The Foreign Policy Advisor Program
Diplomats Among Warriors

A Conference on Interagency Cooperation

May 10, 2013
American Foreign Service Association
Washington, D.C.
About this report:

On May 10, 2013, The Simons Center for InterAgency Cooperation and the American Academy of Diplomacy sponsored at the American Foreign Service Association a tightly focused, interactive conference on the role of the State Department Foreign Policy Advisors, or POLADs, who serve with the U.S. military.

Current or former officials, including prior and serving POLADs, took part. Acting Assistant Secretary for Political Military Affairs Thomas Kelly and Director of the Army Staff Lieutenant General William J. Troy made formal presentations. Retired General David Petraeus provided comments and insights from a strategic perspective. Ambassador (Ret.) Ronald Neumann moderated the discussion.

Ambassador (Ret.) Edward Marks
Director
Arthur D. Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation
emarks@TheSimonsCenter.org
202-372-6231

Ambassador (Ret.) David Nicol Greenlee
Former Program Chair,
American Academy of Diplomacy
academy@academyofdiplomacy.org
202-331-3721

The sponsors of this conference wish to express special appreciation to The American Foreign Service Association for its generous support of this conference by hosting it in their headquarters and by generously assisting with staff support.
Agenda

8:15-8:45 a.m.  Registration and coffee

8:45-9:00 a.m.  Administrative remarks and introduction of moderator Ambassador (Ret.) Ronald E. Neumann

9:00-9:30 a.m.  Keynote presentation by Mr. Thomas Kelly, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs

9:30-10:00 a.m.  Q & A with Acting Assistant Secretary Mr. Thomas Kelly

10:00-10:15 a.m  Break

10:15-12:00 p.m.  Moderated Discussion—all participants

12:00-1:30 p.m.  Lunch, followed by dialogue between Gen. (Ret.) David H. Petraeus and Ambassador (Ret.) Michael Gfoeller

1:30-2:00 p.m.  Q & A and concluding observations
# Participants

## Organizers
- Ms. Hong Dinh
- Amb. (Ret.) David Greenlee
- Mr. David Jones
- Amb. (Ret.) Ed Marks
- Ms. Aimee Stoltz
- Mr. Trip Taylor

## Speakers
- Amb. (Ret.) Michael Gfoeller
- Acting A/S Thomas Kelly
- Amb. (Ret.) Ronald Neumann
- Gen. (Ret.) David Petraeus

## Attendees
- Mr. Marshall Adair
- Amb. (Ret.) John Campbell
- Amb. Katherine Canavan
- Mr. Raphael Carland
- Amb. (Ret.) Mary Carlin Yates
- Col. (Ret.) Hank Cormier
- Mr. Joseph Donovan
- Ms. Cynthia Efird
- Amb. Tatiana Gfoeller-Volkoff
- Amb. (Ret.) Lino Gutierrez
- Amb. (Ret.) John Herbst
- Amb. (Ret.) Bob Hunter
- Ms. Susan Johnson
- Dr. Christopher Lamb
- Amb. (Ret.) Michael Lemmon
- Mr. David Litt
- Mr. Tony Major
- Amb. (Ret.) John Maisto
- Dr. Shoon Murray
- Dr. John Nagl
- Mr. Richard Nelson
- Mr. Thomas Niblock
- Amb. (Ret.) Tony Quainton
- Mr. Scott Rauland
- Amb. (Ret.) Charles Ray
- Amb. (Ret.) Lange Schermerhorn
- Mr. Phillip Skotte
- Mr. Gerald Talbot
- Lt. Gen. William Troy
- Col. (Ret.) Bob Ulin
- Ms. Janel Voth
- Ms. Tonia Weik
- Amb. (Ret.) Molly Williamson
The POLAD Program: History and Current Circumstances

The Foreign Policy Advisor (POLAD) program has been a longstanding facet of the U.S. foreign-defense policy structure. The POLAD program was initiated in World War II when Ambassador Robert D. Murphy was assigned as an advisor to General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Murphy, who wrote about his experience in *Diplomat Among Warriors*, initially reported directly to President Franklin D. Roosevelt but later was incorporated into Eisenhower’s staff, the organizational template for POLADs today.

When formally initiated by the Department of State in the post-World War II period, the POLAD program was quite modest, both in scope and mission. In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, debates took place within the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM), the POLADs’ “home” bureau, about the future utility of the program as a whole. Even as recently as the beginning of the last decade, senior Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) were assigned only to a small number of military service chiefs, service secretaries, and combatant commanders and, as of 2004, numbered only 17.

However, with the advent of the post-9/11 terrorism era, the U.S. government recognized that the country faced a complex, multifaceted threat that would require close interaction between State and the Department of Defense (DoD)—indefinitely. Largely in the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and sparked by greater attention from senior leadership at the Departments of State and Defense, the POLAD program, as a basic tool to address this environment, was steadily expanded. Now numbering over 90 FSOs, the program no longer provides the equivalent of “handcrafted Lamborghini” to a small number of senior officials, but rather a wide array of “muscle cars” throughout the politico-military spectrum.

This commitment represents a significant percentage of State’s senior FSO strength. POLADs traditionally were assigned directly to commanders as staff advisors, not as liaison officers or formal representatives of the State Department. Under this model, the POLAD works for and under the direction of the commander—while maintaining substantive and professional links to the State Department. With the enlarged POLAD complement, the essential POLAD function remains the provision of dedicated support to the military officer and staff to which the POLAD is assigned. While “reach back” to State is meant to channel effective information to the commander, the POLAD is not a State representative on the military staff. Rather, the commander “owns” the POLAD.

