Security Cooperation Workforce Reform:
The Path to Effectively Including the Acquisition Community

By

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Reform has been a keyword among United States (US) officials in the Security Cooperation (SC) arena, and this push has been substantially reflected in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017 (NDAA FY2017). One of the key changes in the law is the push to professionalize and develop SC workforce under the newly formed ‘Department of Defense Security Cooperation Workforce Development Program (SCWD).’\(^1\) As the Department of Defense (DoD) moves to implement this program, significant consideration must be taken to account for the critical issues regarding the current workforce, especially those with a dual role in acquisition. Possible solutions can be achieved through a multi-faceted approach to include training, education, and professional development.

Intricacies of Security Cooperation

To understand the need for a robust and knowledgeable workforce, one must understand how complex SC is. SC is a huge and confusing set of authorizations the DoD uses to perform tasks and activities related to foreign policy and national security that can fall under either the DoD’s or Department of State’s (DoS) authority. These interactions are used to promote the US Government strategic objectives and security interests by building defense and security relationships, developing partner military capabilities, and improving access to host nations.\(^2\) Historically, these DoD authorities have been spread throughout United States Code (U.S.C.) Title 10, leading to confusion and a lack of transparency. In an effort to reduce these issues, Congress has consolidated the various programs, 21 in total, under a new Chapter 16 in Title 10.\(^1\)

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In addition, the DoD administers programs on behalf of DoS under U.S.C. Title 22 authority, which is called Security Assistance (SA). Essentially, the DoS owns the authorities for programs such as Foreign Military Sales (FMS), but the DoD will execute them, because this agency has the manpower, technical knowledge, and acquisition capability. This inter-agency relationship can be convoluted and confusing to those new to the process and creates challenges when managing the programs.

**Pushing for Career Development Reform**

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the lead DoD agency on SC, has been one of the biggest drivers in pushing to have a career development and education program for the SC workforce. On 17 May 2016, Vice Admiral Joseph Rixey testified to Congress’ House Armed Services Committee on the current status of the FMS process and SC initiatives and stated the following, “An initiative that will have broad impact on our efforts is the professionalization of the Security Cooperation Workforce. DSCA is taking several steps to improve training and education for the over 12,000 members of the workforce, from personnel working at our embassies, at the implementing agencies and supporting components, and at our own headquarters.”

These discussions eventually led to the adoption of a mandated professionalization program within the FY17 NDAA:

“The purpose of the Program is to improve the quality and professionalism of the security cooperation workforce in order to ensure that the workforce— ‘‘(1) has the capacity, in both personnel and skills, needed to properly perform its mission, provide appropriate support to the assessment, planning, monitoring, execution, evaluation, and administration of security cooperation programs and activities described in subsection

(a), and ensure that the Department receives the best value for the expenditure of public resources on such programs and activities; and “(2) is assigned in a manner that ensures personnel with the appropriate level of expertise and experience are assigned in sufficient numbers to fulfill requirements for the security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense and the execution of security assistance programs and activities described in subsection (a)(2).”

By requiring SC personnel to be certified for their positions by law, it gives a legal push to a certification program that was previously voluntary. This was a major hurdle DSCA had to overcome in the pursuit of an effective workforce development program. The current International Affairs Certification Program (IACP) implemented by DSCA is a tiered certification process through a compilation of courses accumulated from multiple providers. DSCA’s provider for SC/SA education, the Defense Institute of Security Cooperation Studies (DISCS), teaches the majority of courses for the certification program which include a wide range of SC management topics to include: SC legislation and policy, technology transfer, SC process management, FMS acquisition, SC financial management, SC logistics, planning and programming, and some cultural studies.

