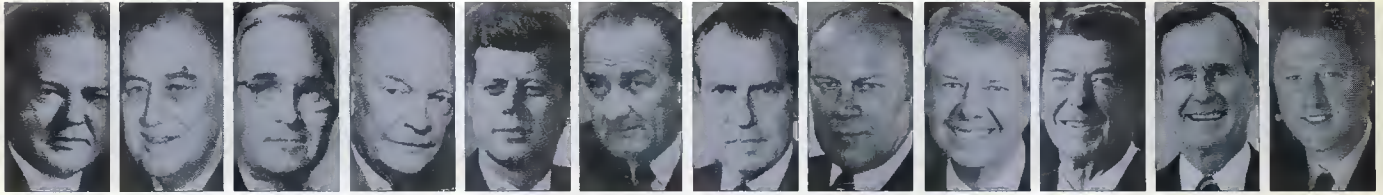




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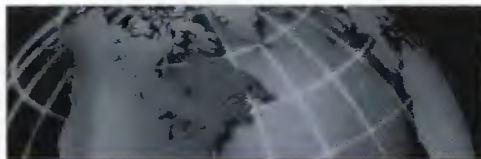
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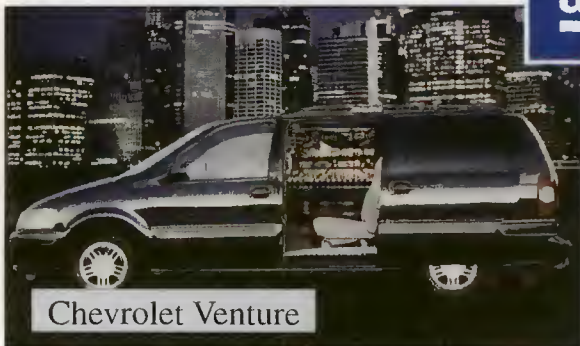
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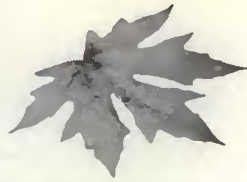
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# PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

## *Mission Statement of the US Foreign Service*

By F. A. "TEX" HARRIS

After six months' work by the Committee on Professionalism of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), the Governing Board formally adopted a mission statement for the Foreign Service. Participating in the work were 15 active and retired FSOs, all AFSA members, from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Information Agency.

In response to drafts circulated in August and September, more than 40 written critiques came from AFSA members on every continent of the world. The Professionalism Committee and the Governing Board are grateful for members' help. Their inputs substantially shaped the end product.

To enhance its lasting qualities, the statement focuses on the entire Foreign Service and avoids mention of specific agencies or policies. We invite members and friends to use it widely to explain the role the Foreign Service plays on this country's behalf. The statement follows:

### THE MISSION

To advance, defend and explain American interests and policies overseas; to serve and protect Americans around the world; to advise our nation's leaders on foreign affairs; and to carry out faithfully the policies and instructions of those leaders.

*F. A. "Tex" Harris is president of AFSA.*

### WHO WE ARE

We are our country's corps of non-partisan professional diplomats: American men and women from all parts of our nation, skilled in languages, history, international relations, economics, trade, economic development and global issues; expert at operating in foreign environments; and sworn to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

We are the front line of America's national security, together with the armed forces and the intelligence services.

We are this country's official representatives overseas and its government's foreign affairs staff at home.

### WHAT WE DO

We advance our nation's goals worldwide, speaking to foreign publics, making friends, finding allies, engaging opponents, anticipating and preventing threats, discovering and making the most of opportunities, negotiating agreements. When we attain American goals through diplomacy or negotiation, America prospers and the need to use military force is reduced.

We provide nonpartisan policy recommendations to the secretary of State, other foreign affairs agency heads and the president, and carry out their instructions.

We enhance the security of America's borders, screening out undesirable visitors, criminals and terrorists.

We protect Americans who may be abroad — tourists, business people, missionaries — helping them

when they are hurt, sick, in trouble or need passports.

We deliver disaster and refugee relief and implement America's overseas programs to fight drugs, protect the environment, improve health, foster economic growth, create open markets for American business, and promote democracy, the rule of law and human dignity.

We advance peace and negotiate and oversee agreements to eliminate chemical, nuclear, biological and other weapons around the world.

We advance the economic and commercial goals of the United States. We promote and protect American jobs and exports: the products of our citizens' minds, factories, farms, forests and fisheries. We stand up for American business, America's workers and American investors overseas.

We support and coordinate international negotiations by the president's envoys and experts from all parts of our government.

We coordinate and integrate the work of the scores of U.S. agencies that send people abroad to work under the authority of U.S. ambassadors and manage the resources to get the job done.

We go wherever we are needed, often in hardship and despite dangers, diseases, discomforts and family separations.

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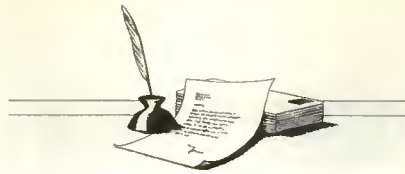
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# LETTERS

*To the Editor:*

I am writing concerning the November issue of the *Foreign Service Journal* that focused on diversity. The diversity I support — casting a wide net, developing diverse talents, trusting individuals and valuing differences — is too subtle for bureaucratic rulemakers who toil with quantitative goals, timetables, and de facto quotas that don't make much sense. The winter Olympic team has more skiers from Colorado than Florida, even though some individual Floridians are better skiers than some Coloradans. Group results need not affect individual performance, but equal opportunity for individuals results in unequal outcomes for groups. A "representative" ski squad can be created using "goals and timetables," but it will win fewer medals. Trying to remake the Foreign Service to achieve proportional representation of American society is an equally daunting task.

It is not that the Service is discrimination-free. No doubt covert discrimination is practiced; against "pale males" it is sometimes fairly overt. But in a system free of prejudice, group proportions will never mirror those of society. All groups are artificial, defined by differences. By definition, they exhibit variations in behavior, lifestyles and choices that result in different outcomes.

Great civil rights movements draw their moral authority from the truth that we must judge people by

character, not category. Most Americans understand that if law protects individual rights, legitimate group rights require no protection. Vigilance in protecting individuals regardless of — not because of — group affiliation or outcome, is the only way to fight discrimination. It is tragic that official policy has abandoned the moral high ground, retreating to the discredited concept of group determinism, precisely what made the fight for civil rights necessary in the first place. Racism and sexism, after all, are manifestations of groups over individuals.

Social engineering started with good intentions. Temporary programs were justified as "jump starts" or compensation for past wrongs, but once established, bureaucracies created to administer them found new reasons to exist and expand. In the process, they lost sight of their purpose — equal opportunity — and focused on what they could measure and manipulate — numbers. If they ever succeed in getting quantities right, this triumph of collective rights over individuals will be achieved at the expense of equal opportunity. People simply cannot be neatly packaged.

America has been unusually successful in integrating diverse peoples into its mainstream by focusing on individuals. The very fact that we talk about a "white majority," not hundreds of ethnic enclaves, or that the nation's largest minority (58 million Americans of German descent)

need not figure into a rights discussion, is proof. FSOs, with worldwide experience, observe that few nations come close to providing equal opportunity to all their citizens. We can and should hold ourselves to higher standards, but the fashionable habit of cataloguing only our failure is pernicious if it leads us to ignore the successes we need to build on, and reject the ideals that made them possible. We've come too far to drift further down that attractive dead end of determining outcome by group status.