For State, the POLAD provides a straight channel to top-level military command echelons. For Defense, the officer provides insight into policy and the workings of the State Department, personal advice, and a conduit for expanding a commander’s influence.

The latest State-Defense Memorandum of Understanding on exchange of personnel between the two departments (January 4, 2012) sets forth terms of personnel exchange of non-reimbursable positions. It reiterates the State-Defense staff relationship while formalizing the significant expansion in the numbers. For POLADs, it institutionalizes the program’s growth and constitutes a State commitment to maintain the program at the current level. However, it also commits DoD to significantly increase uniformed military personnel at State. The number of military officers working at State is expected to more than double.

The State program is administered by a small office within the Political-Military Bureau. The number of FSOs seeking POLAD positions has risen in recent years, reflecting heightened career interest in interacting with senior military officers. POLAD work requirements are integrated with the tenets of State’s Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), providing greater promotion potential.

The expansion is aimed at increased whole-of-government integration, as well as furthering more
Key Observations and Recommendations

**General:** Conferees uniformly praised the expanded POLAD program as an important advance toward greater whole-of-government integration and an essential contribution to increased State-Defense understanding and coordination—a matching of resources to needs. At the same time, all recognized that State has a limited bench and even the 90+ POLAD billets represent a significant strain on the Foreign Service personnel base. With the impetus of the State Department’s QDDR, POLAD assignments are increasingly sought as fulfilling promotion requirements for interagency experience. There is no shortage of bidders for POLAD posts—an anticipated 400 for 40 openings next year.

**Program management:** Organizers of the conference encountered a great deal of difficulty in identifying a point of contact for the POLAD program in the DoD, unlike the Department of State where a specific office in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs is responsible for program management. The organizers recommend that DoD identify a POLAD point of contact equivalent to the PM/POLAD office at State, at a minimum, for the purposes of information and coordination.

**Resources:** There are limited funds and personnel to support an effective POLAD program, and no prospect of expanding the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions much beyond 90. It is possible, however, to re-allocate positions to ensure POLADs go where they are most needed. Reciprocal military billets in the Political-Military Bureau and regional bureaus at State, as provided in the State-Defense MOU, are useful, both for the experience of the military personnel involved and for their interaction with counterpart State Department officials.

The number of POLADs assigned to lower level commands should remain limited because of the overall limitations on the size of the POLAD corps. When such assignments are considered essential, it is important that the POLADs have maximum opportunity to bond with the unit before deployment. State should also draw on retired FSOs as needed to fill POLAD ranks.

**Selection:** Consideration should be given to formalizing the processes of State selection and DoD acceptance to obtain optimum agreement on job qualifications and requirements. Particularly at the most senior levels, personal “chemistry” appears to be the key to an effective POLAD-commander relationship. Care should be taken to provide commanders with slates of good candidates. The right person is important—but even more important is avoiding assignment of the wrong person.

Commanders should interview potential POLADs...
personally and have the opportunity to interact with them on a temporary trial basis if necessary. Both commander and prospective POLAD should be able to step back from an assignment. Regional Bureaus and/or the PM Bureau should have input and/or review POLAD efficiency reports written by senior military commanders.

**Culture:** Moving from State to the more structured and planning-based environment of a military command requires a flexibility and willingness to adapt not always found in Foreign Service ranks. Combatant commanders and service chiefs tend to want ambassador-rank POLADs, but some worry that an experienced chief of mission may not adapt easily to a staff role. An effective POLAD should be agile, aware of the working environment, and able to provide value by having detailed knowledge of the State Department and its equities.

State should reach out more to POLADs, providing greater support, backup, and regular connectivity. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) should establish a mechanism to track, develop, and evaluate the POLAD experience.

**Training:** While only some military officers need exposure to State, most diplomats need exposure to the military. Appropriate education for junior- and middle-grade FSOs should include at least basic orientation on the U.S. military. This experience could be combined, at least for some, with assignments to work with and in military organizations.

Selected mid-level officers should be offered three to six month temporary duty stints at military commands. Likewise, POLADs without previous military experience or exposure should have assignment-specific training/orientation on military culture and especially the role of military planning doctrine. This training should be much more comprehensive than the current three day FSI program—at least three weeks, including some field exposure.

**Authorities:** POLADs should have a solid understanding of the complementary and convergent roles and authorities of State and DoD as codified in Title 22 and Title 10. This background may facilitate sensitive navigation of differing priorities that may emerge between military commanders and their counterparts at State and embassies in their respective areas of responsibility.

**Assignment at brigade level:** There is significant military interest in having mid-grade political advisors down-range, even at brigade level. Such assignments are difficult for State to resource, although there has been a push to get more mid-grade officers into the program. There is not enough depth at State or in the POLAD program to staff such assignments. If the officer pool cannot be expanded, there is a danger that less-than-qualified officers may be offered for available POLAD positions.

**Questions for Further Consideration**

Senior military commanders have often regretted the lack of a State Department partner at the Regional Geographic Command level. Although State’s regional assistant secretaries would appear to be the obvious officials to fulfill this role, such coordination has not occurred.

