

Ethical Considerations of State Partnership Program and Understanding a Worldview

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Introduction

The United States National Guard forces of all 54 states and territories participate in the State Partnership Program (SPP) with 74 nations (77 nations by the end of 2018) worldwide.¹ The partnerships provide incredible opportunities to assist and influence foreign military forces across the globe. The program began in 1993 when the U.S. assisted three post-Soviet bloc nations' military forces during their transition period.² After 25 years of growth, the SPP now includes additional nations across all six combatant commands (CCMDs). It is a joint Department of Defense (DoD) program that seeks to develop stability and partner capacity, promote national objectives, and improve relations between the United States and foreign countries through security cooperation activities.³ Typical activities the partners may conduct include key leader engagements, leadership development, tactical training, and disaster/emergency response training. The SPP is "managed and administered by the National Guard Bureau (NGB), guided by Department of State (DOS) foreign policy goals, executed and coordinated by the geographic CCMDs, with personnel sourced by the National Guard (NG)."⁴ Ethics concerning the program are rarely discussed, and there is a need to evaluate specific areas of the SPP through the ethical lens. Three reasons the SPP requires ethics examination are the funding of the program, the selection methods of nations as partners, and imposing American ideologies on developing nations.

Ethics

Army Leadership doctrine, ADRP 6-22, emphasizes the necessity of all leaders to make decisions using ethical reasoning.

"Ethical choices may be between right and wrong, shades of gray, or two rights. Some problems center on an issue requiring special consideration of what is most ethical. Leaders use multiple perspectives to think about ethical concerns, applying the following perspectives to determine the most ethical choice. One perspective comes from the view that desirable *virtues* such as courage, justice, and benevolence define ethical outcomes. A second perspective comes from the set of agreed-upon values or *rules*, such as the Army Values or Constitutional rights. A third perspective bases the *consequences* of the decision on whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number as most favorable."⁵ (Emphasis added.)

Dr. Jack Kem refers to the three perspectives above as the ethical triangle and argues that leaders must attempt to achieve a balance of the three when making decisions.⁶ Simply applying only one perspective results in an imbalanced approach to ethical issues which tend to be naturally complex. To ensure ethical reasoning is applied, a series of questions can guide the leader to make sound decisions.

When considering the perspective of virtues, one should ask questions such as: what would grandma think of my decision? Or am I applying the Golden Rule? Regarding ethical considerations of the SPP, leaders should also be asking questions such as: what would the American public think? What does the rest of the world think? On the perspective of rules, one should ask questions such as: what rules or principles

exist that I must follow? What are my moral obligations? Again, with respect to the SPP, leaders should consider such questions as: how is program funding allocated, utilized, and monitored? Or how are specific partnership events recorded and/or audited for effectiveness? With the final ethical perspective of consequences, one should seek to gain the greatest good for the greatest number and ask: who wins and who loses? For the SPP, what would happen if the program ended? What about nations not “admitted” to the program? This paper seeks to examine and explore some of these tough questions through a broad overview of the current literature available on the state partnership program.

Funding the State Partnership Program

Government funding is allocated based on requirements. When considering the SPP, and how much money should be appropriated, the objectives of the program should be examined. Four goals identified by NGB for the SPP are:

1. Build partnership capacity to deter, prevent, and prepare,
2. Build partnership capacity to respond and recover,
3. Support partners’ defense reform and professional development,
4. Enable and facilitate enduring broad-spectrum security relationships.⁷

Funding is allocated to the SPP from multiple government sources to achieve the above goals and build mutually beneficial relationships with foreign nations. The complex network of allocated dollars originates from Congress, the states, the combatant commander’s (CCDR) traditional commander’s activities accounts, the DoD, and the DOS.⁸ Each of the funding sources seek to achieve objectives through the SPP and have varying degrees of interest in the program. In the open source documents researched, it was not clear the total amount of funds appropriated from each entity.

According to section 1205 of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), payments for incremental expenses of foreign countries participating in SPP activities may not exceed \$10,000,000 in any fiscal year.⁹ An incremental expense is defined by the NDAA as “the reasonable and proper costs of rations, fuel, training ammunition, transportation, and other goods and services consumed by the country as a direct result of the country’s participation” in SPP activities, but does not include “any form of lethal assistance (excluding training ammunition); or pay, allowances, and other normal costs of the personnel of the country.”¹⁰ It appears that the DoD funding may be utilized for both state NG forces as well as foreign military forces, with ample room to justify use of funds for any requirement within the realm of a security cooperation event between the state and the partner nation. According to the FY 2015 Report to Congress just one year later, the SPP activities numbered 779 across the globe, and increased DoD’s cost by nearly 24%, totaling \$12,398,169.¹¹ Although DoD is not the sole source providing the means for the SPP, the total cost of the program remains unclear because funding amounts from the other government sources were not found during the limited scope and time of the research for this paper.