*John Matel*  
*Branch Public Affairs*  
*Officer*  
*U.S. Information Service*  
*U.S. Consulate Krakow*



*To the Editor:*

A lot has been written recently in the *Journal* about discrimination of various sorts, and most recently, about age discrimination ("With More Employees Over 40, Age-Bias Suits Seen as Growing Trend," November *Journal*).

It seems to me the most blatant example of age discrimination in the Foreign Service today is the mandatory retirement age of 65 for FSOs. While there is considerable flexibility on this count in the private sector — age in the private sector often being equated to experience and experience being a valuable resource — the Foreign Service still

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## LETTERS

imposes a purely arbitrary retirement age. Why is this discrimination not addressed with fervor equal to that with which race/gender/sexual preference/disabilities/whatever discrimination is addressed?

*Al Schrock*  
Associate Director of  
Information Management  
Financial Service Center  
U.S. Embassy Bangkok

*To the Editor:*

Here are some statistics, pieced together from State Department sources, that were not included in any of the articles on diversity in the November issue.

In the last seven years, according to figures provided by the State Department, 21 percent of all women eligible for promotion were promoted, compared to 13 percent of all men eligible for promotion.

If retroactive male promotions were deemed necessary to correct this imbalance, 568 would be needed today. In the Supreme Court's *Castaneda* decision, the court endorsed the standard statistical formula for determining the likelihood that an unbalanced outcome such as this is based on random factors, with a likelihood of less than 1 percent or 2 percent being held to show a *prima facie* case of discrimination, which the defendant would then be obliged to rebut. The likelihood of the above result being due to random factors is 1 in 100 trillion.

These data serve to illustrate the problems likely in a litigation-driven personnel system, especially when only one side is litigating. There are likely to be other areas where women do better than men such as, I have been told, the oral exam. But whereas a significant imbalance in

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## LETTERS

men's favor can be found by the women's class action lawsuit team of lawyers — with access to all State's personnel data — an imbalance the other way may never surface.

A final point: The claim that the written exam can be shown to be biased against groups has never made any sense to me. If an exam is biased, it can only be because a number of its questions are. Can anyone cite a biased question for me?

These are some of the decisions that need to be calmly and dispassionately considered in discussions of diversity programs.

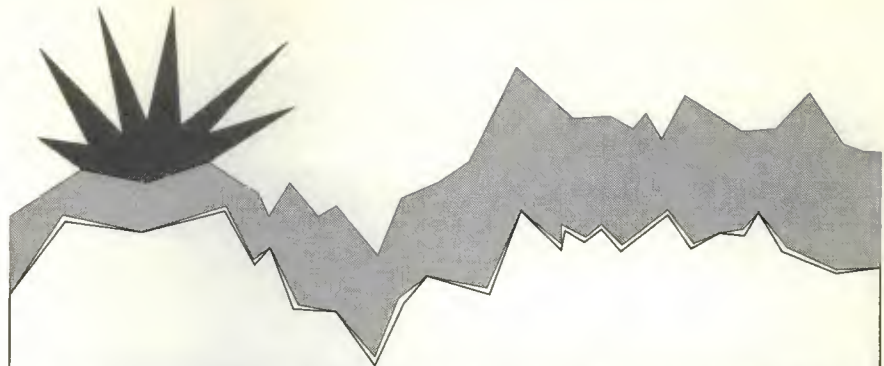
*Craig M. White*  
Political Officer  
U.S. Embassy Kinshasa

*To the Editor:*

I applaud the staff of the *Foreign Service Journal*, [editor] Karen Krebsbach and [contributor] Richard Gilbert on a job well done in tackling the difficult issue of diversity in the Foreign Service in the November issue of the *Journal*. I am particularly proud that the *Journal*, for the first time I can recall, chose to address the issue of discrimination in the Foreign Service against its gay and lesbian employees ("Male Gay FSOs Finding More Acceptance, Fairness; Lesbians Still Closeted"). I thank you, Mr. Gilbert, for addressing the subject with sensitivity and empathy.

Mr. Gilbert correctly points out many of the successes that [male] homosexual employees have achieved. What he unfortunately leaves out is a clear delineation of the challenges that remain.

I, like many of the people Mr. Gilbert cites, have had numerous positive experiences in the Foreign Service, despite my being gay.



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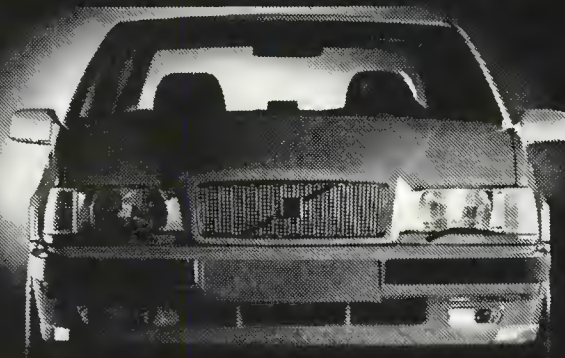
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LETTERS



During my last assignment, my partner of three years and myself routinely attended diplomatic events hosted by the embassy, host government and community-at-large. All this in a conservative Arab country where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by law.

It wasn't all a bed of roses, however, and I have yet to meet a gay or lesbian officer in the Service who believes that discrimination in our ranks has been eradicated. The fact that my partner and myself felt comfortable enough to attend diplomatic functions together was a direct result of the strong and vocal support I received from my post's deputy chief of mission. Not all of my gay and lesbian colleagues have been fortunate enough to have that kind of front-office support. Many of us have never been to a Marine Ball — for fear of being ostracized or treated differently — let alone slow dance with our partner at one.

The key remains educating and helping our supervisors and managers understand that their gay and lesbian employees are not that different from themselves. We want to be judged on merit. None of us needs "charity." What we do need is understanding. If our heterosexual colleagues can talk about their weekends with the family or going on a date, or other personal details, they should not be surprised or put off if I talk about my boyfriend. They should not be surprised that I naturally want to bring him over for dinner.

Unfortunately, what may be seen more commonly are not the success stories Mr. Gilbert describes, but a general lack of knowledge about the subject. Many of the supervisors and managers still do not know that the State Department does not discriminate on the basis of sexual ori-

entation. Many are unaware of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. And I would dare say that there is certainly no deep-rooted understanding of what it actually means when the department affirms that it does not discriminate against homosexuals. For example, does it mean that I can bring my boyfriend to the Marine Ball? If so, why aren't those practices standardized so that the same opportunities exist at all missions?

This lack of broad understanding as well as management's failure to explain how its policy should be implemented in practical terms is a major problem that individuals like myself and our organization, GLI-FAA [Gays and Lesbians in the Foreign Affairs Agencies] are trying to address.

Many gay and lesbian officers within the Service have the talent and the drive to be world-class diplomats of the highest order — on purely merit factors. I, for one, aspire to be such a diplomat. But I neither want nor can practically realize this goal without the cooperation, understanding and tolerance of my heterosexual colleagues.