- Does an expanded presence of State Department officers across DoD’s operational command level offer an opportunity to pursue this objective?
- What is the possible interest for the State Department in this perspective?
- More broadly, what constructive actions could State initiate to take advantage of possible opportunities offered by the expanded POLAD presence to improve State-Defense relations?
- At the same time, what initiatives could DoD and especially the combatant commands take to exploit possible opportunities for better State-Defense cooperation?
- As the U.S. involvement in Iraq and now Afghanistan winds down, some commentators have speculated that there is a need and an opportunity for a re-balancing of the roles and responsibilities between State and DoD. If such is desired, in a post-Iraq and Afghanistan world, can the expanded POLAD program play a role? And if so, how?
Thomas Kelly, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs

The POLAD program demonstrates cooperation between State and DoD. The program has a long history, expanding only slowly until recently, when, under impetus from Secretary Clinton, it currently (at the time of this conference) involves 91 FSOs. A confluence of favorable events, led by senior leadership, has encouraged expanding interagency links and is assuring that FSOs understand how to work more effectively with the Department of Defense.

Secretary Clinton assured that relevant QDDR tenets, specifically the first one requiring the ability to work effectively in an interagency environment, were incorporated into Foreign Service promotion precepts. This development has reinforced FSO interest in POLAD assignments. State also found that increasingly DoD leaders welcome the POLAD role, as, for example, is reflected by the new POLAD position with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is important not just for the POLAD program, but also for leadership of the State Department to have a channel to the head of the Joint Chiefs.

The number of POLADS, which has increased 600 percent in the past seven years, is not a negligible percentage of the Foreign Service. In addition there are DoD requests for FSOs in addition to POLADs, specifically for service in the Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGS). Currently, POLADs are assigned to all service chiefs, except the Marines, all combatant commanders, virtually all component commanders, many Pentagon offices and DoD agencies in Washington, several Theater special operations commands, and special operations component commands.

As a result of these developments, there has been an increased interest in the POLAD program and last year a record 300 officers bid on POLAD positions. Next year, the department will fill 40 positions, for which it hopes to receive 400 bids. These numbers indicate POLAD assignments are attracting increasingly qualified officers for these positions in every bidding cycle.

Broadly, POLADs advise their commands on policy and advance State-Defense cooperation, thus adding value to their assigned commands. When working as POLADs, they are working for their commands and
for DoD. They are assigned to provide a foreign policy perspective to commands and senior military decision makers that they otherwise would not have.

There are some common elements in POLAD success stories: they keep in touch with State to understand the key initiatives of regional bureaus; they keep in touch with PM to share that information with their commanders and to provide real time information on foreign policy priorities; and they stay “synced” with State. POLADs are most effective when they interact with embassy country teams, thereby allowing them to update the command with the latest in-country information from U.S. government experts on the ground. POLADs advise their commanders on proposed operations in theater and help to increase the odds the ambassador will agree to permit a particular command to conduct operations in their country.

A State-Defense inter-agency agreement circa January 2012 sets forth terms of personnel exchange of non-reimbursable positions. For POLADs, it institutionalizes the program’s growth and constitutes a State commitment to maintain the program at the current level. It also commits DoD to increase significantly uniformed military personnel at State. The number of military officers working at State is expected to more than double.
The Army and the POLAD program are a classic case of requirements and resources matching quite well to everyone’s benefit. The Army-POLAD relationship is especially beneficial for the Army Headquarters functions, which focus on “today’s fight,” building the Army of the future and crisis management. The Army also constantly communicates—both externally (getting its message to the outside world) and internally—to assure Soldiers, their families, and civilians are on board.

So how does the Army POLAD fit into that operation? Essentially, the POLAD is at the center of everything, not that POLADs can make everything work perfectly, but they can from their experience reach out and touch all of these bits and pieces. Specifically, the POLAD can see intelligence and operational information and assure both are taken into consideration. Moreover, they can touch other places, including attaches, embassies, and combatant commanders.

Bureaucratic practice tends to limit uniformed personnel from contacting other agencies or services. A POLAD can contact both easily and naturally without undue bureaucracy.

Another element is “context.”

• Regional context - the regional realities beyond the one-on-one requests from countries.
• The temporal piece - the history of U.S. military action in a specific country and how U.S. actions fit the history of this country or region.
• The political dimension - broader U.S. government policy goals that are not always immediately apparent.
• Translation - the “language” of different agencies, the broader language of government, and nuances of what individuals (U.S. and foreign) say.

The Role of the POLAD in a Service Headquarters

Lt. Gen. William Troy
What does the Army bring to foreign affairs? What does the POLAD bring? Working together, what can they do to help achieve U.S. goals?

The Army has “allocated forces” throughout the world. In some places, numbers are small, but, if properly deployed, effects are greater than numbers. The Army also has “regionally aligned forces,” reflecting a reshaping of the Army to have forces better prepared to go throughout the world and engage with partners. The Army is developing this concept of forces prepared to go to a country and exercise and train at a scale that they want and need. This is a perfect example of where the POLADs’ contribution will be enormously helpful.

**Questions & Answer Session**

Asked what the major arguments to be used to support the continuation of the POLAD function, in light of resources pressures especially to retain FTEs, Acting Assistant Secretary Kelly responded that the main argument involved the State Department’s interest in retaining one of the major instruments for influencing the top leaders in our government. Increasingly, U.S. foreign policy is determined by security policy; consequently, DoD is a critically important partner in policy determination. In addition, there is strong demand by DoD to continue to grow the program. DoD appreciates how small an institution State is, with a short bench, so an increase in FTEs is unlikely, but State should be able to continue at the present level and possibly reprogram some positions. There is no imminent pressure to reduce FTEs for the POLAD program.

The subject of Foreign Service awareness and understanding of the military world was raised, and how it can be expanded beyond the limited POLAD experience. A/S Kelly agreed that this was an important responsibility for the PM Bureau, because it is an important element of the professional formation of all senior Foreign Service Officers. To fulfill this responsibility, the networks of POLADs help organize bringing senior military officials in to the State Department for meetings, consultations, and presentations. POLADs have a responsibility to bring their commands closer to the State Department.

