

Security Briefs 21 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 3

Last episode we saw that legitimacy is the first core element of a security strategy called Strategic Intercultural Relations or SIR. In this episode, we'll go over a familiar tool to help you establish your legitimacy in a country which will help both your witness and your acceptance and security in a country.

STS

All of you who have gone through any of our security training courses are familiar with what we call an "STS". You can sometimes see this rendered as "Short Tenable Statement". But I prefer changing the abbreviation to "Short Truthful Statement". You'll see why in a minute.

An STS is simply a statement that helps you respond to the question that you will be asked everywhere, "What are you doing here?" It is not the only tool you will need, but it is an excellent first step in establishing your legitimacy in a country.

Characteristics of an STS

The characteristics of a good STS are:

- It should be 1-2 sentences. Unless you are in a formal interrogation, when people ask you what you are doing in their country, they are mostly just looking to satisfy their curiosity and figure out what box you belong in. The STS helps you to do that. Don't overthink it.
- Even though it is a short statement, it can be expanded. The initial statement should take no more than a minute to communicate, but you should be able to discuss it at length for hours if necessary.
- Finally, it needs to be legitimate – meaning real. Not just a plausible statement, but a real, legitimate statement. This is why we call it a "Short **Truthful** Statement". Remember, it takes more effort to lie than it does to tell the truth. If you simply tell the truth, you never have to remember what lies you told to cover it up.

A good STS is thoughtfully crafted. You can work with your field or team leadership to determine your STS. Take your time to get it right.

It should be both honest and accurate *and* appropriate for the local context. This means you should avoid an STS that is intentionally provocative. Don't joke about things – irony and sarcasm usually do not translate well cross-culturally. Your STS instead should enable your role in the country not limit it. If possible, your STS should be altruistic so that you are seen as benefiting the local population.

Maintaining Your STS

As you maintain your STS, you must remain consistent. Share the *same* STS with **everyone** who asks you. This doesn't mean that your STS won't change over time. It will. But don't have two different statements depending on who asks you. Have one Short Truthful Statement.

Also, and this is critical, make sure that everyone around you – meaning your colleagues, friends, and family – knows your STS.

Remember, when your STS is inconsistent, unwanted scrutiny will increase, and some will make it their goal in life to find out more about you. Worse, you will be seen as illegitimate and become a target for people rather than a valued member of the community.

Now you know. Next episode we will talk about the next area of Strategic Intercultural Relations – Awareness. Well see you then.