

Embassy Reform

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Mr. C. T. “Chuck” Phelps took a seat in the soft leather chair in the library of his spacious Georgetown home following the midnight telephone call from his good friend and fellow Iowan, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA). Senator Harkin had called to inform Chuck that he had finally been confirmed as the new U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic (DOMREP) on the final day of business before the Senate adjourned for the Christmas break. It had been a long, sometimes painful nomination process—too long and unnecessarily painful from Chuck’s perspective. Despite the fact that a Democrat had sponsored Chuck at his confirmation hearing, the Democratically controlled Senate had moved very slowly to confirm President Bush’s nominee. Nevertheless, Chuck knew he would have little time to celebrate the novel distinction of being called “Mr. Ambassador” before the somber reality and challenge of leading a very different type of organization descended on him like a ton of bricks.

As a successful executive in the private business sector and as a former Navy lawyer, Chuck was understandably anxious with the prospect of representing his country—not to mention his “appointing authority,” the president of the United States—in a region of such economic and strategic importance. He knew that along with the prestige, pomp, and circumstance of the lifestyle of the overseas diplomat, comes the significant and profound responsibility of leading an eclectic, diverse group of professional diplomats and government agencies in the coordination and execution of United States foreign policy. The new ambassador was anxious to get started.

During the eight months it took to complete the Senate confirmation process, Chuck had already begun to prepare for his new assignment. He had received specific tasking from the president at a White House coffee shortly after his formal nomination. “Chuck,” the president had said, “I need three things accomplished in the Dominican Republic. First, I want a smooth, fair, and democratic presidential election next year—an election no one can question or protest. Second, I want you to stop the drugs moving through the Caribbean—I am going to make counter-drug policy a big part of next year’s State of the Union address and I need some positive numbers to back me up. This also ties into our war on terrorism. If and when we move the war to our backyard, I want cooperation from our neighbors. You need to grease the skids. Third, get our people and the Dominicans ready for another natural disaster—hurricane or earthquake. It is not a question of *if* another disaster will occur, only a question of when. We had a satisfactory response after Hurricane Georges and Mitch in 1998, but I believe we can do better.”

“Oh yeah,” said the president as he smiled and added, “When you finish with all that, have some fun in the sun in the beautiful Caribbean!”

With his assignment and objectives clear, Chuck had begun to prepare for his new job. He began by visiting with the DOMREP country desk officer at the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs in the political affairs section of the State Department. The new ambassador, an accomplished and successful businessman, was already skeptical of an embassy chain-of-command structure before he talked to the desk officer. As a political appointee, he reported to the president through the secretary of state—as such, his responsibility, lines of authority, and accountability with the State Department were clear. Simply put, he worked for the State Department. What was not so clear was his relationship with and authority over the other government agencies and personnel attached as “tenant commands” to the embassy. While other government agencies reported to him as the ambassador, they also received direction from and reported to their respective agency headquarters in Washington. Chuck foresaw potential accountability problems with these fuzzy lines of authority between him and the numerous agencies working at the embassy. Could he fire people? Give them deadlines? What could he do if his priorities differed from those of the Department of Defense or the Department of Agriculture? He was the ambassador, but was he really the boss? Too late to worry about this now, he thought to himself. He would have to figure it out “in country.”

Through the desk officer, Chuck had arranged unofficial consultations and orientation briefs with many of the flagship government agencies that had significant representation at the United States Embassy in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. These include various State Department “counselors” assigned to the economic & political section, the public affairs section, the security section, and the administrative section. Other government agencies represented include the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Justice, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Commerce, the Peace Corps, and the Department of Agriculture among others. To Chuck’s surprise, there would be over twenty-five different agencies, departments, sections, and private contractors to oversee and coordinate in leading the embassy—or “mission”—in accomplishing his goals and objectives. The image of “herding cats” came to mind as Chuck pondered his future in the Caribbean.

More troubling to Chuck than the mission’s multi-agency leadership challenge was the disturbing information he was receiving, albeit unofficially, regarding the reputation, ineffectiveness, and productivity of the mission staff. He was told by the State Department that the problem was not with the quality of personnel—in fact the State Department had been sending only what they termed *A-grade* career diplomats to the country in an attempt to turn *the embassy problem* around. They said the embassy had been without an ambassador for over a year and the lack of strong leadership had taken its toll on performance. The State Department could not—or would not—speak for the quality of personnel from other agencies represented at the embassy. Chuck recalled having been told by the State Department desk officer that he would have to “get those other agencies under control” if he wanted to

make improvements. The other agencies needed to be “brought in line” with State Department’s foreign policy objectives. State had assured Chuck that their people would not cause any problems he encountered in country. Despite the fact that State had the most people assigned to the embassy and had the responsibility to oversee embassy finances, the problem they had said, “lies elsewhere.”

