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AUTHOR: Wm. A. Tidwell

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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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*This and the following article debate a radical solution to the problem of deinsulating intelligence officers abroad from the cultures they are sent to penetrate.*

## KIM OR MAJOR NORTH?

W. A. Tidwell

It is primarily through overseas intelligence activities that official Washington reaches out to seek an understanding of other countries and tries to meet their people on their home ground in their own cultural environment. The intelligence community is not only responsible for knowing what the people of other cultures think, but for knowing how they think and why, and for doing something about it when it is in the US national interest to influence their thinking and actions. Discharging this responsibility requires overseas personnel who have analytic, reporting, or operational ability, language skills, and the ability to live with people whose culture is radically different from the American culture.

The need for all but one of these skills is well recognized, and with much effort we are making progress toward acquiring them. The requirement for ability to live in a foreign culture, however, is not so widely understood, and we have made little progress toward acquiring it.

The American culture is in some respects an Electrolux and Old Granddad culture. We are most at ease when surrounded with the familiar and convenient amenities of American civilization. As a result, when Americans go overseas they usually try to take the material aspects of their culture with them wherever they go. In many cases they are amazingly successful—so successful that their two-year tour abroad is spent shopping at the local supermarket, watching the latest Hollywood product, and reading Mickey Spillane; and they come into contact with the local population only as they must make use of servants, cab drivers, and waiters from among the "natives."

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In another respect the American culture could be called a Good Old Joe culture. We want to be open and friendly. If we meet people who do not understand or respond to this attitude we tend to avoid them and seek associates who do. The path of least resistance abroad is to associate only with other people who are trying to be Good Joes, and by and large these will be other Americans. This natural gravitation toward our own kind reinforces the tendency to form isolated colonies and makes it doubly hard for us to meet, know and understand foreigners.

For all the hue and cry about the breaking up of homes and neglect of children the American culture is one oriented toward family life. The population statistics reveal at least one result of this preoccupation with family. Most American men in the twenty or thirty most active years of their lives are centering their energies on home-making and often are devoting a large portion of their time to household chores and child-raising. This speaks well for the vitality of the Americans as a people, but it leaves little time and no incentive for learning to live in an alien culture.

We have read a lot recently about the drive for conformity dominating American culture. There are lots of good reasons why this tendency should exist; after all, we are still assimilating many varied elements into our race and culture. But this tendency can lead us to neglect and even reject any understanding of people who do not conform to our way of life.

In addition to these natural cultural barriers, we in CIA have created a number of artificial obstacles which make it difficult for a man to live inside another culture even if he should overcome the natural barriers and make a serious effort in that direction. One could say that these obstacles are a result of the headquarters orientation of our organization and its personnel policies. We discourage association with aliens and practically prohibit marriage to them. We require conformity to American moral standards, social mores, and conventionalities of behavior in those who hold or seek key positions in Washington. The practice of rotation to headquarters and the greater opportunities of a Washington career combine to enforce these standards and conventions upon overseas personnel as well. These policies prevent our developing men who

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can live inside a foreign culture. Worse, they drive away men who do want to live inside a foreign culture and attract those primarily concerned with success in the headquarters milieu.

All of these obstacles, natural or of our own making, create serious operational problems for us. It is natural for an intelligence organization to depend heavily on foreigners in its work, but our situation forces American intelligence to depend on foreigners much more and at an earlier point in the process than is desirable. It forces us to use those foreigners who are best educated and most westernized to do our own job; and these people are poor points of entry into a culture, being themselves at least partially withdrawn from it. Furthermore, our relative unfamiliarity with foreign cultures makes it hard for us to get a true reading of the people we are so using. It is hard for us to judge their reliability and motives, and hard for us to guide them in their operations, because we know so little about the context in which they must operate. In some cases we even use foreigners against third countries. This device may have virtues, but it means that we are trying to see through two cultural barriers instead of one.

The Communists do not have the difficulties in crossing cultural barriers that we do. Through their emphasis on the subordination of national, racial, and cultural differences to an international cause, the Soviets have at their disposal intelligent and trained Communists who are at home not only in West European cultures but in the Burmese, or Javanese, or Arab and can bring the Soviet influence to bear on great numbers of backward and unwesternized people throughout the world. These Communists are our strongest competition. They are the people that we must beat, and we cannot beat them from the desks of an embassy office or a consulate compound.