*Manish K. Mishra  
Economic Officer  
U.S. Embassy Helsinki*



*To the Editor:*

After joining the Foreign Service in 1945, I served under three of President Harry Truman's four secretaries of State. Edward Stettinius had relinquished his holdover command in pseudo-renaissance splendors of Old State to James Byrnes, who was succeeded by George Marshall and then by Dean Acheson.

I am familiar with John Foster Dulles' efforts ("The Forgotten

## LETTERS

Dulles," November *Journal*) to oust Charles Bohlen from U.S. Embassy Moscow and later to engineer his exile in Manila, from where his views and his associations with Democratic presidents would cause less bother than in Washington. So I'm not surprised to learn that imputations of nepotism led the secretary to try to euchre his own sister out of her job. It is a pleasure to learn that the distinguished "Mother of Berlin" out-maneuvered her eminent sibling.

*John Bovey  
Retired FSO  
Cambridge, Mass.*

### To the Editor:

Bob Martens' story ("Cold-War Moscow," December 1995 *Journal*) brought me fond memories of ambassadors Charles Bohlen and Llewellyn "Tommy" Thompson, and particularly of the Sunday night ambassadorial poker games in Moscow during the late 1950s. As a regular — if not always winning — participant in those games, I take the liberty of painting moustaches on Bob's account.

Chip Bohlen had all the characteristics of a good, even great, poker player, save one: He could seldom bring himself to fold 'em, walk away or run. His great curiosity too often kept him playing a hand long after he had much hope of winning. Thus, he lost more than necessary — often to his permanent house guest, Bob Martens.

At our final poker get-together in 1959, his fellow players presented the ambassador with a scroll, signed by all, and addressed to "Ambassador Charles E. (Let's See That Last Card) Bohlen." In reply, he noted, in a warm and very funny

discourse, that he was sure we all would miss his contributions very much, but none more than Bob Martens, "who will now, perhaps, have to start living on his own salary instead of mine."

Tommy Thompson kept the game going when he succeeded Bohlen, but did not share his fatal weakness. He was careful, and he played to win. Once in a high-low game, I made a most injudicious raise for a high hand to find myself hopelessly sandbagged by the military attaché, Bob Stroot. As if that were not bad enough, the ambassador, who was going low, was sucked into the vortex of raises that ensued. We both lost. I was the most junior FSO in the embassy. He looked at me evenly, and murmured, "Are you going to play poker with us, Brad?"

Most games took place at Spaso House, but occasionally we met elsewhere. Once, late after a game at Bernice Cutler's apartment in downtown Moscow, Thompson asked if he could give anyone a lift. A number of us, too many as it turned out, piled into the ambassadorial limousine, going before the ambassador, directly against protocol. There was a moment's silence as we all — including CBS correspondent Dan Schorr, sitting right flank rear in the ambassador's seat — sat staring up at Thompson, still standing on the curb with no room in the car. "Alright," he said. "Everybody out!" He did not roar off into the night, as he might well have, but allowed us to squinch up in the available space — after he had taken his seat.

Thanks, Bob. You brought back a whiff of the old corps — diplomatic, that is.

*Brady G. Barr  
Retired FSO  
Washington, D.C. ■*

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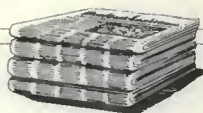
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## CLIPPINGS



*President Clinton's nomination of U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright as secretary of State "is a breakthrough for women in the Foreign Service."*

— PATRICIA IRELAND,  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
NATIONAL  
ORGANIZATION FOR  
WOMEN, IN A DEC. 5  
INTERVIEW WITH TED  
KOPPEL, HOST OF  
ABC'S NIGHTLINE

### FSO MEYER'S WORK LAUDED BY EDITORIAL

Robin Meyer, the FSO who was kicked out of Cuba because of her human rights reporting, is still making news. In a Nov. 5 editorial, *The Washington Post* praised Meyer and noted, "Staying in touch with these non-state-directed sectors of society has become as important and essential, in Cuba and other police states, as staying in touch with their governments and official circles. ... It also lets Americans keep faith with and encourage the elements of other societies that most share American values and most deserve American support." The *Post* editorial supported human rights reporting as essential to contacting people who might one day be crucial to Cuba's transition to a free society, and singled out Meyer's work for "shattering the cliched image of a diplomat as someone who frequents elegant salons and takes tea."

### BACKLASH REPORTED OF WHITE MALE FSOs

Shortly after the *Foreign Service Journal* devoted its November issue to discrimination in the Service, which reported on all kinds of discrimination as well as the growing agitation among white, male FSOs, the *Washington Times* "Embassy Row" column of Nov. 7 reported on an internal State Department cable from then — U.S. Ambassador to Russia Thomas Pickering to Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

The cable described white male diplomats at the embassy and other missions in Russia as "often vitriolic in their views of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) rules set by the federal government."

Pickering, who retired from the Foreign Service in November, noted in the cable that State has addressed diplomats' concerns, many of which were based on "misinformation" and were voiced in response to a poll of FSOs in Russia.

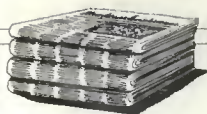
Still, Pickering said that concerns about EEO have polarized FSOs, who were "frequently quite frank, and I regret to report, often vitriolic in their expression of anti-EEO sentiment." In responding to the poll, one diplomat wrote to Christopher, saying, "Affirmative action in hiring and promotion are denying white male officers equal opportunity," according to the *Times*.

### NICKEL-AND-DIMING OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Stories about American diplomacy going broke are more common now than tales of skillful maneuvering and cartoons of "Uncle Sam as a pauper have become common fodder for foreign cartoonists," wrote syndicated columnist Trudy Rubin in a column that appeared in the Nov. 1 *Miami Herald*.

Rubin reported on the Department of State's antiquated computer system at home and scrambling by American diplomats in Japan because they cannot pay the high rents of Tokyo, among other cities. In Hanoi the American embassy had to turn off the air conditioning during a heat wave, because it couldn't afford to keep it going, she reported. Washington was further humiliated, she reported, when it had to ask Japan for cash after agreeing to fund a light-water reactor for North Korea in return for a nuclear freeze.

"Despite all this, some budget cutters in Congress want to slash the foreign



# CLIPPINGS

affairs budget in half again by 2002," wrote Rubin. "It's easy for isolationists and budget hawks to dump on diplomats. Foreign Service officers don't have a local constituency." Rubin argues that the nickel-and-diming of diplomacy is dangerous in any time, but particularly short-sighted now. "In this new opaque world, America needs skillful diplomats to ferret out the future threats or opportunities that are emerging in ex-communist, fundamentalist or even friendly countries," she wrote.

## CLINTON POLICIES FAULTED ON ETHICS

President Bill Clinton's first-term foreign policy was weak because it failed to "match the moralism inherited from the tradition of Woodrow Wilson with muscular action in the style of Harry Truman," Michael Ignatieff wrote in the Nov. 18 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. He argued that Clinton backed down on human rights in China, reneged on commitments in Somalia, broke promises to the Kurds, didn't win a cease-fire in Ireland and brokered a settlement resulting in ethnic partition in Bosnia. He also criticized the president for only taking action when Sen. Robert Dole attacked his weak leadership on foreign affairs, and that his first administration "failed to articulate the connection between ethical goals and national interest."