Next, Chuck had met with representatives from the Department of Justice. He had been surprised at the large number of mission personnel in country representing several different Justice Department offices at the mission. Representation included the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the U.S. Marshals Service. These offices, Chuck thought, would provide the lion’s share of the effort in the war on drugs—one of his three big areas of concern.

Chuck had appreciated the honesty of the Justice Department desk officer during their discussions. “Mr. Phelps,” she had said, “Justice people don’t always work well with each other or with other agencies in our overseas embassies. Our agenda ranges from drug interdiction operations, money laundering, and extradition cases, to training, criminal investigations and adjudication of complex policy issues. To be successful, we must work with other agencies, including the State Department’s counter-drug Bureau for International Narcotics/Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the military, and our intelligence agencies—not to mention our relationship with the host country. Embassies in general—and the Justice Department in particular—suffer from the ‘left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing’ syndrome. This problem seems to be particularly acute in DOMREP. Because of the large number of Dominicans in the United States and the correspondingly large population traveling back and forth between our countries, many of our agents view DOMREP as an extension of the United States. We tell our agents to keep the embassy—and each other—informed of their actions, but sometimes they don’t do a very good job. This is particularly true with sharing of intelligence. For example, the DEA might have some information on the whereabouts of a wanted narcotics dealer—a drug dealer for whom the U.S. Marshals are desperately searching. This same drug trafficker might be on an FBI protection list as a “source” in a New York City drug bust! This sort of thing happens more than we would like. We just need to communicate better.”

The desk officer continued, “We want you to know that the Justice Department will support you one hundred percent after you arrive in the Dominican Republic. It is an understatement to say that all law enforcement agencies—including the Defense Department when operating in a counter-drug role overseas—need to do a better job of simply communicating with each other. I would appreciate it if you give us a call after you have had time to assess the situation and let us know how we can do our job better. I will tell you that our people in DOMREP have at times voiced frustration with the level of support received from their State Department ‘landlords.’ The problems vary from having the necessary office space and secure communication lines to effectively do their job to the quality of the private residences provided by the mission housing pool. Our DEA attaché in DOMREP has also indicated during consultations in D.C. that his office was often ‘left out of the loop’ by the

State Department ‘mafia’ as well as the Military Group and the defense attaché. These problems are common in many embassies, but they seem to be worse in DOMREP.”

The Justice officer smiled and concluded, “We are just one cog in a big wheel—a wheel that you have to try to move in the right direction. Every country is different and offers a different set of challenges unique to a country’s culture. Best of luck to you sir.”

Chuck felt a little better after hearing the voice of support and cooperation from the Justice Department. He was concerned with the apparent disconnect between State and Justice Department’s assessment of the mission “problems.” All in good time, he thought to himself. All in good time.

Chuck’s next stop had been at the Pentagon where he met briefly with the Hon. Douglas J. Feith, under secretary of defense for policy and two action officers from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Because formal briefings and consultations were not permitted new ambassadors until after Senate confirmation, Secretary Feith had only greeted Chuck and mentioned that, if confirmed, his office would work to help the new ambassador with two of the three mission objectives assigned by President Bush: counter-drug operations and natural disaster mitigation and assistance. With that, Chuck followed the two action officers to a small briefing room where each provided an informal DoD assessment of the situation in the Caribbean.

Army Lieutenant Colonel Ben Hughes, a foreign area officer who recently reported from U.S. Southern Command in Miami, began the conversation, “Mr. Phelps, I will be brief and to the point. The counter-drug effort in the Caribbean is a full time job, but the Defense Department is limited to what we can do by ourselves. We have to work with many different agencies, including DEA, U.S. Coast Guard, State Department, the Europeans—particularly the Dutch, the Brits and the French—as well as the host nation to make anything work. The Defense Department’s “main battery” in the war on drugs in the Caribbean is Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF East) located in Key West, Florida. They actually collect the intelligence and have operational control over some DoD and Coast Guard assets during counter-drug operations. We have had some success, but frankly speaking, we have had too many embarrassments. Simply put, we need to do better than we are doing if we want to make a dent in the drug flow through the Caribbean.”

