The Marine Corps has devised a plan for how to build partner capacity in the year 2025. The plan takes into account national security objectives and the future operational environment, and then describes a program intended to meet these national security objectives. An analysis of the proposal shows that the Marine Corps plan is flawed; it only accomplishes some of the national security objectives and does so at an unnecessary expense. The two most significant flaws are the plan's insufficient integration of interagency/NGO elements and the reliance on a Marine Air Ground Task Force when much smaller units can be used. These two flaws result in the plan's inability to address all the national security objectives and the plan's unnecessary expense. Despite flaws, there are parts of the plan that show the Marine Corps can play an essential role in partner building. The Marine Corps recognizes that in all likelihood the need for building the capacity for US partners will be a key mission of the United States in 2025. The current plan is a start and, to its credit, it does show that the Marine Corps recognizes the importance of this mission.
FUTURE WAR PAPER

TITLE:
The Marine Corps Plan for Building Partner Capacity in 2025

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS SCHOOL OF ADVANCED WARFIGHTING OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.
The United States Marine Corps must plan for the missions of today and also prepare itself for the missions of the future. In order to do this, an analysis of the key future missions of the Marine Corps should be undertaken and an assessment should be completed to determine if the Marine Corps will be prepared to accomplish these missions. One of the key tasks for the US military in the future is to take part in the mission of “building partner capacity.” Building partner capacity is the process whereby the US increases the ability of other countries to take care of their own security concerns. The Marine Corps describes this mission as an effort that will “build our partner nation’s capacities to address their own problems thereby building relationships, while simultaneously providing US presence in foreign areas in a manner that deters the growth of these irregular adversaries.”

The Marine Corps has devised a plan for how to build partner capacity in the year 2025. The plan takes into account national security objectives and the future operational environment, and then describes a program intended to meet these national security objectives. An analysis of the proposal shows that the Marine Corps plan is flawed; it only accomplishes some of the national security objectives and does so at an unnecessary expense. The two most significant flaws are the plan’s insufficient integration of interagency/Nongovernment Organizations (NGO) elements and the reliance on a MAGTF when much smaller units can be used. These two flaws result in the plan’s inability to address all the national security objectives and the plan’s unnecessary expense.

The Marine Corps plan is described in a series of documents written by the Commandant of the Marine Corps’ (CMC) Strategic Vision Group (SVG). The SVG’s mission is to “analyze potential future security environments and report future force implications in order to assist
CMC and senior leadership to posture the Marine Corps for success. In order to do this, the SVG draws from various National and Joint strategy sources. The Marine Corps plan for building partner capacity is described in the SVG produced “Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025,” and the plan is further explained in a series of SVG PowerPoint briefs and papers.

The first step in the analysis of this plan is to examine whether the plan is written in accordance with the guidance of its higher authorities. A review of the SVG documents shows that the proposed Marine Corps mission is well-nested within both the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the National Security Strategy (NSS). The Strategic Vision Group describes the 2025 plan as follows:

Instead of training with foreign security forces to build interoperability, the SC MAGTF will focus on building the capacity of foreign security forces to be more effective in a manner that allows those foreign security forces to handle their own country’s and region’s security challenges.

This is embedded in the objectives laid out in the NDS. The National Defense Strategy states:

We will support, train, advise and equip partner security forces to counter insurgencies, terrorism, proliferation, and other threats. We will assist other countries in improving their capabilities through security cooperation, just as we will learn valuable skills and information from others better situated to understand some of the complex challenges we face together.

In turn, the NDS plan is well-nested in the NSS. The National Security Strategy states:

Pursue Sustainable and Responsible Security Systems in At-Risk States: Proactively investing in stronger societies and human welfare is far more effective and efficient than responding after state collapse. The United States must improve its capability to strengthen the security of states at risk of conflict and violence. We will undertake long-term, sustained efforts to strengthen the capacity of security forces to guarantee internal security, defend against external threats, and promote regional security and respect for human rights and the rule of law. We will also continue to strengthen the administrative and oversight capability of civilian security sector institutions, and the effectiveness of criminal justice.