Now that the elections are over, he argues that the Clinton administration should address "growing incoherence between America's moralizing rhetoric abroad and its strategic interests." In other words, on moral grounds, the United States must intervene in areas of the world that threaten peace and its strategic inter-

ests, he said. Ignatieff argued that this can be done without committing troops, but does require that America become more involved in the United Nations and that it broker international peace agreements. "The simple case for intervention is that we live in one world," he wrote. "Its problems can't forever be quarantined within stable zones of imperial influence or rule. In the end, everything ends up on America's doorstep."

## ENVOY MONDALE SAYS SAYONARA

When President Bill Clinton picked former Vice President Walter Mondale to become ambassador to Japan three years ago, "there were rumblings among Japan specialists that a lifelong pol with no Japan expertise, or even any demonstrated passion for foreign affairs, was a poor candidate for the diplomatic post," wrote Kevin Sullivan and Mary Jordan in the Nov. 14 *Washington Post*, but "Mondale developed a reputation among both Americans and Japanese as one of the most effective ambassadors to Japan in recent memory."

The only former vice president to serve as an ambassador, Mondale guided American interests in Japan during particularly trying times, the pair reported. On Mondale's watch, three U.S. servicemen raped a 12-year-old girl on Okinawa, but he handled it well and defused a particularly nasty situation, Sullivan and Jordan wrote. Still, Mondale was frustrated by his inability to open more Japanese markets to American commerce, according to Robin M. Orr, a U.S. business executive in Tokyo, who was quoted. Mondale is returning to America in time to help his son, Ted, in his bid to become governor of Minnesota.

# 50 YEARS AGO

"*Corps Diplomatic*, a bi-monthly of diplomacy ... published a feature on the *American Foreign Service Journal*," the *Journal* reported in its January 1947 issue. 'Far from being a staid house organ, the *Journal* is a bold, frank and colorful magazine which does not hesitate to criticize [State] administrative policies,' it reported. 'Its descriptive articles on U.S. diplomacy sometimes scoop the world press.'

"Although staffed with experts, the *Journal* does run into problems of editorial policy. Constantly faced is this dilemma: whether to present a publication of a social nature that makes it little more than a house organ or to fill the *Journal* with constructive articles on policy and administration, which would be of interest to a variety of readers outside of the Foreign Service. Currently, the magazine represents a compromise between the two poles of thought."



*"A diplomat's life is made up of three ingredients: protocol, Geritol and alcohol."*

— ADLAI E. STEVENSON JR., FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, WHO DIED IN 1965

## NO PINK SLIPS DUE IN ENVOYS' FUTURE

Career Foreign Service ambassadors can rest easy. President Clinton has put out the word through top political appointees at State that he has no plans to ask the 102 career ambassadors to submit resignations, as is the custom after a presidential election. This is different than four years ago, when the new Clinton team quickly swept out Bush-appointed ambassadors, according to Al Kamen, writing in "In The Loop" in the Nov. 1 *Washington Post*.

## '97 CLINTON PRIORITY: PEACEMAKING ON HILL

President Clinton's foreign policy goals for his second term — expansion of NATO, new initiatives with China, new

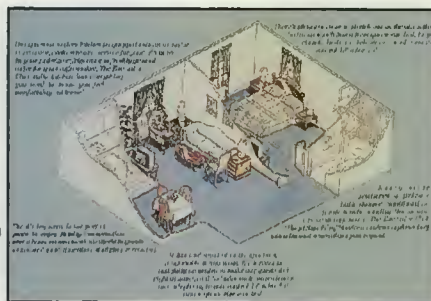
trade agreements and peace in the Middle East — won't get anywhere unless he first makes peace at home with the U.S. Congress, writes columnist Jim Mann in the Nov. 11 *Los Angeles Times*.

"During the last two years, Clinton won only half of all congressional votes on issues involving foreign policy and national security, the lowest batting average for any president since the figures were kept a half-century ago," wrote Mann. He notes that most of Clinton's opponents in Congress — including Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) — will return to vex him in his second term. Mann predicted showdown battles over NATO expansion, which could be hung up because of reluctance to pay for the additional costs involved, and trade, including admission of China to the World Trade Organization and the extension of NAFTA. ■

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# SPEAKING OUT

## *Why Consulates Should Operate Like Companies*

By ERWIN VON DEN STEINEN

Since the United States is a nation of traders and travelers as well as a nation of immigrants, commerce has always been central to the American experience, and national interest has always been intertwined with international mobility. At the founding of this country, the consular establishment was recognized as a central factor in enabling this national interest. In the Constitution, founders spoke of "consuls" in the same context as "judges of the Supreme Court."

In the early 20th century, the United States maintained more than 300 consular posts and numerous consular agencies worldwide, staffed by a professional consular corps that predates today's Foreign Service. When the Rogers Act created a unified Foreign Service in 1924, more than 80 percent of the officers in the new service were former members of the consular corps. By 1930 there were still seven independent consular posts for each embassy overseas.

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*Erwin von den Steinen, a retired FSO, owns a consulting business in Arlington, Va. From 1970-1971, as a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, he extensively researched the consular function, submitting a report to the Department of State, entitled "Whither the American Consul?" Before retiring from the Foreign Service in 1988, he served in Stuttgart, Germany; Belgrade; Zagreb; Adana, Turkey; and Bonn.*

*Employees in consular sections need to think and act like workers in the private sector; and develop a strategic business plan for making foreign relations productive.*



This tradition of maintaining independent consular establishments eroded through the 1930s, and following World War II it swung dramatically. By 1950, there were only three independent consular posts (including the three types: career consulates, consulates general and consular agencies) for every U.S. diplomatic mission in the world, or 207 consulates compared to 74 diplomatic missions.

Today there are nearly two diplomatic posts for every independent consulate. Why is that? Budget constraints, the proliferation of newly independent countries, particularly

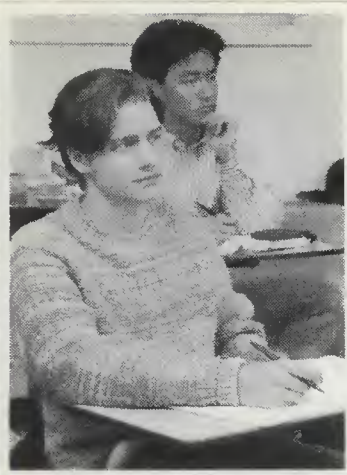
since the Cold War, and improvements in transport and communications — making diplomacy via vehicle and telephone more common — partly explain why the United States is lowering flags in many cities while raising flags in small capitals where U.S. interests are often marginal.

Institutional priorities and perceptions in Washington have promoted a mindset that relegates consular officers and their work to second-class status. This mindset sees demands for services from the public as an imposition on FSOs, rather than as an opportunity to fill an important need abroad.

More than five years after the end of the Cold War, the United States still has a foreign affairs structure driven by the assumption that state-to-state relations between national governments are not only the best way to represent U.S. national interests, but the only way.

But do U.S. national interests now dictate the same response required during the Cold War? I believe that the answer is no. The handwriting of a changing situation has been on the wall for some time, but institutional habits, especially those codified into laws, regulations and procedures, can make change very difficult.

