

Security Briefs 25 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 7

We've been talking about *Strategic Intercultural Relations*, or SIR—how building respectful, intentional relationships supports both our mission and our security.

In our last episode, we explored **Proximity Relationships**—the everyday connections around you. Today, we'll look at two more vital types of relationships: **Facilitative** and **Strategic**.

Facilitative Relationships

Facilitative relationships are those you build with **people in positions of influence or authority**—local police, immigration officials, secret police, or even military leaders and politicians, depending on your context.

Start by paying attention—**who holds power** in your area? If you sense an open door, step through it. A warm, respectful relationship with these individuals can **smooth your path and increase your safety**.

Let me give you an example. In one country, Kim and I became friendly with the local police who handled residence visas. Because of that relationship, we received **three-year visas**—instead of the standard one-year visas — and with far fewer bureaucratic hurdles.

In another country, Kim partnered with local believers and expats to open a café. Local code enforcers routinely showed up seeking bribes. But the café team intentionally built relationships with the enforcement officers' supervisors. They consistently showed integrity, appealing to the values those leaders claimed to hold. **Not once** did they have to pay a bribe to keep operating.

These relationships work best when they're **authentic, not manipulative**. Be consistent. Be honest. Be honorable. These connections can make all the difference when things get complicated.

Strategic Relationships

Now let's talk about **Strategic Relationships**—relationships with people or groups that may be **opposed** to your work, or even to the presence of expats in general.

Why would we pursue this?

Two reasons:

1. **It's dangerous** when opposition groups and expats share space **without** any relationship—because each assumes the worst of the other.
2. **It's less dangerous** when even a minimal connection exists. Some form of relationship helps shift perceptions.

These connections might be **direct or indirect**, but either way, you want to be known as a **person of peace**, someone honorable in the community—even by those who disagree with you.

Of course, a word of caution: it's **not wise** to pursue direct contact with leaders of **violent** opposition groups without serious thought, clear purpose, guidance from veteran leaders, and input from trusted locals.

Still, remember this: opposition leaders often shape their views based on what they hear from **family members, group affiliates, or the general public**. So even indirect relationships can change how you're seen—and whether you're targeted.

Being seen as a person of integrity—even by those who oppose your message—can be one of your strongest defenses.

Conclusion

So now you know. **Facilitative** relationships help smooth your work. **Strategic** relationships help shape how others perceive you — even those who may not welcome your presence.

In our next episode, we'll talk about how to **develop these relationships well**, as we wrap up our conversation on Strategic Intercultural Relations.

See you then.