has contributed to building partner capacity to deter, prevent, prepare, respond, and recover; supporting defense reform; and enabling and facilitating security relationships.⁴⁷ But despite overwhelming anecdotal evidence and continuous praise of SPP in Congressional testimony by Geographic Combatant Commanders, SPP has not been without its critics.

Some critics come from Congress, who raised concerns over SPP's effectiveness, conformity to federal law, nesting with TSCPs, and encroachment upon or conflicts with DoS and USAID interests, responsibilities, and programs.⁴⁸ In a 2011 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, congressional researchers noted that the program suffers from written assessments "limited in scope" and focused on "outputs... rather than outcomes"⁴⁹ The report also noted that "the SPP has no dedicated statute authority"⁵⁰ of its own and uses several different statutes within United States Code (U.S.C.) to authorize SPP activities. These statutes range from Title 10 U.S.C. (Armed Forces), to Title 32 U.S.C. (National Guard), to Title 22 U.S.C. (Foreign Relations and Intercourse).⁵¹ The 2011 CRS report provided several options for Congress to consider: (1) consider a Directive Type Memorandum regarding SPP funding, (2) direct periodic evaluations, (3) require centralized approval of SPP activities, and (4) codify the SPP in law.⁵² Still, the report acknowledged SPP's ability to build enduring relationships; capitalize upon unique civilian skill sets of National Guard Soldiers and Airmen and the dual state and federal status of the National Guard; remain engaged with high and low priority nations; and develop unique relationships between states and foreign countries.⁵³ Despite the issues outlined in the CRS's report, a

subsequent U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report characterized the SPP as “a force enabler for the combatant commands”.⁵⁴

In May 2012, the GAO conducted an investigation into SPP and found several problems. They identified a lack of comprehensive oversight that clearly defined and outlined the program’s goals, objectives, and measures of performance. There was insufficient data available for an assessment, to include management of funding from 2007-2011, multiple data management systems, inconsistent program terminology between the GCCs and National Guard Bureau (NGB), and challenges with funding civilian participation in the program.⁵⁵ The GAO, therefore, found that neither Congress nor the DoD can quantitatively assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.⁵⁶ Thus, the GAO made the following recommendations to the DoD in May 2012: develop an oversight process to measure program effectiveness and standardize data management; develop specific guidance for funding civilian participation in the program; and develop additional training for SPP Coordinators and Bi-Lateral Affairs Officers.⁵⁷ In an effort to address the Congressional concerns, NGB began implementing a more formal process for assessing the program’s goals, and tracking program funding in accordance with the recommendations in the GAO’s report. NGB has also initiated a more comprehensive and formal training process for Bi-Lateral Affairs Officers and SPP Coordinators,⁵⁸ but the ability to quantitatively assess the program has yet to be reached.

Can SPP be Realigned?

The recent national strategic guidance from the President to rebalance U.S. efforts to the Asia-Pacific region, envisions a rebalancing from a whole of government perspective. In his national strategic guidance, the President also stressed the need for

developing partnerships with small footprints of U.S. forces that will help counter the multiple, asymmetrical threats the U.S is likely to face in the next decades. As the DoD implements a strategy of realigning current programs to support strategic objectives within the Asia-Pacific region, it may be depending more on resource-intensive ways to accomplish strategic objectives within the region rather than less costly, yet efficient and economical ones.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, the current U.S. strategy is characterized as one of sustained, significant U.S. military presence, coupled with a few long-lasting regional alliances, and ongoing security partnerships sustained through a “robust policy of diplomatic engagements.”⁵⁹ This strategy is earmarked by a continuation of the traditional bilateral alliances with countries within the region – Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand. These alliances have existed since the end of World War II and the Korean War and are currently “the foundation for U.S. security strategy in Asia.”⁶⁰ Additionally, the strategy includes a significant U.S. military presence in the region in Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Australia.

In his recent posture statement to the U.S. Congress on April 12, 2011, Admiral Robert F. Willard, Commander, USPACOM, characterized the Asia-Pacific region as “relatively secure and stable”.⁶¹ He outlined the challenges within the Asia-Pacific region as those posed by North Korea and its nuclear weapons program and threats to proliferate WMD; transnational criminal organizations as well as violent extremist groups (VEOs) and their threats of destabilizing emerging partners; cyber threats; humanitarian crises caused by pandemics, famines and natural disasters; environmental degradation;

and China's military modernization coupled with its aggressive actions in regional territorial disputes.⁶² In his subsequent report to Congress in 2012, Admiral Willard reported essentially the same challenges to Congress while adding "the need to continuously manage and optimize U.S. alliances and strengthen regional partnerships" and declaring that cooperative security within the region can be achieved through "strong ally and partner associations."⁶³ He went on to place emphasis upon the importance of the forward presence of significant U.S. forces within the Asia-Pacific region and the continued need for that forward presence; however, there was little mention of other aspects of the theater strategy that represent a whole of government of approach to building strong partner associations.⁶⁴

