

A FACTOR FOR ANALYSIS, A FORCE FOR GOOD

Strategic Religious Advisement at the Combatant Command

A United States Southern Command Perspective

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Chaplain Werner P. Krug, Chaplain (Captain) with the 35th Medical Battalion, 90th Division, was out of wine and wafers. His unit had landed at UTAH BEACH and he needed resupply. Realizing that he was unlikely to get speedy response from the unit supply section he took matters into his own hands on that 16th day of June, 1944 and went to the Catholic Church in Sainte-Mère-Église, France. Arriving at the church the priest greeted him enthusiastically. Chaplain Krug did not speak French and the priest did not speak English, so they communicated in Latin. Chaplain Krug, my maternal grandfather, explained in his diary, that he received wine and wafers and that he and the priest also enjoyed a couple of bottles of champagne.

My grandfather could make many assumptions about advising his Commander on matters of religion, engaging local religious leaders, meeting the religious needs of his troops and providing ministry to the many patients in his unit's hospital.

In 2016 the doctrinal framework for the Army Chaplain is as it was in 1944, "advise and provide." While the framework is the same the operating environment is dramatically and exponentially more complex. It is imperative that the US Army Chaplaincy appropriate the lessons of the recent past and seize the opportunities before us in capitalizing on existing networks, relationships and methodologies that strengthen

the profession and empower our leaders to understand religion as a **factor for analysis and a force for good.**

This article is about the **Commander** and the **Context** for religious advisement at the Geographic Combatant Command level.¹ I have witnessed the development of religious advisement and religious leader engagement ever since service in Bosnia in 2000.² Over the past 16 years there has been some good writing, reflection and spirited conversation on how chaplains *ought to* or how chaplains *ought not to* engage religion and religious leaders in operational environments.³ While some of the conversations and writings were thoughtful, instructive, and often viscerally stirring, they often lacked the firm doctrinal foundation from which to analyze the work and effort of chaplains in the broad area of religious advisement.

The good news is that we are now operating in an environment where we can access doctrinal publications, school curriculum and subject matter experts in religious

¹ Department of Defense website, internet site: <http://www.defense.gov/Sites/Unified-Combatant-Commands> , 2015. (In this article I am speaking from my own perspective as the US Southern Command Chaplain and in no way am speaking for the Joint Staff Chaplain or any other COCOM Chaplain or Religious Affairs Office.)

² I served as the Plans and Operations Chaplain, 3rd Infantry Division, Stabilization Force 8, Eagle Base, Bosnia-Herzegovina, September 2000-March 2001.

³ Here are just a few of the references with which I am familiar:

(Books) Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace: Religious Leader Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Environments, – July 25, 2014, by S. K. Moore.; Change and Conflict in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Since 1945, By Anne Loveland, 2014; Religion, Terror, and Error: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Engagement, (Praeger Security International) 1st Edition, by Douglas M. Johnston (Author), January 4, 2011. **(articles and blog posts)**, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2013/07/30/engaging-religion-at-the-department-of-state/> , <http://www.eucom.mil/media-library/blog%20post/30860/key-religious-and-military-leader-engagements-in-albania> , <http://www.fletcherforum.org/2014/12/13/thames/> , <http://www.slideshare.net/JWP82/a-short-history-of-religious-leader-engagements-in-operation-iraqi-freedom> (**references, websites**), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/index.htm> , <http://www.state.gov/s/rga/index.htm> , <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol13/no1/doc/moore%20eng%20web.pdf> ,

advisement. We, at USSOUTHCOM, are further aided by our relationships and engagements with the US State Department.⁴ We are further informed by our growing relationships with Non-governmental Organizations and academics working in the field of religious advisement and engagement around the world. We cannot underestimate these growing areas of networking which provide the USSOUTHCOM Religious Affairs Office access to statistics, studies, forums, expertise and analysis that, just a few years ago, would have been non-existent.⁵

At USSOUTHCOM we sense a clarity in purpose and definition that strengthens our resolve to see religious advisement as a fully integrated element of the COCOM strategy and operations.

“Religious affairs are the commander’s responsibility. Religious affairs consist of the combination of RS and religious advisement. The management of religious affairs requires fully informed and committed command support, communication, coordination, and collaboration. It is a mutual effort to create and sustain the most responsive and relevant service possible. It is built upon mutual respect and partnership from the combatant command (CCMD) and the Service component commands to the lowest level.”⁶

“**REQUIRED CAPABILITIES**

1-2. The Army requires the capability to provide religious support and advise commanders on the impact of religion. These two required capabilities reflect the dual role of the Chaplain Corps: religious leader and religious staff advisor.