A review of these quotes makes it clear that the plan proposed by the SVG is designed to accomplish the national security objectives of the United States. The SVG recognizes the
guidance in the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy and incorporates this guidance into its own plan.

The next step in any plan is for the planners to build a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment so they can construct a plan in accordance with those factors. In response to the mission, the SVG has attempted to forecast what the state of the world will be in 2025. Using a variety of unclassified and classified sources, they were able to develop a worldwide picture that identified potential areas of conflict, trends of conflict, and sources of instability. Their analysis showed a variety of issues, including overcrowding, lack of adequate infrastructure, resource scarcity, lack of effective governance, and a host of other issues. These issues, as well as where in the world they are most likely to occur, are all included in the overview of the plan.

What all of this reveals is the SVG plan has successfully accomplished the first and most important aspect of any plan; it has an understanding of the guidance from higher authority and an understanding of the operational environment. The SVG has derived the future Marine Corps mission for partner building from the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. Furthermore, the SVG has gained a comprehensive understanding of the future operational environment, which is not just limited to traditional military concerns but also includes sources of instability, such as economic and demographic factors. A clear understanding of the national objectives and the operating environment is a crucial foundation for any plan.

After comprehending the national objectives and the future operating environments, the next step for the SVG was to plan how these objectives can be accomplished. In order to show
how the objectives can be accomplished the SVG plan describes various missions that will build the capacity of US partners.

One mission that builds partner capacity is exercises between the US and a partnered military. These exercises provide a key training venue for a partnered country and give them an opportunity to learn directly from a US unit. The SVG plan recognizes the importance of these exercises and includes them in their plan. Not only do these exercises build the capacity of partners, but the SVG also states that exercises are a key way to “build enduring relationships.”

One plan for building partner capacity is presented by the SVG utilizing a notional deployment of a Security Cooperation-Marine Air Ground Task Force (SC-MAGTF). The SVG uses these notional unit deployments to illustrate the different types of missions a SC-MAGTF could do and how it could be employed. The SC-MAGTF is envisioned as a unit with a command element, a reinforced infantry battalion, an aviation detachment, a logistics element, and other attachments as necessary. On one presentation of possible employments of a SC-MAGTF, the SVG describes the missions and activities a SC-MAGTF could do in South America. One of the proposed missions for the SC-MAGTF is a combined arms exercise between elements of the SC MAGTF and the Brazilian military. This is exactly the type of exercise that could help to build partner capacity.

The SVG plan also includes small detachments and mobile training teams (MTT) that can provide tailored training to a variety of units. While combined arms exercises are critical, there is also a need for small training detachments and Mobile Training Teams (MTT) to offer more focused training. For example, an infantry detachment can specialize in weapons training while a MTT can provide staff training. Both are essential trainings that might not take place in a
bilateral unit training exercise. This part of the plan is key because it recognizes that different types of military training are necessary.

The SVG elaborates on how different types of training could be provided by using a description of a notional SC-MAGTF deployed to Rota Spain with a mission to provide training to numerous militaries throughout Africa. In the SVG plan, company sized forces would be spread all over Africa while the command element of the SC-MAGTF stayed in Rota Spain. The plan has elements of the MAGTF in Kenya, Djibouti, Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, and Liberia with a variety of missions to include company level training and staff training.

The SVG plan to send MTTs and small detachments to partner countries has a solid foundation. The training detachments and MTTs are key elements for building partner capacity and will assist in accomplishing the national security objectives. MTTs and training detachments have proven their worth in the past and will likely do so in the future. However, despite the fact that this part of the plan accomplishes some of the national security objectives, it is here that the first major flaw of the SVG plan becomes apparent.

While this portion of the plan satisfies many of the national security objectives, it does so at an unnecessary expense. It is not necessary to deploy an entire MAGTF to support company size detachments and MTTs. Detachments and MTTs can be deployed directly from established US bases, which alleviates the requirement to deploy an entire MAGTF.

