

Risk Culture

Similarities & Differences

between State and DoD

by Bryan Groves

Background

It is difficult to compare what the Department of Defense does with what the State Department does. The missions of the two departments are very different, and while DoD concentrates its forces in a few areas during periods of conflict, State maintains a continuous presence in almost every country in the world. State has been in countries before, and as they become conflict environments, including Europe, Korea, Viet Nam, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria—to name a few. Occasionally embassies are forced to evacuate, but eventually American diplomats return. They engage and negotiate, sometimes with unwilling counterparts and those who allow a permissive environment for our enemies. The State operating environment is more global, is at best defensive, and is routinely reactive. State is also comparatively resource poor. Not every post has Marines, a Regional Security Office, or a medical unit. Foreign Service officers (FSO) go to places with endemic disease, absent civil infrastructure, with no health care, where there is no DoD presence, and where tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and severe environmental hazards occur.

DoD has vastly superior resources in personnel,¹ equipment, and budget,² and it does a much better job of personnel support when its people are serving in austere environments. A portion of DoD, the combat troops, have traditionally signed on for taking the fight to the adversary; to seek, engage, and destroy at deadly risk to themselves. Their superior firepower, training, situational awareness, combat and logistics support, and the ability of each individual to protect themselves mitigates this risk, but troops have and continue to perform their duty with willing sacrifice. In today's conflict environment, even combat support troops can expect to regularly be on the frontlines. In fact, they sometimes face greater dangers than elite units due to the amount of time

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they are exposed to the enemy as they travel between military camps, due to the appealing target their large supply convoys present to insurgents, and because they are not resourced as well and receive less tactical training than do conventional combat or special operations forces.

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Hence, many factors contribute to different levels of risk acceptance between the Department of Defense and the State Department. The primary causal factor is a difference between the two agencies' missions and the corresponding discrepancy between the military's willingness to accept casualties to accomplish the mission and State's aversion to doing so. "The military is willing to take casualties because it may be necessary to do so to accomplish the mission. The nature of State's mission usually makes it unnecessary, and in many cases counterproductive, to take casualties.³⁷" The underlying reasons for these differences have multiple facets, including the departments' missions, presence overseas, personnel profiles, and deployability. The intelligence each organization gathers, though an important determinant of force protection measures and tactical directives, is not a causal variable.

Missions

State, like DoD, is focused on mission accomplishment. Its mission, however, is

diplomacy, not conducting raids or patrols. Because diplomacy requires relationship building and takes more time, the timeline for mission accomplishment is prolonged for the diplomats of the State Department. Therefore, the State Department does not share Defense's same sense of urgency for mission accomplishment—get it done now! This cultural difference means that State can often wait to accomplish a task if faced with credible threat information. On the other hand, it is DoD's responsibility to eliminate threats, not distance itself from them.

The contextual timing of each organization's involvement during the war-peace continuum of overseas missions has also reinforced each agency's risk culture. Defense has traditionally viewed its role to involve entering war torn countries, fighting the battles, and then leaving—turning over responsibility for long term and peacetime engagement to its State Department colleagues. However, State's robust involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last decade has significantly altered this paradigm, rightly causing DoD to increase its interagency collaboration, and increasing the exposure of more FSOs to conflict environments.

Third, the military prides itself on being offensive minded and taking the fight to the enemy. Much of its investment in time and money is dedicated to outfitting and training its people with equipment and vehicles to conduct offensive operations, while placing relatively less emphasis on defensively reinforcing its headquarters or barracks with thicker walls, better overhead cover, and shatter resistant Mylar. State places a higher importance on presenting themselves to the host nation in a manner that is neither provocative nor menacing, preferring to "move among the people and blend in." Diplomats do have a need to visit various locations around their respective countries, but nothing in the mission of embassies can be construed as similar to DoD's offensive

operations. Besides different missions, the frequency and size of vehicle movements that leave embassies are much smaller than on a typical military operation. As a result, State's force protection efforts during movement are primarily 'defensive' in nature and more narrowly focused. In terms of hardening fixed sites, State is aided in that effort by the Office of Overseas Building Operations (OBO), a bureau dedicated to constructing buildings that State determines it needs. The closest thing the military has to this force structure is the Army's Corps of Engineers and the Navy's Seabees, but their relative capacity to meet the Defense Departments' needs is less than that of OBO's to meet State's needs. Further, OBO's construction requirements are specified to meet blast resistance standards, which is often not the case with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Seabees.