LTC Hughes continued, “The DoD piece in the Caribbean drug war is small, but significant. We could do better if we received better cooperation and support from the Coast Guard and DEA. There have been times when DEA would be covertly tracking a ‘go-fast’ boat loaded with drugs to see where and who would be at the drop off point, when a USCG helicopter, working with a U.S. Navy ship would—to DEA’s surprise—swoop down for the ‘bust’ and disrupt the entire operation. Sir, I tell you this because the DEA agents, the Defense Department and Coast Guard officers involved in this case all worked ‘together’ at the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo. We at the Defense Department become very frustrated with the other agencies that won’t talk to us. Believe it or not we have seen Coast Guard ships and U.S. Navy ships working the same case—but not in coordination—during a

counter-drug operation because different operational commanders, JIATF East and the local Coast Guard command in Puerto Rico were not talking to each other. Another embarrassing example of poor coordination at your prospective embassy was the time the commander in chief's (CINC's) embassy representative, the Military Group commander, had purchased computer hardware and software worth \$20,000 for the Dominican military to use in counter-drug operations. It was discovered only a few days after delivery that the State Department counter-drug section at the embassy, INL, had already purchased the same equipment for the same Dominican office for the same purpose! Unfortunately I could go on and on."

"Mr. Phelps," he concluded, "The Caribbean needs help in coordinating the interagency counter-drug effort. I think I can speak for my boss on this one—if you can provide the leadership from Dominican Republic, you will have the Defense Department's support."

Chuck thanked the officer and thought about this new information. Chuck had taken over dysfunctional companies in the private business sector before and straightened them out in short order. Was the public sector the same? Would "best practices" of the private sector work in a non-profit, government organization? He would soon have a chance to find out.

The other OSD action officer, LTCOL Murray, USMC, continued the discussion, "Mr. Phelps, I want to briefly discuss natural disaster mitigation and relief from a Defense Department perspective. I recently completed a tour as the defense liaison officer with the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in Costa Rica. I worked extensively on disasters in Central America and the Caribbean, including Hurricane Georges, which struck Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic in 1998. As you probably know, OFDA is the FEMA equivalent that oversees United States disaster assistance in foreign countries. OFDA actually works for USAID, not the State Department."

LTCOL Murray continued, "Sir, while I will have more detail for you after your confirmation, I want to leave you with a few key 'lessons learned' we put together after the Hurricane Georges relief effort. First, after a natural disaster, there is little the United States military can do to help you without first receiving approval from OFDA. OFDA controls all relief funding, and as such, must decide what relief services are needed and then decide whom they want to pay to provide those services. OFDA might choose to pay the Defense Department to provide assistance or they might choose someone or some organization that can provide the services at a lower cost—it is their call. The commander in chief (CINC)—in this case U.S. Southern Command—will certainly provide emergency assistance in life or death situations if you request it. The more routine, large scale relief efforts, however—like road clearing, bridge repair or the distribution of relief supplies—are significantly more expensive and must be approved, coordinated and funded by OFDA. The Defense Department is sometimes frustrated by this chain of command limitation because our instinct is to help and help fast. We have to remember that the agency holding the purse strings makes the decisions—and in this case it is OFDA."

“Sir,” he continued, “I tell you this because the Defense Department had some coordination problems with other agencies during the Hurricane Georges relief effort—problems might have been avoided if the embassy personnel had been better prepared for the operation. Unfortunately there was a great deal of finger pointing between agencies during and after the operation, each trying to place the ‘unprepared’ label on the other guy. For example, USAID blamed the embassy Military Group for not having a damage-assessment plan ready to implement immediately after the storm. The Military Group’s position was that the damage assessment should have been the responsibility of a special Dominican team trained by USAID personnel! A prepared and rehearsed plan could have clarified the responsibility. Another problem emerged in the process of deciding where the relief goods should be delivered—who has the priority? The CINC and other DoD organizations provided several helicopters (at OFDA expense) to distribute relief supplies to flood-stricken regions of the country. Defense personnel were waiting for direction on where to take the supplies—but USAID had moved on to other problems and was not prepared to tell us exactly where to deliver the relief items. In the end, our helicopter pilots worked with—of all people—the Peace Corps to determine where the relief supplies should be delivered!”

Concluding, LTCOL Murray said, “My only point, sir, is that I think the embassy in DOMREP needs someone to bring the various players together, read them the riot act, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each group before, during and after a natural disaster. Most embassies do not have these problems. I think your embassy only needs some strong leadership and clear direction. If some don’t like it, give them a plane ticket home.”

LTCOL Murray smiled and added, “Sir, please forgive my bluntness—it comes from my Marine training.”

Chuck laughed and thanked the Marine for his candor. He had used the “my way or the highway” leadership technique before with mixed results. Chuck decided to refrain from judgment until he had a chance to see things for himself and form his own opinion based on the facts on the ground.