It has also been a weakness of presidents and secretaries of State to believe they can not only make policy but generate the necessary support for it — while leaving intact the Department of State's organization. If



*"Something about this place  
pushes you  
in the right direction."*

His family's *moves* meant Sam had attended several different high schools. His *grades* had been "bad" in those where there were large classes and he was lacking *self-confidence*. After he and his parents visited five local independent schools, Sam chose *Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School* because he liked its campus and friendly *atmosphere*. Once enrolled, his *attitude* changed. "I started getting good grades in English class, and that boosted my *confidence*." He also began to *participate* in sports. "I'd never liked sports before, but I tried soccer and became captain of the JV team." Sam made the honor roll for the first time and began writing poetry and short stories and keeping a journal in his spare time.

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## SPEAKING OUT

State takes today's institutional structure as a broad given and restricts the organizational policy debate to only tweaking the status quo, that would be tantamount to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. The secretary of State alone, no matter how thoughtful and indefatigable, cannot adequately shape long-term perceptions of public and national interest. To persuade Congress and the public to support investments of public resources requires systematic institutional responsiveness to U.S. citizens' interests and needs. The American people will not believe foreign policies and programs are important simply because they are told so.

Yet, millions of Americans are personally and professionally affected by developments in foreign countries. More Americans today have vital involvements overseas than inhabit the nation's rural areas, yet U.S. diplomats often act as if creating a political constituency is beyond the logical reach of their daily work. Yet virtually every farmer in the United States acutely understands the importance of international trade. This understanding grew only in part through impersonal forces, and more significantly from the forward-looking promotion of U.S. agricultural trade interests by professionals in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the systematic communication of those interests through the networking of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and USDA's superb community outreach. This outreach, achieved through hard work and not image-making, has been reciprocated by informed, broad-based American support for USDA's programs overseas.

A similar program in embassies' Consular Sections would achieve more appreciation and understanding for consular officers' work — and fill a growing niche abroad. In terms of

aiding U.S. business overseas, State's Bureau of Consular Affairs has the potential to enhance the services now offered through FAS and USDA, and these services could be profitable.

If innovatively managed, consular establishments could be financially independent and help increase public support for adequate funds for foreign affairs budgets.

Consular work is often described as "people centered," which implies it has no connection to policy. However, in today's world, consular diplomacy is increasingly relevant. Broad economic, technological, demographic and cultural trends are critical in affecting this change. Even as America basks in its role as the world's lone remaining superpower, it is increasingly dependent on foreign exports of oil, electronics, cars and low-cost consumer items as well as foreign tourists and skilled, ambitious immigrants. At the same time, Americans hope emissaries of an exploding world population — refugees, welfare claimants, illegal immigrants, drug dealers or bearers of communicable diseases — will not threaten the United States. Worldwide mobility will be the key to U.S. competitiveness in the 21st century. Few societies have been challenged, as the United States is today, to simultaneously promote and restrict mobility across their borders as a vital aspect of national interest and security.

It may be less important to discuss what role consular officers play and more illuminating to reflect on what U.S. consular establishments have not become. Today there is no unified management concept for consular sections outside a nation's capital, as was the case before 1937. For example, there has been no system to promote consuls as community relations



coordinators abroad, and when consuls do provide these services, it's not considered an important part of their job. For years, the State Department has devoted little attention to the potential of consulates and embassies' consular sections to focus the foreign affairs efforts of other government agencies at the mission.

Even tasks such as tourism promotion, with direct links to today's narrow definition of consular work, have evolved into separate bureaucracies, with costs on all sides. A prime example is State's decision after World War II to take business services out of consular sections, where they had flourished, prompting the Commerce Department to step in and create the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), which is the only one of the foreign affairs agencies today that has expanded its workforce in the face of government-wide layoffs.

It's time to revitalize the consular function as a mainstream operating and management system under State's overall umbrella, but not by employing yet another top-down, supply-side system devoted to determining from the center exactly what forms of "help" are appropriate to extend and to whom. To restore the vitality of the consular function, Americans need a demand-side, bottom-up approach in which the Consular Bureau in Washington would provide general guidance to consular establishments overseas, although they would operate independently. This type of management system could include joint ventures with the FCS and collaborative fee-for-service agreements with State's Administrative Department to contract, for example, with individuals and businesses overseas who need help finding office space or other logistical support. Employees in con-

sular sections need to think and act like workers in the private sector, and develop a strategic business plan for making foreign relations productive.

This proposal could be test-marketed by selecting several overseas consular sections to become self-supporting within two years. The consular chief would need authority to hire, fire, promote, set salaries within a given range and enter into contracts to get work done. Consistent with the broad definitions of consular functions contained in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1969, the consular sections would be empowered to provide facilities and services to individuals and the private and public sectors for standard local fees. The post would receive credit for fees collected for work done on such standard consular work as visa applications and passports. The posts could also produce revenue by publishing printed or electronic newsletters with local advertising and by working with institutions such as the U.S. Information Service (USIS) to sponsor programs such as exhibits, events and conferences that help positively influence foreigners about America. The consular sections would also establish a budget for services provided to the embassy — and bill State.

These types of self-supporting programs would not dilute the traditional consular duty of serving Americans in need overseas. However, consular sections could charge for their services and collect fees from insurance, the premiums for which would be built into fees already charged when Americans are issued new passports or when they register as overseas residents. For example, when an American buys a passport, he would automatically buy insurance providing services such as prison and hospital visits; when he registers as an

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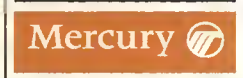
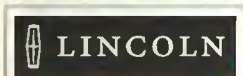


American citizen, he could buy insurance providing for notification of his family abroad in case of a country-wide emergency in America.

In such an environment, consuls would pay more attention to the interests of the private sector. And the private sector would reciprocate by supporting a system that supplies it with an efficient means of getting information and making business contacts. Citizens would no longer be viewed as "problems," but as consumers, and as opportunities to generate income for the post. This makes it important that the post be able to control its income to match new resources to increased demand.

If consular sections operated as businesses, State would operate like a franchiser for a local monopoly service provider. As the franchiser, State should appoint or elect a consultative board from the local American community to provide evaluations of consular services to the ambassador and the Bureau of Consular Affairs. This would give customers a direct role in evaluating services and would provide incentives to create a positive image abroad. State should also define procedures to prevent partiality and stipulate that consular services must be consistent with the Vienna Convention and bilateral consular treaties.