However, actual full implementation of the certification program prior to the reforms of the FY17 NDAA has been problematic. The past guidance required one course for international programs security as mandated from DoD Directive 5230.20 (Visits, Assignments, and Exchanges of Foreign Nationals). This is required for “all DoD personnel responsible for negotiating, overseeing, managing, executing or otherwise participating in international activities,” and is offered by multiple educational providers, such as DISCS and the Defense Acquisition University (DAU). DSCA, and subsequently DISCS, tracks these requirements in


the Security Cooperation Workforce Development Database (SCWD), which currently has approximately 13,000 personnel listed.\(^6\) This database identifies SC positions and the current level of training achieved by those users.\(^7\) However, with personnel turnover and leadership changes the workforce has lost momentum in following the guidance adequately, leading to training deficiencies reoccurring.\(^6\) Going beyond that initial training is particularly difficult for the acquisition community. This is the workforce responsible for procuring major weapon systems, sub-components, support equipment, and services for the DoD and partner nations under SC. This segment of the workforce does not fall under DSCA’s purview within the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) but under the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (OUSD(AT&L)). The acquisition career fields, while having a vital role in procuring major weapon systems through SC/SA, has not historically required SC training and education.

However, the acquisition workforce is legally required to go through education and on-the-job training to be certified under the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA). This act covers auditors, contracting specialists, engineers, financial managers, logisticians and program managers to prove competencies in their subject of expertise.\(^8\) DAU, the provider for acquisition education, does have an International Acquisition Career Path (IACP), but it is not an official career field as the aforementioned functionals. As such, the Acquisition Professional Development Program (APDP), which implements the DAWIA requirements, focuses primarily on acquisition policy only and had no legal requirement for acquisition personnel to be educated on international policies. However, with the new legislation these organizations, DSCA with the support of DISCS and DAU, will have to work together to

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develop a strategy and framework for the enactment of the Security Cooperation Workforce Development Program.

Certifying this workforce will be a monumental task as over half of the estimated personnel do not have the current mandated training, and those already with SC education may need to receive additional curriculum. DSCA currently has three working groups to look at the possible issues and to develop a strategic plan for execution. As these plans are developed, the working groups should consider the unique nature of each organization in SC management. Each implementing agency, where most of the SC management and execution occurs, have their own organizational structure. This will make standardization difficult, and is even mentioned in the reports on the FY17 NDAA, “The conferees are also concerned about the lack of standardization in the organization of the security cooperation workforce within the Military Departments.”

While each implementing agency is unique, many voice a similar theme of concerns. From the Army to the Navy, many personnel mention a lack of understanding of their role and responsibilities and how to navigate the many gray areas of SC/SA management. To gain a better understanding of these working-level issues, a sample look will be taken of the Air Force, which is one of the major implementing agencies. This reflection and analysis on the impacts of the SCWD Program can provide insights into the many workforce development issues SC personnel currently have and find viable solutions to be applied DoD-wide.

**Impacts of the SCWD Program on Air Force Acquisition Organizations**

Under the oversight of the Secretary of the Air Force, Deputy Under Secretary for International Affairs (SAF/IA), the U.S. Air Force is responsible for the management of SA/SC tasks relating to USAF capabilities. Procuring these capabilities occurs at the Air Force Lifecycle Management Center (AFLCMC), which is under the leadership of the Air Force

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Material Command (AFMC). The center is responsible for the life cycle management of weapon systems from research and development to sustainment and play a crucial part when acquiring under SC/SA when the USAF is the implementing agency. While there are many more organizations involved with the management of SC programs in the USAF, a closer look will be taken at the complex responsibility the Air Force Lifecycle Management Center (AFLCMC) for major DoD acquisitions. Procuring these weapons systems is already a cumbersome process when it is being accomplished for USAF customers, as this community has to navigate through multiple layers of laws, regulations, and policies. When adding the complexity of procuring on the behalf of partner nations through FMS program, these processes can be even more burdensome due to the nature of the business and additional regulations and policies on top of the red tape that already exists.

The FMS program is probably the most well-known of the authorities used under SC/SA. The USG sells defense articles or services to a partner nation and is accomplished by providing these items or services from current USG stock or from procurement making the acquisition community extremely important to the successful implementation of SC/SA programs. These acquisition tasks are critical to delivering capabilities to partner nations, and has a significant impact in executing USG strategic goals with its partners. Making the ability to integrate acquisition and logistical policy within a SC framework is imperative as the differences between FMS and USAF acquisitions occur frequently.