Following his Senate confirmation, Ambassador Phelps had three weeks to attend the mandatory ambassador “charm school,” pack his household goods, and tie up the loose ends in his private and professional life before he jetted off to the Caribbean. As a successful businessman, he decided he wanted to visit one more agency in Washington D.C. before his departure—the Department of Commerce. Chuck was a strong believer in the link between strong, healthy democracies and strong, healthy economies. The president of the United States wanted a strong democracy and fair, democratic elections in the Dominican Republic. Chuck thought a strong economy might be the best “weapon” he had to make this happen. He felt he might be able to use the Commerce Department to help build a strong Dominican economy while at the same time help build U.S. overseas markets in the Caribbean. And besides, Chuck wanted to get a “businessman’s” view of the embassy

organizational and operational problems alluded to by the State, Defense and Justice Department representatives.

On the day before his scheduled departure, Chuck arranged a quick visit to the Herbert C. Hoover Commerce building near the White House. Entering through 14th Street foyer, Chuck proceeded to the designated briefing room in the Office of Strategic Industries and Economic Security (SIES). Chuck checked his directions twice. SIES seemed like an odd place to conduct his initial Commerce Department brief, but it was the office his secretary had written down on his schedule.

As Chuck entered the large, corner office, a tall man in conservative dress stood and greeted him, “Welcome to the Commerce Department Mr. Ambassador. I am Sandy Martin, SIES director of Latin American operations for the sale of defense articles and services. When I saw Dominican Republic on the docket, I asked to brief you personally so that I can bring to your attention some issues we have in your country. Please sit down.”

Sandy began, “The Dominican Republic has one of the largest militaries in Central America and the Caribbean. We at Commerce believe it is an important, untapped market that offers great opportunity for our defense industry—particularly patrol boats and aircraft. Unfortunately, we are not getting the support we need from either the military or State Department representatives at the embassy. State is the more problematic of the two. The problem with the embassy Military Group is simply that we at Commerce are not a priority for them. They help us when they have time, but our people in DOMREP are pretty much on their own in dealing with the Dominican military. We do the most business in countries where the Defense and Commerce Departments work closely on the same sheet of music. I would appreciate it if you could convince your military staff to place the sale of defense items higher on their priority list.”

“The State Department,” Sandy continued, “is where we really need your help. First, the State people have decided to move our offices from the downtown business sector to a new complex on the embassy grounds, citing security reasons. Please see if you can put a stop to this. We work better if we are close to our customers. Second, and more importantly, the State Department has some officers in country who are very much against arms sales to the Dominican Republic. They cite many of the tired economic arguments such as the ‘struggling, fragile economy’ or that the ‘money would be better spent on social programs’ as reasons to keep the U.S. defense industry out of the country. Mr. Ambassador, as a businessman, I know you will understand that if United States does not sell arms to these countries, then the Europeans will. Let’s be realistic, we want those markets. We need you to go down there and clarify the priorities for the people at Defense and State—it would be most appreciated. They just need a little leadership.”

Chuck was shocked that this was the one issue Commerce Department wanted to discuss with him. He assumed they would want to talk about expanding markets for agricultural products, electronics, tourism or garment manufacturers—areas that might provide jobs for an impoverished population. He was surprised that the sale of weapons seemed to be the

priority of the Commerce Department. Chuck was beginning to realize that some of the problems at the embassy might stem from guidance and direction from the various agency headquarters in D.C. This had been a most enlightening conversation.

Sandy and Chuck continued the conversation for a few more minutes touching on a variety of subjects. Finally, Chuck rose to leave, “Thanks for your insight Sandy. I cannot make any promises as I am still putting together my vision for the embassy and the country—from the United States ambassador’s perspectives. When I decide where the sale of weapons fits in the big picture, you will be the first to know. Thanks for your time.”

Chuck hurried down to 14th Street exit where he hailed a taxi to take him to his home to finish preparing for his flight the next day to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic.

As Chuck stood in front of the full-length mirror admiring himself in his new, crisp white suit and white fedora—the diplomatic dress required of a new ambassador when presenting his credentials to a head of state—he chuckled to himself as he recalled the first meeting he chaired with his key embassy staff on the day after his arrival in Santo Domingo.

Chuck wanted to start the meeting in his office at 0900 sharp. At 0905, his office still empty, Chuck called his executive officer—or in State Department lingo: the deputy chief of mission (DCM)—to ask, sarcastically, what his staff thought was more important than the first meeting with their new ambassador. He chuckled to himself as he recalled the response.

“Don’t worry,” the DCM said, “These meetings never start on time. Some are late because their offices are so far away from the embassy and the traffic is always a problem. Others have to finish morning phone calls to their Washington headquarters—you know, to get their daily marching orders. I’ll let you know when everyone arrives.”