The Q & A continued with a query about the role of POLADs in the new DoD concept of regionally aligned military units mentioned by LTG Troy in his remarks. The ensuing comments noted that there is an important opportunity for POLADs to help shape this concept, first by advising and assisting the Army in the preparation and training of selected units—their training plan, planning, and mission when they deploy. By linking back to the relevant combatant command, the POLAD network can help ensure that everyone involved understands the situation and the mission.

Although the conference focused on the POLAD program as employed in military commands, participants mentioned the mirror image of the military personnel assigned in the State Department and how this experience was viewed and treated in the services. Was it reaching able mid-career officers? Were they assigned to career enhancing jobs? What did they bring back to their home services? The obvious observation was that such service was beneficial and positive for FAOs but unclear as to its worth for others. There is a lack of clarity here about the value of this duty at least within the Army.

A participant pointed out that the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) has been conducting an Interagency Fellows program for Army majors for the past six years. These Fellows work in various federal departments for ten months, enabling employees of those departments to attend the CGSC course at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This program is an example of the opportunities for interagency education available in the military education system. However, the expected downsizing of the services and the Army in particular raises the question of whether in an era of declining resources this system will be able to keep open these opportunities. There was no clear answer, but it was noted that while the Army, for

*POLAD Conference*
example, is expected to get smaller, senior leadership has made it clear that leader development and officer education remain a priority and must be adequately resourced. The ability to build back in the future is crucial, especially in a period of diminished resources and declining manpower.

A shift in the session brought about the subject of occasionally contentious relations between ambassadors and the regional combatant commanders, and what role, if any, the POLADs have played in facilitating “peace” between them. It was claimed that the best POLADs have done that without any public notice or reputation, and that this behavior is a tradition which should be preserved. In one sense, the function of the POLAD is to be a kind of osmotic barrier and figure out what information to let pass across the filter between the two authorities to keep coordination without violating an officer’s responsibility and loyalty to the commander.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Following the Q & A session with the two formal presenters, a general discussion was initiated by Ambassador Neumann, who offered a number of discussion questions. These included the traditional definition of Political or Foreign Affairs Advisor and whether it is still sufficient as POLADs are deployed to more and lower spheres of command, or whether new job descriptions are needed.

There are questions about quality versus numbers, and what to do if the new demands exceed the supply of FSOs of requisite quality. Is it better to leave the position open rather than fill it? There are also some interesting chain of command questions, as everyone recognizes that POLADs have a primary professional loyalty to their commander. As POLADs are deployed in multiple numbers into active theaters at subordinate levels, from whom does political guidance come?

For instance, there were numbers of people who gave the operational appearance of POLADs by their deployment in brigades and in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Afghanistan, yet who were not in the chain of command of relevant unit commanders. POLAD training was mentioned in the presentations, but questions remain about the adequacy and appropriateness of training available, and how that applies to the unique nature of the relationship with the commander.

These questions are important on their own, but even more pertinent as pressures from the military for more POLADs increase.

**POLAD Selection/Criteria**

The question of selection and competence of officers selected for POLAD positions covered several aspects. The intimate relationship between POLADs and the relevant military commander requires consideration of compatible personalities as well as professional experience. Examples of the need to curtail assignments because of incompatibility were noted.

This raised the question of staffing needs and available personnel. Can State afford to leave positions vacant while the system searches for the perfect candidate? Timing is also important, as there might be unrealistic requirements set by the requesting commander. The current selection process was described in some detail. The responsible office in P/M Bureau acts as a clearinghouse, pulling together the best slate of bidders available after interviewing the bidders. This has not always been a rich selection, but recent interest has been high, and the State Department does not approve all applications. The slate is then passed to the relevant commander to make the final choice.

The decisions made by the military commander are not always self-evident, and occasionally what appear to be well-qualified candidates are rejected. The current system does not specify what process or criteria the military commander is using, and how the candidates’ qualifications are being validated, if they are. In other words, State proposes and the military disposes, each side operating on its own criteria.

Many senior commanders insist on candidates who already have the ambassadorial title. There seems to be an impression that many senior military people feel the ambassadorial title should be a requirement. This conclusion is at least partially a lack of understanding by many military of the Foreign Service rank structure and the assumption that the title of ambassador is equivalent to flag or general officer rank. For this reason, FSOs without the ambassadorial title may find it difficult to be accepted automatically as a senior officer...
in the military environment. Military commanders also appear to believe that an ambassador will bring them more clout and influence.

In any case, a chief of mission (COM) may not be the best person to be a political/foreign affairs advisor because of the very nature of the COM environment. A COM tends to be the center of the embassy universe, much like a combatant commander, and a supporting role may prove to be difficult. This consideration should be expressly broached to COMs proposed for POLAD positions.

While recognizing that this aspect of the POLAD selection process exists, most comments focused on the more basic consideration of picking the best candidates, convincing military commanders that very good senior FSOs are available, and that restricting the choice to those with ambassadorial titles is limiting their options. The concern should be ensuring that the best candidates are put forward for the most important positions.

Defining the best person for a job is not just a matter of credentials. Possibly more important is the personal chemistry between the military commander and the POLAD. How to obtain the right chemistry is important, and probably requires that the military commander have input into the assignment decision. This is important because if the right relationship or chemistry does not exist, the commander will at minimum ignore the political advisor or work around the assigned officer. In more extreme cases, the commander may request a re-assignment. In any case, there is no point in State forcing the situation; if the relationship is not right, it might be better to let the position be gapped (or an officer withdrawn from an unproductive assignment) until circumstances change.

