

International Roles

Our ability to sustain . . . alliances, and to build coalitions of support toward common objectives, depends in part on the capabilities of America's Armed Forces. Similarly, the relationships our Armed Forces have developed with foreign militaries are a critical component of our global engagement and support our collective security.

We will continue to ensure that we can prevail against a wide range of potential adversaries—to include hostile states and nonstate actors—while broadly shaping the strategic environment using all tools to advance our common security.

—*National Security Strategy*¹

The U.S. Armed Forces play a vital role in the global security environment. Drawing on the professional traits, qualities, and competencies developed within their respective Service branches and enriched through experience, exposure, and engagement, the noncommissioned officer/petty officer corps greatly contributes to meet America's national security objectives in diverse environments. Furthermore, as leaders in the Profession of Arms, their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and innovative methods of operating can provide a model for other countries to emulate.

The 21st-century global security environment differs greatly from the environment of yesteryear. It is marked by remarkable complexity, ambiguity, evolution, and transformation. Among the factors shaping

this environment are shifting demographics, interdependent economies, competition for natural resources, global natural disasters, and, in several parts of the globe, the aspirations of newly emerging contenders for regional and global influence. Advances in technology and communications both improve and threaten this evolving and transforming security environment. Emerging security threats and challenges include often unpredictable failed states, international criminal and terrorist networks, and other nonstate actors. In this fluctuating context, the global community must think collectively about new ways and means to deter, dissuade, or defeat these threats through unity of effort and innovative security arrangements.

Serving in alliances, coalitions, and partnerships is woven into the fabric of the U.S. Armed Forces. From the inception of the Nation, Americans have relied on, and provided aid or assistance to, other countries. Beginning in the second half of the 20th century, the United States has worked within international organizations such as the United Nations and has entered into a wide variety of security arrangements, from multinational alliances, often bound by formal treaties for enduring mutual defense, to less formally bound multinational coalitions, with specific purposes and generally limited durations. Maintaining international alliances or coalitions requires a collective vision of mission, flexibility, and adaptability, and a continuing effort by all leaders to keep the alliance or coalition strong and confident. Often, keeping the coalition focused and unified is as important as the operation itself. General John P. Abizaid, USA, then-commander of U.S. Central Command, captured this idea well in 2005 when he told his senior staff and the senior national representatives of the coalition supporting the war on terror: “Nothing is as important as the Coalition in this battle.”²

Irrespective of the strategic framework, or the size and scope of any security arrangement the United States may enter into, the Nation will leverage the Armed Forces to engage with its partners. Whether in combat or in a humanitarian role, the United States, its allies, and partners have always depended on the specialized skills, expertise, and leadership capabilities of its professional enlisted force. Forged in crisis and reinforced during decades of peace, the history of NCOs/POs in international affairs is deeply rooted in a resilient personal determination, persistent resolve, and a strong set of professional standards and

ethics. This international legacy transcends generations and instills in today's NCOs/POs a high sense of global purpose and a positive bias toward solidarity with the militaries of other nations working with the United States.

In this new century, not only are NCOs/POs depended on to perform their traditional roles with credibility and efficiency, but they are also leveraged and empowered to perform strategic roles in this evolving global security environment. NCOs/POs are uniquely adept at advising, training, and mentoring others at various levels of military organization and structure. Moreover, NCOs/POs are critical in helping other nations' militaries to achieve new or increased levels of capability, especially at the small unit and individual levels, and to meet emerging or evolving challenges where interpersonal skills, the warrior ethos, and diplomatic approaches are necessities.

NCOs/POs, regardless of specialty or background, may find themselves involved directly in a wide range of international engagements—from major combat to various forms of international security force assistance operations to humanitarian relief. They may be involved in multilateral or bilateral exercises, military assistance activities, and even large-scale engagements. NCOs/POs may be assigned to an alliance delegation, a coalition battle staff, a multinational force headquarters, an Embassy, or a personnel exchange program. Almost assuredly, they will be connected with whole-of-government endeavors, working hand in hand with other U.S. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and ministries of defense in pursuit of common goals. In each case, NCOs/POs can and do facilitate professional relationships that can yield an enduring positive strategic effect.