Stunned, Chuck returned to his office to wait—it was too soon to get mad. He stared at the water stains on the ceiling of his office and thought of the broken and cracked cement curbs along the driveway to the front of the embassy. A baseball fan to the core, Chuck liked to compare his ambassador stint to a nine-inning baseball game. This was only the top of the first inning.

Unfortunately, when the staff finally arrived, the situation only deteriorated. Chuck’s first concern was that only six of the staff showed for the meeting. When queried, the DCM explained that this was the “kitchen cabinet,” a select group chosen to assist the ambassador with the important issues of the day. Of the six present, five were State Department representatives and the other was the defense attaché. Chuck persisted and noted that many of the heads of important agencies were not present—Defense, Justice, and Commerce Departments for example—and as such, it would be difficult to impossible to obtain a full picture of embassy activities. The response was revealing.

“We used to have a bigger group,” the DCM explained, “But more people created too many problems. There was always more to talk about than could fit into the allotted time.

Plus, agency heads would take up too much time discussing schedules and events—that is, whenever they decided to show up. Too many times they would leave the country without letting the front office know. We found it easier to keep the staff meetings small—it makes decisions easier and less painful. We do meet with the entire staff every Monday morning, but that is only for administrative announcements—way too many people to get anything done.”

Not wanting the meeting to be a complete waste of time, Chuck decided to bring up one of his specific tasks as assigned by President Bush—the next Dominican presidential election. He asked Kris Larsen, the economic-political counselor, the State Department representative responsible for all political and economic issues in the country, to brief him on the status of the political parties and their respective platforms.

“I’ll tell you what I know, Mr. Ambassador,” Kris began. “The two mainstream parties have their headquarters here in Santo Domingo. There is not much difference between them. Both patronize the urban poor and make promises that will be very difficult to keep. Both are pro-United States. At least that is what I read in the local newspapers. I have trouble getting the party representatives to come to the embassy to brief me on their platforms.”

The Counselor continued, “There is a third and somewhat vocal political party operating in the northern part of the country—an area rife in poverty. They have a party leader who is trying to get on the ballot for next year’s election. He claims the established parties are trying to keep him from running. Lately, I have read reports that some members of the party are becoming violent and have protested at several of the U.S.-owned clothing factories or “maquiladoras”—sort of a “yankee-go-home” thing. We’ve seen it before. I’m having trouble getting good intelligence and the papers just cover the violence, not the politics. I’m hoping they calm down before the election.”

Chuck asked a few more questions and then adjourned the meeting. He asked his administrative counselor (AC)—the State Department individual responsible for administration, budget, and personnel—to stay behind and answer some questions.

Chuck began, “Give me your three biggest problems that affect your ability to do your job. We can talk details later, just give me the big picture.”

The AC thought for a moment and then replied, “Sir, I’m glad to report that I don’t have any problems. When I arrived at post eight months ago, things were a disaster, but I’ve pretty much fixed things. My biggest problem was insufficient funding. The embassy was trying to do way too much. I reviewed our budget and then cut out the fat to make our programs fit the budget. I reduced the number of automobiles in the embassy carpool—our people were traveling around the country way too much. I also reduced the number of trips to the United States for staff training. I come from embassies that relied upon on the job training for the staff—we can do the same here. I also cut back on the English training for the Dominican employees and cut the building maintenance staff in half. Some of the agencies complained about the cuts, but they will adjust—eventually.”

“It was not all draconian, Mr. Ambassador,” the AC continued. “We did have a large number of the Dominican staff complain about not receiving an award at the last annual award ceremony. I plan to solve this by giving every employee an award at the next ceremony—that will shut them up.”

Chuck was jolted from his daydreaming to the present by the DCM as she entered the room to tell him they had to hurry to make it to the National Palace in time for his first official meeting with the president of the Dominican Republic.

The new ambassador awoke the next morning eager to meet with his embassy law enforcement team—those at the embassy concerned with not only the drug war, but also extradition requests, terrorism, immigration issues, judicial reform, and all the variations of white collar crime including money laundering and political corruption. A full plate for even the most competent experienced professionals.

Chuck had scheduled an hour for the meeting, which was a long time by his standards, but he felt that he had a lot of ground to cover. He was surprised at the “cast of thousands” who attended the meeting. He not only had the usual cast of law enforcement characters—DEA, FBI, Immigration—but also attendees who he had not expected, including the defense attaché, Military Group commander, commerce attaché, public affairs, USAID and several junior counselor and political officers. Chuck wanted to have a meeting, not a circus. What were the security clearances of these people? He assumed they would be discussing some sensitive issues.

