

# STRENGTHENING THE BRIDGE:

## Building Partnership Capacity

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PHOTO: Military members from 29 nations march in formation during the closing ceremony for Combined Endeavor 2009 held at Kozara Barracks, Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 17 September 2009. (U.S. Air Force, TSGT William Greer)

**A**DMIRAL MIKE MULLEN has said, “Developing a relationship on the battlefield in the midst of a crisis with someone I’ve never met before can be very challenging . . . Trust has to be built up over time. You can’t surge trust.”

Trust comes from years of cooperative experience, listening, success, and failure, and is held together by a common vision of a secure and prosperous future. Because relationships are so important, it is critical never to take them for granted. That is why *building partnership capacity* is the centerpiece of all that European Command does and is clearly the command’s top priority.

What is partnership? By definition, it is a *relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual respect, cooperation, and responsibility for the achievement of a specified goal*. Notice that it is *not* a one-way exchange, but a two-way relationship, a relationship between partners who both have a stake in the outcome. We chose the word “partnership” carefully. Partnerships are built on unique experiences, imply recognition of both strengths and shortcomings, complement each other to reach mutual goals, and learn from each other. We in the European Command believe no one person, service, agency of government, or nation is as good as a coalition of willing partners working together.

### Forward-based, Partner-focused

European Command is a geographic combatant command stationed in the center of a partner region. It is as easy to overlook this fact, as it is hard to quantify the effect this has in all we do. For decades, our members have had the opportunity to live and work in host nations. Many senior leaders often remark that one of their fondest memories of service is their first tour in Europe. Then as now, service members and their families form lasting personal relationships with local nationals, both at work and in the community. Discovering local cuisine, using local public transportation, and learning the language are simple, yet meaningful steps to gaining mutual respect and building alliances. These personal experiences become the foundation for larger organizational relationships. The reverse is also true for our allied friends.

How many times have you heard an allied member recall fond memories of a treasured U.S. exchange assignment? Living with and near our partners gives European Command members a unique perspective and solid credibility with our allies.

We recognize that knowledge is a powerful commodity, and it takes effort to understand the culture in partner nations. Understanding the history of Europe helps us see our allies' world view and why they approach problems and situations in the manner they do. Without a sense of this view, we are like moviegoers arriving late to a film and wondering what is going on and why major characters are reacting so strongly.

As Americans, we often seek quick solutions and comment that "time is short." Our European allies may see things a bit differently. The United States is a young nation. A yearly festival, the *Ducasse de Mons*, is celebrated near Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, in the city of Mons, Belgium. Rich in symbolism and tradition, the festival dates back to the year 1349 and has occurred nearly every year for more than 650 years. Clearly, our partners may see things with a different lens given their culture and history.

To gain a better understanding of this tapestry of history and culture, European Command has recently published a reading list of over 80 titles with genres ranging from history to literature. (This can be found at <http://useucom.wordpress.com/2009/08/06/what-are-you-reading/>) European Command members are encouraged to find an area of interest and learn more about their host country or a specific period in its history. For example, after reading *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone*, by James J. Sheehan, a reader may have a much better insight into the differing approaches of our partners. No single approach is "correct." Partners give each other ideas and learn from one another. It may be hard for Americans to fully comprehend the influence of disastrous 20th century wars, both hot and cold, and their aftermath on the psyche of our partners, but we owe it to ourselves and to our friends to try.

If you understand the European culture, you will understand the United States better. The United States is a country with strong ties to the European continent. The recent 2008 U.S. Census revealed that approximately 60 percent of the U.S. population identifies somewhat with European ancestry. A glance at some of the name tags of European Command members validates this unique connection. As the names Cimicata, Gallagher, Rodriguez, and Stavridis suggest, America is a nation of immigrants; but immigrant offspring quickly assimilate into contemporary culture. One indication of this assimilation is our loss of the native tongue. Only 8 percent of DOD members speak a foreign language, and European Command likely mirrors this statistic. Thus, we almost always conduct business with our partners in English. By comparison, a visitor to Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe, would hear a variety of languages in the hallway and cafeteria, but as soon as a meeting would start, virtually all the international staff would display an admirable mastery of English.