For example, agreements made under FMS between the United States Government (USG) and foreign nations must then be translated into contracts between the USG and defense industry. If not managed correctly, the buyer’s or foreign nations’ requirements for cost,
schedule and performance may be lost in translation. As such, positions that manage acquisition programs that deal with SC require a special compilation of training, education, and experience.

The USAF has also announced there is a need to improve the SC process within the organization, especially in regards to complex case/program development and associated contracting tasks. In 2016, previous Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James under the Obama administration and Gen. Davis L. Goldfein sent out a memorandum stating that the USAF plans to work closer with academic institutions to develop a new curriculum to support its acquisition community working in an international forum. James noted, “We’re going to establish and deliver an FMS training program for program offices, international partners and U.S. industry, which leverages best practices and better connects the major stakeholders of FMS, while linking these efforts with our professional military education institutions.”\(^{13}\)

How will these reforms and legislation on workforce development effect the current policies, education requirements and organizational structure of AFLCMC? Multiple aspects will need to be incorporated when determining plans and solutions for the implementation of the SC Workforce Program within this implementing agency organization. While discussion has occurred frequently at the senior levels it will also be important to consider the working level perspective when developing these solutions.

In 2012, a major re-organization occurred within AFMC. The organization reduced its twelve center construct down to five, consolidating the functions into the new center structure. The newly formed AFLCMC is a merger of multiple prior centers to include: the Air Armament Center (ACC), the Air Force Security Assistance Center (AFSAC), the Aeronautical Systems Center (ASC), and the Electronic Systems Center (ESC).\(^{14}\) AFLCMC is now broken down into multiple directorates to include the functional home offices, Program Executive Offices (PEOs),


Mission Support Offices (MSOs) and the Air Force Security Assistance/Cooperation Directorate (AFSAC) to name a few. This re-organization changed the interaction between the workforces as the chains-of-commands were shifted and re-located. However, the dust from the re-organization has not completely cleared, resulting in frequent confusion regarding roles and responsibilities of a particular position. While the roles and responsibilities are well documented in the Air Force Manuel (AFMAN) 16-101, many employees do not know of its existence.15

All of these directorates play an important role in executing SC/SA programs, particularly for FMS programs. While SAF/IA provides oversight and top-level guidance of SC/SA programs, much of the preparation, processing, and management of these cases occur at AFSAC with major support from the PEOs and MSOs.16,17 AFSAC primarily manages follow-on support cases which is a key vehicle in providing partner nations the ability to sustain their capabilities. However, when providing a weapon system to a partner nation additional management will be required. According to the AFMAN 16-101, “Cases that are weapon system specific or require major and complex integration/coordination efforts of multiple commands or centers will also be assigned a SAPM [Security Assistance Program Manager].”15 These SAPMs and the members of Integrated Product Team (IPT) are assigned to manage the acquisitions associated with the FMS case(s). The IPT is located in the program office that are imbedded within the PEOs. As mentioned previously, SAPMs and other functional members of the IPT require an additional set of skills and knowledge to effectively manage these SC/SA programs, but may not have historically been receiving the necessary education to do so.

Facilitating Education, Training and Career Development Improvements

AFSAC has made huge strides in tracking and determining which employees need additional education in the international arena. They are using the SCWD database to identify

these positions and requiring those in the acquisitions fields to complete training course at DISCS, which in time will make a more effective workforce. However, this information is being managed separately from other manpower databases which could lead to inefficiencies. As professionalizing the SC workforce will be a daunting task, the Air Force will need to manage its training systems as efficiently as possible. Rotations occur frequently in the Program Offices and are crossed managed by human resources personnel in the PEOs, the Personnel Directorate (DP), and functional home offices. AFSAC does not know when these placements occur which has led to the SCWD database being outdated. The possibility of moving the management of the database to the PEOs may help with keeping the information updated as possible.

Nevertheless, there are also issues with possible duplication of work. Civilian positions are managed through the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPCS) and military are managed in the Manpower Programming Execution System (MPES). Both of these systems have certain codes that are attached to positions which reflect the experience being gained by the employee. For example, the majority of personnel at AFLCMC are acquisition-coded, which informs supervisors and training managers that the employee is obligated to meet DAWIA requirements. Personnel who do not meet these requirements by a certain timeframe are red flagged and the employee could be cited as deficient in their training requirements.