Remembering his baseball analogy, Chuck relaxed and let the DCM start the meeting. The meeting began with the USAID representative giving a lengthy summary of his program chartered to help the Dominican government create and train an effective pool of public defenders and prosecutors to improve the administration of the judicial system. The brief continued for over twenty minutes. Chuck could not help but notice the lack of interest and apathy of the other attendees. Understandable, thought Chuck—the USAID program has little to do with chasing down drug runners or capturing terrorists trying to enter the United States.

Following the USAID brief, the DCM asked the public affairs officer to brief the group on the local press response to an extradition of a Dominican citizen to New York City wanted for a murder charge in Queens. This discussion took another twenty minutes. By the time the immigration and naturalization officer briefed the number of Dominicans being exported from the United States back to the DOMREP for criminal activity, the sixty minute meeting was over—and the counter-drug and anti-terrorism programs had yet to be discussed!

After making another mental note in his “things we have to do better” file, Chuck dismissed the group but asked those with a specific counter-drug or counter-terrorism portfolio to stay behind. He had to ask some questions about the second of the three specific

taskings he had received from his boss. He hoped he would get a better answer than he got from his political officer concerning the upcoming presidential election.

When the room cleared, the agency heads from the DEA, FBI, U.S. Marshals, INL, U.S. Coast Guard and the Military Group had stayed behind to discuss the counter-drug program. Finally, Chuck thought, he would see where he stood in the drug war.

“Gentlemen,” Chuck began, “Who is in charge of the embassy’s war on drugs?” A simple question Chuck thought—but silence filled the room. “Let me ask this a different way,” Chuck continued, “Where is the embassy counter-drug plan? How do you coordinate your activities?” The silence was not encouraging.

The DEA attaché sheepishly began to speak, “Sir, my office probably is more directly involved than anyone else in the war on drugs, but my agents don’t have the time to work closely with the other agencies. The only coordination we do is at the law enforcement meeting we just completed and you see how that turned out. Anyway, my office goes directly after drug dealers while the INL and the Military Group focus on training and equipping the Dominican military for the counter-drug war. I don’t feel we can always trust the Dominican military to support the DEA’s operations so we have stopped working with them. The DEA does work with a Dominican special counter-drug police unit but the INL and the regular Dominican military don’t like working with this unit. As such, the DEA—my agents—have gone our own way and mostly work independently. That creates less confrontation between Dominican and United States agencies that way.”

The INL representative interrupted the DEA agent, “Mr. Ambassador, I have my marching orders from the State Department. There are some unsavory characters in this special police counter-drug unit the DEA just mentioned. Until the State Department confirms that none of the Dominican special agents are guilty of human rights abuses, they prohibit me from working with the Dominican unit. This ‘human rights abuse’ screening process can take a long time.”

Frustrated, Chuck commented rhetorically, “I thought we all worked for the same government!” Remembering a fact from his counter-drug briefings in Washington, Chuck next asked, “What about the border with Haiti? I was briefed that it is a crossing point for large amounts of illegal drugs flowing to the Dominican Republic and on to Europe and the United States. What can you tell me about this?”

Silence again. Finally the DEA attaché admitted, “Sir, it takes six hours just to drive to the border. When you get to the border, it is hard to get any information because of the sparse population. The fact is, there is plenty to keep us busy in the city—I don’t think any of us have been to the border area in over a month.” The silence around the table confirmed that no one had been to the border recently.

The ambassador had one more question for the group before he ended the meeting. This time he directed his question to the Coast Guard officer sitting at the far end of the table. “Washington seems to think counter-drug operations in the Caribbean are disorganized,

chaotic, and ineffective. I hope the reality is not as bad as I was briefed. How exactly do we coordinate operations?”

The others at the table—relieved they were not asked the question—all turned to look at the now nervous Coast Guard officer. “Mr. Ambassador, I work with our Coast Guard command in Puerto Rico—the Greater Antilles Section (GANTSEC)—to coordinate operations in the DOMREP. GANTSEC is an 0-6 command and reports to the Coast Guard District 7 commander who is a two-star admiral in Miami. That admiral has responsibility for all Coast Guard activities in the eastern Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic. USCG District 7 in Miami takes direct responsibility for operations in the western Caribbean, including Haiti and Cuba. As we fall in their area of responsibility, GANTSEC lets me know when they want to run a counter-drug operation in or around Dominican territorial waters. I don’t get involved much in District 7 operations in the western Caribbean. Some of the confusion might be caused by the split responsibility for the Caribbean—GANTSEC works for District 7, but operationally speaking, they are really two different commands. Sometimes JIATF East gets involved, but they work for the commander in chief of the U.S. Southern Command and are not in my chain of command. We try to coordinate with the DEA when we can, but the DEA people here have to coordinate directly with the DEA office in Puerto Rico and their headquarter in Washington. By the time all of the agency coordination is done, the bad guys have disappeared. Sometimes we operate with insufficient coordination, causing some of the horror stories you might have heard back in D.C.”

