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# Thoughts on U.S. Military Representation Overseas: Revisited

By

Commander Don H. Waylett, USN

[Editor's note. Commander Waylett presents a counterpoint to an article published in *The DISAM Journal*, by Colonel Hector A. Negroni, USAF, Ret. Colonel Negroni's article, entitled "Thoughts on U.S. Military Representation Overseas," appeared in Vol. 8, No. 1 (Fall, 1985), pp. 50-52. DISAM welcomes the opposing viewpoint, and any further responses it may evoke.]

In the Fall, 1985 issue of *The DISAM Journal*, an opinion was put forward by Colonel H. A. Negroni, USAF, (Ret), for the detailing of U.S. military personnel to overseas assignments who would melt into the Host Country's military organization. This opinion was apparently developed through an admiration of the 1911 German advisor effort in Bolivia which resulted in Bolivians wearing German military devices and goose-stepping to this day. The German effort did not, apparently, result however in any long-lasting infusion of German ideals, ethics, or work habits. The counter point to Colonel Negroni's viewpoint is found in defining the objectives of security assistance before debating the identification of personnel make-up for overseas assignments.

In my opinion, security assistance is purely an instrument of foreign policy. A few steps lower than war, but still an instrument of foreign policy--of U.S. Government Foreign Policy, not the Host Country's. If the concept of security assistance being a tool of foreign policy is accepted then there is a very real danger in assigning personnel to overseas assignment who may readily "go native" to the extent where host country desires are weighted more heavily than United States objectives in the host country.

Of the three *crucial* qualifications identified by Colonel Negroni, professional competence is not contested. But, cultural empathy and linguistic fluency are challenged as to their placement in the *crucial* category for effective security assistance management overseas.

To state that language capability is mandatory is to ignore United States Security Assistance Organization successes in the Middle East, the Far East, and many other nations around the globe where a security assistance effort is in place and supporting United States foreign policy with personnel who are not fluent in Arabic, Swahili, or Korean, to mention but a few. It is only in Spanish-speaking nations that some in our military feel that language capability is a must; this is a position that is not rationalized against the many nations where there is a United States presence without the added benefit of speaking the native language. Albeit, there is an advantage to speaking the host country's language, but it is not critical to mission success.

Secondly, Security Assistance Officers should always attempt to be "Ambassadors of Good Will," but the cultivation of friendships should never hinder the attainment of United States security assistance objectives in a host country. Often when a member of a Security Assistance Organization becomes overly culturally empathic there is a tendency to support invalid desires of the host country. This phenomenon is vividly evidenced by numerous static military equipment displays throughout the world. The rusting monuments to questionable expenditures of United States taxpayer money often were the end result of Security Assistance Officers that had become as deluded as their host country counterparts by the grandeur of an unnecessary and unsupportable military technology. Often this faltering in judgement is first noted by the Security Assistance Officer speaking in the collective, i.e., *we* need these tanks; *my* country needs this training, *our*

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plans hinge on this acquisition. This may demonstrate the ultimate in cultural empathy, but it does not usually promote the best interests of the United States, nor in reality, the host country concerned. Actions such as these are usually the brain child of the In-Country Security Assistance Manager who has gone native, and a host country high-ranking friend, when both parties are convinced that they are serving the best interests of the host country. The United States military representative, however, has permitted his professional logic to waiver from a primary goal of achieving United States' objectives through providing military equipment and training that is realistic for the the host country. That goal should not be the promotion of equipment that provides the host country a page in *Jane's* for the ego satisfaction of the current political power in the host nation, regardless of the practical necessity existing in the host nation.

Therefore, the concept of following the 1911 German model of Security Assistance is not only in all likelihood counter to current security assistance guidance on United States military personnel relations with host country military forces; it could create an atmosphere, regardless of regulation, where emotion leads the decision process instead of rational evaluation of the requirements needed to support and advance United States Foreign policy in the host nation concerned.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Commander Waylett, in addition to several U.S. Navy tours, has served as a Naval Advisor (Security Assistance Manager) in Saudi Arabia and the Dominican Republic. While attached to Commander, Naval Forces Pacific Fleet, Commander Waylett was Project Officer for Ship Delivery to the Government of Peru.