It is not an easy job to find people with the brains and personal skill necessary to do an intelligence job inside an alien culture who will make the effort and endure the discomfort involved. Even in the comfortable and insulated communities abroad through which we now operate, Americans and their families must go to a great deal of trouble and suffer illness and other discomfort to work overseas. What can we do to get intelligence officers to dig deeper into the world abroad?

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For one thing, the hard core of the overseas service might consist of men unburdened with family ties. It is true that if a woman is willing to make the effort she can be a great help to a man in getting to know people and aspects of foreign cultures that he might not get to know on his own, particularly in those western cultures where women are relatively emancipated. Very few American women abroad, however, have an ambition to serve in this way. Families can therefore accompany without detriment only those overseas officers who have no real need to get to know the country they live in intimately, or those few whose wives are found to have the skill and interest necessary to make the same sort of movement across the cultural barrier that we want their husbands to make. These wives should be subject to the same recruitment and training process as their husbands. The active nucleus of an overseas station should be made up of bachelors or men in a position to act like bachelors, having the freedom to move deep into the local culture and to spend most of their time in contact with the local people.

For another thing, we might encourage the development of career patterns oriented primarily toward a particular foreign area or culture. Overseas officers could be selected from personnel whose ambition is not to become a division or office chief, but to enjoy success, power, and prestige in the area or culture selected for them. They should be encouraged to "go native," devoting their energies to making a place for themselves in this culture, not burying themselves in the routine of the local American business or diplomatic community. Problems of cover would be complicated, but these problems would not be unsolvable, and the gain would be worth the extra effort.

The activities of these overseas officers should be evaluated upon their effectiveness, which will in large measure be a function of the position they carve for themselves in the local milieu, and they should not be expected to conform to American social standards and conventions. They should, it is true, be expected to maintain an objectivity of view in spite of their prolonged adoption of another culture, but a man who bridges two cultures is more likely to be objective than one who has never got outside the American way. The danger that an officer so thoroughly assimilated may develop greater sympathy and loyalty toward his adopted society than his native country

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can be forestalled by periods of leave in the United States and a system of rewards and incentives, and in extreme cases can be disposed of by modern security check techniques.

What system of rewards and incentives would attract intelligence officers to surrender for long periods their status and aspirations in American society in exchange for the dangers and discomforts of an unfamiliar one? The standard incentive is money; yet money is for spending, and spending abroad leads to the conspicuous consumption which is one of an American's greatest obstacles to crossing the cultural barrier. The assimilated intelligence officer should have access to good medical service, but no other material support which would tend to differentiate and separate him from the people with whom he must live.

The problem could be met in part by providing the major monetary reward in the form of a bonus to be collected after a fixed period of satisfactory service. The amount of the bonus might be raised considerably for each additional fixed period of satisfactory service. This would prevent the development of conspicuous consumption, but would hold an ever larger carrot before the man's nose.

Another incentive could be provided in the form of a radical change of pace. Most people can endure hardship much better if they know that at some point they will be relieved of it. These overseas officers could be rewarded with a year's vacation with pay in the United States for say every five years spent in Aden or Meshed; and this year would at the same time serve to prevent their becoming too un-Americanized at heart.

The best way to attract people with drive, however, is to provide prestige and recognition for them. At home this reward in the profession of intelligence has to be confined to a narrow circle, but intelligence officers who achieve success in another culture have by virtue of their very duties acquired prestige and recognition inside the culture they have penetrated. This prestige abroad could be augmented by the Agency in various ways tailored to each individual case. Many men would rather have fame and power among the Sikhs than obscurity in Foggy Bottom.

Aside from the concrete intelligence yield from better cultural penetration, American prestige and influence in general

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might rise drastically in many parts of the world if inside each important culture we had well-known Americans who, although obviously foreign, conformed to and participated in the customs and practices of that culture.

It is a hard job to take on a completely new way of life, but intelligence personnel have to undertake many a hard job; they can do whatever is necessary to accomplish this too. Life in any culture is really a question of learning the appropriate techniques. The techniques of staying alive and healthy in a neolithic culture are probably no more complicated than the techniques we use every day; they are only different.

Probably the key element in this problem, however, is the image of what we want to be that we carry in our minds. Being Americans, we carry first of all the image of the successful American. It may have many forms, but they are all American forms. Next, being in the profession of intelligence, we have an image of what an American intelligence officer should be. This is an image not yet fully matured, because we are still internes at the profession. The chances are that at the present stage of development this image is closer to that American superhero of fiction, Major North, than it is to Kipling's Kim. Let us be careful that as we develop this image we make it that of a brave and energetic man who can move freely in non-American society. Let us not make it the image of an expatriate bureaucrat.