

Ambassador Frank G. Wisner II

In Memoriam

St. Thomas Church

New York City

May 22, 2025

It is truly a great honor to be here in this beautiful church with Judy, with David, with all the other members of Frank's family from the United States and France and with his legions of friends and admirers this afternoon.

Like all of you, I am here to remember our beloved friend Frank.

As a fellow member of the United States Foreign Service, I am also here to pay tribute

to our fallen leader on behalf of the literally thousands of American diplomats, military officers and intelligence professionals who knew Frank, who worked for him and with him throughout his extraordinary lifetime of service to our country.

For all of us in the State Department who were a bit younger and looked up to him, Frank was the man to see.

Frank was a counselor when one needed advice on matters big or small.

Frank could tell you how to handle the Indians and Iranians, the Russians and Chinese in difficult, often opaque and complex negotiations.

Frank was our mentor. Where should I serve next, Frank? In Foggy Bottom close to the center of power?

No, Frank would suggest, you might consider the field, overseas, far from Washington in the critical places where the work was more real, more immediate, more of what the country needed us to do.

Franks always knew what to do. He had been there before. He knew how the game should be played.

He was a Man in Full. A man, in many ways, larger than life so vivid is he in our memory today in this church.

So alive in our minds as we recall his fixed gaze, his wonderful ability to tell a good story, his laughter and his smile.

Frank was also a Protean man.

Father, Husband, brother, Son, Uncle, Diplomat, business leader, Consultant, friend.

And, Ambassador Frank Wisner was an American.

He was by birth a direct inheritor of the Wise Men, of whom his legendary father was one, the men and women who helped America to shape the world we live in after the great victory in the Second World War eighty years ago this year.

In this specific sense, Frank carried forward, in the American Century, the work his father's generation had begun.

We can only imagine the young Frank Wisner, just out of Princeton in 1961, eager, bursting with energy to experience the great moments, the awesome power of what it meant to be an American diplomat for John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon,

Ronald Reagan, in those early years and in every Presidency through to Barack Obama.

Frank carried on his back the weighty and sometimes burdensome responsibilities given to his generation of American diplomats.

In his prodigious knowledge of history, politics, culture, languages and manners, in the breadth of his experience, in his sophistication and shrewdness, Frank, in my young eyes, was the epitome of what an American diplomat should be.

As we look back upon his long life and his career today, he was, in my judgment, the most original, most creative, most courageous and most complete American diplomat of his and our time across the last half century.

Given Frank's family history, his enormous charm and his promise, he could easily have angled for Paris or London, Bonn or Rome in those early years.

But, Frank was built for where the real challenges were in JFK's New Frontier.

The list of his foreign postings reads like a Graham Greene novel.

Vice Consul in Tangier followed by Third Secretary in Algeria during the revolution that won that country's independence from France.

And then the great test for Frank's generation, where the action was most important and the danger most pronounced—to Saigon in the early years of the Vietnam War.

Frank didn't settle to be Staff Assistant in the capital to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.

but chose to be in the field where the war was being fought, where the work was most immediate.

Frank was five years in the provinces in Vietnam as an aid officer trying to change hearts and minds in our ultimately ill-fated effort in that terrible and confounding war.

In those days, the Cold War was being fought in the difficult corners of the world. After a brief stint in Washington, Frank went back out—to Tunisia in North Africa and then Bangladesh just after the bitter and tragic war for its independence in the early 1970s.

And then, as we withdrew from Vietnam and the communists won a complete victory, Frank went to the White House to serve on the task force to make sure we left honorably and tried to make sense of it all.

Most American diplomats are fortunate if, over a twenty-five or thirty-year career, they are asked by the President to serve in one Ambassadorship. Only one in eight diplomats made Ambassador in Frank's generation.

Frank served in four.

In Zambia during the time when white rule mercifully fell in nearby Zimbabwe and when the world's sights turned to ending Apartheid in South Africa.

In Egypt, the most important American partner in the Arab World at that time and the country that had made its peace with Israel.

In the Philippines, a critical military ally in the Pacific, a former colony of ours at a transformative and difficult time in its history with itself and with us.



By the early 90s during the Presidencies of HW Bush and Bill Clinton, Frank was at the top of his game, widely considered to be the man who could do any job, fill any void and do it well.

Under Secretary for Arms Control at State and then for Under Secretary for Policy at the Pentagon—as high as a career officer could fly in those days.

But, he wasn't finished. Not by a long shot.

Frank's service as Bill Clinton's Ambassador to India was his time at the summit of his profession. Because it was in those years in Delhi that we began to build the strategic relationship with India that is, without any doubt, one of the most important diplomatic accomplishments of American foreign policy in our time.

One might think that Frank had done enough by then to have earned a comfortable retirement.

But, Condi Rice and I asked him in 2007 to bring the embattled state of Kosovo to full independence after the horrors of the crimes that had been inflicted upon its Moslem population by the Serb government in the savage Kosovo war.

Frank and I worked side by side in those years. I can tell you that he was fearless, indefatigable, brilliant in that very difficult job. And he is the American most responsible that justice was achieved for the people of Kosovo.

And if that was not enough, President Obama and Secretary Hillary Clinton turned to Frank again in 2011 to make sense for America of

the great uprising in the Arab World that year, the Arab Spring.

Beyond all these achievements, there is one thing I have to tell you about Frank that also stood out for me.

In addition to his intellectual brilliance, his toughness as a negotiator, his passion for our country and its causes, Frank was simply the most sophisticated and elegant man whom I knew.

He was fully modern but one could also picture Frank holding forth in his father's time or even before America became a great power in the nineteenth century.

In fact, when the movie is made of Frank Wisner's life, we're going to have to bring back Cary Grant to match Frank's manners, his dress, his sophistication, his elegance.

He can be described by a word that seems to have gone out of fashion. Frank was a gentleman.

I better stop now. But, I think you get the point.

Frank was an original. There is much more to say about what he did in life and what it meant for him and for us.

There is a book that needs to be written to accompany the movie. Perhaps I'll write it.

One last thing.

More than a decade ago, Frank would always mention when we talked that there was another Wisner who had decided to serve his country.

I remember distinctly Frank saying: Nick, David has decided to join the Foreign Service. May I ask you to please look after him.

And some years later: Nick, David is now Charge d'Affaires in Tirana and has been promoted to the Senior Foreign Service, I am so proud.

David, your father was indeed very proud of you and rightfully so as you carry his torch, his ideals, his patriotism and his passion for his life's work forward.

Boy, do we miss him today.

For all of us who were his students and his friends, we will remember him and honor him always.