1-3. As the religious staff advisor, the chaplain advises the commander and staff on religion and its impact on

⁴ Shaun Casey, Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs; Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs-Religion Working Group; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

⁵ **1. Chris Seiple**, Ph.D., President Emeritus and Chairman of the Board at the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), a research, education, and diplomatic institution that builds sustainable religious freedom worldwide through local partnerships. As such he works for and with the President and CEO of IGE, **John Gallagher**. **2. Brian J. Grim**, president of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation and a leading expert on the socioeconomic impact of restrictions on religious freedom and international religious demography. **3. Knox Thames**, the special advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East (NEA) and South and Central Asia (SCA) at the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. **4. The Reverend Eric Wester**, guest instructor at National Defense University, Southern Seminary (Lutheran) and Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Federal Chaplaincies (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) **5. Jacqueline E. Whitt, Ph.D.**, professor at the Air War College **6. James Wallace**, Ph.D., He is a consultant as the founder and CEO of Lacuna Group International. Previously he worked for over 30 years as a religious leader, government consultant and political advisor in the United States and Canada.

⁶ Joint Publication 1-05, Religious Affairs in Joint Operations, FUNDAMENTALS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND DUTIES, 20 November 2013, pg. II-1.

all aspects of military operations. The chaplain advises the commander on the impact of religion within the unit and how religion impacts the unit's mission throughout its area of operations. (See Figure 1-2)

- Internally, the chaplain is responsible for advising the command on the religious practices and requirements of Soldiers and authorized civilians within the command. This can include identifying holy days, specific worship requirements, dietary requirements, and wearing of religious garments.
- Externally, the chaplain advises the command on the specifics of the religious environment within their area of operations that may impact mission accomplishment.”⁷

Partnership

The COCOM is truly a Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multi-National organization. There is an encouraging openness to discussions of religion and its impact on the mission. At USSOUTHCOM we are in regular dialog with the Office Human Rights, The Congressional Affairs Office, Office of Strategic Communications, Public Affairs, J9-Public/Private Partnerships, Non-governmental organizations, as well as Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in the Miami, Florida area. We are afforded maximum latitude and invitation to engage others who work in the ‘soft sciences’- or who wield ‘soft power’.

“Soft power is more difficult, because many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences. Moreover, soft power resources often work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes.”⁸

There is a real sense that when we talk about religion we are entering a sacred space that reaches to the ground of being. This type of discourse demands patient listening and a willingness to build bridges rather than string barbed wire. Talking religion is

⁷ ATP 1-05.03, Religious Support and External Advisement, 3 May 2013, pg. 1-1.

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., **Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics – Chapter 4 - Wielding Soft Power**, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/joe_nye_wielding_soft_power.pdf, April 2004, p. 1.

risky. Like political discussions, it is difficult to remain objective, but it is possible to build confidence in advising on religion through the sweat and toil of responsible staff work. In this regard, there is nothing soft about the soft power concept. It takes determination and perseverance to provide the Commander actionable information on religion in the area of responsibility. We, in the USSOUTHCOM Religious Affairs Office, gain a great deal from nuanced conversations with colleagues who have long histories in the political affairs of the region and who are in direct contact with policy makes in Washington. In this environment we are able to get beyond the common perception of religion as only a personal matter or a driver of instability and move to providing products and staff processes that inform the command and staff on the impact of religion on the mission.

Engagement

Religious advisement at the COCOM is about strategic engagement and coordinated actions towards outcomes which support the Commander's priorities. It is indeed, about 'thinking' **and** 'doing'. Understanding religion as a factor for analysis demands a thoughtful strategic framework **and** a commitment to direct, well integrated, staffed and resourced engagements with our Partner Nations.⁹ The USSOUTHCOM Religious Affairs Office, over the past 12 months, has; worked with the J5 to ensure a

⁹The U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility encompasses 31 countries and 16 dependencies and areas of special sovereignty. The region represents about one-sixth of the landmass of the world assigned to regional unified commands.

SOUTHCOM's Area of Responsibility includes:

- The land mass of Latin America south of Mexico
- The waters adjacent to Central and South America
- The Caribbean Sea

<http://www.southcom.mil/aboutus/Pages/Area-of-Responsibility.aspx>

Religious Affairs Annex to the Theater Campaign Plan (TCP), contributed an activities summary for inclusion in the Monthly Message Guidance put out by the Office of Strategic Communication, and worked with Congressional Affairs Office to offer religious talking points in support the annual Posture Statement.

Part of our engagement strategy is also to provide training to planners so that they are able to include religion as a factor for analysis in their work on exercises and operations (even when a chaplain or chaplain assistant is not around). What we have found helpful (and certainly not original to USSOUTHCOM) is to see religion as an element in the PMESII model (POLITICAL, MILITARY, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, INFRASTRUCTURE, INFORMATION). The result would be **PMESII-R**. By linking religion as a routine factor alongside political and military etc., it (religion) is seen as a normal part of the process, rather than an afterthought or special consideration. Some practice at this is necessary and just as no one would think of offering their personal political views when conducting mission analysis planning, no one should expect that individuals would share their personal faith convictions when considering the religious factors of an exercise or operation.

