

[October 7, 1963]

MEMORANDUM

From: Maj. Gen. Lansdale *SL*

Subject: Through Foreign Eyes

There is something about an American stationed abroad that scares the Communists.

We have U.S. military men in MAAGs and Missions, working closely with foreign military allies, in more than 40 countries around the world. Increasingly, these U.S. military men have come under propaganda attack of the type of "Hate America" campaign so noticeable among the Chinese Communists in recent years. This is particularly marked in areas of open conflict, such as Vietnam, where the Communist propagandists try hard to smear U.S. military advisers as murderers, rapists, and torturers in radio broadcasts, leaflets, and rumors. Similar vitriolic attacks are appearing in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. These attacks are sharply different from the old Communist propaganda picturing Americans abroad as money-grubbing, flabby imperialists. Something is hurting. . . and scaring . . . the Communists, to cause this increased vituperation of American military men as individuals.

It seemed logical that maybe our best friends, our foreign military allies, would tell us what this "something" is. . . if we could get them talking candidly in an atmosphere of military camaraderie. Thus, several months ago, I had my staff officers add a little extra duty in their visits abroad and to U.S. military training centers, to use their spare time in talking to foreign military men about the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. military individual activities in their home countries. Care was taken to conduct the interviews as between professional military men, constructively, and in candor. A number of the interviews took place at private, social gatherings.

Source: Reading 10

History 463 Reader, Unconventional Warfare
USAF Academy Department of History, January 1970

The result of this collateral work by my staff is a selective survey of opinions held by more than two hundred foreign military men, ranking from Major General to Staff Sergeant, in foreign Army, Navy, and Air Force Services. The staff who did this interviewing were Colonel David C. Jolly, USAF, Colonel Kenneth M. Lemley, USA, Captain John H. Bowell, USN, Colonel Orr Y. Potebnya, USAF, and Lt Colonel Harry H. Jackson, USA. Lt Colonel Jackson compiled and edited the findings. The work enjoyed the considerable interest and assistance of a number of U.S. commanders and staff officers abroad and in the U.S., particularly at U.S. military training centers. We are indebted especially for the fine assistance at the Inter-American Defense College, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Air University, U.S. Army Special Warfare School, USSOUTHCOM School of the Americas, and the USAFSOUTH School.

The findings are given in the attached report. It is issued as being of possible interest and help to U.S. officers planning and conducting U.S. military activities abroad, as well as those selecting and readying U.S. military personnel for foreign service. The survey uses the word "Mission" to denote a MAAG, Mission, Group, MTT, or Command advising, training, or otherwise assisting foreign military in a host country.

Attachment

a/s

Criteria for Personal Success
in US Military Missions Abroad

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The purpose of this selective survey is to identify those qualities considered most important by Allied military men in the successful performance of their duties by US military men in MAAGs and Missions abroad.

The approach to the survey was selective, seeking well-considered answers by responsible Allied personnel. Open discussions in a small conference atmosphere were used with 91 Allied Officers and NCOs, while some 150 others were interviewed on an even more informal, personal basis.

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General Comment: The Allied Officers and NCOs who participated in this survey were surprisingly frank and straight-forward in their discussion of US Mission personnel criteria. They were anxious to "get out the word" to us on what they thought were key considerations. There was a note of urgency and sincerity in all the discussions. These people want to learn and they want our best to teach them. The value the foreign officer puts on the contribution of truly effective US Mission personnel was emotionally summed up by one Latin American officer: "We feel Colonel . . . is now a proud part of our military tradition. He is a historical personality."

Again and again, it was impressive to note our Allies' identification of subtle nuances of inter-personal relations which defy reduction to quantitative evaluation, but which are essential to successful Mission operations. It rapidly became evident that some of the key facets of successful Mission operations would not be reducible to check-lists but, instead, demand continuing perception by the US advisor, both while preparing for his assignment in the US and, later, on the job in the foreign country. Also, it was clear that the Allied military man was asking that the US military man be more than the all-around generalist or the technician who "adapts" to the local environment only after learning by "experience" and sometimes by tragic "trial and error."

Professional Competence. The overriding requirement for skill at military affairs cropped up in all discussions. The Ally wants to learn and as one officer put it bluntly: "If my US counterpart can't offer something worth learning, the value of US presence is nullified, no matter how pleasant or social he is."

"Agreeability" can be exaggerated. The advisor who lacks professional competence and currency in his field has little impact. The Ally appreciates the US military man who clearly knows what he is doing, and does it. In a polite factual parable, a Latin American officer said the Japanese came to his country to show them how to catch tuna. The initial complaint was that the Japanese couldn't speak the local language; however, their effective, practical instruction "proved that you didn't have to say a single word if you work and don't talk."