Having noted the importance of “chemistry” and the matter of personal relationships, a further elaboration was that the personnel environment is different in different commands. Some commanders are more collegial, some more authoritative. The POLAD’s responsibility is to adapt to the specific environment. The good POLADs—as good diplomats—do that.

It does come down to chemistry. Four-star commanders are unique individuals, just as very senior FSOs are unique individuals, and it is difficult to predict personal relations. However one of the skill sets of the Foreign Service is the ability to interpret different situations and seek to blend into the environment. The Foreign Service is professionally well equipped to do that, but it doesn’t work in every case. There is a corollary question regarding whether it works as well in reverse when military officers come to the State Department. The dynamic is entirely different, given the differences in organizational culture and the fact that the military officers assigned to State tend to be comparatively junior in rank. There’s an asymmetry in the State-Defense exchange relationship, probably to State’s advantage in terms of sending senior officers to DoD.

At the senior level, the chemistry factor remains crucial, but at the O-1 and O-2 levels, there appears to have been a more substantive, professional interchange with the military counterparts, with considerable learning back and forth.

On the basis of having reviewed the full range of relevant Officer Efficiency Reports and other relevant personnel folders, such as performance pay and promotion lists, one commentator stated the experience has been especially interesting at the O-1 and O-2 level, which is a phenomenon of recent involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the distribution of political advisors down the military chain of command and in the PRT system. PM has managed to change the precepts for the promotion panels and has begun to see a very sharp increase in the number of POLADs who were promoted, including a significant number across the threshold to senior rank.

**Distribution and Size of the POLAD Program**

The recent expansion of the POLAD program has introduced several new factors. First is the distribution within the military system. Once restricted to regional geographic commands, POLADs are now assigned to a wider range of commands. How far down the chain of command should POLADs be assigned? Should it be low as brigade level? And if political advisors are deployed to maneuver units in the military chain of command, should they all be functioning independently from each other, paralleling their military bosses, or should the relationship between POLADs be reexamined?

Second is the personnel demand on the State Department and the Foreign Service—approximately 100 POLADs, disproportionately drawn from the senior ranks of the senior Foreign Service. This is a huge percentage of Foreign Service assets and resources. The expansion of the POLAD system can only add to the personnel shortage which has been affecting State’s
overseas operations for some time.

Whether the assignment of POLADs to subordinate commands, even to the brigade level, is valuable for both sides should be reevaluated. A decision on this subject may depend on the unit in question and its specific mission. For instance, if there is to be a dedicated brigade for Africa, what specific requirements might be called for? As David Jones pointed out in *The Future of Foreign Policy Advisors*, assigning POLADs to maneuver brigade might require that such assignments needed to be made well before the brigade deployed as part of the unit’s training cycle. This would be another burden on State’s personnel and assignment system.

Increased and more widespread deployment of junior FSOs, possibly down to assignment of FS-3 officers to lower ranking military commanders, raises other considerations and concerns. A POLAD’s knowledge of their own organizational culture is an important requirement, yet two thirds of FSOs have less than ten years of service. Are there enough qualified officers to fill this full range of positions?

There are also legacy issues related to the way the POLAD program was conceived and viewed 10-15 years ago. It is changing, but there is a definite time lag. There was a tendency to discount POLADs as a class, as well as Diplomats in Residence and others serving outside the State Department on details to other federal agencies. This attitude established a hurdle that was difficult to cross, at least statistically. The attitude was reinforced from the perspective of the POLADs themselves, as many thought of the assignment as a pre-retirement, end of career assignment; consequently, the Officer Efficiency Report exercise was viewed as pro forma.

Some of that attitude still exists, although it is changing, as the present generation of younger officers with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan is much better prepared to be ambassadors, having had deeper exposure to the military. Although changing, that old legacy still remains.

### Relationships

Central to the subject of POLADs is the relationship between State and Defense, especially the relationship between commanders and ambassadors. This question has become more prominent in recent years with the concern expressed in some circles that U.S. foreign policy has become excessively militarized. While most commentators spoke about the necessity for ambassadors and commanders to reach sensible working arrangements, there was also a general sense that the chief of mission authority of ambassadors must be recognized and that POLADs have the delicate task of educating their military colleagues on this question. An ambassador has to be in charge, and there must be clarity of relationships and clarity of authority.

The rubber meets the road most often in this interdepartmental relationship in the environment in which combatant commanders and COMs interact. For State and ambassadors, it is vital to accept the reality that combatant commanders exist and that they have tremendous resources available to them. They can obviously do a great deal of harm from a country team’s perspective, but they can also do a great deal of good. Which situation obtains is often due to creating a sensible and sensitive professional relationship between the two organizations, one based on dialogue and respect.

The participants in this discussion recognized the concern and mentioned several examples where combatant commanders appeared to have crossed boundaries. Nevertheless, most argued from their personal experience as POLADs that their commanders and military colleagues were careful to respect the appropriate relationships.

More pertinently, former POLADs argued that POLADs as a general rule played an important role in ensuring that lanes were respected on both sides. All emphasized the power and importance of the informal networking State officers do at a variety of commands, embassies, and department relationships, and how that informal networking needs to continue to be a part of the development as well as the implementation of policy.

### Special Operations Command (SOCOM)

The discussion generally dealt with the various military organizations to which POLADs are being assigned as more or less similar for the purposes of the discussion, although special attention was given to the regional combatant commands because of their interaction with ambassadors and embassies. However
there has been much attention recently in the media and elsewhere to the creation and expansion of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and questions have been raised as to whether this different kind of global military activity calls for a different function or role for political advisors.