USPACOM conducts military engagements throughout the region; however, as former U.S. Ambassador Edward Marks wrote, "the [military] engagement programs no longer can be handled as a discrete military activity...and can only be seen as a part of the overall engagement activity of the U.S. government".⁶⁵ He went on to add that the need to manage engagements, especially in an environment challenged by the regional asymmetrical threats and challenges noted by Admiral Willard, must be accomplished from a "whole of government" approach.⁶⁶ While the current alignment of resources within the Asia-Pacific region could achieve the effect of adequately building sufficient regional partnerships, conditions do exist within several regional countries that could be better addressed through a whole of government approach to partnering. The SPP is an effective program for building partner capacity from a whole of government perspective and could be an effective tool for building lasting relationships within the Asia-Pacific; however, it is underutilized within the Asia-Pacific region.

The significant presence of U.S. forces certainly provides the capability to dissuade and deter China, North Korea and other regional actors. This presence, however, could give the appearance of a theater strategy more heavily influenced by the Air-Sea Battle and heavily reliant upon the forward positioning of U.S. forces within the region while placing less emphasis upon building and maintaining long lasting partnerships from a “whole of government” approach in order to achieve strategic objectives. This aspect of U.S. strategy in the region gives credence to the concern noted in a January 2007 CRS Report that expressed concerns “that a policy towards China that assumes China will become a threat to the United States and its interests in Asia will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.”⁶⁷

A coalition of willing Asia-Pacific regional partners with lasting relationships with the U.S. is needed. Several regional partner countries—South Korea, Australia, Mongolia, Thailand, Indonesia, and New Zealand—are currently supporting regional security initiatives, especially in peace keeping and anti-piracy operations.⁶⁸ However, should some of the challenges outlined by Admiral Willard spark conflict scenarios described in the National Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, how many Asia-Pacific partners could the U.S. count on for support? While it is likely that some of the closest partnered nations within the region would assist – Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia - it’s reasonable to assume that unless a regional conflict requires a NATO response, some of the SPP countries who are NATO members may be reluctant to brave the “tyranny of distance” in the Pacific to support U.S. interests in a regional conflict there. Based upon the goals of the SPP, and the

challenges faced by some of the lesser profile countries within the region, the SPP could be better utilized.

For example, Malaysia is strategically positioned, and, like Laos, Brunei and Timor-Leste, currently works to counter violent extremist organizations within its borders. The Maldives could benefit from a whole of government approach to partnering in their efforts to deter their youth population away from joining VEOs and transnational criminal organizations, while Nepal could use assistance as it integrates former insurgents into its Army and prepares for future natural disasters.⁶⁹ Burma, with its current military junta and human rights issues, could conceivably become a reliable partner with a whole of government approach to partnering. These conditions are not unique to these countries within the Asia-Pacific region. Other GCCs have successfully employed a whole of government approach to partnering within their AORs, especially USEUCOM and USSOUTHCOM, where the SPP is used quite extensively.

Recommendations

Expansion of the SPP in the Asia-Pacific region provides legitimate partnering and development of regional countries through a non-threatening National Guard presence, as opposed to the perceived threats posed by the sustained presence of large-scale Active Component organizations and bases. In order to fully utilize the SPP within the Asia-Pacific region, DoD should increase the force structure of the National Guard, increase funding to the program, and expand the program within the region while maintaining the current level of partnerships throughout the other regions.

USPACOM should coordinate with the National Guard Bureau and the U.S. State Department to expand the SPP to include additional countries such as Brunei, Nepal, Maldives, and Malaysia, as well Burma and Laos. In conjunction with the four goals of

the SPP, it offers a unique advantage of developing long-term individual relationships in the Asia-Pacific region that span the entire career of service of key leaders among partnered states and countries. From a cultural perspective, this would have a unique appeal within the Asian community by fostering deeper trusts and greater cultural understanding in a region that has long felt diplomatically neglected by the U.S.⁷⁰ In the long term approach, building slow and steady long-term relationships is more likely to reduce friction points between partnered countries, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict and fostering more opportunities for diplomatic solutions to regional issues.

Expanding SPP in the region may create the risk that other regional countries, such as North Korea, would see this increased partnership as an unacceptable shift in the balance of power, thereby causing them to seek out and develop more mutually beneficial partnerships with rogue states, VEOs, and other non-state actors that could lead to the proliferation of WMD. It is possible that China may see expanded SPPs in the region as a precursor to U.S. multi-lateral military aggression.⁷¹ This could lead to the risks of an increase in the pace of China's military build-up, deterioration of U.S.-China relations, and possible alliances between China and other regional actors or countries to counter perceived U.S. threats in the Asia-Pacific region.