This coding system has already added another identifier for personnel on international programs. In 2010, the Secretary of the Air Force/Acquisition Career Management (SAF/AQH) office determined that all AF acquisition positions comprised of 50% international duties should be identified as an International Acquisition Specialty. While at the time OUSD(AT&L) only directed this change occur for program managers, SAF/AQH included all positions in anticipation of future directives that would include any position with international duties, which

did in fact occur in 2014. These specialty duties are also reflected in the Position Category Description (PCD), which can impact an employee’s Individual Development Plan (IDP) and performance appraisals.\(^{19}\) As the implementation planning of the SC workforce reform occurs, the possibility of including information from the SCWD database into the current manpower management systems should be explored. As this system already addresses specialty duties for International Acquisition positions, it would be logical to integrate possible future training and education requirements into the current system.

Another example of work duplication is having multiple training offices managing the training requirements of the same position. Due to the duality of the positions, training management occurs at both the functional office and AFSAC. For example, program management guidance for Acquisition training comes from the Acquisition Excellence Directorate (AFLCMC/AQ), but the requirements for SC training derive from AFSAC. Acquisition professional development, including the International Acquisition Career Path (IACP) provided by DAU, is pushed out to the workforce by the functional offices while requirements for DISCS courses are prescribed by AFSAC, creating a possible overlap in training management.\(^{20}\) As international and SC education and training expands, functional offices (AQ, EN, FM, LG, and PK) and AFSAC will have to work closer together to manage coinciding training requirements.

To meet the requirements of the NDAA FY17, curriculum will also have to be reviewed and analyzed to determine if the current courses available meet the unique requirements in the acquisition field. When examining the additional educational requirements, curriculum developers will need to take into consideration the dual nature of these acquisition positions. For example, the SAPM is an interesting role where acquisition lifecycle management and SC/SA


\(^{20}\) Foreign Military Sales Engineer, e-mail message to author, February 2, 2017 (message will remain confidential to protect the identity of the employee).
management meet. Rather than consider these two different roles, effective integration of the policies is required. By having education that focuses on the application on this dual role, SC/SA programs can be managed more adequately.

On-the-job training (OTJ) will also be required to teach the specifics of SC/SA positions. Properly utilized, the SCWD Program can be a tool to help facilitate these training plans and ensure proper incorporation into current position requirements. By facilitating rotations into FMS positions during training years, once these trainees become journeymen, they can then easily step into leadership roles on FMS programs. One prior SAPM states, “no one should be in a lead PM role on a FMS program without prior FMS experience as there is an extreme learning curve the first year for a CCM [Country Command Manager], New Business Program Manager, or SAPM,” and yet current professionals in the field have a perception that this is a frequent occurrence.21

Another common complaint is employees with significant FMS experience may be passed over for promotion, for those with experience in only in USAF acquisitions, even when the position being applied for is SC/SA related in favor for those with only USAF acquisition experience. This is commonly referred to as having an “FMS stink”, and may dissuade employees from becoming a FMS subject matter expert (SMEs), as it requires years of experience to understand on the complexities of the FMS process. The feeling of SC/SA experience being devalued at AFLCMC is prevalent, and hurts the pool of candidates that should be considered for leadership roles dealing with SC/SA activities. To gain a better grasp of this situation, metrics should be gathered to determine if there is, in fact, a deficiency within the promotion process when regarding SC/SA experience. This should also include an analysis of the

21. Interview with a Security Assistance Program Manager, September 30, 2016 (interview was conducted in confidentiality to protect the identity of the employee).

22. Interview with a Country Command Manager, September 28, 2016 (interview was conducted in confidentiality to protect the identity of the employee).
possible impacts on job performance when managing a specialized program without the necessary education and training.

