

# Unrecognized Potential in the Military Attachés

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
18 SEPT 95

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*A former G-2 officer gives some personal views on how to multiply the value of a military intelligence asset.*

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The system of U.S. military attachés, a worldwide liaison service which today is accredited to 75 countries, including five behind the Iron Curtain, is one of the least well understood of the Government's intelligence arms. Probably because of this lack of understanding its great potentialities remain relatively untapped.

The military attachés have produced and are producing large amounts of intelligence information, and certain attaché reports have been of significant strategic value. The Army attaché in Tel Aviv correctly interpreted the Israeli Mobilization of October 1956 as a war measure and determined the direction of the attack against Egypt. His prompt report, a key item in the intelligence which enabled the Watch Committee to alert the President to the impending Suez War, could be counted by itself a sufficient justification for the attaché system's entire budget for the year. Service reporting from behind the Iron Curtain has also been of incalculable value, and that from many other areas has provided information of importance.

As the attaché systems become recurrently the target of economy drives

in the Department of Defense, however, the lack of knowledge in the proper places as to what the attachés Produce for the intelligence community grows apparent. Attaché reports are not often singled out for distribution to high departmental policy levels. Most of them are inconspicuous elements of the routine reporting which keeps each military service up to date on the corresponding services of other countries. They contribute to the "finished intelligence" of the encyclopedic National Intelligence Surveys; but officers at the policy level are unlikely ever to look at an NIS until, when a crisis hits, they have an immediate need f data on the Lebanese army or the Indonesian navy, and even then they do not necessarily remain conscious of the fact that it was the attachés who supplied these data. Nor is it always obvious at the policy level that there is a significant contribution from the military attaché system in nearly every National Intelligence Estimate.

It seems clear that the social rather than intelligence aspect of the military attachés' work is weighed too heavily a certain levels in the Pentagon. Hence the attachés are criticized as "cookie-pushers" assigned to duty on the cocktail circuit. It is true that the nature of the job in many capitals requires considerable social activity. In Washington itself the papers abound with accounts of parties for or attend by the service attachés of the various foreign embassies. I may also be true that the attaché staffs occasionally include some too socially conscious or ambitious officers who devote themselves too assiduously to the kind of intelligence collection that is done over a glass. But that sort of thing can happen in any organization; it is something that can be remedied quite quickly and easily by command action.

It is important that a new dignity be given to the attaché system and a deserved respect accorded it. It is important that the still untapped reservoirs of information needed by the Government which are available to military attachés be recognized and exploited. There are new areas that need to be covered, and old ones that should be covered better. There are new horizons of opportunity, and new approaches that can be used to obtain intelligence of utmost value.

## **Coverage and Cross Accreditation**

Today there are 761 U.S. staff personnel serving in the attaché systems of the Army, Navy, and Air Force overseas. The Army has 429 (143 officers, 212 enlisted men, and 74 civilians), the Navy 161 (157 officers), the Air Force 171 (145 officers, 22 enlisted men, and 4 civilians). There are army attachés accredited to 73 countries, air attachés to 69, and naval attachés to 58. Army attachés are actually stationed in 69 countries, air attachés in 53, and naval attachés in 45.

It has been the policy to accredit one attaché to more than one country in order to economize in manpower, because the activities of some countries in some military fields are limited. For example, there are army attachés in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua; but Air Force interests in these four countries are handled by the air attaché in Guatemala, and naval matters in all five republics plus British Honduras are the responsibility of the naval attaché in Mexico City. There are other variations in service practices around the Caribbean. A naval attaché is stationed in the Dominican Republic, but the air attaché accredited to Ciudad Trujillo is stationed in Venezuela, and the army attaché comes over from Cuba. Haiti, on the other hand, has an army attaché in Port au Prince but is covered by the air attaché from Caracas and the naval attaché from Havana.

While there is certainly not enough work under present conditions in many of these places to keep separate attachés fully occupied, the system of cross accreditation does create some peculiarities. Thus in Havana, where the Air Force representative covers only Cuba, the Navy's covers Haiti in addition, and the Army's the Dominican Republic. Our military expertise on the Dominican Republic is partitioned among Ciudad Trujillo, Havana, and Caracas; a regional conference would have to be called to get the consensus of our on-the-spot representatives about the over-all strength of the Trujillo regime.

Sometimes the changing currents of international relations create some curious situations in this representation from outside, and changes have to be made in accreditation. At one Point the United States had no service attachés in the Sudan, the representatives of all three services in Egypt being accredited also to Khartoum. With the Sudanese more than a little suspicious of Nasr's designs on their struggling young nation, this doubling raised obvious problems. Today there is an army attaché in Khartoum—a most important assignment with a military junta running the Sudan—and air affairs there are covered by the air attaché in Ethiopia.