The Military Group commander added, “To add to the confusion, my job as the Defense Department representative in the counter-drug war is to provide equipment and training to the Dominican military, and in some instances, operational equipment—like helicopters—to the DEA to help in the counter-drug effort. The DEA also can request specific training by U.S. military forces for Dominican counter-drug units. My planning horizon can be six months or longer to provide the requested counter-drug equipment or provide specific counter-drug training to the DOMREP military. This does not fit well with the DEA’s more immediate operational requirements. When the DEA moves, they move fast. By the time I can answer a DEA request, the requirement has often gone away. This has caused the Military Group and the DEA to go in different operational directions, resulting in a serious disconnect between real time counter-drug operations and the Defense Department’s efforts to provide training and equipment. We need to do better.”

Before Chuck could adjourn the meeting, the FBI representative spoke up, “Sir, we haven’t discussed the war on terrorism yet, but I want to make it clear we have a long way to go in that area also. It is not fair to pick on the INS people when they are not here, but we—the FBI—have an awful time getting information from them regarding their immigration cases. Just last week the embassy INS office had information of three suspicious individuals from Yemen traveling on fake United States passports with student visas through the Dominican airport trying to get to Miami. My office was not aware of this until after the Dominicans had sent the three back to Yemen. The Dominicans did the right thing by

notifying our INS but the INS, from my perspective, dropped the ball by not letting us know immediately. We would have loved to talk to these guys.”

With the FBI getting the last word, Chuck ended the meeting and made a mental note to schedule separate counter-drug and counter terrorism meetings early next week—too much to talk about. This would take some work to fix. He had seen similar problems in the private business sector when the planning, design and manufacturing side of the business was not in synch with the marketing, sales and service operations. One side needed time and patience—the other needed a fast, flexible response. He knew he could overcome the problems, but it would not be an easy fix.

The last meeting on the Friday of Chuck’s first week on the job was with his natural disaster mitigation and relief team, composed of representatives from the State and Defense Departments, USAID, Public Affairs, Peace Corps and Agriculture. An eclectic group Chuck thought, but he was beyond being surprised at what agencies appeared for any particular meeting. For the initial set of meetings, he was resigned to working with whoever showed up, whether it seemed to make sense or not. He wanted to move this meeting along, as he had scheduled a large reception for Dominican baseball players, including Sammy Sosa and Pedro Martinez, at his residence that evening and he needed time to help his wife prepare.

Skipping formalities, Chuck moved quickly to the point, “The president has asked me to take a close look at the U.S. government relief efforts during and after natural disasters. As you know better than I, hurricane season will be here soon. If DOMREP gets hit hard, who is in charge of the relief effort and how is the effort coordinated?”

The large man sitting on Chuck’s right quickly bellowed “USAID is in charge of disaster mitigation and relief. As the USAID director in country, I am responsible for every aspect of the operation.”

Chuck was pleasantly surprised that USAID would step forward and claim responsibility for this important program. Maybe his third task from the president would be an easier or less painful issue to manage. Chuck responded to the USAID comment, “I’m glad to hear it. Please elaborate.”

“As you know, sir, the United States agency responsible for disaster assistance overseas, OFDA, is part of the USAID organization. USAID has a robust program to help train and equip the Dominicans to prepare themselves to respond to a natural disaster. We believe it better to help a country help themselves after a disaster as opposed to the United States trying to do everything for them.

“If a disaster does occur, we quickly bring OFDA representatives into the country to assess the needs of the people and then start to work with the Dominicans to provide the essentials such as food, emergency shelter, and water to the affected populations. The embassy USAID office—my office—works with the OFDA representatives to fund activities

required to provide for the immediate needs of the people. We do not have a full time OFDA representative in country—we fly them in as required. The other U.S. agencies are required to support USAID efforts. Normally USAID does not need much help, but occasionally one of the agencies sitting at this table has a capability that we need so we pay them to provide the service.”

The USAID director continued to elaborate on the extraordinary effectiveness of his organization and assured the ambassador that he had nothing to worry about—USAID was in charge. Chuck was about to ask for independent confirmation of the USAID version of the story when his secretary stuck her head in the room to tell Chuck he had an important phone call from the French ambassador. Chuck excused the group and promised to meet again soon to finish the meeting. He took the phone call then hurried home to prepare for the big Dominican baseball reception at his residence.

