



Security Recommendations

American Foreign Service Association
QDDR Security Working Group

INTRODUCTION

Our diplomacy protects our nation's security but our diplomats must operate securely to accomplish their mission. The issue is not simply whether or not to engage with people in dangerous areas; we must. The issue then is how we can engage safely. Thus, we should adopt a concept of operational security or goal-oriented security where policy goals and security expertise combine to identify how to conduct our diplomacy as safely as possible.

We need to identify flexible ways to carry out our goals. Sometimes that will mean face to face meetings in dangerous places. Sometimes that will mean alternate meeting sites, electronic chats, video conferencing or virtual presence. Flexibility is required at three levels: 1) when we make decisions about maintaining a physical presence; 2) when we decide how to staff and carry out the Post's mission; and 3) when individuals decide about individual events. In each case, the policy goals and the security concerns need to combine into a joint decision between policy makers and security personnel: How do we carry out the task as safely as reasonably possible?

Once a decision is made in Washington to establish a physical presence, personnel in the field take responsibility and are accountable for their decisions on how they carry out their jobs. The Department must support them with tools, training and, above all, every possible bit of information so that the people in the field can make fully informed decisions. They have an affirmative responsibility to accomplish their mission and an affirmative responsibility to do so in a safe way.

We have grouped thoughts on how to put these principles into practice into three areas of responsibility: Washington; mission management; and individual responsibility. There is inevitable overlap among the areas but we believe the distinction helps to focus responsibility.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- We are opposed to the creation of a new Under Secretary for Security. Cross cutting decisions involving security and achieving other national priorities need to be consolidated, not further divided.
- AFSA should have a formal role in the vital Presence Validation Process (VPVP) for reasons of union oversight, employee morale and ensuring arms-length views in the process.
- The Department should consider devoting some of the position savings from reductions in Iraq and Afghanistan to more security training.
- The Department needs new training in risk management decision making for COMs and DCM that goes beyond DS and current FSI skill sets to include perspectives of COMs who have served in high threat posts.
- We suggest new cost-benefit review of whether all employees going to high threat posts require driving training. Are there reasonable savings that could go to other aspects of security training?
- We support continued crisis management training at post.

- Review and where possible rationalize agency differences in security requirements at post.
- Ensure that all relevant security information is available to post management.
- Training should emphasize individual personal responsibility in security decision making.
- Consider including personal security criteria in establishing the need for language training.
- We support the development of a new FSI course on how to conduct diplomacy in high threat posts.

WASHINGTON ISSUES

Non-concurrence with Decision to Create new Under Secretary for Security

The Benghazi ARB, the Report of the Independent Panel on Best Practices, and the OIG Special Review of the Accountability Review Board Process all focus on the need to tighten and better focus responsibility for security at senior levels. The independent panel report recommends the creation of a new undersecretary level position for security. We disagree.

The problem is not just security but finding the balance between risk, resources, and the accomplishment of national foreign policy objectives. The result, as the OIG report notes (pg. 4), is that contrary positions tend to be “represented respectively by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and the Under Secretary of State for Management.” Creating a new undersecretary for security will do nothing to resolve this problem and, in fact, is likely to prioritize security over our reason for being in risky locations in the first place. The need is for a single location to reconcile the two perspectives and take responsibility for the resulting decisions. This could either be in the U/S for political affairs or, as the IG recommends, at the level of the Deputy Secretary level but it should not be in a new U/S devoted exclusively to security.

All three reports note the 14-year failure at consistent implementation of similar recommendations made previously. A significant challenge for Department leadership will be to put in place and maintain effective implementation mechanisms. Almost as important will be to convince its personnel that it continues to pay attention once the political heat dies down.

Formal AFSA Role in VPVP

We support the Department’s decision to create a Vital Presence Validation Process to bring together in a single decision making framework the key elements of national interests, risk, and required resources as recommended by the Benghazi ARB (Critical Recommendation #1)ⁱ. We respectfully request that AFSA, as the exclusive representative of the Foreign Service, have a formal role in this process. AFSA is fully sensitive to the need to do the nation’s business as well as to secure our personnel. The Vital Presence decision process will look at critical and ultimately somewhat subjective balancing of multiple factors deciding whether at any given time the import of the national interest justify the increased risk and exposure to USG facilities and personnel. Any decision which impacts the terms of Foreign Service employment – including safety and security – is subject to union consultation whether on substance or impact and implementation. However, beyond reasons of compliance, having an AFSA representative at the table will help reassure employees generally that such decisions are being made carefully, thus helping with a critical aspect of employee morale. With AFSA at the table, it will also help employee morale to know that an extra set of eyes is focused on the follow up on any

major implementation issues. This is an area that has come up for repeated criticisms in ARB reports over the years and, hence, an area where there is a lack of confidence at present.

Training to Improve Post Leadership, Management, and Oversight of Security

New training also falls within the Washington area of responsibility. The ARB and OIG reports focused on the need for cross training of management and security officers, particularly in the area of risk assessment and how to find safe ways of accomplishing critical work. There is room to draw on best practices developed in Iraq, Afghanistan and other high threat posts. The Department should consider devoting some of the Iraq and Afghanistan position savings to increase the overall size of the training complement for the language and security awareness training items outlined below. Precisely because many difficult decisions involve how to mitigate risk rather than completely avoid it there is a need for enhanced training that focuses on this critical issue and includes DS officers. This is particularly true for COM and DCM training. The presidential charge to ambassadors to take responsibility for their personnel is not currently backed up by training in how to carry out this responsibility. The Regional Security Officer (RSO) must be the ambassador's primary advisor on security but the responsibility cannot, and in our experience is not delegated to the RSO, but remains with the COM. The Independent Panel Report addresses many of the specifics needed (pg. 15) However, we believe that training in risk management and decision making on acceptable risk needs to include, in addition to FSI and DS, the perspectives of current or former COMs with extensive critical threat post experience. While FSI has extensive training experience and DS the same for threat prevention and mitigation neither organization has a well-established base to deal with the policy side of the decision making matrix. COMs and senior field leaders need more training before proceeding to post in how to manage the intersection of risk and mission achievement.

