

Remarks by Ambassador Clifford M. Sobel
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An Ambassador's Perspective on Coalition Operations

I know this is a somewhat over used expression, but one cannot deny that the world changed after September 11th. In actuality the attacks on the United States simply brought the recognition that the world had already changed and an emerging evil needed to be dealt with, and dealt with on a worldwide scale. No longer could nations stand idly by.

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Some key realizations spring forth when one looks at confronting the foe. The first is that a nation can ill afford to just build a fortress. We cannot give the enemy safe harbor. We cannot cede to him the time to plan, to recruit, and to act at place of his choosing. No longer can large standing armies ensure that a nation is protected and safe. Wherever possible we must take this fight to the enemy, denying him safe harbor, denying him rest, and denying him the choice of the battleground. You know that these new missions of asymmetric warfare require transformation. We need to move from legacy force into expeditionary, lethal, interoperable and flexible forces.

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We must engage this fight with all able countries to rid us of this common threat to our common values of - life, liberty and peace.

The age of coalition warfare is truly upon us and this is will not be a one-time event. But, we had better get it right, if we are going to be successful. To live together in peace, we must fight together in war.

The question at hand is how do you do this, and where does the Embassy fit? I am not sure most of you have a picture of what an Embassy does in peace, let alone during times of conflict? In the context of coalition operations it is of value to look at what the Embassy can do for you. Working with the Embassy can support not only implementation of coalition operations, but also the eventual success.

Let me begin this morning by asking some questions:

- First, did you know that the Netherlands has the 11th largest Economy in the world? Dutch companies like Shell, Philips, ING are among the worlds largest. And, the Netherlands has the 6th largest budget for foreign assistance in the world?
- Did you know that going into 2004 the Dutch ranked 4th in NATO in percentage of standing forces deployed?

- Do you know that the Netherlands is a consensus-based society? And, that all Dutch governments are coalitions and the Prime Minister is really the Minister of General Affairs. He must get the consensus from all coalition partners as well as the main opposition party for all major overseas deployments?
- Did you know that the Dutch are currently deployed in significant numbers in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia?

If you don't know how the Dutch make their decisions then how can you bring the full range of capabilities – military, political/diplomatic, and economic – to bear in your operation? I am not proposing that you should, that is my job, and the Embassy's staff, which is commonly called a country team.

The Embassy can best understand what contributions the host country can make. Today it is not just military power but a collection of all the tools, which lead to a successful coalition. In today's world we must also be focused on peace support operations as well as post conflict reconstruction.

A nation can exert economic power with the enforcement of sanctions, or conversely with the infusion of money into development programs. It might exert political power by showing public worldwide solidarity against non-democratic regimes. Or support for embargoes, as in the case of the present EU arms embargo on China.

My role as an Ambassador is essentially to lead the effort in country to build and maintain the coalition. Whether it be heavy brigades, F16s, or special forces. Whether it's denying Al Qaeda access to finances, or sharing intelligence, intercepting suspected terrorists, or simply working together in the political arena to put pressure on less cooperative regimes. Being part of a coalition is not just force generation.

A coalition partner may make available their own airfields and ports as the Dutch did by supporting our movement of troops of the 101st Airborne Division through Schiphol Airport or by our movement of the equipment of the 1st Armored Division, through the port of Rotterdam en route to the conflict in Iraq.

In fact, this is a perfect time to illustrate how an Embassy team on very short notice can respond effectively to facilitate your operations. When 25 trains of the 1st Division were denied passage through southern Europe during the Iraqi build up, it was the seamless efforts of our country team with the government of the Netherlands, which enabled the trains to be turned around and pushed through Rotterdam harbor for trans-loading literally in a few days. The Political Section and DAO had to notify the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Defense Ministry. Using existing agreements, DAO and ODC addressed their counterparts at the Foreign Ministry, the Defense Staff and the National Command to request assistance for the transit.