Sourcing MTTs and detachments from established bases has a couple of key advantages. First, it relieves the Marine Corps of the expense of deploying an entire MAGTF just to send out a few MTTs and detachments. There is no reason to think that the Unites States will be any less concerned about rising military costs in 2025 than it is today. Concerns with the on-going cost of military operations will most likely always be a concern. Any military plan must recognize
that unnecessary expenses must be avoided as long as the national security objectives are still being accomplished.

More importantly, if detachments and MTTs are sourced from Marine Corps bases they will actually have more flexibility to accomplish the objectives. The issue with tying detachments and MTTs to a MAGTF is they will then be restricted to a time frame that matches the deployment of that MAGTF. If they come straight from Marine Corps bases, they can instead deploy at times that are best suited to meet the training objectives for the partner country.

An example of this can be seen with the 2009 training of the Georgian military by the Marine Corps. Over a period of 12 months, Marine MTTs travelled to Europe to provide staff training to the Georgian military. These training sessions would last anywhere from two weeks to a month. These MTTs were able to align with the Georgian military training cycle to best integrate their efforts with the partnered country’s efforts. Because these MTTs deployed from the United States, versus being tied to a deployed MAGTF, they were able to time their training to get the most out of their efforts. The training provided to the Georgian military provides a better model than what could be done with a SC-MAGTF because of its flexibility and its tailored nature.

An analysis of the SVG plan reveals that it is not necessary to deploy an entire MAGTF to conduct security cooperation missions. This becomes most apparent in the SVG plan for how the Aviation Combat Element (ACE) will be used; it is clear that the ACE will be under-utilized in these missions. The SVG plan states that the ACE will be primarily used for “mobility, training support.”¹² In essence, the purpose of the ACE in the SVG plan is primarily transport. While that is certainly one of the purposes of the ACE, it is a waste of an expensive asset.
Ironically, the SVG recognizes the issue of overstretched forces who have been tasked to build partner capacity. The SVG plan mentions that partner building has “previously been the exclusive purview of SOF...high demands being placed on SOF require that the Marine Corps take on some of these missions...”\textsuperscript{13} In essence the Marine Corps plan entails replacing small special operations forces (SOF) detachments with an entire MAGTF. While this might meet the national security objectives, it does so at a much higher expense than when it is accomplished by a small Special Forces detachment.

Altering how MTTs and detachments deploy is a relatively easy fix to the Marine Corps plan. The plan could simply be modified so that detachments and MTTs deploy directly from established US bases rather than from a SC-MAGTF. This change not only lightens the load for Marine Corps but these types of deployments are already something the Marine Corps does with success. While the Marines of every detachment and MTT might like easy access to air transport, it is not necessary to have attached air support to accomplish their mission. There is nothing the SC-MAGTF can do that cannot be done with small detachments and MTTs deployed directly from established bases along with periodic support from Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) on their standard deployments. Because there are usually two MEUs constantly deployed as a contingency force, these MEUs are often made available to take part in exercises with partnered countries. With MEUs providing a unit-to-unit training experience and MTTs and detachments deploying straight from the United States, the national security objectives can be accomplished at a much lower expense.

This is not as big of a departure from the SVG plan as it might appear. The SVG plan for MTTs and detachments will still happen, only with Marines deployed from established bases instead of coming from a MAGTF. Unit to unit training will still happen, just with a MEU
instead of a SC-MAGTF. In essence, the MEU will take over some of the SC-MAGTF duties, and MTTs and small detachments will pick up the rest.

It might be argued that constant security cooperation missions will interfere with the MEU’s mission as a crisis contingency force in readiness. However, this is no different from what was expected from the SC-MAGTF. The SVG plan clearly states that the “SC MAGTF would have the ability to reaggregate on short notice and respond to contingencies, up to and including high intensity combat operations, on short notice.” Being prepared for a crisis is no heavier burden on a MEU than it would be for a SC-MAGTF.