Much will depend on what sort of command SOCOM becomes; that is, what will be the relationship between SOCOM and the regional combatant commands. There will also be the relationship between SOCOM and ambassadors, which will be in addition to the relationship with the regional commanders. The military network is being expanded, and that will inevitably expand the network between POLADs, ambassadors, and the Department of State. In a sense, the POLAD dynamic is not changed, but it is a bit more complicated with more players than in the past, requiring even more networking.

**Policy Implications**

Apart from the human resource problem for State, there are two other policy or institutional issues. One is whether having this resource deployed is aiding the dominance of the military within diplomacy, and the second is whether the POLAD, by the designed structure of the position, is representing the command more to the State Department than providing political guidance to the commander.

With regard to the first question, there are those in the national security community who are concerned about the “over militarizing of foreign policy.” Part of that issue concerns whether the regional command system is coming perilously close to being a parallel foreign affairs system to the State Department by interacting with foreign governments. In this situation, if State provides a significant number of officers who help the military commands in their diplomatic function, is it not taking a serious risk of undercutting what is already a damaged role in foreign affairs? If it does not help, won’t the conflicts between civilian and military views of policy lead to avoidable clashes in the field?

The second question returns to the role of the POLAD. Is a POLAD someone who is representing the command’s interests back to the State Department more than representing the State Department’s interests to the command, and is this the most appropriate role from the perspective of the overall national interest? This returns to the first “diplomat among warriors,” Robert Murphy, who was initially assigned to advise General Eisenhower but worked directly for President Roosevelt and not for the State Department. In fact there were those who wanted to put him into uniform.

Murphy was a policy advisor to the military, but that first model of a foreign policy advisor who comes from the policy side of the U.S. government has, in a way, been lost by the concern over assuring that the State Department officer on a combatant commander’s staff is not seen as a spy. With that concern, for reasons elaborated earlier, came the insistence that the State Department officer works for the combatant commander.

Discussion of the role of the political advisor expanded into a broader discussion of the relationship between ambassadors and regional combatant commanders. One view argued that the authority relations were clear with the ambassador’s authority in the country of assignment well recognized by commanders, although this authority requires constant attention by the ambassador and the Country Team. Other comments pointed out that a commander’s recognition of this official relationship has not always been the case, sometimes involving the higher reaches of the Washington establishment and requiring appropriate reaction on the part of all concerned, but especially ambassadors. Here again, the personal equation and personal chemistry play an important role.

Reference was made to Bob Woodward’s description of the current foreign policy environment in his recent book *The Price of Politics*, but rejected in favor of a more optimistic view that the U.S. has moved into an era where the President determines U.S. foreign policy, the National Security Council coordinates foreign policy, and the component parts of the U.S. government carry out foreign policy. Some thought this judgment somewhat naïve, but, in any case, the role of leadership at all levels is clearly crucial. This includes the role of the State Department, where State has seen more effective leadership in recent years with Secretaries Powell, Rice, and Clinton.

But again, at the end of the day in the field, it is going to depend upon the individual ambassador and the individual commander to understand each other and, as mature professionals, build a mutually constructive relationship.
Training and Orientation

This situation of dual authority also makes it important that POLADs receive appropriate training so that they can contribute to making the relationship work, on the one hand, while ensuring the appropriate role for the State Department, on the other. In fact, appropriate education and training in interagency relations is necessary for both FSOs and military officers early enough in their careers so that it becomes part of their professional perspective. The Army likes the motto that it fights like it trains, and there is a message there for all State Department professionals.

While experience with and knowledge of State and other civilian departments is desirable for many military personnel, the reality is that such knowledge is really only necessary for a comparatively small percentage of those in uniform. Comparatively few military personnel interact with FSOs while all Country Teams interact with the military. State Department personnel must be cognizant of key elements in the military culture such as the plethora of military commands and the central importance to the military of their formal, codified planning process.

For these reasons, appropriate education for junior- and middle-grade FSOs should include basic orientation to the U.S. military. This should be combined with, at least for some FSOs, assignments to work with and in the military. This implicit requirement is a challenge for State, which has traditionally done little professional education or planning. Even with new interest in the importance of professional education in the State Department and Foreign Service, obstacles exist. First, the small size of the Foreign Service and the lack of a training float combine to create a serious resource constraint for State. There are also questions about relative value of different experience for officers.

These resource concerns are exacerbated by personnel developments over the past 30 years. The role of the Foreign Service in the State Department has been curtailed by appointment policies of successive administrations. When comparing the size of the Foreign Service today and adjusting for various changes such as the United States Information Agency and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency integration, and the large growth in diplomatic security, the FSO corps is hardly larger today than it was in 1970, and is much less represented in the senior ranks of State Department positions and ambassadorships. This reality raises an assignment problem of where are our most urgent needs for experienced senior officers.

One commentator endorsed that view, expanding it to include FSO assignments to other agencies beyond the POLAD program and DoD where the “outsider” label might be applied. However, in these situations as well as those of the POLAD, the ability to assemble information from various corporate cultures can be important and constructive. Perceptions of loyalty play a major role, where the officer is required to demonstrate loyalty to both cultures, at least partially by subsuming them in the loyalty to the broader national interest. Also it is important to differentiate between strictly personal commentary and advice and attempting to provide guidance on the State Department’s position. In the latter case, it is vital to be accurate, which requires the POLAD to retain good contacts at State.

