LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By

Anthony M. Kolankiewicz
Maj, USAR
U.S. Embassy, Bucharest Romania

[The following is a reprint of Mr. Kolankiewicz's response to the preceding article which was also published in the *Foreign Area Officer Newsletter*, Fall/Winter 1993.]

Dear Sir:

I wish to commend you for publishing the timely article by David Jones, *Diplomats and Warriors Revisited*, in the spring/summer issue (Volume 4, Issue 1). The article contains much useful information about relationships between diplomats and military personnel and debunks the more common stereotypes and misperceptions each group harbors toward the other. It should be required reading for all Foreign Area Officers, Defense attache personnel, and others about to be assigned to an embassy or diplomatic post.

However, while the article does a good job of identifying differences, it sheds little light on how to bridge the gap between the two groups in an operational environment. Like Mr. Jones, I am a Foreign Service Officer, now assigned as a political officer in Bucharest, Romania since April 1991. I am also a Foreign Area Officer in the Army Reserve, specializing in east European affairs (MOS 48E). Having a foot in each camp has given me invaluable insight into the thinking of both military and diplomatic personnel. While I do not suggest that my ideas are universally applicable, some or all might be helpful to those who are contemplating assignment to a position in which they are likely to work with diplomats.

- **Foreign Service is a Competitive Environment.** Military personnel should know where their diplomatic colleagues are coming from. Most enter the Foreign Service through a grueling officer selection process that begins with approximately 16,000 men and women nationwide per year and ends with the selection of less than 200. The stiff competition for assignments and promotions continues after initial selection, especially for political and economic officers, and creates an environment that demands top performance at all times. So if your diplomatic colleagues occasionally seem a bit too intense, more than likely it stems from the "system" in which they must function.

- **Diplomats are not Lazy.** This is a corollary to the observation above. Like Mr. Jones' attempt to dismiss the stereotype that the military is lazy, FAOs should recognize that FSOs also work long hours, often under difficult circumstances, and with fewer resources available than their military colleagues. Moreover, most political and economic officers are required to maintain far more contacts within the government and society at large than are normally needed by FAOs or Defense attaches. In most countries, for example, the DAO generally has 1 -3 officers to look after the Ministry of Defense and a few related agencies, whereas the State Department "reporting" contingent in an Embassy, which may or may not number more than the military attache staff, monitors virtually every other government ministry, not to mention the legislature, human rights groups, trade unions, and other peripheral organizations.

• **Exploit your Diplomatic Colleagues' Access.** Since the contracts available to most political and economic officers are so numerous and wide-ranging, FAOs should seek to tap into this treasure trove of knowledge about the country, its people, and its institutions through frequent contact with diplomatic personnel. In most cases, this means the political-military officer, but FAOs have an obligation to broaden their focus beyond military issues. Most FSOs would not object to providing a list of potential contacts in a given field, and many would gladly assist in making the initial introductions. To this end, asking for an invitation to a diplomatic reception or to an interesting seminar are two excellent ways for FAOs to develop contacts, practice the language, and increase their exposure to nonmilitary segments of society. At the same time, FAOs can reciprocate by sharing information they pick up during travels around the country or region.

• **Recognize FSO Diversity.** As Mr. Jones correctly noted in his article, military stereotypes or generalizations concerning diplomats merit debunking as much as the other way around. FSOs today come from every section of the country and represent every race, ethnic group, and religious denomination in the United States. Most are also older since the average age for incoming officers is approximately 31. Long gone are the days when the Foreign Service recruited only white Anglo-Saxon males educated in the Ivy League colleges. In other words, the Foreign Service is pretty much like any institution in America today, including the military. This diversity also extends to political views. Although FSOs are trained by experience in the arts of negotiation and compromise (the essence of diplomacy), the range of political opinions among officers is as great as in the military. In fact, after serving on military active duty throughout the 1970s, during which we routinely referred to the "wimps" at the State Department, I was shocked to discover after joining the Foreign Service in 1981 that one of the unofficial explanations for posting so many military officers to State's Political-Military Bureau was to reign in many of the hard-charging FSOs who wanted to "send in the Marines".

• **Avoid "We" Versus "Them".** Having served in the Philippines, Singapore, and Romania, I have noticed a tendency among some military personnel assigned to embassies to remain in their own cliques. To a certain extent, this is human nature, since most of us prefer to associate with people with whom we share something in common. However, too many military personnel have told me they feel uncomfortable in what is essentially a civilian environment, that they miss the traditional support structures provided by military bases, or that they believe that Foreign Service personnel have an antimilitary bias. While all of these may be valid concerns (although probably no more nor less than encountered in other nonmilitary environments), FAOs should avoid retreating into the fort. Serving in a country without the normal military infrastructural support can be an enriching experience, but only if FAOs are willing to spread their wings beyond the secure but rather limiting military enclave.

• **State Runs the Show.** Despite the Department of State's harping about lack of adequate resources to conduct foreign policy, the fact remains that State is still firmly in charge of the nation's diplomatic missions. In the great majority of embassies around the world, the ambassador is a professional diplomat, usually but not always from the political or economic officer ranks. His Deputy Chief of Mission or (DCM) is also generally a professional FSO, especially in the case of those missions (roughly 25% of the total) with a politically-appointed ambassador. Although an embassy community may be composed of a wide range of USG agencies, the political section is generally accorded top billing, followed closely by

the economic section. Administrative services for most agencies, including the AD and military personnel assigned to that section, are also provided by State. Thus, for a variety of reasons, FAOs should bear in mind this bureaucratic reality since it is far easier to swim with the current than against it.

- **Work Together.** The culmination of all the above is the obvious but often neglected requirement to work together to accomplish the mission's overall objectives. Just as the military is unable to function effectively without coordinating closely with State, FSOs cannot do their jobs without relying on the expertise provided by military personnel and other specialized agencies at post. We do indeed work for the same "uncle". Let's expend our energy striving to achieve the mission's goals rather than squandering it through senseless intramural competition.