The NCO/PO leadership cadre is the closest to the force and will have the greatest immediate impact on accomplishing organizational milestones. NCOs/POs keep things in proper perspective and they help maintain a positive and productive organizational climate through an acute understanding of the mission and a keen sense of inclusiveness, not only for U.S. forces, but also for those of other nations. They foster mutual trust and confidence in a multi-Service and multinational force, recognizing that troops of any Service or nation will follow an engaged leader who genuinely cares about them and appreciates their contribution to the organization.

In addition to their involvement with multinational alliances and coalitions, NCOs/POs directly contribute to fostering partnerships with other nations on behalf of the United States. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote, “This strategic reality demands that the U.S. government get better at what is called ‘building partner capacity’: helping other countries defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside U.S. forces by providing them with equipment, training, or other forms of security assistance.”³

An Ambassador and a Professional

The American people have exceptionally high expectations for their military, especially when serving overseas as the face of the United States and the ambassadors of its citizens. They expect that their military will ably represent the society it serves and the ideals on which the Nation was founded. Americans further expect their military to maintain high moral standards, embody the Code of Conduct, and personify the standards, traits, qualities, and competencies of a member of the Profession of Arms. As trusted leaders of the all-volunteer force, NCOs/POs lead their subordinates to exceed these expectations, and they do so through personal example, inspiration, and enforcement. General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, defined the expectations of Americans for their military members this way: “We must provide an example to the world that cannot be diminished by hardships and challenges. This example is based upon the words and intent of the U.S. Constitution that each of us takes a personal oath to support and defend. Our oath demands each of us display moral courage and always do what is right, regardless of the cost.”⁴

NCOs/POs can justifiably lay claim to a long and impressive history of contributing to success in managing and resolving international crises, and partnering with other militaries during peacetime and conflict. U.S. military personnel are judged by their deeds, including when dealing with other nations. NCOs/POs serving in alliances, coalitions, and security partnerships must remain true to who they are, while bringing out the best in others. NCOs/POs bring with them the values and strategic objectives of the United States, as well as the traits, qualities, and competencies of the Profession of Arms. Whether sta-

tioned abroad (often with their families), enjoying a port of call, or attached to an international force, the enlisted leader understands that every engagement can have strategic effects and that those who wear the uniform are representing the United States. Their conduct must be above reproach. NCOs/POs take all appropriate measures to ensure that military members are professional at all times and respectful of other cultures, peoples, and societies.

At the same time, NCOs/POs must remember those times when events have not gone well for the U.S. military or the United States. From violation of a status-of-forces agreement to some form of inappropriate conduct by an individual or small group, these incidents result in significant strategic setbacks and international embarrassment. As an institution, the Armed Forces do not relish highlighting such occurrences in which the conduct of a tiny percentage of the force tarnishes the honorable reputation and ethical service of the military as a whole. However, all members of the Profession of Arms must be personally reflective, open to national and international scrutiny, and dedicated to preserving the integrity of the Profession of Arms by policing its ranks.

Proven leadership throughout the NCO/PO corps provides a solid foundation for engaging with foreign counterparts. Over the years, the fine work of NCOs/POs with extensive experience in international military assistance and building partnership capacity has yielded many best practices worthy of study and emulation. A great deal can be gleaned from U.S. Special Forces, who for many decades have been intimately involved with training, advising, and mentoring international militaries. Working at the operational and tactical levels, special operations forces NCOs/POs maintain a high degree of strategic awareness, which makes them especially well equipped to take on engagement activities. In building international partnership capacity, and in contributing to professionalizing other militaries, the most effective NCOs/POs are critical and creative thinkers who keep a wider view of the environment, and who are extremely adaptive when empowered in diverse, highly decentralized situations. They maintain a keen understanding of the “human element.” Seeing through the eyes of others is a powerful way to learn and thus gain the trust and garner the respect of those of other cultures and traditions.