Participants proposed several approaches to POLAD training. One approach might be to adjust the old concept of rotational assignments to include time spent with a military organization. Another recommendation would resolve the question about the level at which one should be a POLAD by suggesting that such assignments should be at both mid-grade and senior levels. The first middle level assignment would provide working experience that would enable a more effective performance at the senior or policy level. A third proposal would be to use the extensive—especially in the military—exercise program whereby State Department officers could participate in military exercises, thus providing subject matter expertise on the one hand and exposure to military planning and culture on the other.

These proposals would all require modifications in the current “stove-piped” character of the bureaucratic culture currently prevailing in the federal government.

Conclusion

There was a general consensus that one of the most crucial aspects of our government’s current engagement abroad is the necessity to integrate the instruments of policy and influence. The POLAD system occupies one place where that integration must take place, so this discussion is important in itself but maybe more
important if it is only the first of many such efforts.

The subject is important because many believe the system is broken. The overall performance of the U.S. government as a multi-functional, “whole-of-government” creature has not been impressive recently.

The POLAD system and function is one way to deal with this problem, but that role requires greater emphasis on training, education, and cross-posting people at various levels into the different organizational cultures.

DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS, USA RET.

Following the general discussion, General Petraeus, accompanied by Ambassador (Ret.) Michael Gfoeller, outlined his views on POLADs and the political advisor function based on his personal experience and perspective as a senior military officer. His remarks are summarized below.

With respect to POLADs, there are three points up front that are pretty straightforward, the big ideas for “POLADships”.

The first is that POLADs really matter, and it is important that the numbers of POLADs have expanded over the years because of the great value they provide in the liaison function with the State Department and embassies, the personal advice to commanders, and the representational function.

Point two is that the POLADs really matter only if they are the right people. And that does not necessarily mean those with the ambassadorial title as those can, on the one hand, be too intimidating to military commanders, while, on the other hand, they themselves may have difficulty in adjusting to operating as a member of a military staff. The right choice for a POLAD position is someone who can complement the military commander, complement his staff, and bring relevant experience and expertise to the table.

Point three is the requirement that the POLAD makes the most of the opportunity. The military commander is not looking for and does not need someone to compete with or duplicate the efforts of his existing staff such as his Director of Plans or his POL-MIL section. The POLAD needs to complement and to augment that staff, and will need to demonstrate personal initiative in doing so. The commander wants someone who can expand his own influence, expand the range of advice and insights he gets, and expand his relationships with State and embassies—especially when the commander may be pursuing policies or programs not to everyone’s liking. This requires initiative on the part of the POLAD combined with sympathy and understanding of the commander’s perspectives and intentions.

In order to get people to do these sorts of jobs it would be great if FSOs could gain experience with the military early in their careers, as was mentioned earlier in the discussion. It would be wonderful if they could actually deploy with military units when the units are out in the field. But the issue of resources is a problem and has been pointed out. The problem of adequate resources and of professional development exists in other
agencies as well, for instance the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The fact is that, outside the military, there is no department within the U.S. government that has sufficient end-strength to allow each department to truly invest in human capital. The CIA created new programs which created new career opportunities, but that required an increase in active duty personnel. Some increases were made, but sequestration has probably put a stop to this growth. But the State Department has always had fewer people than it has missions, and creating real professional development and sequential programs with those limitations is difficult.

These resource problems will make new professional opportunities like military experience for young FSOs difficult. The State Department will have to be very careful about adding new steps. Nevertheless, this military experience would be a plus for everyone even if the benefit were largely for the professional development of the officers in question, as it will contribute over the long run to interdepartmental relationships. But it is unlikely to occur soon given the end-strength resource challenges of the State Department, regardless of the desires of many people.

This is of concern because the recent intensification of working relations resulting from the pressures and demands of Iraq and Afghanistan, which acted as catalysts for cooperation, coordination, and integration. As the U.S. withdraws, there will be a lessening of this pressure. As a result, POLAD positions will probably become more important rather than less as they will be the key links for the military to the respective State Department organizations.

A final point is to note the importance that the State Department reach out to the POLAD, in the same way that General Petraeus did as the Director of the CIA to the CIA reps who were in those commands. It is very important that the POLADs retain the link to the “mothership,” so to speak. There are all sorts of techniques to accomplish this. For instance, the CIA conducted regular video teleconferences with its representatives at combatant commands to ensure that they were conversant with what was on headquarters’ mind. It is very important for the State Department to do something similar, despite the challenge it will pose for those on the seventh floor, the Secretary, and the Deputies.

On the other hand, it is important for the POLADs to remind the mothership of their existence in a structured way with memos and other means of communication, similar to the way that senior military commanders communicate regularly and personally to their most senior superiors.

Q & A for General Petraeus

Referring to the recent dramatic increase in the POLAD program, the need for people with very specific skills, and the lack of a bench in the Foreign Service as a very small institution, one participant noted the difficulty of manning the program. For that reason, the State Department has not filled some important posts, although it is almost the end of the assignment season. This is a problem, but there can be no solution until the right people are found to fill the positions.

Another participant commented that, in the approaching postwar period, there are two major areas where this POLAD relationship may have great importance for both State Department and the military. One is post-disaster response that will involve multiple U.S. government agencies, and yet where neither State nor the military are really the experts in disaster and disaster response. The other area is mass atrocity response. The participant asked how the POLAD/military relationship would work in those scenarios.

These scenarios are going to be the more significant situations, short of war. The military will be very significant players, especially in disaster response, because of their enormous capabilities. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) may have the expertise, and even have some of the funding and the first response professionals, but at the end of the day USAID does not have Chinook helicopters, Black Hawks, refuelers, a hospital ship, or large response teams. These assets are available in the military to support or, in fact, constitute emergency response missions. An excellent example of the importance of this capability was the response to the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. The departments involved learned from that experience the importance of stockpiled supplies.