Requirements determine funding, but there is also a need for evaluating the proper utilization of the funds once allocated. When examining the SPP, there is a lack of oversight of the program and only recently have measures of performance (MOPs) and measures of effectiveness (MOEs) been integrated into the requirements for funding allocations.¹² The challenge remains evaluating the success of the program in a standardized manner because each partner nation has individualized needs, and each combatant commander may have different goals for security cooperation efforts.

When considering the ethics of funding SPP, there are many questions to contemplate from each of the three perspectives: What do Americans think about paying for the program? Do they know about the program and their tax dollars funding it? If funding were reduced or eliminated, would there be second and third order effects? How are the funds being utilized, monitored, and audited? Are the desired effects of the program

achieved? Could the funds be allocated elsewhere with better results? Ultimately, there needs to be more transparency about the state partnership program and the use of funds allocated. Continued progress toward measuring the success of the program is also necessary to justify the funding.

Partnership Formation

New state partnerships within the SPP are initiated on an annual basis with nominations from the geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) to the Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff (CJCS). Each nomination must include a formal request from the nominated partner nation Ministry of Defense, Chief of Defense, or Head of State, an endorsement from the associated Chief of Mission, and documentation of strategic objectives and long-term U.S. interests that will be advanced through the potential partnership.¹³ The CJCS reviews all nominations, and forwards a consolidated, prioritized list to the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)) who may then issue approval of new state partnerships.¹⁴ Finally, working closely with National Guard Bureau, the USD(P), with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, selects a state and the new partnership becomes final.¹⁵

In the FY 2015 Report to Congress there were four partner nations who received no SPP activity, and therefore no funding, due to a lack of Defense Cooperation Agreement or tension with the U.S. government.¹⁶ At the time of research for this paper, the criteria to include or exclude a foreign country in the SPP was not found. Nor was a definition of “tension” found. The analysis process to begin a partnership with a foreign nation appears to be subjective. There is always a potential for a degraded relationship based on many factors such as politics, economics, and culture. As a final note, with no access to cooperation programs, military training, and humanitarian and civic assistance, non-partner nations may feel excluded. Others may have actors that seek retaliation.

As one considers the ethical implications of nation selection, several questions around the ethical triangle must be addressed. Are our forces safe? How do we prevent non-select nations, or actors within, from retaliating? What is the likelihood of insider threat attacks once the partnership is established? Does the American public know which nations are included in the partnership program, and should they be able to influence selection? Does the American population understand that foreign military members often conduct training with U.S. forces at federal installations in the United States? Should a partnership be limited or terminated when the objectives are met? The safety and security of the nation is a priority and can be easily affected by the SPP. In addition, national leaders may face public mistrust by U.S. citizens due to a lack of transparency regarding the program.

Ideology Alignment

Culture, laws, and values across nations are not necessarily in alignment with the United States and can have a negative effect on relationships in terms of interpretation of ethics, war, and world perspectives in general. Although the terms security cooperation and partnership imply both nations involved in the SPP are equally invested, little is mentioned throughout the documents about the U.S. building a foundational understanding of the partner nation. Because a nation seeks to partner with an American state does not mean their country desires to be like America. LTC (Ret.) Brian Steed states that there are four topics one must study to understand another nation’s people: religion, history, culture (how people act and interact), and language.¹⁷ Failing to spend the time and effort to know one’s counterpart results in “cultural arrogance” and can quickly deteriorate a relationship.¹⁸

One example of a state partnership is with Washington state’s National Guard which is partnered with both Thailand and Malaysia in PACOM. The core beliefs and values in one area- religion- vastly differ from Washington to the two partner nations. Thailand is 90% Buddhist and Malaysia is 61% Islam and 20% Buddhist while Washington is 60% Christian with a very small minority of residents practicing either Islam

or Buddhism.¹⁹ The Joint Force Headquarters—Washington National Guard State Partnership Program Brief details the priorities, past and planned SPP activities, as well as challenges with conducting SPP with the two nations. Of note in the brief is one specific challenge highlighted with the new partner, Malaysia: “Race Politics: Malays limit Chinese (25%) / Tamil (7%) in Armed Forces.”²⁰ To an American who typically views inclusion as the rule and doesn’t tolerate discrimination, the limits of races within the Malaysian military appear racist and discriminatory. It is unknown what type of analysis has been conducted to date, but there may be a historical, religious, or cultural reason for the Malays to have the rule in place. This is one example of how partner nations may feel the American ideology imposed upon them throughout the security cooperation activities as the National Guard members conduct training based on U.S. doctrine, standards, and ideologies.