Building Partner Capacity

In these situations, a high degree of mutual respect, openness, inclusiveness, and patience is critical. NCOs/POs are mindful that the servicemembers of other nations are equally proud of their own countries. NCOs/POs appreciate different national visions, cultures, traditions, sensitivities, loyalties, and motivations whether they are political, tribal, or religious. They seek what is common among military professionals and get to know the people they are working with. They understand that no two countries are alike and that regions vary in any number of ways. Thus, any developmental or professionalization approaches must be calibrated to be effective for each particular country. To this end, NCOs/POs familiarize themselves with that nation's defense structures, force foundations (volunteer or conscript), rank structures, and levels of responsibilities and authorities of the force. They respect the other nation's institutions and customs and show appropriate courtesies to its officers and other leaders. When focusing efforts on professionalizing mid-level leadership, NCOs/POs understand that many other militaries may not have a professional NCO/PO corps. Therefore, NCOs/POs may find themselves advising and mentoring another country's officer corps to win access, support, and buy-in for developing a corps of professional mid-level leaders.

In working with other nations' militaries, it is paramount to understand and appreciate that NCOs/POs both learn from and teach others. Effective U.S. advisors, trainers, and mentors understand that they must learn from others and that they will gain understanding by listening. There is no immediate benefit or strategic advantage in attempting to replicate the U.S. military model. While the U.S. structure is superb in many ways, and can be a distinctive model, other nations have different circumstances and requirements. NCOs/POs are at their best when they show other militaries what is good, effective, and efficient in the U.S. Armed Forces model and then pursue meaningful discussions and courses of action toward what makes best sense for that nation's military. NCOs/POs help another nation's military leaders understand what is right for *their* country as opposed to attempting to recast another nation's military into a mirror image of the U.S. military. Competence, credibility, capability, and character build *trust*. When military leaders

in other nations recognize these professional traits, qualities, and competencies in U.S. advisors, trainers, and mentors, they are more inclined to cooperate, thus setting the conditions to move forward in security partnerships and arrangements that serve the near-term and even longer term interest of all participating nations.

NCOs/POs continue to play vital roles in attaining the national security objectives of the United States. Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III underscored this point to Army NCOs: “Forging bonds with the Soldiers of other countries can pay big dividends as our Army engages in regional alignments and builds partner capacity. NCOs can have an impact across the entire spectrum of operations.” Service to one’s nation is what is common to the Profession of Arms. As the U.S. Armed Forces’ premier advisors, trainers, and mentors, NCOs/POs will increasingly be called on to serve alongside, and also to provide a professional example for, international forces in multinational alliances and coalitions, to assist in building partnership capacity, and to contribute to innovative approaches to foreign affairs. To meet the known and emerging requirements of the international environment, the U.S. noncommissioned officer and petty officer will need to possess a global vision and an adaptive mind—as well as professional and personal traits, qualities, and competencies—to positively influence and operate with international militaries. They will need to do so while striking a necessary and desirable balance between traditional U.S. military culture and identity and the unique partnership requirements of an international force.

Notes

¹ *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010), 41, available at <www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf>.

² General John P. Abizaid, commander, U.S. Central Command (2003–2007), Guidance and Intent during 2005 strategy focus session with field commanders, commanders, and senior U.S. and coalition staff as recorded by U.S. Central Command senior enlisted advisor.

³ Robert M. Gates, “Helping Others Defend Themselves: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2010, available at <www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66224/robert-m-gates/helping-others-defend-themselves>.

⁴ Martin E. Dempsey, “America’s Military—A Profession of Arms,” 3, available at <www.jcs.mil/content/files/2012-02/022312120752_Americas_Military_POA.pdf>.



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