With respect to the response for mass atrocity, the key is to have a high-level accurate definition of the mission. With that, the various relevant departments and agencies can sit down and decide what needs to happen on the ground and provide the appropriate recommendations to the political level. A particular challenge, of course, is that in such situations there may have been or still is a shooting war going on, and then
there are all the challenges that are being aired in all the op-eds concerning possible intervention in Syria.

Such crises are inevitable. The U.S. will have to respond to them, which will require some surge capacity in the form of personnel with relevant expertise, for instance languages, local knowledge, and contacts. This requires having qualified cadres on hand to deal with these future crises. This also means having qualified POLADs who can serve at operational levels.

The term “qualified” here means officers possessing traditional diplomatic skills, something that sometimes gets overlooked. In a crisis situation, nothing replaces local language capability and local political and historical knowledge. Those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have many stories arising from the lack of these skills.

In addition to ensuring individual skills, employing the right organizations is crucial. Existing organizations, structures, and procedures should always be used. In Afghanistan and in Iraq, the structures were not right for a number of years. That is not a reflection on the Coalition Provisional Authority, who were trying to do a difficult job while trying to build an organization. Instead, existing organizations, like Army contracting or the Corps of Engineers, should have been used for reconstruction.

Possibly more important a U.S. Forces headquarters organization was not installed in Afghanistan until years after the U.S. entered the country. There is a legitimate concern, stemming from U.S. experience in Bosnia, that installing a formal military unit becomes permanent, but despite that circumstance, once the decision is made to become involved then existing organizations are required.

Returning to the question of State and its personnel resources to support the POLAD program, where should the emphasis be in providing military experience? Participation in pre-deployment military exercises is an excellent opportunity, especially for someone who is going to deploy with a designated unit. Another excellent opportunity, or opportunities, is the various military staff colleges. However, taking advantage of these opportunities raises a problem with synchronizing assignments as well as the availability of people—a real hurdle for State—but such opportunities would be valuable.

Of course, the departments should not overlook the advantages obtained from the reverse flow—the
assignment of military officers to State. Apart from giving military officers the required joint service credit, it provides for useful professional experience.

Responding to a question about POLADs in a combat situation, it was noted that the general usefulness of a political advisor was clear. However, there was a great deal of variety in such situations. In Iraq, where the ambassador and military commander worked in close proximity, the need for the commander to have a POLAD or the ambassador to have a defense attaché seemed superfluous. In consideration of the coalition character of the Iraq and Afghanistan situations, the usefulness of political advisors—and not just American political advisors—is obvious.

The importance of personal chemistry has been noted already, but it should be considered as an important factor outside of the command as well as inside the command’s area of responsibility. The POLAD needs to provide connectivity to other players—ambassadors, officials in State, and local and regional government officials—by drawing on personal experience and personal contacts.

Asking about POLAD training or preparation, General Petraeus was informed that there is a POLAD course at the Foreign Service Institute, but it is only for three days, and there was some question about its content and quality. Further discussion followed on the desirable or necessary elements of pre-assignment training for POLADs. These included:

- Overview of the job requirements for POLADs, tactics, techniques, and procedures.
- Organization and activities of combatant commands and other relevant military organizations.
- Military culture and standards, and especially introduction to the military planning culture.

Some of this orientation could be generic in nature and some assignment specific. Of course, the degree of formal training or preparation needed would depend upon the candidate’s previous exposure to the military, to include attendance at military schools such as the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the National War College, or the Capstone course.

Finally, a fairly detailed discussion ensued on building and fostering the institutional side of the Foreign Service, the State Department structure, and especially the Foreign Service Institute. FSI should include an element that would build a capacity for developing and fostering doctrine and ideas, and that oversees professional development in order to produce senior leaders. This function would also include a formal “Lessons Learned” capability and activity. The military does this quite extensively, producing manuals for counterinsurgency, leadership, and other subjects important for the military professional. The CIA is doing some of the same things, developing and promulgating good professional behavior among its employees.

FSI needs to do something similar for diplomatic professionals. Some skepticism was expressed given the history of State on training and education and the approach to anything labeled doctrine, but there are State Department policies, procedures, regulations, and traditions embodied in the Foreign Affairs Manual series. That is, after all, State Department doctrine, and FSI should be engaged in turning that material into lessons learned, lessons to be passed on, and professional development.
**About the Simons Center**

The Arthur D. Simons Center for the Study of Interagency Cooperation is a major component of the Command and General Staff College Foundation, Inc. The Center’s mission is to foster and develop an interagency body of knowledge to enhance education at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College while facilitating broader and more effective cooperation within the U.S. government through study, research, analysis, publication, and outreach.

In addition to sponsoring programs at the Command and General Staff College, the Simons Center publishes the *InterAgency Journal* as well as special reports and publications.

For more information about the Simons Center and the CGSC Foundation visit:

www.thesimonscenter.org  •  www.cgscfoundation.org

---

**About The American Academy of Diplomacy**

The American Academy of Diplomacy’s mission is to support and strengthen U.S. diplomacy and enhance public appreciation of its critical role in advancing the national interest.

In pursuit of its goals, the Academy supports programs that help diplomats respond to a world undergoing change, highlights past achievements and future opportunities for U.S. diplomacy, advocates for the resources needed to conduct an effective foreign policy, and fosters constructive debate on the best use of U.S. diplomatic assets.

Academy members are former career and non-career U.S. government officials who have served with distinction in international affairs. They are elected by their peers based on criteria of professionalism and achievement, and reflecting the Academy’s commitment to diversity.

For more information visit:  www.academyofdiplomacy.org