In this type of consular section, challenges would expand, and it would again encourage entrepreneurial managers of the kind that emerged from the old consular service and became its most distinguished ambassadorial products. Finally, a customer-driven orientation in the consular section need not compete against a policy-focused approach in other departments. In fact, this kind of division of duties would be a win-win situation for all. ■



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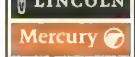
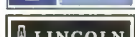
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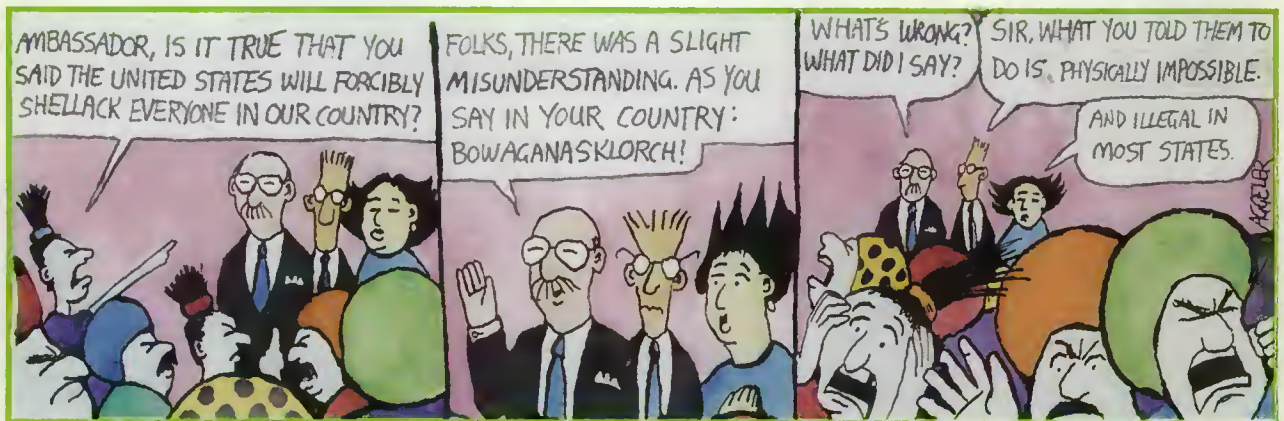
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# DOES HUMOR PLAY A ROLE IN DIPLOMACY?



BRIAN ACCELER

## FROM REPRESENTATIONAL EVENTS TO CABLES, A WISE FSO USES QUIPS AND *BONS MOTS* SPARINGLY

*By Ellen Rafshoon*

**H**

umor is as hard to find in the Foreign Service as a plumber on Sunday. Next to treason, making an inappropriate joke may rank as the second most taboo practice in diplomacy. But the stolidity of the profession is not something that veteran FSOs are proud of. After all, to admit they are dry and stodgy is to give credence to the unflattering stereotype of the tight-lipped, pin-stripe-suited diplomat.

Diplomats are evasive when asked about the role of humor in statesmanship. On the one hand, FSOs swear that humor can be a valuable tool in their daily work, especially in relaxing tense situations. "After patience and stamina, humor is one of the top three assets to a Foreign Service officer in his overseas post," said one seasoned diplomat. But when it comes to their own use of a joke or even the most lighthearted banter, they are quick to recount the missteps of the diplomatic comics amongst them. Everyone, it seems, can recall a funny cable that prompted the author's transfer or the innocent witticism that insulted a foreign host. Diplomats disagree on whether humor and wit serve best in social situations, in formal situations or in reporting cables to Washington.

Why is humor so frowned upon by diplomatic practitioners? One reason is that the stakes are so high in foreign relations. "You can always survive a mistake in domestic affairs but you can get killed by one made in foreign policy," said President John F. Kennedy, who brought the nation to the brink of a nuclear war during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis. Yet surely not every diplomatic encounter has the survival of the world riding on it.

In the ordinary day-to-day business and social encounters of the average FSO, isn't there room for levity or even the appropriately timed joke? Experienced foreign policy officials say only rarely do opportunities for

## F O C U S

*One has only to make the most cursory examination of  
diplomacy at the highest levels of government to  
find examples of humor gone wrong.*

humor arise, and when they do, the risks often outweigh the benefits. The cardinal rule for all diplomats abroad is that they must behave as official representatives of the United States; they are not private citizens. Cultural implications notwithstanding, the bottom line with any attempt at humor is: It's the recipient's reaction that counts most, not the humorist's.

One problem with humor is that it is nearly impossible for an American to tell a joke properly in a foreign language no matter how fluent the speaker is, says Hume Horan, a retired FSO who was U.S. ambassador to the Ivory Coast and Saudi Arabia, and speaks Arabic, French, German and Spanish. Another pitfall is that cultures, ethnic groups and nations have certain inside jokes that outsiders just can't make. Trinidadians engage in a form of teasing they call "piquant," says Sheldon Kryz, who was the U.S. ambassador in Trinidad and Tobago from 1985-1988. An American can participate, but a diplomat should only do so with care on social occasions, Kryz cautions. Arabs, says Horan, like sarcastic put-downs about people in the next village or the neighboring apartment. They tend to make jokes referring to a neighbor's stinginess, suspected homosexuality or the "loose morals of a woman," he says, adding that Egyptians prefer political humor and enjoy jokes at the expense of their "corrupt, publicly conscienceless rulers." But, Horan warns, "You can't do that as an American. You're not within the circle. It could be seen as an arrogant American putting [them] down." His advice when working abroad: "Better to be seen as bland and pedestrian."

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Most ethnic groups and nationalities also have unique jokes about other groups. For example, officials in formerly French colonies throughout Africa and in the Arab world would have several variations of jokes that put down the French for their cultural arrogance. One version goes like this: Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush, François Mitterand, a hippie and a priest are on an airplane that's about to crash. There are only four parachutes aboard. Gorbachev grabs the first chute and announces he has to save himself because he's the most powerful leader in the world. Bush does the same, also declaring himself the most powerful leader in the world. Mitterand grabs the third parachute because, he notes, "Everyone knows I'm the smartest leader in the world." The priest then tells the hippie to take the last chute. "I'm an old man," he says. "Save yourself and pray for our souls." The hippie responds, "No sweat, pop. We still have two chutes. The smartest man in the world just jumped out with my sleeping bag on his back."

However, to successfully engage in such "in-jokes," one must be aware of the unwritten rules. "Don't tell a Polish joke in Poland. Tell an Irish joke," counsels one retired FSO who has served in many European and African posts. "In Egypt, they love to tell jokes about themselves but you can't make one about them. Instead, make a Syrian joke."

Walter Clarke, who spent most of his 36-year career as a political officer in Africa and Latin America, says another danger with being too lighthearted is that it makes an FSO appear "too solicitous to the local people. You could be seen as developing 'localitis,'" a cardinal sin in the Foreign Service. Retired FSO and ambassador Chas. Freeman Jr.'s *Diplomatic Dictionary* defines "localitis" as forgetting one is "sent abroad to represent the interests of his own country to the host country and not vice versa."

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Interestingly, the faux pas having to do with humor that diplomats recall most vividly concern communications with State officials back in Washington rather than offenses to their hosts. For it is in Foggy Bottom that one's reputation as a Foreign Service professional is established. The kiss of death for an FSO's career is for him to appear frivolous and consequently, unprofessional.

Clarke, for example, will never forget the cable known infamously as, "Kigali No. 17," or the fate of the FSO who sent it. The cable in question was sent to Washington by one of the many novices assigned to new American embassies in Africa when most of the continent's nations achieved independence in the 1960s. Clarke met the author of the infamous cable, the charge d'affaires in Kigali, when he was en route to Bujumbura. The charge had just left a cushy post in London and "arrived looking like Prime Minister [Neville] Chamberlain, impeccably dressed with an umbrella over his arm. His young lovely wife was dressed in the latest London fashion," Clarke recalled with a chuckle.

