

# Providing Something Extra--The Human Touch

By

J. Bruce Parker

In general, security assistance provides something extra for the host country and our national defense--that something extra being the involvement of dedicated U.S. and foreign personnel to accomplish mutual security objectives. This symbiotic relationship is the foundation upon which we have been able to sustain our defense efforts throughout the free world, while assisting other friendly countries.

All security assistance programs that I have encountered successfully meet our stated as well as our unstated objectives. But to what degree have we been successful? The answer comes down to two things--program management and individual initiative to provide the host country with the highest degree of service possible. When one looks at the bottom line, the individuals who work in an overseas security assistance organization (SAO) are the ones who will make or break each individual program. The SAO is really in the business of service to the customer, the host country.

I am the first person to admit that this is much easier said than done. There are many things that must be overcome to provide a host country with an excellent security assistance program. One of the most frequent problems is a result of organizational staffing. In many situations, SAO positions are assigned as an additional duty to another position deemed more "mission essential." This obviously increases the burden on whoever is responsible for the SAO function in the command. Further, many positions are allocated to short tour personnel who will only be in country for one year. After one year, an individual is just gaining the needed experience to perform his job plus the confidence of his counterpart, and there is rarely a significant overlap of time for the replacement to glean information from his predecessor. These bureaucratic distractions make it difficult to provide the best possible security assistance program to the host country.

On a higher level, many political decisions are made that may not be understood at the action officer level, but yet have a major impact on a security assistance program. This can sometimes add turbulence to what is usually a stable program. Or it can result in last minute requests for training, materiel, or the setting up of last minute visits to CONUS or OCONUS training sites, a process that can make even the most organized SAO chaotic for a time.

Given the picture I have just painted, one might wonder how an SAO can be successful. The answer lies in the human element of the program. As stated earlier, the extra effort by individuals will translate into a successful security assistance program. All SAO personnel are briefed on the cultural differences of a particular country and how to best deal with their host country counterparts. In addition, there are a few methods to enhance one's individual relationships with host country counterparts. Let's discuss a few!

In many cultures, business is not always of primary concern to the host country counterpart. It is wise to learn what advantages accrue to the SAO as a result of the local culture and to also assess the restraints caused by that same culture, restraints under which one is usually not used to working. A sort of "cultural exchange" is an excellent way to start off the relationship with a host country counterpart. Take the time to find out about his culture and what is interesting to him as an individual. One will find that he is just as eager to learn more about the SAO officer's culture, whether he comes from a large metropolitan area or a small farm in the country.

In many cultures, an individual may be judged more on terms of friendship and trust than on business acumen. I have observed representatives of our government who entered a meeting with allied officers in a very businesslike manner and departed shortly after the completion of their objectives. Weeks later, the same people were wondering why they could not get an appointment to visit again and discuss additional business. The key in many cultures is making friends while conducting business, which requires more "unproductive time," as we see it, but will pay long-term dividends in working with foreign counterparts. Our security assistance program links us politically and militarily with our allies, but without the countless bonds of trust and mutual respect developed by individual friendships, the program is less effective. Every time we show concern for our counterparts on a personal level, we strengthen the foundation of our individual programs and security assistance as a whole.

I realize this is only my personal perspective, but getting to know my counterparts on a personal level made my day-to-day job much easier as well as much more enjoyable. To take an extra 20 minutes or half an hour to drink a cup of tea and converse with host country counterparts is a great experience. I have been invited into their homes while I was a guest in their country, and also have visited with them here in the United States at times when they had an opportunity to receive training here. I have also tried to stay in touch with friends that I have made through an occasional card or letter. And they generally call me when they are in the States. It does take time, but is really worthwhile when one remembers that we are not only strengthening personal friendships, but representing our country as well.

There are both tangible and intangible benefits to building long-term friendships with someone from another country and culture. The tangible--a bond of friendship strengthened over the years by gaining mutual trust and respect for each other. The intangible--a worldliness developed as a result of one's interaction with various cultures throughout the world. The long-term benefits for SAO personnel are rewarding in terms of self-esteem and knowing the tasks were completed successfully. In terms of country-to-country benefits, one can never know when a young captain or major befriended many years ago will rise to a position of political influence and look to the United States for guidance and assistance. I will always believe that making friends while one works can only help one be even more successful on the job.

In the final analysis, we are selling services, be it training, material, publications, or spare parts. It is our responsibility to provide our customers with the best possible service and products. That means being available and accessible when called upon to provide such assistance. It takes a special individual, a friend if you will, to put in the extra time and effort required to make everything work right. It takes a caring and self-motivated individual to provide something extra.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mr. J. Bruce Parker is currently serving as a Training Technician for the Security Assistance Training Field Activity, Training and Doctrine Command (SATFA-TRADOC) in their Washington Field Office, Alexandria, Virginia. He formerly worked as an Education Specialist with the PM-SANG project in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for nearly four years. Prior to his tour in Saudi Arabia, Mr. Parker served for five years as an Education Specialist at the Soldier Support Institute, Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, serving on the original task force that planned the current Physical Fitness School in 1982.