While the SVG plan has been shown to satisfy certain national security objectives, there are other areas where it does not satisfy the national security objectives. In particular, the plan lacks an approach that adequately incorporates the non-military elements of American power or of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to alleviate root causes of instability. The National Security Strategy is very clear that the different elements of America power must be used to build the capacity of US partners. The National Security Strategy states:

> Successful engagement will depend upon the effective use and integration of different elements of American power. Our diplomacy and development capabilities must help prevent conflict, spur economic growth, strengthen weak and failing states, lift people out of poverty, combat climate change and epidemic disease, and strengthen institutions of democratic governance. Our military will continue strengthening its capacity to partner with foreign counterparts, train and assist security forces, and pursue military-to-military ties with a broad range of governments. We will continue to foster economic and financial transactions to advance our shared prosperity. Also, our intelligence and law enforcement agencies must cooperate effectively with foreign governments to anticipate events, respond to crises, and provide safety and security.

The SVG appears to recognize this but fails to adequately address a solution in their plan. The sources of instability are mentioned in detail in the SVG briefings. The SVG plan gives a confident forecast that in 2025 numerous parts of the world will face problems such as
overcrowding, lack of adequate infrastructure, resource scarcity, lack of effective governance, and so on. The SVG plan even states that a purpose of the plan is to “alleviate some of the underlying conditions that lead to instability.” While the SVG recognizes the requirement of an approach that incorporates interagency elements and NGOs, the extent of their plan is for the requirement for “Increased interagency and HQ staff integration” and to “Support Non-Governmental and International Organizations.”

Though it could be argued that the SVG plan is conceptual and will not have all the details, the lack of detail for interagency/Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) coordination is telling. The plans for notional SC-MAGTFs give numerous examples of how they could be employed but lack any mention of interagency/NGO operations. The entire plan revolved around training forces yet includes no ideas for how to alleviate sources of instability that arise from economic or civil factors. Working with interagency elements or NGOs on economic or civil projects are not types of missions that can just be assumed. If the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan have proven anything, it is that interagency and NGO coordination must be pushed at all levels. It is too easy for lack of coordination to become the standard practice. It is not sufficient to (as the SVG plan does) simply have a line in a chart that says “interagency representative.”

While the nature of interagency and NGO coordination will change for each operation, this is not a reason to neglect providing more detail. This element is of such importance that the different ways that interagency and NGOs can collaborate needs to be clarified. The SVG plan needs to offer examples and guidance for how the interagency and NGO efforts can be integrated with the military effort. For example, the requirement for a Civil Affairs-Interagency-NGO coordination cell is critical. Proposals for coordination issues, such as infrastructure projects,
must be a part of the plan. The different types of interagency representatives, as well as what
they provide, need to be included. NGO coordination and how it can further partner capacity is
essential and too often overlooked in military planning. While this might seem to be over-
detailed for a conceptual plan, it is of such importance that it must be included.

Common missions of recent Marine Expeditionary Units show the need for interagency
and NGO coordination at all levels. It is very common for MEUs to visit various countries and
conduct certain civil affairs missions while they are there. These missions include everything
from improving local infrastructure to providing medical and dental care. In the MEU these,
missions are developed with the intent of fostering goodwill with the local populace.
Unfortunately, these missions are rarely coordinated with interagency elements or NGOs. The
MEUs often decide for themselves what should be done and operate with little knowledge of the
local areas. These critical lessons provide insight on how the Marine Corps can better coordinate
interagency and NGO plans in the future.

