



IN STRANGE COMPANY: AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WITH MULTINATIONAL FORCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IRAQ

BY ROLAND J. TISO JR.

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REVIEW BY JOHN P. RINGQUIST

Winston Churchill is credited with saying, “There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.”¹ The U.S. Army has frequently worked with allies during United Nations (UN) operations such as the Korean War and the interventions in Haiti, and in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) operations like the peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. An airborne infantryman with experience in Korea and Panama, Col. Roland Tiso Jr. performed multiple successive UN observer duties in Kuwait with the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission, then as chief of staff of the Multinational Force and Observers in the United States Task Force Sinai. Eventually, Colonel Tiso became the commander of Task Force Sinai, part of the Multinational Force and Observers peacekeeping organization in Egypt. Tiso’s final assignment with the international forces as chief of staff and deputy chief of staff of operations (C-3) for the Coalition Military Assistance

Training Team assigned to build the new Iraqi army, serving as the hallmark for his multinational service.

In his book *In Strange Company*, Colonel Tiso sheds light on the underreported role that United States military personnel and their foreign partners performed in peacekeeping and stabilization operations in the Middle East, notably in the Sinai Peninsula, Kuwait, and Iraq. Uncovering the complex relationship between the U.S. military and its allies with a deft and precise hand, Tiso leaves few stones unturned in citing the sometimes-ugly sources of friction and competition in these relationships. The author recognizes his succession of assignments with allies and is quick to ascribe his success in these environments as stemming from his youth in racially and culturally diverse settings. It gave him an appreciation for distinct cultures and languages and for people of different races. Throughout his book, he reiterates how these early experiences translated into the skills required for him to be successful in multinational operations.

Colonel Tiso cites the keys to his success as arising from an ability to adapt to new surroundings quickly and the mental awareness to appreciate the nuances of new situations. The numerous stories and anecdotes that form the substance in much of *In Strange Company*’s chapters add a personal dimension to his descriptions of the plans and processes that went into multinational operations—especially the 2003 invasion and postwar stabilization operations in Iraq. The author’s recollections within *In Strange Company* are equally professional memoir and personal revelations of the pressures, political considerations, and internal staff processes that shaped successful alliances.

Colonel Tiso’s leadership lessons start early in his story. His statement on page fifteen that “change is not something with which multinational organizations are comfortable” still rings true today—through the years of multinational efforts to combat terrorism, to the control of violent extremism across the Sahel, and even to the reaction to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It quickly becomes apparent in *In Strange Company* that Tiso is a systems person with a meticulous leadership philosophy and focus on real-world mission readiness. First, in the Sinai narrative and then in the Iraq stories, Tiso

demonstrates through anecdotes how care for soldiers and their welfare transcends nationality, race, culture, and language. Readers cannot help but be impressed with how the author encourages actively interacting with foreign troop contingents, a theme that he repeats throughout *In Strange Company*.

The author does valuable service with his explanation of how world politics drove the need for closer cooperation with allies and alliances worldwide in the post-Cold War period as the United States planned to reduce its military through a force drawdown. Reducing U.S. forces also affected the forces available to confront regional threats in the Middle East, Korea, and elsewhere. U.S. war plans for Iraq therefore focused on how to destroy potential threats, despite advice to retain sufficient types and numbers of U.S. forces to reconstruct and secure postwar Iraq. The lack of available U.S. forces and two subsequent major political decisions made postwar security difficult to attain: the choice to disband the Iraqi Regular Army and the decision to bar former Ba’ath Party members from serving in the new Iraqi government. Ultimately, these decisions, in tandem with the ongoing U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, created the need to reconstitute the Iraqi army and work with international allies to secure Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion.

Colonel Tiso has captured masterfully the triumph and frustration of working in a paradigm parallel to the U.S. military but with foreign forces. When his story expands to cover the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the behind-the-scenes explanation of the challenges that he faced while rebuilding the New Iraqi Army is a sobering reminder of the effort required for any disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration effort. These detailed and engaging chapters offer gripping accounts of the unanticipated consequences of disbanding the Iraqi government and army. The author’s efforts to build the New Iraqi Army and his service with the Polish-led Multinational Division (MND) offer thrilling accounts of Poland’s performance as the lead NATO ally amid a twenty-three-member international contingent. The unfiltered assessment of the MND’s command and organizational mix of languages, cultures, and ways of conducting military operations would have challenged any command. On top of it, the author reminds us of the national

contingents' need to inform their own Ministers of Defense before following MND orders. The author navigated those demands and imparts some lasting words of wisdom for future advisers and staff members in the same position, one of which resounds through the last part of *In Strange Company*: the need to rely less on aggressive or kinetic behavior and more on a passive approach in potentially tense situations involving civilians. His service with the MND and its polyglot members is a brisk reminder that allies do not have an obligation to think the same way about how to resolve problems and the need for all leaders to have a common operating picture informed by consensus and not unilateral action. Chapter 24's recounting of operations in the aftermath of the death of two American personnel is a powerful argument for understanding planning, commander's intent, and civil-military considerations before any military response, especially in an urban insurgency.

Throughout *In Strange Company*, there is a tone of humble appreciation of the author's opportunity to serve with international partners. Colonel Tiso has written a fascinating memoir with all the elements of a military travelogue while embedding plenty of professional guidance for readers. His book serves as an excellent primer for any U.S. military personnel considering being an adviser, staff in a multinational unit, or a foreign area officer. The nature of any duty as an observer or multinational staff member demands a baseline of personal discipline, acuity, and diligence. Tiso amplifies this obligation with examples from his service while remembering to honor the troops with whom he served.

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ogy, and African security affairs. He is the author of articles on counterinsurgency, the intersection of climate, technology, and security, and the African American soldiers of the Kansas-raised 79th United States Colored Infantry Regiment in the Civil War West. His duty assignments frequently have involved working with NATO allies, foreign military partners, and the delicate civil-military relations that Colonel Tiso referenced so well.

NOTE

1. "D-Day: FDR and Churchill's "Mighty Endeavor," n.d., Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/mighty-endeavor>.



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