For the Allied officer, professional competence is associated with rank at higher staff and command level. No matter how seemingly competent Mission personnel are in dealing with senior Allied commanders and staffs, they operate from a tremendous disadvantage, if they lack the rank or demonstrated background associated with commensurate assignments.

Language Skills. Following professional competence, if any one requirement was identified by Allied personnel as of paramount importance for the successful advisor it was language skill or, more specifically, an ability to get thoughts across to host country counterparts. Both Officers and NCOs alike considered a language capability essential for US personnel who are working with host country military on a day-to-day technical or operational basis. Many of the officers indicated that they would rather work with a competent US officer who could communicate his knowledge rather than to an outstanding officer who was operationally inarticulate. They felt that an inability to speak the language denied them access to the doctrinal and technical knowledge that the US officer had. The foreign NCOs considered the language capability as the most important single requisite for the advisor. The Officers qualified the language requisite to those US personnel who deal day-to-day with their host country counterparts. They did not stress the language requirement for the Mission chiefs. Although language skills were stressed, there also were cautions about going over-board in this area. The mediocre or sub-standard US officer who makes out because he speaks the language "like a native" apparently has been the bane of many a Mission.

The effort of the US military man to make a real attempt to learn and to use the language of the host country is long remembered and appreciated. The level of language fluency achieved is not as important as the effort to learn and try. A North African Captain recalled how a US officer worked night after night to learn Arabic and his genuine effort was known and appreciated throughout the host country's military.

Accessibility. The survey identified accessibility as one of the more important criteria. Accessibility means to get out and see the troops as well as just being available. Among troop leaders, the point that the Mission officer gets out to see them ranks high. (Note: The continuing complaint of US Mission personnel is that the burden of reports to higher headquarters acts as a barrier to any real effort to consistently be out of the office and with the troops.)

Furthermore, successful Mission operations require an ability to adjust schedules to the local situation. Host country military want access to the US Mission. In some cases working hours do not follow US patterns. For example, one Latin American officer stated that during the afternoon hours when coordination could best be effected, the US Mission staff was taking language training.

Empathy. Empathy, or to be "simpatico" in its true sense, as a point of importance, appeared to be a key consideration throughout the surveys. The officers in particular stressed the need for US personnel to really want to be assigned to their country (a difficult criterion to implement). As an Asian officer put it: "If they don't like our country, then they shouldn't come." The deliberate effort of some US personnel to isolate themselves physically from the indigenous environment was noted as a negative quality. It was pointed out by the officers that the language barrier isn't the cause of this isolation but, instead, a deliberate lack of empathy and interest in the host country.

~~The NCO group also stressed the need for empathy in the successful US Mission.~~ The NCOs in particular indicated that the willingness of the US NCO to go to their clubs was desirable. Some pointed out their homes or quarters were limited and that the NCO club was the best focal point for social activity.

Empathy is a two-sided coin. The Ally wants US officers to know about the host country. However, when a US military man comes up against other cultures, he needs an understanding of the toughness of his own heritage and the system under which he works.

All agree that close personal and social ties make for best professional relations. Friendships and trust lead to acceptance as an advisor, but entree into foreign society is not always easy and the foreign officers recognize this.

An Asian general, who had been in a Communist-overrun part of his country as a school teacher before he went to the Free part of his country, succinctly illustrates the role of empathy from his own experience. A Russian captain, a former school teacher himself, had come to his school merely out of curiosity and personal interest. From this simple act a close friendship developed. The Asian general made his point: "I feared the Communists and hated the Russians, but this man was my friend."

The absolute need for continuing cognizance of the human side of Mission work was summed up by another Asian officer who said: "I have read the Ugly American; and while you may not think it at all good, I think it should be required reading for all Mission people so they can better understand us."

Know the Country. The officers indicated that if the US military man "isn't interested in our country, he should not be assigned." The NCOs interviewed did not stress this point as a requirement, since they tended to personalize their relationships with US personnel, rather than requiring "big picture" interests in their country by US counterparts.

Nationalism and historical pride play active roles in the host country military outlook. The US officer who appears deliberately ignorant or disinterested in the history of the host country puts himself at a tremendous disadvantage. The intense and, many times, non-rational sensitivity of the foreign military man in this area of national pride must be faced up to by US personnel, and the US officer who takes visible interest in the history, both past and current, of the host country operates with a tremendous plus. A Latin American officer described the need for US personnel to sense the intense nationalism of the Latin American and his sensitivity to US dominance by stating: "You use the word American as if it were the personal possession of the United States. We know the US is powerful, but please speak of your destiny with some modesty."