Permanent versus Temporary Presence

Apart from exceptional circumstances in the United States' bilateral relationships with select countries, or in crisis scenarios, American diplomatic posts abroad are permanent fixtures. This affords them the opportunity to wait out unique surges in the threat environment.⁴ The military cannot do this. Senior leaders in DoD and civilian executive and legislative leaders expect results in a timely, if not immediate manner. Moreover, the American people expect it, and want their troops to return home as soon as possible. Despite the extensive global posture that the American military has held for a number of decades, the U.S. does not view its motivation for overseas endeavors as traditional imperialism, or colonialism. Hence, Americans expect the military to come home—albeit successfully—sooner rather than later.

On the other hand, the expectation for the Foreign Service is one of permanent presence abroad. As a result, Diplomatic Security can

require diplomats, for instance, to curtail movement when a credible kidnapping threat in Iraq permeates their intelligence circles. The military cannot. The results would be far more adverse were the military to implement such force protection measures than for State to do so. Were the military to halt its patrols or offensive operations, it would embolden the enemy, further contributing to a deterioration of the security situation. The same is not true when the State Department takes such actions. State's patience, however, stems from the fundamental desire to demonstrate that the American diplomatic presence is there to stay, rather than risk aversion or an inability to take offensive action.

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As a result of these dynamics, DoD is less likely to invest in permanent facilities than is the State Department because it does not anticipate maintaining a permanent presence in many of the places it goes. There are obvious exceptions like Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Even in those countries, though, the military has the advantage of a larger size and of being able to build and live on bases that inherently provide adequate setback and standoff distances.

Intelligence

Differences in risk aversion levels are not attributable to differences in intelligence; both DoD and the State Department receive reasonably equivalent intelligence feeds. This is certainly true in the post 9/11 world where

interagency intelligence fusion centers abound, and crosstalk is more prevalent. Even prior to 9/11 and the subsequent emphasis on sharing information across the intelligence community, diplomatic posts around the world were leading the way with country teams that integrated information from various intelligence, defense, and other governmental agencies. The caveat on intelligence is that the interpretation of what to do with the intelligence can differ from the perspectives of the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and DoD, but that is for reasons primarily relating to each agency's mission.

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Certain offices of USAID, for instance, have a mandate to work beyond the capital and consulate cities on development projects and humanitarian missions. And, if Congress requires them to brand those activities as "sponsored by America," it puts them and their implementing partners at greater risk in areas where that label is not perceived in a positive light. Yet, despite intelligence sometimes indicating a high level of risk, the Office of Transition Initiatives and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance missions provide their members with a compelling reason to move around the country.

Administrative & Medical Considerations and the Blackwater Factor

When in foreign countries, diplomatic and

consular privileges and immunities determine the legal status of diplomats, while a Status of Forces Agreement typically governs military forces. The former is worldwide and reciprocal, while the latter is usually negotiated on a bilateral basis and may not be reciprocal. Both arrangements often afford American diplomats and service members comparable liberties and protections. This is a generality, however, as the point of comparison varies between those who work at the embassy and those at consulates, as well as between those permanently assigned and those on temporary duty. Those on temporary duty are generally not declared to the host government and therefore may have no coverage at all. For all situations and across both organizations, it is the U.S. government's attempts to provide sufficient protections for its people, while using the appropriate conventions, that drives the decision making process, not differences in risk cultures.