The new ambassador was enjoying his first diplomatic reception. Chuck was finally relaxed as he excused himself from a conversation with Bud Selig, professional baseball’s ninth commissioner, to work his way to the bar to refresh his drink. While he had yet to develop the entire picture, he was beginning to understand why this embassy had some problems. As he approached the bar, he greeted the Military Group commander who was also in line for a fresh drink. While ambassadors would normally have “head of the line” privileges, Chuck decided to wait with and pick the mind of the senior defense representative assigned to his country. He started by asking the Navy commander to comment on the rosy picture portrayed by the USAID director during the “disaster relief” meeting held earlier in the day.

The commander rolled his eyes and responded, “Sir, USAID does a great job of coordinating the USAID piece of the operation. They need to do a better job of working with the rest of the world—they need other agencies a lot more than he indicated. For example, after Hurricane Georges in ’98, it took almost three days for the OFDA representative to arrive in country to do battle damage assessment—that is too long. USAID’s ‘plan’ does not include many of the fundamentals required to support disaster relief—things like transportation for damage assessment if roads are washed out, communication capability to support coordinated relief efforts, coordination with other countries providing relief to avoid inefficient redundancy and the building of a data base to determine not only the amount of relief supplies needed but also delivery priorities.

“Mr. Ambassador, no agency, including mine, has done enough to plan for the next disaster. I’m only saying I don’t think USAID has thought through the depth and complexity of “being totally responsible” for a major disaster relief operation. The problem is compounded by the fact that almost everyone at USAID with disaster experience, including the director, has been rotated out of the country. USAID has a culture of working independently from other United States agencies and directly with local Dominican governmental officials and private contractors. They seem to have a ‘go-it-alone’ culture.” The commander smiled, “Sort of like the U.S. Navy. Going alone works okay in peacetime, but in war, or during a natural disaster in the case of USAID, it can be problematic. USAID needs the Defense Department to get the job done. We need to work hard to better align our efforts.”

Chuck responded, “I think I understand. I took a phone call from the French ambassador this afternoon. He has a team of disaster relief specialists coming in next week from Paris. He said his office had called USAID and tried to set up a coordination meeting but our USAID people seemed unsure and not very interested in coordinating with his team. I still need to get our side of the story, but regardless, this does not make us look very professional.”

Chuck finally arrived at the bar and ordered tonic water with a splash of sweet Caribbean rum and a twist of lime. He thanked the commander for his candor and made a mental note to schedule some extra time for his next “natural disaster” staff meeting. He now realized that his tour of duty as an ambassador was going to be anything but a relaxing party in the Caribbean. This embassy needed to fundamentally change the way it did business and he was the guy who could make it happen. The embassy needed many things, not the least of which was a unifying vision—something to focus every agency on the same goal or set of goals. Yes, the embassy needed a change, but not tonight, thought Chuck. As he collected his drink and walked towards Sammy Sosa and Juan Marichal who were autographing baseballs for an appreciative group of guests, he decided the transformation could wait until tomorrow.

The case study, Embassy Reform, is a fictional narrative based loosely on actual events occurring during the author’s tour as the commander, Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) to the United States Embassy, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic from 1998 to 2001. While the individuals portrayed (and some events) are fictional, the government agencies, relationships between agencies, and organizational challenges are not. The reader should know that while many of the events depicted in this case are based on actual occurrences, many of the details of the events and their problematic nature have been purposely exaggerated for academic, instructional purposes. The problems associated with this embassy are common to many large organizations and are derived from conversations between the author and representatives from United States government agencies as well representatives from countries with interests in the Caribbean.

Finally, and most importantly, the author wishes to emphasize that the United States personnel representing government agencies at U.S. Embassies overseas, particularly the State Department foreign service officers, are thoroughly professional and should be commended for their extraordinary effort in making a quite difficult—sometimes thankless—task appear routine. The United States Embassy in the Dominican Republic was not the dysfunctional organization depicted in this case though there was a need for constructive change and improvement when the new ambassador arrived in country. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the author that the United States military can learn much from our diplomatic colleagues in the execution of our overseas duties. Working as a team is far more constructive than working alone.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Administrative Counselor
AOR	Area of Responsibility
CINC	Commander in Chief
DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
DOMREP	Dominican Republic
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GANTSEC	U.S. Coast Guard Greater Antilles Section, San Juan, Puerto Rico
INL	Bureau for International Narcotics/Law Enforcement Affairs
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
SIES	Office of Strategic Industries and Economic Security
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps
USSOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command, Miami, Florida

