

.....

## Tim Law

### Defence Attaché

.....

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Defence Attaché to China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Mongolia

**Organisation:** British Embassy Beijing

**Location:** Beijing, China

#### How did you get to where you are now?

I became a Defence diplomat in April 2017, having previously completed a post-graduate degree in Chinese foreign and security policy whilst a student at the Australian Defence Force's Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies. My time spent studying geography as an undergraduate was of substantial value to me as a military officer and has utterly shaped my entire career. Partly, it is because it gave me the tools to think critically when confronted with challenging problems, and partly because it generated a real interest in how people interact with landscape, and how this leads to development of society in a range of contexts. Wherever I have served, I have used my geographical skillset to help me decipher the cultural context of my environment and this has allowed me to make sound strategic judgements. I consider geography an outstanding discipline for someone in the military, and recommend this career field to anyone.

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)

In my current job, I advise Ministers, senior officers and Whitehall officials, as well as my peers in the British Embassy in Beijing, on a whole range of strategic issues relating to defence and security. I travel widely within the region to improve my understanding of the strategic context and I meet some fascinating people.

#### What do you do as part of your role?

I usually work in Beijing, although my job involves a fair amount of travel. Each week, I spend a good deal of time reading and researching a whole range of material on Chinese and regional politics, global current affairs and defence matters. This primes me for a range of engagements, both with host nations and with my counterparts in other missions. I contribute very often to policy development, offering my perspective on the view from Beijing, Hong Kong, Pyongyang or Ulaanbaatar.

I also arrange for all the bilateral engagement between the UK and the countries to which I am accredited. This ranges from strategic dialogues, short visits, climbing expeditions, sports engagements, training events, and the exchange of personnel for individual training activities. I attend a lot of meetings, but they are generally fascinating in their content. The Far East is a very vibrant and dynamic part of the world. Things change with rapidity and it is important that Senior Ministers and officials making decisions in London do so with advice from the UK's network of overseas posts. I have a small team who assist me and who I manage.

#### What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

The key attribute needed for my role is an understanding of how and where I can add most value, and to gain as much understanding as I

.....

can so that, when my opinion is requested, I can respond with speed and accuracy. Gaining knowledge on China, Mongolia and North Korea is not always easy, so it is important to establish positive relationships with a range of contacts, some from the host nation and some who are well-placed to comment.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The thing I enjoy most is feeling that my contribution is valued in the development of international relationships between the UK and the countries to which I am accredited.

**Do you get to travel for your role?**

In the last six months, I have visited Shanghai and Mongolia three times (once by the Beijing to Ulaanbaatar leg of the Trans-Siberian Railway), Hong Kong twice, Singapore, Xian, Tianjin and Hefei once and I also spent a week in Qingdao as a guest of the People's Liberation Army's Navy for its 70th anniversary celebrations.

**What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?**

Go for it. Even if you only join the military for a short period, there are so many interesting things to do it will no doubt offer something that exploits your background.

**Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?**

I guess I fell into it, in the absence of anything else. As I specialised more in human, economic and political geography, I realised that it was the academic discipline that pulled everything together. If you wish to understand what motivates people to act and think as they do, there is no better subject to study.