

EXCHANGING INFORMATION IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHODS OF PREVENTION



What is your background and how does it help you in the execution of your present duties?

I have just over twenty-five years of international and operational experience in all facets of security. Every job that I have held has contributed something to my knowledge base and this has enabled me to build up a solid security portfolio.

“We always have something to learn from other people, nations and their cultures”

However, I should say that what helped me most – and this is incredibly useful in my current job – is my interest and curiosity about people elsewhere in the world. We always have something

to learn from other people, nations and their cultures. This interest probably stems more from my university degree studies in the arts (Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Literature, History, Philosophy) than from my postgraduate degrees in Law and Strategic Intelligence.

Seriously though, I believe that the development of this interest in other national cultures goes back to when I was very young, the time when I used to accompany my father, who was working for the US Navy as a Naval Aviator. Of course, later on this curiosity was reinforced when I was traveling a lot myself and was posted abroad. My military service in Vietnam was also instructive in terms of analyzing conflict.

Today, these many experiences and this desire to learn from others I find are still very useful. Especially when I have to understand a person’s attitude or analyze a situation in a context where the parameters are not always clear.

“The best way to get a clear understanding of a national culture is to visit that country and meet the people”

In any case, from all these experiences I’ve learned one thing: the best way to get a clear understanding of a national culture is to visit that country and meet the people. You shouldn’t rely only on the media to form an opinion about them.

What is your current job?

I am the Regional Security Officer of the Tri-Mission in Belgium. This position places me in charge of the analysis, organization and coordination of America’s security interests in this region. In particular, the security of the personnel and facilities of the US Embassy, the U.S. Mission to the European Union and the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels.

What are the key factors for protecting a diplomatic organization?

The art and the difficulty of this job consists in finding the right balance between the need to guarantee the safety of the embassy staff and its visitors and the need to allow them space to carry out their diplomatic duties in a calm atmosphere that is suitable for working and negotiating.

“You have to change the image of a security officer who says no to everything”

More exactly, you have to change the image of a security officer who says no to everything and who never stops watching you and replace it with the image of a security professional who is a partner, efficient and firm when he has to be, whose only objective is your well-being and your security.

This attitude has to go right through the whole list of tasks that we have to do to ensure the safety of the embassy, whether we are organizing the protection of the surroundings of the building, the screening of our staff and visitors, or the protection of our Ambassador or an American VIP when they are going to meetings. Fortunately we have a very experienced Belgian Staff at the Embassy to assist us in this goal.

What logistics do you use? (technical systems, internal resources, suppliers etc)

My policy is quite simple: the technical support must always be up-to-date and we have to exploit the very latest technological innovations. But you must never forget that these technical supports are only tools, and their primary objective is to improve the quality of the work of the officers who use them.

We use a whole range of highly sophisticated technical systems in order to carry out the surveillance of our buildings, establish an efficient

Interview with L. Scot Folensbee

Regional Security Officer Embassy of the United States of America

communications network between our agents and assure the proper access control and screening of our personnel and visitors.

“There will never be better and more effective tool than the human brain”

Still, I'm the kind of person who remains convinced that, as far as security is concerned, there will never be better and more effective tool than the human brain.

Let's take as an example of this the preliminary controls of people in the zone around the building, or the screening of visitors. Will we ever one day have a machine that would really be better than a human brain at reading the behavior of an individual before screening? Could we really leave it to a machine to judge by itself whether a person is suspicious or does not, in its opinion, pose a threat to security?

“That's why in Brussels we have formed a close collaboration with a private security firm”

Obviously, when managing the security of an embassy, this sort of problem requires collaboration between the embassy security staff and local forces. In fact, local security forces are probably better than we are at reading the behavior of their nationals. That's why in Brussels we have formed a close collaboration with a private security firm, Securitas (with the support of the local and federal police as well as the Belgian Surete).

Summing up, I believe a great deal in "brain power", and I place an enormous amount of importance in the members of our team and also in everybody who works with us to protect US security interests. That is why we invest a great deal of time in regular training sessions for our security personnel and also spend time with them in informal meetings to exchange ideas. I like to get close to the people who are working for us because they all play a key role.

After that 9th September, can you tell us what had to change as far as security goes?

In my view, the 9/11 attacks and the Madrid and London terrorist bombings above all made the whole world sit up and understand that the threat of terrorism was not just a possibility but was very real and deadly.

For the United States this event also gave us one of the first illustrations of what terrorism could really do in comparison with the threats that our services used to receive in the context of the Cold War.

During the initial period, this brought about huge changes in the way that people behaved, especially their acceptance of personal checks in the name of security. It may even have created a rather excessive demand for security. But, little by little, the threat and the damages were forgotten and the acceptance of personal security checks then went down. So now we have to go back to find an adequate balance for each person between effective control and the respect of individual liberty in order to guarantee safety for everyone.

“...in the months that followed 9/11, we were able to ask for anything we wanted”

To illustrate what I mean, I'll take just the example of security controls in airports. Before 9/11, it was absolutely out of the question to ask anyone to take off their shoes and their belt to put them through the X-ray scanner... in the months that followed 9/11, we were able to ask for anything we wanted. But today, we have to find our way back to the right balance. This remains a challenge for every security professional.

Do you have any advice for people in charge of security for other diplomatic organizations or for business?

I have no ambitions to lecture my colleagues. Having said that, I think that the best advice

I can offer is that we should meet each other more often, exchange critical security information and also share our best practices. If you ask me, information sharing is one of the most effective methods of prevention because the more you learn, the more you know.

In this context, I think that the idea of organizing a Diplomatic-Security Network is interesting and worth pursuing. That's why I am pleased to take part in this initiative.

P.H.



Take part in the first ever Diplomatic Security Network event on 9 February 2006 in Brussels.

A conference with three top-drawer specialists sharing with you the secrets of their experience.

A meeting for decision-makers involved in questions concerning "diplomatic security" in Brussels.

An opportunity to exchange ideas and stimulate networking during an informal walking buffet lunch in a fantastic Brussels venue.

The speech will be given by :

Mr. Glenn C. Schoen, MA - Senior Manager - Ernst & Young Security and Integrity Services
Mr. Scot Folensbee - Regional Security Officer Embassy of the United States of America
Mr. Koenraad Dassen - Administrator-General - Sûreté d'Etat - Belgium

More details: diplomatic-security@securitas.be