

# The Military Attachés

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
18 SEPT 95

*The Military Attachés*

Dear Sirs:

Lyman Kirkpatrick's "Unrecognized Potential in the Military Attaches"<sup>1</sup> is such a good summary of important considerations with which I have been closely concerned over quite a period of time, as a former G-2 and Army attaché now with CIA, that I cannot resist the temptation to comment on it. The article, affirming that attaches contribute heavily to our national intelligence and defending them against some of their critics, notes deficiencies resulting from the cross accreditation system; but its main burden is that attaches in many countries have a natural entrée, one that should be more fully exploited, to political leaders with a military background, and especially to junior officers who are likely to become the country's future leaders. In an extension of this thesis the author notes that of the many foreign officers that come to the United States for training a number have later turned out to be political leaders in their countries; he suggests that there is a great potential for intelligence and covert action operations in this situation.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's observations are all sound. If anything they are too conservative. The distressing thing about them is that they need to be made at this late stage of the intelligence community's development. For this reason I make bold to amplify his views, speaking in perhaps painfully plain terms, and make some further suggestions, particularly with reference to the role CIA should play.

The attaché system is recognized, at least in military intelligence circles, as an effective collection arm. As in any system, there are some weak individuals and features and some reportorial sins of omission and commission, but it is my observation that the percentage of these is very low indeed, comparing most favorably with that of any other group of U.S. intelligence collectors. Certainly there is continuous attention to the selection and training of attaches, to the guidance of collection, and to the evaluation of performance:

the important practice of commenting on reports is, at least in the Army, on a sound and effective basis.

In the matter of distribution of attaches and the problems of cross accreditation, it would seem wise in the long run to work out a scheme of joint service representation by an attaché in residence. Most observers recognize that an embassy without a service attaché lacks an important component. Although in some cases the attaché's value will lie more in prestige considerations than in intelligence collection, that value is nevertheless a real one. The services have repeatedly wrestled with this problem and sought various joint ways of meeting it. I agree that the results of these efforts have not been quite adequate; but at least they have been made. Budgetary and personnel considerations may be at the root of the trouble. There is a role that CIA could play in this matter that is worthy of reconsideration.

Mr. Kirkpatrick is too diffident about the practicability of attaché contact with junior officers for assessing their potential. He need have no qualms on this point. Such contact is, as a matter of fact, a part of basic attaché guidance. While the situation varies in each country, a study of reports will show that most attaches can and do make these contacts. In friendly countries junior officers can be cultivated through all sorts of activities: one attaché organized an annual golf tournament between officers from two areas; one used to make it a point to attend any amateur dramatic presentations; an air attaché arranged that a delegation including junior officers visit U.S. military installations. Arrangements like these are difficult or perhaps even precluded where the atmosphere is unfriendly, but something can generally be developed.

One of the more disturbing aspects of Mr. Kirkpatrick's comments is that he finds it necessary to emphasize the political intelligence value of contacts with the military. This potential is recognized and stressed in guidance to Army and Air Force attaches, and although I do not know about the Navy, which has not combined its attaché training with that of the other services, I assume that its position is similar. Perhaps the civilian agencies need to be prodded; but to my knowledge the importance of military contacts has more than once been raised in CIA. If the needed U.S. interdepartmental coordination is not in effect, the proper steps to capitalize on this important opportunity should be taken by command decision.

It is similarly disturbing that there should be a need to point out the intelligence potential of foreign officers studying in the United States. I know that the Army is alert to the situation, and I know that it has been brought to the attention of responsible persons in CIA. I know of cases where individual attaches have worked along these lines. But I also know of efforts to take advantage of this opportunity which failed to gain support. After a British officer, formerly a Leavenworth instructor, had spent time, money, and effort

establishing informal contacts between UK and U.S. Leavenworth graduates in England, the expected U.S. help fell through. Remarking on Iranian and other foreign officers who wore with pride the badges of the U.S. schools they had attended, I was told there were no measures, not even subtle ones, being taken to keep alive this alma mater spirit. A project to provide a periodic news letter to foreign officers failed to win support. A regularized system for getting the kind of biographic data on foreign military students that Mr. Kirkpatrick advocates was deemed comparatively unproductive when proposed a few years ago.