The new diplomat was obviously unprepared to be in Rwanda, which barely had paved roads. He was shocked when he arrived at the makeshift embassy, previously home to a butcher shop. The rustic quarters prompted him to write "Kigali No. 17," in which he humorously complained about the dirt and the number of flies in his office, which were plentiful even for Africa. The charge took extra delight in ridiculing the meathooks still embedded in the walls. When the assistant secretary of State for African Affairs received "Kigali No. 17," Clarke said he responded with orders to "get that man out of there" and he was promptly removed. Although the author of "Kigali No. 17" was accurate and honest in his portrayal of his surroundings, the humorous tone he used showed evidence of a "colonialist mentality," another Foreign Service no-no.

Clarke, who believes "far more reputations have been ruined by efforts at humor than have been advanced by it," remembers another cable snafu. He said an ambassador to Gabon in the early 1970s was always "trying to be cute in his cables" and Clarke said the man's "feistiness grated against the establishment." In one of his cables, he jokingly threat-

ened, "If you don't like what I'm saying, send me to Vietnam." After six months, the ambassador got what he asked for.

Retired ambassador Edward Peck is one of the few former members of the diplomatic corps who champion the use of humor and believe it can be used successfully. However, even a fan like Peck knows how humor can cause professional setbacks. Once in his career, he was being considered for "a significant job" and during a series of interviews he told a funny story. "I didn't get the job and I found out later that someone had said, 'He's not serious,'" recalls Peck. "State Department doctrine holds that people who display humor are not considered serious about their work. The truth is that I am very serious about my work, but I refuse to treat work as a religion."

Newcomers, especially political appointees, sometimes have a hard time adjusting to the sobriety of the State Department. Robert Janz, who joined the Foreign Service in 1929, describes the clash of cultures in the 1978 collection of essays, *Tales of the Foreign Service*. He relates the experience of an unidentified acting secretary of State, a political appointee on the job for only a few days, who was confronted with a "frightening crisis" abroad. The official received a telegram from a distraught ambassador who at an official dinner had been scated below a foreign dignitary whom he outranked. The ambassador asked for instructions on what he should do. In a three-word reply, the acting secretary responded, "Laugh it off," only to be told by an aide that department codes contained no symbol for "laugh."

One only has to make the most cursory examination of diplomacy at the highest levels of government to find examples of humor gone wrong. These highly publicized incidents serve as an additional deterrent to comedy for FSOs. President Ronald Reagan, who had demonized the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," looked reckless when he mistakenly announced on a 1994 weekly radio address that he had "signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." Reagan, who had been vacationing at the time at his ranch in

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*No envoy from Great Britain should engage in such "fatal diplomatic indulgences as irony, epigrams, insinuations and the barbed reply," points out Harold Nicolson, a British diplomat.*

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Santa Ynez, Calif., thought he was testing the microphone and hadn't known his words were broadcast across the nation.

President Jimmy Carter was portrayed as an ignorant boob during a 1979 visit to Mexico when, in a luncheon toast, he joked about the Montezuma's revenge he experienced on a family trip to Mexico City some years earlier. Most presidential jokes are planned in advance, but on this trip Carter's speech writers had come up dry so the Montezuma crack was spontaneous and even shocked Carter's aides. The Mexicans actually weren't too insulted by the joke, because it is a distinctly American joke about Mexico, according to Robert Pastor, who accompanied Carter on that trip as his Latin American expert on the National Security Council. "They smiled because they knew a joke was being made but they didn't get it," recalled Pastor, now Carter's Latin American Affairs specialist at the Carter Center in Atlanta. But, the American press portrayed it as a slight to the Mexicans and Carter vowed not to make impromptu jokes anymore on foreign missions.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev made a fool of himself when, in October 1960 at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, he took off his shoe and began banging it on his table while yelling at a Philippine delegate who had described Eastern Europe as a Soviet colony. Khrushchev's outburst set off a ruckus in the hall and the episode ended with the Irish president slamming his gavel so hard that it shattered to pieces.

Some diplomatic historians find evidence of the rapid onset of the Cold War in a deadly serious running joke between President Harry S Truman's secretary of state, James Byrnes, and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. According to historian Robert Messer, author of *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman and the Origins*

*of the Cold War*, at the end of World War II, American leaders hoped to use the American monopoly on the atomic bomb as leverage to get concessions from the Soviet Union during post-war negotiations. But Byrnes and the president chose not to flaunt the monopoly. Rather, using the metaphor of the American gangster type or gunslinger with an ominous bulge in his pocket, Byrnes veiled the threat in discussions with the Soviets. The problem was that Molotov used Byrnes' metaphor to publicly ridicule the American monopoly and "[let] Byrnes know that he could not use the threat to gain political concessions from the Soviet Union," writes Messer.

The historian illustrates how the joke backfired in describing a reception during the 1945 London Conference. Byrnes asked Molotov if they could get down to business. In reply, Molotov asked Byrnes if he had an atomic bomb "in his side pocket," to which Byrnes, a South Carolina native, responded: "You don't know Southerners. We carry our artillery in our hip pocket. If you don't cut out all this stalling ... I am going to pull an atomic bomb out of my hip pocket and let you have it." The two men laughed during the exchange, but it led Byrnes to abandon the attempt at "atomic diplomacy," according to Messer.

**I**t seems the tendency toward self-restraint has been passed down through generations of envoys. Throughout the centuries, etiquette guides for diplomats have admonished readers of the dangers of levity. For example, the 17th-century French ambassador François de Callieres cautioned against "[gaining] a reputation as a wit." Likewise, in his *Standard Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, the late 19th-century British diplomat Sir Ernest Satow advised his colleagues: "Above all, do not attempt to be witty," especially in drafting dispatches. Harold Nicolson, a British diplomat and member of Parliament, doesn't

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even mention sense of humor as one of the five qualities to be cultivated by the "ideal diplomatist," in his 1939 handbook, *Diplomacy*. According to Nicolson, no representative of his country should engage in such "fatal diplomatic indulgences as irony, epigrams, insinuations and the barbed reply." As we all know, these "forays into verbal brilliance" as Nicolson calls them, are the lifeblood of humor.

More recently, the drabness of the diplomatic corps has been further hinted at in the introduction to American diplomat E. Wilder Spaulding's 1961 history of U.S. ambassadors since the Revolution, *Ambassadors Ordinary and Extraordinary*. In his research, the now 96-year-old who was an FSO for 27 years, says he found little to laugh about in the annals of the U.S. Foreign Service. With a tone of utter disappointment, he writes that U.S. diplomatic history is replete with examples of diplomats "who could tell a good story upon occasion" but, alas, "there can be no chapter in this book on humorists in the Foreign Service."

The demeanor of U.S. secretaries of State also does little to lighten the mood of the diplomatic corps. Few have displayed even the slightest sense of humor. Nary a smile seemed to cross the lips of the most recent holder of the office, Warren Christopher. But, most old-timers rate John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of State, as the most dry. "He had a legal mind," is the diplomatic way retired FSO and former ambassador Marshall Green explains Dulles' somberness. Because Green began his career as an assistant to Franklin D. Roosevelt's ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, he has had a chance to observe or know all the late 20th century's secretaries of State. He says the exception among them was Henry Kissinger, who used humor to offset his own arrogance as well as establish an intimate rapport with world leaders. In his recent biography of Kissinger, Walter Isaacson recounts several humorous "Kissingerisms." At his first meeting between diplomats from Israel and Egypt in Washington, Kissinger began the meeting saying, "I have not faced such a distinguished audience since dining alone in the Hall of Mirrors."