Cross accreditation is of course economical, and it can be satisfactory in certain instances. But we should be aware that in this era of rising nationalism the armed services of those countries not accorded resident attachés may consider themselves slighted and so feel more kindly-and cooperative-toward the major powers that do keep attachés in residence. It would be wasteful, to be sure, to assign naval attachés to the Sudan or Switzerland, but the most powerful and influential nation on earth should be able to afford at least one appropriate service attaché in every country that has a military force, however embryonic. That there will be more than enough to keep such officers actively and profitably employed I hope the following paragraphs will demonstrate

## **New Horizons**

One need only look at the number of countries where the military are today in full control, hold a dominant position or at least exercise considerable political influence, in order to see the ascending potential of the role of the service attaché. Taking the world region by region and noting only the more important examples of this situation, we find in Europe General de Gaulle master of France, General Franco running Spain, and Marshal Tito ruling Yugoslavia, all of them dependent in one degree or another on support from the army; in the Middle East Egypt's Nasr and Iraq's Kasem, army officers brought to power by military coups; in Africa Haile Selassie of Ethiopia relying on the loyalty of his imperial body guard and the Sudan run by a military junta; in Asia the governments of Laos, Pakistan, and Burma subject to the will of the military and Indonesia pivoting on the key position of the army; in Latin America the army not the dominant factor in domestic politics only by exception from the rule.

In such countries, and in countries where the military may in future emerge as a powerful political force, the officers of the military services become a prime intelligence source and target. The U.S. service attaché has as his first obligation of course, the development of contact with officers on the chief-of-staff level of the service to which he is accredited. But the circumstances of the coup in Iraq point up the need for getting to know also the ambitious and rising young officers who through ability or good fortune may achieve prominence at some future

time. The attachés could by this means insure, not an advance warning of all future coups, but that there would be fewer surprises.

It is acknowledged that in many countries a too obvious or aggressive cultivating of friendships with military personnel by U.S. attachés would be viewed with disfavor—and probably recognized for the surreptitious probing that it was. Some ingenuity and long-range planning would be required here. Initially the attaché might be able only to spot upcoming young officers who should be approached later, perhaps by others, particularly since in many countries those that carry a political thrust are kept in provincial garrisons away from the capital. Sometimes the embassy, using the country-team system, could have people outside the attaché's immediate office make the initial contact, develop the necessary rapport, or maintain a relationship which had been established.

But a main avenue of long-term approach to future wielders of power starts in the United States. Every year hundreds of foreign military officers attend U.S. service schools. Perhaps not all of these will reach chief-of-staff level, but the expectation that they will achieve senior rank is implicit in their selection for the expensive visit to the United States. Consider, for example, that Admiral Larrazabal, who headed the junta that governed Venezuela between the overthrow of the Perez Jimenez regime and the election of Betancourt, had attended the U.S. Naval War College at Newport.

We have thus an ideal opportunity to establish personal relationships that could in the future keep us informed on affairs of critical intelligence interest. I am not talking about recruitment of these officers as agents; it is a matter of developing the conviction in a foreign officer that his, your, his country's, and the United States' interests are all identical, or so very close that it would be to his country's advantage, or at least not to its detriment, for him to confide in you.

First, there should be a thorough, methodical system at the school for developing biographical data on each individual officer—not just the usual personal history statement or biographical sketch, but knowledge of the likes and dislikes of the man and what makes him tick. Did his father fight with the Khalifa against Kitchener at Omdurman? Does he drink heavily, have occasional sprees or amatory adventures? Is he ashamed he can't afford a better home, feel he can't entertain Americans? What are his cultural interests—music Goethe, chess? Has he

been discriminated against because of his race? Where does he want to end his career-as chief of staff? as constitutionally elected president? as dictator? or as a professional officer who has served his country well? And how does he see the future development of his own country? Which great powers does he think can best help it?

Much of this information can be assembled by the faculty of the school in question. But intimate insight into a man's character, and especially the establishment of a rapport that would yield continuing intelligence dividends, would require that as often as feasible and practical the U.S. officer destined to be assigned to a country become a classmate of its potentially influential students at a U.S. service school. The identity of interest among classmates creates a strong bond.

If a foreign officer attends a U.S. school it can be assumed that his English is passable. But this should not lead to any relaxing of the attaché's effort to acquire fluency in the language of the country to which he is assigned. The psychological advantage of knowing the language is tremendous. An intelligence officer's objectives are much easier to reach if his foreign contact senses in him not a superficial, self-seeking interest but a true and deep understanding based upon knowledge of the country's language, history, and customs and appreciation of its people. Such specialization, it is true, implies a relatively long assignment at the post in question.

The full implications of this long-range approach for the personal career of a military attaché may appear rather formidable in terms of present-day concepts. A year or two spent learning language, area, and customs, a year or more at a service school to cultivate the friendship of a foreign officer, and at least a double tour of duty in one country-these may add up to a third or a half of the U.S. officer's entire active military career. But if we are serious about our intelligence effort, this is a way to give new significance and worth to the attaché system, and the long-term benefits should certainly be high.

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Posted: May 08, 2007 07:23 AM