Directness. Often expressed as requirements for "frankness" and "directness," the feeling that US Mission goals have been deliberately obscured in dealings with the host country cropped up in conversation with Allied officers. The need for US personnel to appear "direct" or "straight" is evident, and is treated as a "delicate" point by Allies. The host military feels in some cases that they are not

being given a straight cut and do not have access to all the rules of the game. In the words of a Middle East infantryman: "We are soldiers; tell us what you want as a soldier." The need for an appearance of frankness in discussion is of vital import to the host military. "What do you want us to do and why?" and "What is the purpose of the query or request for reports?" are the questions asked by the Allies.

Enthusiasm. The American trait of demonstrable enthusiasm is valued by the Ally. The host country officer appreciates the "can do," positive approach of his US counterpart and time after time "enthusiasm" combined with the appearance of genuine interest cropped up as requirements in discussions. The US officer who shares problems and successes, and who can genuinely say "our" effort when working with Allies can break down many of the barriers to effective communication.

Adaptability. Flexibility and skill in "the art of the possible" were identified by the officers as a much needed ingredient for success. The US military man who is "locked in concrete" is quickly spotted by the Ally. The ability to see the whole picture and, if necessary, to adjust US doctrine and technique to the indigenous military environment and the resources at hand is a must. To tailor the model to the environment rather than arbitrary attempts to recreate US military models within stilted parameters is the object.

Patience. Although the Ally appreciates the sense of urgency, directness, and the business-like approach associated with US military personnel, respect for local culture patterns, that include varying degrees of formalism and indirection, is an identifiable requirement.

To be able to appreciate the foreigners' culture, work within it, and still get the job done, is the trick. At the heart of this working from within is the need for patience. Foreign personnel are the first to recognize the oft-times exasperating situations created for US personnel by language and culture barriers and, as a result, the Ally appreciates the man "who will explain again."

The US advisor who reflects "can do" optimism, a faith in people, combined with patience, a willingness to stick it out, has a real chance to get the word through.

Humor and Temper. The ability of US personnel to recognize and share the humorous word or deed was identified. Conversely the pompous, stilted US military personality who lacks the imagination to share humor or who escapes into military posturing is likely to become a butt for derision.

In contrast to the ability to share humor, public displays of ill temper by US personnel can destroy all previous efforts to achieve rapport. A US officer assigned to a foreign military school was cited as a case in point. The officer was refereeing a student volley ball game and, when challenged over a mistaken ruling, lost his temper. His highly emotional outburst in this single instance destroyed the rapport he had carefully nurtured with the student personnel over an extended period of time.

Politics. Both Officers and NCOs were vehement in establishing the requirement that US personnel not meddle in the internal politics of the host country. However, the officers felt that prior orientation on politics was important, and the advisor who is totally oblivious to the political milieu in which he operates appears naive and disinterested to his host country counterpart. In contrast, the NCOs thought knowledge of politics had little significance, but instead stressed the importance of being "technically qualified."

Tours. Two years is thought to be a minimum, at least in those cases where close personal relationships are important to effective working patterns. A Latin American officer summed up the need for length in tour. "It takes one year for a Mission man to find his way. The second year he begins to make a contribution, and it is not until his third year that he is achieving maximum value and we really get the most from him."

Of particular interest was the NCOs opinion that US NCO personnel should be limited to two-year tours. They felt that they outstayed their usefulness beyond that period. A Latin American NCO put it frankly: "They just slow down."

With regard to second tours, the officers indicated that they would have value if there was a two- or three-year break -- but of most significance, that there should be no second tour if there was a ten- to twelve-year interval between assignments. The NCOs were against second tours. The NCOs expressed a concern about over-familiarity. As one stated in parable: "When a visitor first comes to your house, he sits straight in his chair and makes proper conversation. After many visits he doesn't bother to speak, but goes straight to your kitchen." In the opinion of the NCO personnel, the one-shot TDY team was believed to be acceptable, but not the best solution to passing on technical information if language skills are limited.

Dependents. If a US Officer or NCO has dependents, they should accompany their sponsor on a long tour. Absence of families makes for "social" problems. Presence of dependents makes for efficiency. The NCOs emphasized the undesirability of the "geographical" bachelor to a greater extent than the officers. Language skills for dependents were not considered mandatory, only "nice-to-have."

Be a Good Guest. The attitudes of US military personnel toward local laws are closely observed by host country people. Diplomatic immunity or preferred status is no excuse for license. Courtesy in driving is a particularly sensitive subject. US personnel who sell their cars and household goods upon leaving are subject to criticism when blatant commercialism is evident. It isn't a question of legality, but a question of propriety and ethics.

The PX system is another cause for criticism. PXs are many times located in conspicuous areas where they ostentatiously display the affluence of the US military community. A PX-oriented US military population does not favorably impress the local community.