

# Overcoming Barriers to Working with Highly Capable Allies and Partners in the Air, Space, and Cyber Domains

## An Exploratory Analysis

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### ISSUE

The Department of the Air Force (DAF), like the entire U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), has been directed to support the National Defense Strategy objectives of defending the homeland and deterring strategic attacks against the United States and its allies and partners. The National Defense Strategy stresses that mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are critical to achieving U.S. objectives and calls on DoD to incorporate ally and partner perspectives, competencies, and advantages at every stage of defense planning. This report is the first of a two-volume set of reports in which we consider how the DAF and DoD can enhance engagement with highly capable allies and partners to improve interoperability by exploring the following key questions:

- What are some of the main barriers to security cooperation (SC) with highly capable allies and partners?
- What workarounds, if any, have been or could be created?

In this first volume, we create a typology of the barriers that impede SC with highly capable allies and partners; identify some of the more specific barriers in the air, space, and cyber domains; suggest mitigation strategies for each of these barriers; and propose a preliminary approach for implementing some of these mitigation strategies. In the second volume, we provide a similar overview, as well as the supporting analysis of 11 case studies.<sup>1</sup>



### APPROACH

This work is the first of its kind and is meant to document barriers to working with allies and partners, as well as the benefits and risks. Although the case studies are few in number, they allowed us to begin to identify barrier mitigation strategies. The case studies document key barriers and allow for a deep conversation, from both the U.S. and the allied and partner perspective, regarding the issues that exist within the confines of each case study.

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Stephanie Pezard, David E. Thaler, Gene Germanovich, Beth Grill, Bruce McClintock, Karen Schwindt, Mary Kate Adgie, Anika Binnendijk, Kevin J. Connolly, Katie Feistel, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Alison K. Hottes, Moon Kim, Isabelle Nazha, Gabrielle Tarini, Mark Toukan, and Jalen Zeman, *Overcoming Barriers to Working with Highly Capable Allies and Partners in the Air, Space, and Cyber Domains: Case Studies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A968-2, 2023, Not available to the general public.



## CONCLUSIONS

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In these 11 case studies, we identified several barriers to cooperation with highly capable allies and partners; some are within individual domains, and many are across domains (meaning more than one domain but not necessarily across all three). Although some of these barriers might be well-known to many SC practitioners, we document them in relation to specific cases. Our case studies suggest the following key findings:

- One of our air case studies suggests that differences in strategic priorities (i.e., that the United States seeks to create new capabilities, while an ally or partner wishes to obtain U.S. technology) can lead to unrealized expectations and diminished cooperation.
- Our space case studies suggest that
  - the large size and complexity of space programs and the lack of a single voice across the U.S. space SC enterprise challenge the scale and pace of collaboration
  - the DAF and other U.S. organizations appear to have insufficient human resources to enable the level of space SC envisioned by strategy.
- Our cyber case studies suggest that
  - the United States and its allies and partners often have differing views over what they consider to be “sensitive” information
  - similar to the space community, the cyber community suffers from the lack of a single voice within the cybersecurity cooperation enterprise, which somewhat explains the lack of advocacy for, and clear prioritization of, the agreements that the United States should be pursuing and the types of technology it should be developing with allies and partners.
- Across domains, our case studies suggest that
  - allies and partners are rarely included in concept and system development phases
  - the extent and speed of communication between the United States and its allies and partners are limited
  - there are technical collaborative infrastructure constraints that inhibit the ability of the United States and its allies and partners to share information
  - slow bureaucratic execution can impede SC
  - some U.S. regulations impede rather than support SC, particularly with fast-evolving technologies
  - failure to account for a partner’s political constraints can slow cooperation activities
  - there is an overall lack of incentive, tasking, and understanding of priorities for combined SC partnering in third countries.

We further identified mitigation strategies that could help overcome some of these barriers. These mitigation strategies present various levels of complexity that, in some cases, can make their implementation challenging, often requiring other parts of DoD and even the U.S. State Department to resolve. With only 11 case studies and an emphasis on depth over breadth, we have to be cautious about drawing broad conclusions and making specific recommendations. Still, our research pointed to a few key areas in which action would allow the DAF to make significant advances in the short term to address some of the pervasive barriers noted in our research.

## BARRIERS TYPOLOGY

We find that barriers fall into the categories outlined in the following table.

| Type of Barrier | Representative Examples   |
|-----------------|---|
| Budgetary       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differences in funding priorities or availability of resources</li><li>• Inability to determine or agree to fair share (costing requirements)</li></ul>   |
| Bureaucratic    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sheer number of stakeholders and organizations</li><li>• Over-classification of communications (default to NOFORN)</li><li>• Conflicting priorities and incentives within U.S. and partner organizations</li></ul>                                |
| Cultural        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differing approaches or expectations regarding military cooperation</li><li>• Reluctance or inability to share sensitive or classified data</li><li>• Historical experience in bilateral or multilateral engagements/relationships</li></ul>      |
| Political       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Governmental restrictions or limitations external to DoD or MoD</li><li>• Domestic pressures or influences from industry, legislatures, or popular opinion</li></ul>  |
| Regulatory      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written prohibitions or limitations to collaboration in U.S. legal code, congressional legislation, or departmental instructions</li><li>• Ally/partner legal or executive-level restrictions on collaboration with foreign partners</li></ul>    |
| Strategic       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diverging national interests and threat perceptions</li><li>• Differences in priorities re: collaboration with U.S. and other allies and partners</li></ul>   |
| Technical       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of compatible systems or procedures to share information</li><li>• Imbalances in scientific or domain expertise</li><li>• Lack of confidence in ally/partners's ability to protect effectively classified or sensitive information</li></ul> |

NOTE: MoD = Ministry of Defense; NOFORN = Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The DAF and allies and partners would benefit from a review of the legal authorities for the roles and the placement of exchanges, nonreciprocal exchanges, and liaison officers, many of which are legacy positions.
- Given the increase in demand for technical expertise in new and growing SC domains (space, cyber), it would be helpful for the DAF to ensure that the foreign disclosure community is enabled with sufficient technical or domain-specific expertise (and embedded in the relevant organizations) to make rapid decisions.
- It would be useful to look for ways for the DAF to improve its advocacy for the inclusion of international equities throughout a program's life cycle. This could include the identification of a DAF "champion" for each major U.S. capability development initiative to improve transparency and accountability internally and streamline communications with highly capable allies and partners.
- The DAF would benefit from supporting additional allied and partner access to collaborative platforms to facilitate cooperation and information-sharing. Cyber cooperation, in particular, could benefit from such efforts.



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