Europe is a continent of many languages. The European Union has 23 official and more than 60 indigenous languages, so it is a significant challenge to communicate in host-nation languages with our partners. For that reason, European Command has challenged all its members to study a foreign language using the various tools the services offer, such as the award-winning language software, Rosetta Stone. Furthermore, European Command is exploring ways to make it easier for its members to have access to more language resources. European Command recognizes that the study of a language is a tremendous way to gain insight into another culture. The knowledge of basic phrases can help build trust between individuals.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Never have the challenges or opportunities been greater for European Command to strengthen the bonds of partnership. Our partners face an array of hazards, ranging from international terrorism,

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extremism, shifting demographics, and economic turbulence to concerns over access to energy. We do not want to face these hazards alone. The United States cannot obtain its strategic objectives without a unified approach, and the military is seeking more innovative solutions using proven concepts.

## NATO

After 60 years, NATO still stands as the most successful military alliance in history. One legacy of this alliance is the adoption of hundreds of “standardization agreements.” These agreements established processes, procedures, terms, and conditions for use of common military and technical procedures and equipment among member countries. They may seem bureaucratic, but in reality, these agreements have vital relevance to our operations today. The fact that the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul produces operations orders using a standardized NATO planning process, in English, and in formats that staff members are familiar with, is a minor miracle. It is easy for those who work with these standard processes regularly to overlook them, but our neighbors do not do so. Indeed, countries seeking to work closer with us often aspire to achieve the “NATO standard.” NATO’s investment in interoperability decades ago continues to be beneficial in both old and new partnership enterprises.

Although our collective memory of training in Europe during the Cold War is fading a bit, we can and should build upon the positive legacies of that era. Through exercises, unit partnerships, and exchange assignments, the United States and its allies in European Command have built a common framework of principles for conventional warfare. We must be comfortable training for irregular warfare on one day and stabilization, security, transition and reconstruction the next. Our emphasis on training will not only be on how to perform a mission, but also on how to “train the trainer.”

The Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams Program (OMLT, pronounced “omelet”) is a prime example of this change in focus and the synergy of multiple partnerships. An OMLT is a small team of partner-nation officers

and noncommissioned officers whose primary task is to deploy to Afghanistan to coach, teach, and mentor an Afghan National Army unit. They also provide a conduit for command and control and, when required, provide support with operational planning and employment. Operational mentor and liaison teams help Afghans develop collective and individual skills to achieve and maintain peace and stability. In this process we should avoid “Americanizing” our partners and impart the concept of service and professionalism. It is better to allow them the flexibility to fit such concepts into their culture.

European Command plays an important role helping our partners train and deploy for this vital mission. Hungary recently deployed a team that was small in size, but huge in impact—an OMLT aided by European Command training, resources, and mentorship. It would have been difficult years ago to imagine Hungarian forces training and partnering with U.S. forces, then deploying out of Europe to the distant land of Afghanistan with the ultimate mission of mentoring the Afghan National Army. This example demonstrates the power of cooperation and unity of effort when trust is formed based on professional relationships.

However, there is more to this story, much more. Due to the highly successful State Partnership Program, a bilateral training and mentoring association that began in 1993, this particular OMLT included not only members of the Hungarian Armed Forces, but also 30 members of the Ohio Army National Guard.



1LT Nicole Ashcroft, 179th Air Wing public affairs

**During the Ohio National Guard’s Operational Mentor and Liaison Team homecoming ceremony held in Solnok, Hungary, on 15 August 2009, General Laszlo Tombol, Hungary’s chief of defense, recognized CPT Austin W. Dufresne for his work.**

The National Guard's State Partnership Program continues to be one of our most effective security cooperation programs. By linking American states with designated partner countries, we promote access, enhance military capabilities, improve interoperability, and reinforce the principles of responsible governance. Currently 20 states have partnerships with 21 countries in the European Command area of operations (see box). Our intent is to build enduring military-to-military, military-to-civilian, and civilian-to-civilian relationships, all of which enhance long-term international security. In the end, personal relationships trump everything, and are the key to our success.

To achieve our common goals, we must partner with many organizations in addition to traditional military allies and coalition members. To succeed, we must work more closely with other departments and agencies of the U.S. government, such as the Department of Treasury, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Agency for International Development. We seek the same strong relationships and trust with multinational organizations and nongovernmental organizations as we have with uniformed allies.