While the SVG recognizes that economic factors and inadequate infrastructure are prime
causes of instability, it does not address how the Marine Corps could rectify these problems. If
civil affairs projects conducted by MEUs or any other units are to be most effective, then they
need to be coordinated with interagency elements and NGOs. These organizations know best
which projects could have the greatest impact in reducing the causes of instability. Interagency
organizations and NGOs could make effective use of military assets, such as construction or
medical skills, to support key projects. The end result could be these MEU “goodwill missions”
being much more than that; they could help alleviate some of the root causes of instability if they
are properly integrated with the interagency/NGO effort.
Interagency coordination cannot be limited to just civil affairs projects. The National Security Strategy makes clear that Strategic Communication is a key element and that “across all of our efforts, effective strategic communications are essential to sustaining global legitimacy and supporting our policy aims.” While this is a key goal of the National Security Strategy, in no part of the SVG plan is there any discussion of how an Information Operations plan will be coordinated with a Strategic Communications plan.

There is some mention of Information Operations in the plan to show that the SVG sees its importance. Part of the SVG plan discusses how the Marine Corps Information Operations Center (MCIOC) will assist a unit commander so he can “…prepare a receptive environment before his arrival, maximize his effects on the ground, and ensure his influence persists long after his departure.” This is valuable but once again, it shows the SVG plan is not sufficiently tied into the interagency effort. Like other interagency issues, this area needs to be developed to ensure coordination and unity of effort.

Marine Corps units need to be aware of the Strategic Communication goals and coordinate their Information Operations campaign to support those goals. The NSS makes clear that:

Aligning our actions with our words is a shared responsibility that must be fostered by a culture of communication throughout government. We must also be more effective in our deliberate communication and engagement and do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples—not just elites—around the world.

In order to accomplish the national security objectives, the Information Operations campaign plan has to be closely tied into the overall Strategic Communication plan for the region. The United States Marine Corps must be conveying the same message that other elements of the US government are trying to convey. This adds credibility and consistency. An
information operations plan that is not coordinated with the Strategic Communication plan will almost certainly lead to a muddled message that fails to convey the primary intent of the United States government.

There is a great advantage to having the Marine Corps part of a well-coordinated Strategic Communications plan. The US Marine Corps is often in a better position to communicate with people who other parts of the US government have only limited access to. Whether it was working with junior military officers or building a school in a coastal village, the Marine Corps might have access to people who rarely come into contact with any part of the United States government. This gives the Marine Corps a prime opportunity to communicate key messages for the United States. However, these messages need to be aligned with the Strategic Communication plan to be most effective, and there is no mention of this in the SVG’s plan. Again this could seem like it is over-detailed for a conceptual plan but it is a key element. Uncoordinated information operations plans have been common in the US military, thus it is necessary to stress the requirement for a cohesive plan.

Despite flaws, there are parts of the SVG’s plan that show the Marine Corps can play an essential role in partner building. The SVG recognizes that in all likelihood the need for building the capacity for US partners will be a key mission of the United States in 2025. While it is impossible to know exactly what the future will be like, the lessons of history lead us to the conclusion that it is in the United States’ best interest to have strong and capable partners. In the past, today, and most likely in the future the United States Marine Corps will have a key role in this mission. The current Marine Corps plan is a start and, to its credit, it does show that the Marine Corps recognizes the importance of this mission.
However, to be truly successful, this plan needs to be improved. The Marine Corps must learn to think in terms other than the Marine Air Ground Task Force. While Security Cooperation is important, there is no need for a Security Cooperation-MAGTF. A MAGTF is too expensive and too unwieldy to meet all of our partner training requirements. Mobile Training Teams and small detachments, as well as the established Marine Expeditionary Unit deployments, can accomplish the mission with more flexibility and less expense. The Marine Corps must also push hard towards the integration of interagency elements and Non-Governmental Organizations. These elements are critical to success and cannot be addressed as an afterthought. Successful partner building should eventually involve small detachments, mobile training teams, MAGTFs, other elements of the department of defense, other elements of the United States government, and Non-Government Organizations. Any Marine Corps plan must integrate all of these elements to be successful.

4 According to Marine Administrative Message 011111, issued on 5 January 2011, the SC-MAGTF has been renamed the “SPMAGTF-(Security Cooperation)”. For the purpose of clarity in this paper, the former term SC-MAGTF will be used.
Bibliography


