
FMS and the U.S. Army Information Systems Engineering Command

By

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It is fairly well-known that the Army's Materiel Command, responsible for cradle-to-grave management of the equipment and tools soldiers use to do their jobs, also coordinates the sale of those same kinds of military items to foreign governments. The transactions, conducted under the auspices of the Foreign Military Sales program, constitute the marketing of American goods and talents to the military departments of friendly nations abroad.

Not so well-known, however, is the key work in FMS carried out at the U.S. Army Information Systems Engineering Command (ISEC), headquartered at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. ISEC acts as the Army's chief agent for FMS programs and projects assigned to the family of organizations in the major Army command known as the Information Systems Command, or ISC.

With its more than 3,500 computer, software, and communications specialists and engineers assigned at 12 worldwide sites, ISEC's expertise is called upon when a foreign power needs technical assistance in procuring automated data processing (ADP), communications, or telecommunications equipment or systems.

For organizational effectiveness as well as functional flow, the Army rolls up these technical information areas into what it calls the IMA, or Information Management Area. Five disciplines — automation, telecommunications, printing and publication, records management, and visual information—make up the IMA; when an FMS transactions requires advice or expertise in any of these disciplines, ISEC services are solicited.

"Although countries' military departments may contact American manufacturers or suppliers directly for any products or services they desire," said Raymond L. Kervahn, ISEC's FMS program director and deputy director of the Project Implementation Directorate, "in doing so, they bypass a valuable service at ISEC."

He went on to comment, "Our role can influence a whole range of tasks. We prepare price and availability data for information systems and services, and Letters of Offer and Acceptance to foreign governments for materials and services. We also plan, develop, engineer, acquire, install, test, and accept systems for foreign governments, and we offer advice, assistance and technical support, and associated services."

In some instances, ISEC calls upon the expertise of an associate command, ISMA and a subcommand, T-ASA, for advice during a transaction: the Information System Management Activity in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, provides project management when cases are deemed to be highly visible or politically sensitive; and the Television-Audio Support Activity at Sacramento Army Depot, California, is the Army's commodity manager for non-tactical, commercially-available broadcast radio and television equipment, and audiovisual equipment.

"Foreign countries, sometimes dazzled by a vendor's brochures, buy a system that is more than they need, or a system that will not satisfy their requirements," Kervahn said "This is where ISEC can help, by assessing their needs, and engineering a system from the ground up that is tailored to their specific objectives."

In a recent example, El Salvador approached the United States with a desire to buy a microwave communications system. According to Kervahn, "We oversaw every step of the operations. ISEC performed on-site surveys in-country, purchased the equipment, installed the system, and then trained the Salvadorans on its use." The cost to El Salvador was \$5.5 million.

Other notable sales have included a transportable microwave system to Guatemala, which took only one year from the beginning of negotiations to the installation of the system; and a \$2 million computer system sale to support an in-country defensive system for the government of Israel.

Kervahn said ISEC deals only with foreign governments which are friendly to American interests, and executes only those sales which have U.S. State Department endorsement. State has the statutory role to provide continuous supervision and general direction for economic assistance, military education and training, and military sales and export programs of the government; veto and approval powers rest with this department as well. At the Department of State, proposed FMS transactions are scrutinized to ensure they effectively integrate both U.S. and foreign policy.

He also noted that FMS benefits are obvious to the receiving government and the supplier, but the program, because it encourages international technological advances, has implications around the globe in the communications and information systems arenas. And ISEC's talent plays a major part in bringing state-of-the-art capabilities to governments overseas.