Personnel at AFSAC also have concerns with receiving adequate training. According to CCM located within the directorate the workforce is “losing knowledge at a rapid pace, and the people rotating in are not masters at the FMS process.” This evidence of brain drain is a significant concern as experienced employees retire and knowledge is not passed on before they leave. One possibility of combating this loss of knowledge is the use of mentorship programs at the working-level that have been utilized in the past. This is not a revolutionary idea as many trainees have benefited from this type of guidance before, but occurs more to luck of placement rather than strategically placed mentors and trainers. Identifying strong journeymen with the willingness and the ability to train other personnel on the job would be the ideal solution, however in reality, this may prove difficult to achieve when factoring in current workload.

The rotations mentioned above are also a major concern voiced by a sample of the workforce. While on one hand they could provide an employee with diverse experience, or they may be rotating into a position with very little knowledge on how to perform their new duties. As an employee rotates between the PEOs and AFSAC, the job function and culture are significantly different. When AFMC re-organized the centers to become AFLCMC, the walls between the organizations dropped making rotations between the new directorates easier. However, the ease of transfers created other difficulties that need to be addressed to ensure successful implementation of the SCWD Program. Employees who have rotated from one organization to another have felt ill-prepared for their new job responsibilities. One logistician who was rotated from a program office to AFSAC stated he did not feel as if his prior experience and APDP courses applied to his new AFSAC functions. While the functions of the PEOs and  

23. Interview with a Product Support Manager (Palace Acquire Trainee), September 08, 2016 (interview was conducted in confidence to protect the identity of the employee).
AFSAC both manage aspects of the weapon system lifecycle those processes can be inherently different as the PEOs are managing acquisition planning and execution while AFSAC focuses on providing sustainment support to the partner nations as well as processing key documents.

A possible suggestion to help alleviate issues of rotating into dis-similar positions, is exploring the possibility of creating a new career series for case management. Each career field has its own series code, for example, program managers are 1101s and contracting specialists are 1102s. This structure is important for career development as it determines what educational courses an employee must take and the type of OTJ that will be needed and is reflected in the manpower systems mentioned previously. Many of the positions with case management type duties located at AFSAC are either acquisition program managers (1101) or acquisition logisticians (0346). Multiple employees have cited that by putting these duties in the same broad category it hinders their ability to effectively do the level of work expected of them in their current placement. By creating a brand new career series, the position description can better reflect the duties being performed at AFSAC.

There is still a case to be made for rotations to enhance career broadening but this can still be conducted through the formalized career broadening that already occurs within AFLCMC. The primary characteristic of career broadening is where one career series will perform those duties of another career series for approximately a two year period. This will set up expectations more clearly with the understanding that the person rotating in is doing a function completely different from their primary position. While this solution is not necessarily pragmatic, as it would have to be a DoD-wide initiative, the difficulty of executing a significant change should not hinder the exploration and study of determining if this can be a viable solution.
Further research

It is simple to say that improvements are essential because of low processing times, inadequate transparency, and miscommunication, but solutions need to be effective when implemented. During a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Frank Kendall, the prior Under Secretary of Defense for AT&L, cautioned against the use of oversimplified solutions without insights from the professionals who do the everyday work. While Kendall was speaking about improvements to the entirety of the DoD acquisition process, we can apply these insights specifically to FMS acquisition programs as well. The knowledge and expertise of those in the field will be vital to improving SC processes, as those employees will have a deeper insight on how policy changes will affect them day-to-day.

Further research and analysis is required to look into these manpower issues fully in order to understand the intricacies of SC organizations and policy, as well as the impacts on everyday management activities. DSCA has performed an initial analysis on workforce development issues; however, the study was not robust enough to determine any practical solutions (the study is projected to be published by fall of 2017). Wade Markel, a researcher from the RAND Corporation who performed this study stated that, “data is insufficient to give help to leadership make decisions and needs to be studied more.” This will not be an easy task, as the data will be more qualitative versus quantitative leading to more of a subjective analysis. Researchers will have to use surveys, focus groups, case studies, and lessons learned to find the underlying causes of the problems within the SC infrastructure. And although this may be a tremendous effort, such a study should prove to be significantly useful to leadership as it could provide the information required to develop more systematic solutions.


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