In order to accomplish this strategy of expanding the SPP in the Asia-Pacific region, force structure or funding to the National Guard must be increased. The National Guard currently has the capacity to partner with approximately 85 countries, with each state capable of partnering with one country or two countries, depending upon the size of their force structure. With current operational requirements, most states are resistant to take on additional requirements without additional resources.⁷²

The primary deterrent to SPP expansion within the Asia-Pacific region, as well as within other geographic regions, is lack of adequate funding. NGB currently receives a congressional funding allocation of \$13,000,000 total for all 65 state partnerships.⁷³ This essentially equates to \$200,000 per partnership annually. Additionally, each new partnership costs approximately \$830,000 initially.⁷⁴ Based upon an expectation that congressional funding will remain at the current level for the next ten years, NGB currently forecasts expansion of the program at the rate of two countries per year over the course of the next ten years.⁷⁵ Regrettably, this forecasted growth rate does not immediately take full advantage of the maximum partnering capacity of the National Guard. NGB estimates full partnering capacity of all 54 states and territories to be 85 partnerships.⁷⁶ At the forecasted growth rate of two partnerships per year, it will take a full decade for the U.S. to maximize the full potential of the SPP.

In order to take full advantage of the states' maximum partnering capacity, DoD should immediately expand the program by 20 additional partnerships. Congress would need to increase the funding for the SPP from its current allocation of \$13,000,000 to \$26,600,000 initially in order to fund the initial partnership start-up costs, followed by an increase in annual funding of \$4,000,000 thereafter for a total yearly funding of \$17,000,000 annually to maintain 85 state partnerships.

Alternatively, if an increase in federal funding is not feasible current resources supporting existing SPPs in USEUCOM, USCENTCOM, and USSOUTHCOM could be shifted to USPACOM. Shifting resources from current SPPs to expand the program in the Asia-Pacific region requires either "graduating" some countries, such as Poland, Latvia, and Georgia, from the program, and shifting funding for those partnerships to

new USPACOM partnerships, and/or transitioning these well established and developed partnerships into a “sustainment phase” with diminished engagements and reduced funding, or transitioning them into regional partnerships whereby one state becomes the partner for a region within USEUCOM , USCENTCOM, or USSOUTHCOM, thereby freeing up other states to partner with new countries within USPACOM.

This strategy of eliminating existing active SPPs or decreasing the frequency and intensity of engagements within existing SPP countries has several risks. It increases the risk of a potential decline in developed capabilities and capacities of formerly partnered countries and risks reducing U.S. diplomatic influence by sending a message of U.S. lack of long term commitment. This could lead to a perception of abandonment by partnered countries and increase the risk of other countries whose interests are inconsistent with U.S. interests gaining influence within those former partnered countries.

Conclusion

As the U.S. Department of Defense prepares for significant defense spending cuts associated with sequestration, it makes good financial sense to keep the most successful and efficient programs and discard the ones that are less efficient or no longer needed. With regard to SPP, it's proven itself to be an effective small foot-print and whole of government, partner capacity building program, especially considering the contributions of SPP countries over the last decade.

In the early and mid 1990s, the U.S. government sought to build partner capacity in Europe primarily as a hedge against the potential threat of Russian influence over former Soviet countries. It is unlikely that anyone could have foreseen the true value and benefits of partner capacity that was built as evidenced by the support those

countries provided to U.S. national interests over the course of the last ten years. In 1993, when Latvia partnered with Michigan, no one likely envisioned Michigan Guardsmen and Latvian Army Soldiers fighting side by side in a foreign country within two decades, but that's exactly what happened, and not just with that partnered country but with over twenty others.

Limited resources require prioritization, proper allocation, and alignment. The DoD does not maximize utilization of the SPP in the Asia-Pacific region even though there are some likely candidates for the program: Brunei, Nepal, Maldives, and Malaysia, as well Burma and Laos. There are currently 65 state partnership program countries spread throughout the six geographic combatant commands, with only eight in USPACOM. As a component of the U.S. strategy to rebalance in the Asia-Pacific Region, the U.S. should allocate additional SPP resources in order to expand the SPP within USPACOM, while at least maintaining, if not increasing, the current, small footprint partnerships throughout the other GCCs.

As illustrated throughout this paper, the U.S. received a considerable return on an essentially small investment in the SPP. While the program is aligned with the current strategy as an economy of force program for building partner capacity, it is underutilized within the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. could conceivably get a similar return on its investment as it did in USEUCOM by expanding the program in the Asia-Pacific region as the U.S. rebalances its efforts from Europe and the Middle East.

Endnotes

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