The Dutch called up their reserves for force protection, port militarization, and waterside security because of anti-war activists whom we all anticipated would attempt to disrupt the transit. I personally, with my political and public diplomacy sections, worked with the Mayor, the ministers, and members of parliament to get political and public support. And, finally DAO and ODC had to work with Ministry of Defense so that US guards on the trains were replaced by Dutch military as the trains entered the Netherlands. This happened quickly and efficiently because of the close relationships the country team had with their counterparts.

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It is important to remember that military coalitions are political arrangements. Countries, like individuals tend to make decisions based upon their own best interests. We are tasked in knowing what those interests are.

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Even the most sophisticated political and military leaders are sometimes baffled by the decisions countries make. The Embassy must measure and if necessary help build the political will for action. And just as importantly sustain the commitment until the mission is complete. Which is often the most challenging part of the job. I use as an example, working with the Dutch towards their two extensions in Iraq, which was just as vital to the overall mission, as their initial commitment.

It is incumbent upon the country team to have those personal relationships, not only to get insight, but also to deal with the difficult situations we know will arise. There is no substitute to having these relationships grounded in mutual trust.

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Let us also not forget a request for support should not be looked at as an isolated decision-making event. If the host country has any capacity, the request is one in a line of requests, initiatives, programs and operations from multiple sources.

As an example, the Netherlands notes that almost 80 percent of its deployable land forces are either currently deployed, preparing for deployments or recovering from deployments in EUFOR, ISAF, Operation Enduring Freedom, or the NATO Response Force (NRF).

Each and every one of these requests is part of the life cycle of the operation and the decision-making process. This is all supported by a "network" of relationships.

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It is important to note that one of these relationships is the Embassy's relationship with Washington. Not only are we responsible for getting timely information to the host country, it is equally important to convey the information to Washington, all of Washington. As the Ambassador I set the tone for that relationship and my country team does the yeoman's work to ensure we are speaking with one voice, to ensure Washington is confident in our abilities to understand and articulate back the situation in our host country. The key is reporting with timely, focused and relevant information to the users.

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Another key relationship is the State Department relationship with the military. The Embassy is where State and DOD merge. It's my job to make sure there are no walls within the Embassy. That there is a collaborative environment that ensures that we speak with one voice to the host country and with a unified response, back to Washington in the best "one team, one fight" tradition.

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In short, a successful Embassy team forges connectivity between State, OSD, JCS, and EUCOM creating a shared understanding of the situation and the way ahead.

On the other side of the network is the relationship of the Embassy with the host nation – it focuses on government, parliamentarians, military, opinion makers, academics, and the media. With all these elements involved, it is important to make sure there is good communication between all the parts.

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So how does the Embassy make this network of relationships work?

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Here it is important to understand that military planning many times precedes the political decision-making process. The military officers in this room are forward leaning and ready to respond to developing situations not dissimilar to an Embassy. You are aware of what you can offer long before the political apparatus makes a decision to act. Your job mandates your ability to anticipate and prepare. The political decision-making process however, is much more deliberate. We all know that in the end it is governments and nations that say "yes," not Ministries of Defense.

We also know that having capability without the political will is useless. As the Ambassador it is my job to have insight into the motivations and concerns of the host nation. We all must be good listeners. This is vital to understanding how to get a "yes" on deployment and to ensuring staying power when the going gets tough.

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Who are the players within a government? What's the national security decision making process? In coalition governments other cabinet ministers might be crucial.

So, we have to constantly respond to a long list of questions. We need to know who the key players are? Who are the parliamentary committee chairmen? Who are the leaders of the opposition parties? And equally important... who are on the editorial boards of key newspapers, because media and public opinion can make or break a coalition.

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On what grounds will a decision be based? Every country is motivated not only by the future, but also by the past. The Dutch experience in Srebrenica remains a factor in, every decision on whether to deploy Dutch forces. Is there adequate force protection, an exit strategy? Is there a moral imperative? Does geography play a role? Is it an area of national interest like a former colony? What are the politics – does government have a domestic or foreign policy reason for wanting to participate?

