Theater Strategy

Each combatant commander, as well as each branch of the armed services, releases an annual posture statement to Congress. The statement expresses the commander’s vision for the area of responsibility or the service for which it pertains. These posture statements can be a tremendous resource when aligning messages for units or commands. As a staff officer the PAO will normally have a role in the development of the posture statement. The posture statement is a great tool to link themes and messages up and down the chain of command; from the president and secretary of defense down to subordinate units within the COCOM.

Photo courtesy of www.msc.navy.mil
Theater Strategy

A theater strategy is a broad statement of the commander’s long-term vision for the area of responsibility.

Geographic combatant commands develop a theater strategy focused on achieving specified end states for their theaters.

The bottom line is that the theater strategy is the bridge between national strategic guidance and the joint operation planning required to achieve national and regional objectives and end states; in summary, it links U.S. policy and strategic guidance with the combatant command or services activities, operations and resources. The theater strategy should describe the regional end state and the specific objectives that should be attained along with the ways and means of achieving them.

Although there is no specific format for the statement, the general flow normally begins with a strategic estimate which may include the commander’s vision, mission, challenges, trends, assumptions, objectives, and resources.

Using Theater Strategies

Combatant Commanders and the service chiefs who support them use their posture statements and theater strategies to: align and focus efforts and resources, mitigate/prepare for conflict and contingencies in their area of responsibility and support and advance U.S. interests.

Theater strategies normally emphasize: security cooperation activities for building partner capacity; force posture and preparation for contingencies through military and regional engagement and with close cooperation with Department of State, U.S. embassies, and other federal agencies.

Photo courtesy of sphotos-b.xx.fbcdn.net
Theater Campaign Plans

Theater strategies are operationalized through theater campaign plans. A campaign is a series of related major operations aimed at accomplishing strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space. While intended primarily to guide the use of military power, campaign plans consider how to coordinate all instruments of national power, as well as the efforts of various interorganizational partners, to attain national strategic objectives.

Theater campaign plans are produced by the geographic combatant commands to operationalize their theater strategies. These campaign plans comprehensively and coherently integrate all directed steady-state activities (actual) and contingency (potential) operations and activities.

Theater Campaign Plans provide the framework that informs and synchronizes subordinate planning and operations and is the primary vehicle for designing, organizing, integrating and executing security cooperation activities.

Photo courtesy of www.africom.mil
Security Cooperation

Security cooperation activities help to achieve strategic objectives in region. These objectives focus on specific security cooperation goals. Security cooperation goals build relationships that promote U.S. security interests, build allied partner military capacities for self-defense and multinational operations and promote peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.

The key players in security cooperation activities are the Department of State and Department of Defense.

The State Department has overall responsibility for security cooperation, determines which countries are involved, including the scope of their involvement, and approves sales or the transfer of equipment to specific countries. The U.S. ambassador remains a key figure for the U.S. government for a particular country.

The Department of Defense is responsible for implementation of security cooperation. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) is DOD’s focal point for security cooperation activities. It manages DoD’s Regional Centers for Security Studies within combatant commands’ areas of operation, the regional unified combatant commands and the military service components.

Elements of security cooperation activities include military contacts, visits by military officers, defense officials, military units, and exchange programs. Defense shows or demonstrations; bilateral, multilateral regional talks; working groups; and the Partnership for Peace program are all part of this overall program.

Operational activities of security cooperation include anti-piracy, counterdrug operations, intelligence gathering and other support as necessary.

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MEDITERRANEAN SEA (April 7, 2009) Chief Boatswain's Mate Ryan J. Lamkin directs an Armed Forces of Malta Alouette helicopter to a landing aboard the guided-missile frigate USS Robert G. Bradley (FFG 49) during flight operations. The ship will visit Malta for a theater security cooperation mission to strengthen the maritime partnership between the U.S. and Malta. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Whitfield M. Palmer/Released)
Security Cooperation (continued)

Security Assistance

Security assistance is performed by a combination of foreign military sales (example: military arms sales to Taiwan) and international military training with a special emphasis on combined exercises that are sponsored by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the unified combatant commanders. Some examples of this sort of training include civil affairs projects and medical, dental, and veterinarian civic action projects.

Security Assistance (continued)

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English/Anglais IS2012-2003-130
17 July 2012 Kauai County, Hawaii, USA
USNS Concord (T-AFS-5) is used as a target vessel for Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) Victoria (SSK 876) during a sink exercise (SINKEX) at the Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands, in Kauai County, Hawaii, on July 17 2012.

1,400 Canadian sailors, soldiers, and airmen and airwomen participate in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2012 combined and joint exercise taking place near the Hawaiian Islands from June 29 to August 3. Scheduled and coordinated by the U.S. Navy Third Fleet, RIMPAC also offers Canada the senior members of the Canadian Forces the opportunity to assume positions of leadership, further enhancing Canada’s ability to work with other nations of the Asia-Pacific region.

Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) is the world’s largest international maritime exercise, designed to prepare military forces to work together in missions ranging from providing humanitarian aid to full combat operations. RIMPAC began as an annual exercise in 1971 and since 1974 has been scheduled every other year. The endurance of exercise demonstrates the value of bringing international forces together to train and improve their ability to operate in a joint and combined multi-national force environment. Canada, along with only Australia and the United States, has participated in RIMPAC since its inception. Canadian Forces photo by: 407 Long Range Patrol Squadron, Comox, BC © 2012 DND-MDN Canada
PA Support to Security Cooperation

Public Affairs support in security cooperation activities can be crucial to success as they present communication problems and opportunities. The PA is charged with developing and implementing communication strategies that are designed to shape deterrence and other US security interests. Typically the communication plan involves raising awareness of US military capabilities and support of our partner nations. Keep in mind that some of these activities will be classified and the PA will have to vet public affairs guidance to the office of the secretary of defense for PA approval; as even a passive PA posture must be approved.

PA communication strategies should address the three pillars of public affairs; command information, public information, and community engagement. It is very important that the PA participate in the operational planning process to ensure synchronized communication efforts (example: one collective US voice). If operational planning takes place at the secret or top secret level the PA must still take part.

During the planning discussion the PA must be cognizant of communications efforts in the whole of government. Coordinate and collaborate with PA staff members at the combatant command, State Department, OSD, joint staff and the US embassy public diplomacy country team. Coordination is definitely the key to success. It might be prudent to include representatives from the host nations and regional organizations if classification allows. Remember, that the communication effort is massive and will be vital to the overall success of the theater campaign plan.

Staff Sgt Jeffrey S. Ray, a Drill Instructor at MCRD Parris Island S.C., speaks to a delegation of military officers from Yemen via translator, during their orientation of recruit training hosted by Marine Corps Forces Central Command. The visit outlined how the United States, a partner nation, conducts comprehensive training programs and demonstrates the Marine Corps' commitment to being a long-term partner in security cooperation.
Conclusion

Now that you have an understanding of theater strategy you should have a better feel for your role as a PA staff officer in a COCOM or supporting unit during meetings pertaining to security cooperation and security assistance. It is always important for the PA to understand the message being delivered to allies and adversaries by the operations and training missions we conduct.