It should be evident that activities like these would be highly useful and that they can be accomplished cheaply. We can, however, not rely on the armed services alone to carry them out. They constitute a project that needs centralized development and coordinated execution both in the interest of full coverage and for the sake of efficiency. Such a venture could advantageously be coordinated with other programs involving foreign officers that come to the United States for school and other purposes. CIA has the intelligence coordinating job. This is one part of it it should pursue.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's analysis does not cover three other aspects of the military attaché program which are of significance for the intelligence community -- attaché-MAAG relations, CIA briefing of attaches, and collection coordination in the field. In the first, the ball is only partly in our CIA court, but in the others the next move is squarely up to us.

There are a great many papers and doctrines treating the relationship between attaches and MAAG's in the matter of intelligence collection, but their application is no simple matter; certainly it is not uniformly successful. While both our friends and our enemies assume that MAAG's as well as attaches collect information, we must maintain the fiction that MAAG's do not. Open recognition of their collection mission would in fact result in many embarrassments, because MAAG personnel lack understanding and skill in intelligence collection. Although a MAAG is for obvious reasons the dominating U.S. military influence in a nation while it is there, its job is to work itself out of business; and we cannot afford to let misguided views on intelligence collection damage the attaché collection system, the permanent mechanism upon which we will have to rely when the MAAG's are gone. It would be most logical that the attaché be given responsibility for coordinating the MAAG's collection activity with his own. A standing operating procedure covering the subject might be established whenever the attaché or MAAG chief is changed.

One item on which we can and should take action is the matter of CIA briefing of attaches. There are good Agency directives on this point, but the follow-through is spotty. We leave too much to busy and often too security-conscious persons who may lack confidence in the discretion or

understanding of military personnel. It is to our advantage to make good briefings, and in my experience any personal foibles are evenly distributed: neither military nor civilian intelligence operators have a corner on good sense or on blundering.

Another place CIA can help is in better collection coordination in the field; this will be particularly needful under the new DCID's. Here the onus is strictly on us and on the embassy. One aspect of this coordination should be the development of a process for adjusting NIS collection responsibilities to the facts of the collection situation in the field. Responsibilities for formulating the different NIS sections, established after long and thoughtful study, fit the U.S. intelligence and government structure quite well. The same distribution of responsibility for collecting the information, however, does not always meet conditions in the field, sometimes because the structure of the foreign government differs from ours, sometimes for other reasons.

To illustrate, the Army is supposed to collect information on railroads; but railroads often come under a part of the foreign government with which military liaison is impracticable or unwise. The supply and finance aspects of many foreign military forces are controlled by civilian agencies to which State might have best entrée. On the other hand, matters for which State is assigned responsibility are sometimes to be found in agencies with which the service attaches have unusually good contact. In addition, it often happens that personal relationships are such as to give opportunities for collection in fields outside assigned areas: one attaché had a golfing companion who gave good economic and political information, while a colleague in the political section of the same embassy had a lucrative contact in the general staff, and a USIS officer had one in the troop information service. Surely such opportunities should be exploited in disregard of bureaucratic allocations of responsibility. Finally, no matter how wise Washington may be, it often turns out that what seemed at headquarters to require covert collection in fact does not, and vice versa.

There is no reason why the collection responsibilities at each embassy should not be adjusted periodically to the facts of life. If necessary, agreements on this point could be reduced to writing and forwarded for official approval. Or if Parkinson's Law and other bureaucratic propensities make such flexibility too difficult in Washington, the collectors should perhaps just go ahead and collect as convenient for them, give each other the appropriate credit in their reports, and let it go at that. Either from Washington or through its Chief of Mission, CIA should play a leading role in such a coordinating process. It can be done without prejudice to security if we are as skillful as we ought to be.

In Summary, I agree with Mr. Kirkpatrick's views on the attaché system and its new horizons, with the reservation that what is needed in order to reach those horizons and certain further ends is for CIA to get moving. We have the men and the resources. All we need is the decision to act.

Peter J. Dorondo

---

1 Studies IV 2, p. 1ff.

Posted: May 08, 2007 07:26 AM