We understand the resource constraints in expanding training. We support the Department's plan to establish a comprehensive training facility, the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center at Blacksburg, VA, where the disparate skills necessary for the safe conduct of diplomacy overseas can be organized and presented in a cohesive and streamlined manner. It would also be worth examining whether expensive driver training should be limited to personnel going to posts where they will actually drive. We suggest a risk-benefit re-examination of costs.

POST LEVEL ISSUES

Crisis simulation exercises are a major tool for post level training in managing security responsibilities. They are particularly valuable after major personnel rotations and the arrival of new management teams with a dual purpose of improved situational awareness and essential team building. We strongly support maintaining an active schedule of such exercises.

Safe and Sound – Mind and Body

Issues of secure housing, mobility, and the ability to operate effectively in risky places all affect the intersection of morale and effective, secure operations. Having made the decision to do business in risky environments, there is a need to review regularly at post whether conditions and practices allow the officers to carry out the

minimum level of contacts with host nation figures to justify being in the country as ARB recommendation 1 noted. As employee effectiveness correlates with employee morale, particularly in high threat environments, it is essential that we strive to keep employees safe and sound both in mind and body. AFSA is the Department's appropriate interlocutor on this issue. The perception of less secure housing, limited mobility, or restricted ability to engage as compared with employees at other US government agencies, foreign diplomatic services, or private sector partners can be demoralizing. We understand that protecting USG staff requires recognizing that they may face higher threats than other diplomats or the business community. Recognizing that there is no single or permanent answer to this question, both Washington guidance and post management need to regularly review the issue with AFSA at post and headquarters. The Department cannot solve the problem of agency inequality in security procedures, arms and standards by itself but regular review of why practices differ and when adjustments are possible should be considered in light of allowing sufficient mobility to conduct operations effectively.

Notwithstanding Washington's enhanced role in security decision making and physical support, the ambassador's responsibility to make key decisions must remain strong. This is a fundamental issue of joining responsibility and authority. The hardest decisions are frequently at post, involve attention to great detail of the security environment, and should not be micro-managed from the Department, i.e., the Department should not be signing off on individual personnel movements or overnight accommodation at post – this is a Chief of Mission responsibility. At the same time the Front Office needs to be comfortable with delegating operational responsibilities and approvals to lower levels at post, i.e. perhaps not every transportation request needs to go to the Front Office for approval at all times. A concomitant responsibility is to insure the ambassador and RSO have full information on all matters of security. If classification levels or compartmented information available only in Washington diminish the mission leadership's situational awareness then the relevant bureau and INR share with DS the responsibility to find ways to get critical information to post. At post, COM responsibility includes attention to proper sharing of security information among agencies.

INDIVIDUAL ISSUES

Diplomats are neither marines nor missionaries, but they are and must be willing to accept a measure of risk. In practice, this means that personnel should understand that they share a responsibility for their own security. If they believe a mission is too dangerous they must say so. If they think there are safer ways to accomplish a task they have a professional responsibility to enter into discussion. And if they think they are unnecessarily constrained by security or seniority that also requires discussion with post management. In short, Foreign Service Officers and staff have an active responsibility to be part of secure operations. Training needs to undergird this principle.

Enhanced Language Training

Language skills improve an employee's ability to successfully recognize, navigate, and de-escalate conflict. However, not all employees have working fluency in a language before being assigned to a post, nor do they have the opportunity or eligibility to receive training before departure. Positions are currently language designated according to operational requirements that do not include an explicit personal security criterion (see

13 FAM 221.2). We recommend that such a personal security criterion be included and that post and bureau management consider more asymmetric designation during the upcoming triennial language designation exercise. We are encouraged by the Department's efforts to introduce specialized language training for some of the high threat environments, such as the 10-week FSI Arabic Alert course (further to Benghazi ARB Recommendation 15).

Security Awareness and Operational Effectiveness

In addition to learning to recognize threats, it is important that our diplomats understand how to operate and conduct business in high risk environments. We are pleased to learn that FSI, in close coordination with DS, is creating a course focused on Diplomacy in High Threat Posts. Drawing on the Department's experiences in, and training curricula for, Iraq and Afghanistan, the course will include components on diplomatic engagement (how to maintain contacts in a restricted movement environment), development, working with the military, resiliency, and security and risk management. We encourage the inclusion of case studies, panels and exercises in this new course and that it be regularly reviewed by employees, managers, and Department leaders to ensure that expectations and needs are being met on all sides.

ⁱ ARB recommendation 1 said, in part, that " While the answer cannot be to refrain from operating in such environments, the Department must do so on the basis of having: 1) a defined, attainable, and prioritized mission; 2) a clear-eyed assessment of the risk and costs involved; 3) a commitment of sufficient resources to mitigate these costs and risks; 4) an explicit acceptance of those costs and risks that cannot be mitigated; and 5) constant attention to changes in the situation, including when to leave and perform the mission from a

distance. The United States must be self-reliant and enterprising in developing alternate security platforms, profiles, and staffing footprints to address such realities. Assessments must be made on a case-by-case basis and repeated as circumstances change.