Returning to the ethical triangle, leaders must continue to entertain questions about the SPP and whether U.S. forces are being “culturally arrogant.” What outcomes does the U.S. want to achieve with the partnership? What outcomes does the partner nation want to achieve? Have the state NG forces completed sufficient education and training on the partner nation and region? What is considered sufficient education? If the understanding of the partner’s culture is absent, what consequences are possible? Do the requirements for the program enable such learning? How do leaders prevent uneducated or quick decisions? Cultural education is more than learning a few words, customs, and courtesies of another country or region. One of the benefits of forming partnerships between foreign nations and state national guard forces is the ability to form relationships with continuity—a difficult challenge for regular active component forces with relatively high personnel turnover. It requires significant effort and resources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of another culture, but it must be a priority for the SPP to be successful.

Recommendations

Three ethical considerations were explored concerning the state partnership program: funding the program, nation selection, and ideology alignment. Three recommendations have been identified to improve the program and ensure resources are utilized effectively and efficiently to achieve national, CCMD, DOS, and NGB objectives. The first recommendation is that funding for the SPP must be reported and monitored within one department to reduce potential redundancy and ensure proper utilization of resources. Second, the success of the program, or events conducted within the parameters of the program, must be measured in a standardized manner. Simply reporting dates, locations, numbers of participants, and type of activity is not sufficient to gain an understanding of the success of the program. Lastly, cultural training of state NG personnel must be standardized to include language, history, religion, and culture education of their partnered nation(s). Although this type of education is time intensive, it is possible to establish a hybrid distance learning and resident course to train NG forces.

Conclusion

There are number of ethical considerations that need attention in regard to understanding worldviews and the ethical framework of the state partnership program. Currently, the questions to ensure the program is being executed within ethical standards are not being asked or answered fully. As the SPP continues to be one of the cost-effective security cooperation efforts utilized, U.S. leadership must ensure the program is executed within ethical parameters. Transparency and accountability of the program must be increased with funding and nation selection. The efforts of the state NG forces must be invested enough to accept the challenge of understanding the culture(s) of their partners. If the primary goal is to build mutually beneficial relationships, the U.S. must listen to the American population as well as the partner nation. The SPP offers a method by which multiple departments can collaborate to achieve objectives with the ultimate priority of maintaining the safety and security of the United States.

End Notes

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- 4 Department of Defense, *The State Partnership Program FY 2015 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C., 2015), 3.
- 5 Department of the Army, *ADRP 6-22: Army Leadership*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 2012). 3-7.
- 6 Jack D. Kem, “Ethical Decision Making: Using the ‘Ethical Triangle,’” *2016 CGSC Ethics Symposium* (Symposium Report, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2016), 4.
- 7 Lawrence Kapp and Nina Serafino, Congressional Research for Congress, *R41957, The National Guard State Partnership Program: Background, Issues, and Options for Congress* (Washington, D.C., 2011) 2.
- 8 Ziga Pretnar, “The National Guard State Partnership Program and Regional Security in the Western Balkans” (masters thesis, CGSC, 2014), 69, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA613498>.
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- 11 Department of Defense, *The State Partnership Program FY 2015 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C., 2015), 5.
- 12 Government Accountability Office, *GAO-12-548, State Partnership Program: Improved Oversight, Guidance, and Training Needed for National Guard’s Efforts with Foreign Partners* (Washington, D.C., 2012), 8.
- 13 Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *DOD Instruction (DODI) Number 5111.20: State Partnership Program (SPP)* (Washington, D.C., 2012), 1.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Department of Defense, *The State Partnership Program FY 2015 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C., 2015), 6.
- 17 Brian L. Steed, *Bees and Spiders: Applied Cultural Awareness and the Art of Cross-Cultural Influence* (Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co., 2014), 100.
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- 20 Joint Forces Headquarters-Washington National Guard, “State Partnership Program Brief” (Camp Murray, Washington, 2018), 13.