Thanks to the great work of Chaplain Chuck Towery in the RAO we are engaged in all the major, annual exercises. Annual exercises are the right practicing religious advisement utilizing scenario driven events. There are many opportunities in which we can reinforce the ability of non-chaplain planners to use a Religious Area Analysis checklist to go through basic considerations. We are working *through* the exercises, *through* the staff, to the Commander. We are normalizing the process. The J2 continues to brief religion as threat, and now, we in the RAO can brief religion as a

driver of stability, healing, reconciliation and hope. The staff sections have been very willing to work with us on this initiative. It is a very positive development.

Mutual Support

Religion is a unifying factor for analysis in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR). Unlike governmental politics and military structures which differ from country to country; religion often works across national boundaries in areas of common interest (religious services, family care and care for the caregiver). There is also great diversity of faith groups in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Our goal is to provide the Commander with information that takes into account both the commonalities and the diversity of the region and to assist the staff in understanding how religion is a factor in Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Response, Peace Processes and in working with those countries where we have hopes of more normalized diplomatic and economic relationships.

We find that there is great interest among all the Partner Nations in addressing mutual areas of concern, such as; human rights, gender equality, race relations, paths to reconciliation, PTSD, ministry to wounded warriors and how to strengthen families. No one country as the corner on the market on answering these difficult questions. In order to more adequately present the various facets of problem sets we, at USSOUTHCOM, have established a series of Symposia entitled, "Religion Matters".

Predecessor USSOUTHCOM RAOs have done a great job of highlighting the questions and requests from Partner Nations. Through these AARs and the current 'demand signal' from our Partner Nations, ***we have instituted three annual symposia:***

Religion Matters, Religion Matters-Partnership and Religion Matters-South. We will convene Religion Matters III 19-22 April 2016 at the Conference Center of the Americas, Doral, Florida. Each year, through this forum, we bring together academic and military leaders who address, through presentation and discussion, pressing ***strategic questions*** involving religious advisement and how best to support Commanders and staffs with information on strategic topics of interest.¹⁰ We will conduct our second iteration of Religion Matters-Partnership, in July of 2016 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The focus of this Partner Nation symposium is on Professional Military Education. Attendees are introduced to the training and doctrinal methodologies of the Chaplain Schools. We also introduce attendees to two seminaries in Columbia, SC, which have curriculum designed to address the specific needs of military chaplains. We are very grateful to the leadership of each of the schools, and most especially to Chaplain (Colonel) Pete Sniffin, the Commandant of the US Army Chaplain Center and School. In June of each year (this year 6-9 June in Bogota, Colombia) we host a Partner Nation Symposium, Religion Matters-South. Based on feedback from Partner Nations we designed this event to have a more tactical, relational and devotional focus. This year's theme is "Discovering Pathways to Healing". We conduct this symposium in Spanish and Portuguese, as much as possible, and promote speakers from within the attendees; to discuss initiatives, best practices and problem sets from their own experience and culture. We also set more time aside for small group interaction during this event (again, based on Partner Nation feedback). We are

¹⁰ This year's symposium features Dr. Jim Wallace and Dr. Jacqueline Whitt. Under the title "History and Mystery" they will explore the evolution of the traditions of military chaplaincy and the shaping of ministry in the military in the context of the 1st amendment.

most grateful to Monsignor Fabio Suescun Mutis, the Archbishop for the Colombian military, who has served as host for the first two symposia. In 2017 the Brazilian Chaplains will host the event and in 2018 Jamaica (with support from Suriname and The Dominican Republic) will host.

With great thanks to all of the staff agencies at USSOUTHCOM and solid Command support we see increasing opportunity for positive effort and effect in the area of religious advisement. As with all of the other factors for analysis in the PMESII construct we realize there will be contention, discussion and ongoing assessments. This is exactly what we would expect for any staff process that is growing and developing.

The lead stories in the news are full of religion; usually focusing on the ballistic nature of various faiths and individuals. One often has to dig deeper and go to the second and third layer of news to discover other stories in which religion is a major contributing factor. That is where we often find stories and highlights of religious organizations and individuals who are taking seriously the positive role that religion can play in offering hope, healing, reconciliation and stability. We may not have to learn Latin, as my grandfather did, to converse in our current world, but we may, indeed, have to learn new languages and constructs in order to provide necessary religious advisement to our Commanders and staffs. It is worth the try.

Mike Lembke is a retired Army Chaplain. Mike served at every level of the Army from battalion to Theater; including USSOUTHCOM Chaplain, World Religion Chaplain at US Army Chaplain Center and School, The US Forces Command Chaplain, the III Corps Chaplain, the US Forces-Iraq Chaplain, US Army Element Chaplain, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and First Infantry Division Chaplain. Mike served in DESERT STORM (1990-1991), US Stabilization Force 8-BOSNIA (2000-2001), Operation Iraqi Freedom II (2004-2005) and Operation New Dawn (2010-2011). Mike currently serves as Pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Warwick, RI.