Medical services can vary tremendously between State Department and DoD overseas facilities. Differing missions is again the prime driver. The State Department pursues a flexible arrangement based upon its needs, financial resources, and the number of personnel at a given post. When operating in an environment like Iraq with a large military presence, the State Department will usually share DOD's medical facilities. In more austere environments, or with a smaller number of personnel to support, State may set up its own facility with a Foreign Service national nurse practitioner heading an operation that may also serve as a regional medical provider for several posts, some of which may have no U.S. government health facilities of their own. State medical facilities are generally less well equipped to handle mass casualty evacuations, bullet wounds, or traumatic injury, but may be more attune to treating rare foreign diseases. In both departments, the mission—rather than a difference in risk culture—drives the need, which then drives the medical solution

implemented.

Regarding private security contractors, the Blackwater incident at Nisoor Square in Baghdad on September 16, 2007 shaped the different supervisory approaches taken by the two organizations since that time. State took action immediately to increase oversight of its security contractors, requiring each movement to be supervised by a participating (on site) direct hire American.⁵ DoD's security contractors did not suffer from an incident of similar scope and negativity, so they did not feel pressured to adopt similar procedures and continue to allow third country nationals to serve on mobile personnel security detachments for DoD operations.

Personnel Profiles

The expectation of each organization's new recruits—and the type of person that each attracts—reinforces the differences in risk culture. New members joining the military, and those entering the Foreign Service, share a desire for public service, wanting to contribute to a cause greater than themselves. Both categories tend to enjoy travel and are seek adventure. However, part of the decision calculus for some military recruits involves a willingness to do dangerous tasks and to prove themselves in combat. This is not the expectation of a Foreign Service officer. They expect to do significant and meaningful work that impacts the policy of the United States in countries around the world, even in austere environments. Accepting a lifestyle that may occasionally require living in an underdeveloped and sometimes volatile, third world country, however, is different from signing up to be shot at.

Whether they join the military simply to serve the nation, for dangerous adventure, for the GI Bill, or because they lack other viable employment options, Soldiers know cognitively from the day they consider military service—and are made experientially aware from

boot camp onward—of the very real hazards of their chosen profession. This backdrop underlies everything the military does, even in its peacetime training and the development of its standard operating procedures and field manuals. Yet, unlike diplomats, servicemen and women traditionally do not take their families with them when they operate in unstable areas. This dimension adds a completely different (and greater) level of personal risk analysis for Foreign Service officers. The explosion of unaccompanied assignments for FSOs since

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9/11 is an exception to this paradigm and is an area of increased common ground between the two departments in the last decade.

Culture and Physical Security

Within DoD, the culture accepts that casualties will happen. They will be a natural—albeit unfortunate—consequence of completing its mission in a high risk environment. Senior military and DoD officials, consequently, do not require the same level of force protection/anti-terrorism standards as does the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security.⁶ The cultural acceptance of casualties is partially due to the military's mission, but also to the fact that servicemen and women go to volatile places very heavily armed. Every service member can defend themselves against hostile fire with their individual weapon and call in support from tanks, artillery, or air and naval support. These factors mitigate the risk for DoD

and are protections that FSOs do not have. Hence, the difference in scale between the organizations reinforces cultural and mission differences, significantly impacting what each can risk, and the degree to which each must prioritize allocated resources.

The physical proximity of buildings or camps to potential threats is a second distinguishing feature that alters the organizations' requisite force protection standards. Embassies and consulates are often more exposed than military bases. Many diplomatic posts do not share the luxury of space and physical separation from threats that are common for overseas military bases. On the contrary, posts—such as the one in Damascus—are often right on the street, in a heavily trafficked portion of the capital city. The importance of State Department security standards and its risk mitigating measures is revealed when these types of facilities are targeted by terrorists or rioters, especially if waivers are obtained based on mission, political, or logistical variables. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the posts' building complexes are not on the street. Yet, the daily access that embassies afford locally engaged staff and third country national personnel, and that their consular sections offer to the broader public, is greater than is true of military camps, thus require greater force protection measures. Even in places where the access by non-Americans may not be greater than for the military installations, diplomatic posts represent a more strategic, higher visibility target for groups who target U.S. interests, requiring more stringent security measures. This is especially true because State cannot go to the enemy; rather, the enemy comes to them in its own time and in a matter of its own choosing. Finally, in places where the State Department takes over from DoD (like in Kirkuk), a time and resource intensive effort may be necessary to bring facilities up to State standards. Political and logistical considerations may render this infeasible, however.