The point is – cracking the code on the factors and the people involved in a decision before asking permits you to maximize the chance of success.

You might find it interesting to know what questions I ask my team when faced with the prospect of seeking support from my host country. A good Embassy is like the military. We have to anticipate. We should be asking ourselves:

- What's the mission that might arise?
- What capabilities can our coalition partner offer? Deleted: they
- What current commitments might hinder their participation? What could we lose by seeking another mission? Competing demands put the Embassy on the front lines of the process of prioritization.
- Under what auspices does the operation take place? The Netherlands, like many other countries, places tremendous value on NATO. Also, the passage of a UN Security Council resolution can facilitate Dutch participation.
- Are there adequate measures in place to address concerns about in extremis extraction, medevac and Intel sharing? Have we identified "must have" equipment and is it available?
- Will we know the answers to the questions before we ask?
- Is there a process to resolve conflicts in perspectives, means, operational goals, national caveats? And, is there a system to share immediate threats in order to protect the forces of all partners?
- What is the political climate and is there political will on the issue? What would be their motivation for committing to the coalition? If you asked the Dutch they would tell you that their motivation is divided into two parts. Deleted: ill
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- First and foremost the Netherlands has a four hundred-year history of being involved on a global basis. It is a prosperous nation. For that reason the Dutch feel they have a real responsibility to the world beyond their borders, both in foreign aid and support for international security operations. As General Dick Berlijn, the CHOD would say, to whom much is given, much is required.
- Secondly, coalitions allow them to perform operations that alone, would be beyond their reach. There is a synergy in Dutch thinking to coalition operations.

As you all know, you need the right equipment to meet the military challenges of the future. This makes a long-term commitment to interoperability or even better standardization a prerequisite. This is an area where companies play a key role. With the exception of certain niches, our allies and partners need access to US weaponry and technology if they are to operate effectively in coalitions. This requires us to break down barriers between national defense industries. If you want them to stand shoulder to shoulder, you need to be sensitive over the long run -- to their requirements for a capable force.

This has been a key goal at our Embassy. We have sought to encourage our Dutch allies to invest in the kinds of power projection hardware that give them teeth. We need to meet future challenges together. The JSF is a good example of working with allies to give them the next generation of equipment so we can fight together.

One consideration I want to note, is as the European Defense Agency, grows in size and scope, it is critically important that we coordinate and work with them so we have interoperability and that we are maximizing our joint and scarce R&D dollars.

So far I've been discussing the Embassy's involvement in engaging potential coalition partners. The challenges are even more complex when dealing with an Embassy who must facilitate coalition operations within the host country's borders. Fortunately, I have not had that pleasure.

My point here is simple, engage the Embassy early and utilize their input and expertise.

The key is to remember that the Ambassador and his country team have a 360-degree view of the issues of his host country. We are also where all of the various elements of Washington come together. The key is to involve the country team up front in the planning process. Build an email network that brings in all the key players that are involved in a particular country at State, OSD, JCS, and the geographic commands. Don't just share operational requests. Use all the resources you can to be able to get as much input as possible before you make the request. Bounce briefing papers off each other for a reality check. This is a good way to learn what all the elements are that may affect your mission. As you plan you should be asking yourself, what would the Ambassador need to know to be effective in gaining the agreements we need.

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"Keeping the Embassy involved in the decision-making process" is very different from "keeping the Embassy informed."

My compliments to those planners who send out preliminary feelers looking for feedback from my country team, on their concepts and thoughts, before moving forward. Let the Embassy solve it at the front end instead of picking up the pieces at the back end.

Bottom line...."Long distance" may be the "next best thing to being there," but you don't want "second best" going into a fight. When all is said and done what I want you to take away from this that in the long battle ahead, no one country can afford to go it alone. I repeat the key to living together in peace is fighting together in war. Our country team is your partner in maximizing the coalition. Establishing the relationship early keeps us informed. And together we can build and maintain successful coalitions.