One of European Command's most important assets is a bastion of knowledge, not a weapon system. The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch, Germany, has hosted thousands of participants from numerous nations to promote dialogue and understanding. For this command, the Marshall Center demonstrates the primacy that building partnership has in our mission. We cannot surge trust, and we do not want to try to build relationships and seek capabilities after a crisis has started. We want to know each other long before.

### **A Holistic Approach**

Building partnership capacity is not a specialized program or a single event. We approach this key mission with a strategic campaign plan that touches

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## **U.S. European Command State Partnerships**

**Alabama / Romania  
California / Ukraine  
Colorado / Slovenia  
Georgia / Georgia  
Illinois / Poland  
Indiana / Slovakia  
Kansas / Armenia  
Maine / Montenegro  
Maryland / Estonia  
Maryland / Bosnia  
Michigan / Latvia  
Minnesota / Croatia  
New Jersey / Albania  
North Carolina / Moldova  
Ohio / Hungary  
Ohio / Serbia  
Oklahoma / Azerbaijan  
Pennsylvania / Lithuania  
Tennessee / Bulgaria  
Texas and Nebraska / Czech Rep  
Vermont / Macedonia**

all staff directorates and components. We challenge ourselves by asking the question, "How does this action contribute to building partnership capacity?" or "What have I done for our partnerships today?" To be successful, we must synchronize not only our efforts, but also our words and deeds.

We know the best partnerships have open communication and seek an exchange of ideas with eyes on a goal. We do not have all the solutions or all the right answers. The goal of European Command is not "Americanization." We share techniques and processes that have worked for us, but recognize that each partner has a unique culture and approach to problem solving. Even so, we may be justifiably proud that many nations actively seek to emulate our professional noncommissioned officer corps and our emphasis on discipline, ethics, and individual initiative.

We often learn innovative solutions from our partners. The term *specific capability* crops up frequently in forums exploring how smaller nations



courtesy Ohio National Guard, CW3 Lee W. Scott

During a field training exercise in Tata, Hungary, SGT George Taylor (center) reviews squad level assault tactics with his Hungarian and U.S. operational mentor and liaison team combat advisor teammates, August 2009.

contribute to large enterprises. The Irish Army may seem small at 8,500, but it has contributed superb individual augmentees to the International Security Assistance Force headquarters. For example, a dinner conversation in a dining facility in Afghanistan became especially enlightening for an American Army officer when an Irish officer told him that improvised explosive devices were a decades-old issue for the Irish Army, not a recent phenomenon. This prompted a longer discussion, and the American gained greater perspective and useful ideas. We do not always measure knowledge and experience in a specific capability in terms of troop strength.

That American officer benefited immensely from the impromptu laboratory facilitated by his Irish counterpart. Ideally, such tangible and salient lessons can have a broader reach than just one person. A formalized innovative process that reaches out to our military and civilian partners can be a catalyst for similar broad results. We established an

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“innovation cell” in European Command to build partnership capacity through research and exchange of ideas, techniques, technologies, and procedures.

We recognize that building partner capacity is rarely about materiel solutions. It is easy for some to envision a technological solution to every problem—a “silver bullet.” If only our partners had more (fill in the blank), they would be more capable. In European Command, we have found that materiel solutions are not

always the best way to build capacity. Each partner nation is different, and materiel solutions can result in new, additional requirements. The need to maintain, train, and operate complex and expensive platforms can be challenging for smaller countries. At European Command, we understand that building capacity is not always about “things.” It may also be about the power of ideas and concepts. Our noncommissioned officer corps is an example of an investment in people, not materiel. As we work with our partners, we seek to find the right balance between materiel solutions and ideas.

## Communication

We are proud that we are pioneering the use of social networking to reach out to our partners. From a command blog ([www.eucom.mil/english/bridge/blog.asp](http://www.eucom.mil/english/bridge/blog.asp)) to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, we are seeking new ways to tell our story and emphasize the two-way communication central to any successful partnership. We are also working diligently to improve communication with our attachés using collaborative tools such as Defense Connect on Line to hold “town hall meetings” to exchange ideas and improve situational awareness. European Command strives to be a learning organization and to communicate through many means. **MR**