A third difference is that State Department accepts a higher level of hardship at many of its posts and when operating in conflict zones overseas. With the exception of fire bases and combat outposts, DoD provides vastly superior support services and creature comforts than the State Department routinely provides at its posts. When on its own, State has no shopping stores, no post office, no dining facilities, no laundry, no free internet, no fast food, no barbers, usually only a one or two-person community liaison office, and no free “space-available” flights. This is not to diminish the episodic risk/danger to military personnel, which is significantly higher in certain situations, but the steady-state hardship levels are often greater for State.

The Deployment Factor

A final cause of differences between the two departments involves the deployment of personnel to war zones. DoD's ability to deploy its people involuntarily provides leverage over its assignment cycle to a degree that the State Department does not enjoy. In spite of this, State has done a good job to date of filling its personnel requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, given the voluntary bidding cycle the State Department employs, a mass casualty event at one of these diplomatic posts may hinder their ability to fill future positions, as was the case in Beirut and Mogadishu after incidents there. Beyond the considerations already mentioned, this dynamic may buttress tendencies by ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission, regional security officers, and emergency action committees to “play it safe” or “wait it out” in response to specific, credible, and high threat information.

Conclusion

The risks that Foreign Service officers take are completely different than those that servicemen and women take. Both professions and the risks inherent in each are honorable, but simply different. The State Department and DoD's varied approaches arise from different missions, goals and cultures. Neither is inherently right or wrong. It would be incorrect for members of either organization to levy value judgments against the other. The appropriate response is to recognize and appreciate the differences for what they are while also embracing the many similarities: mission focus, competent people, love of travel, and the desire to contribute to a cause greater than oneself despite real risks. **IAJ**

Notes

- 1 DoD has approximately 1.4 million active duty soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen, plus more than 850,000 in the Reserves and National Guard and an active duty civilian work force of nearly 700,000, for a grand total of 2.9 million. On the other hand, State has approximately 13,000 personnel, which totals both Foreign Service Officers and Foreign Service Specialists. Even when adding in the Foreign Service Officers of other agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID – 1,700), the Foreign Commercial Service (250), the Foreign Agriculture Service (175), and the International Broadcasting Bureau (25), the total only comes to around 15,150.
- 2 DoD's base budget in 2012 was \$530 billion, more than ten times State's approximately \$47 billion. The Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget was \$115.5 billion for DoD, more than 14 times the approximately \$8 billion for the State Department. DoD certainly needs more funding, partially because of its larger size and the equipment necessary to its mission. However, as former Secretary of Defense Gates indicated, diplomacy and development endeavors by State and USAID need greater funding given America's substantial overseas commitments and foreign policy goals.
- 3 Major General Walter Givhan, a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Political-Military Bureau of the State Department, provided this perspective in correspondence with the author, Tuesday, March 27, 2012.
- 4 Time is a double edged sword, however, as greater time also allows insurgents and terrorists greater time to plan, while waiting for the opportune time to carry out an attack. If the U.S. military is not present in the country and the local nation's security forces do not counter the threat, time can provide hostile elements with tactical and strategic advantages.
- 5 An additional factor may be that Diplomatic Security requirements only allow security contractors with appropriate security clearances to use secure communications and counter-measure equipment, thereby narrowing personal security details to American applicants.
- 6 These standards are codified in places such as 12 FAM: Diplomatic Security, including 12 FAM 312: Program Management Responsibilities and 12 FAM 314: OSPB Security Standards.