When Kissinger, the first Jew and immigrant to hold the office of secretary of State, attended the bar mitzvah of the Israeli ambassador's son, someone

asked if it were very different from his own in Germany. Kissinger retorted, "Ribbentrop did not come to my bar mitzvah," referring to Hitler's foreign minister. But even Kissinger's renowned wit sometimes missed its mark. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy viewed Kissinger's jokes as evidence of his deceitfulness. Isaacson says Fahmy saw Kissinger as "two-faced" because he felt he was biased in favor of Israel, yet when he came to Egypt he would curse the Israelis and make "funny and unflattering remarks about the Israeli leaders to convince us that he was on our side."

**D**espite the repressed atmosphere in the Foreign Service, there are a few brave souls who try to inject some levity into diplomacy. Green, for one, is famous for his puns and plays on words. In 1969, he was a member of the U.S. delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam. In his soon-to-be-published memoirs of humorous episodes from his lengthy career, titled *Pacific Encounters*, Green recalls a risqué note he sent to an American colleague about the head of the Vietcong delegation. Green's message said, "How would you like to sin on a tiger skin with Madame Binh, or would you prefer to err with her on another fur? Please notify next of skin?"

Green said outside of social events, where he always felt free to tell jokes "to establish a relaxed and closer friendship" with his hosts, he saved humor for defusing tense diplomatic situations. He proudly remembers such an occasion — the day he presented his credentials as the ambassador to Indonesia on July 25, 1965. Protocol called for Green to read a message from the United States and then for a reply from Indonesian President Sukarno. After Green finished his remarks, Sukarno, who had been the target of an alleged CIA-sponsored coup attempt in 1958, lashed out at American foreign policy. Green could have walked out in protest but felt it was necessary to listen to the harangue so he would not be removed from Indonesia.

However, he did not accept the insult passively. When the ceremony ended, Green was introduced to a beautiful female Indonesian official who was rumored to be having an affair with Sukarno.

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Speaking loud enough to be heard on the open microphone, Green slyly told her: "Madame Suipeni, its a great pleasure to meet you. You know, with that beautiful green dress and gold sash, I found you so distracting when the president was speaking just now, that I didn't catch all he said at the end. Could you tell me what he said?" After a tense silence, Sukarno burst out laughing and a sigh of relief went through the room.

Horan, who advises caution to most fellow FSOs, nevertheless believes it's not only possible to write humorous dispatches to Washington without jeopardizing one's reputation, but that it's important to use "style and a bit of humor." However, he counsels, "Just don't overdo it." During a recent interview, he reached into his wastebasket at the Foreign Service Institute and pulled out what he believed was a good example of the proper use of humor. It was a cable from U.S. Embassy Conakry, entitled, "The Skinny from Guinea." The catchy title made him read the cable before discarding it, although it contained

straightforward reporting. Another cable he remembers fondly concerned Sudan in the 1980s. "The country suffered from every plague under the sun," disasters on a biblical scale, he recalled. Someone cabled to Washington, "We've had fire, plagues, pestilence here. What would have happened if we did not let the Falashas go?"

While that kind of humor may not be on a par with Jerry Seinfeld, there's reason to believe that closet comedians like Green may soon be able to come out of hiding. President Clinton's Secretary of State-designate, Madeleine Albright, appears to be a quick wit herself. As ambassador to the United Nations, she wryly lambasted Fidel Castro after the Cubans shot down an unarmed civilian plane off the coast of Miami last summer. "Frankly," she said at a news conference after the U.N. Security Council met, "this is not *cojones*, this is cowardice." President Clinton called the comment the most effective one-liner in foreign policy during his administration. ■

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# DOES A SENSE OF HUMOR HAVE A PLACE IN DIPLOMACY?



BRIAN AGGELER

FOR FSOs, ABILITY TO LAUGH AT THEMSELVES  
KEY TO SANITY AT STRESSFUL JOBS IN DC, ABROAD

By Richard B. Parker

# HI

umor is something I would not dream of writing on had the editor not asked me to. Anyone who presumes to set himself up as an authority on the subject is inviting rebuke from keener, more knowledgeable minds, and to suggest general principles for its application to diplomacy is to risk boring the reader by restating the obvious. That said, let's proceed to general principles.

We all know that humor is one of the lubricants that make life bearable. The question posed here is whether there is a place for it in foreign affairs. The answer is that, of course, there is, but determining what that place is is something else again.

Let's begin by agreeing on the definitions. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives this definition of humor, after disposing of those meanings that concern states of mind and imaginary body fluids: "The faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it; a jocose imagination or treatment of a subject. (Less purely intellectual than wit, and often allied to pathos.)" Wit in the sense used above is defined as "that quality of speech or writing which consists in the apt association of thought and expression calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness."

*Webster's Unabridged* provides two similar definitions of humor: "The ability to perceive, appreciate or express what is funny, amusing or ludicrous," and "the expression of this in speech, writing or action. Usually distinguished from wit." It defines wit as "the ability to make clever, ironic or satirical remarks, usually by perceiving the incongruous and expressing it in a surprising or epigrammatic manner."

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*Some very sober people are able to see the humor of their situation and to respond to it gracefully. It's also possible to be witty but have no sense of humor.*

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The *Modern American Dictionary* says humor is "being funny ... a mental disposition, whim or caprice and [to] indulge." Its third definition of wit was: "understanding, intelligence or sagacity."

I had not realized that humor is allied to pathos, which, according to my *Random House Dictionary*, is "the quality or power, in literature, music, speech or other expressive forms, of evoking a feeling of pity or compassion." Perhaps that means it is more likely than wit to evoke an emotional response, but beyond that, the most important distinction between humor and wit is that wit often tends to be caustic, whereas humor implies a gentler sense of fun. *Random House* contrasts "a genial and mellow type of humor" with "biting wit."

Neither the *Oxford* nor the *Webster*, nor the *Random House* nor the *Modern American*, defines the expression "sense of humor." To have one is often understood to mean that someone is jovial or witty, but to me its more important meaning is having the ability to perceive the truth about oneself and to not take oneself too seriously. In other words, to be able to take a joke. A jovial temperament may go with that quality, but it is not absolutely neces-

sary. Some very sober people are able to see the humor of their situation and to respond to it gracefully. Paradoxically, it is possible to be very witty while having no sense of humor, as when someone's persona as a wit gets in the way of his accepting another's witticism at his own expense.

A sense of humor is generally considered a desirable trait and it used to be one of the qualities rated on Foreign Service fitness reports. I cannot recall the rationale for that, but I assume it was thought to be a positive element in a person's ability to relate to others and to maintain a balanced perspective. People who do not have a sense of humor and who take themselves too seriously tend to be disagreeable. It is not an endearing trait, and working for or with them can be difficult. Dwight Eisenhower may have had this in mind when he said, "Always take your job, but never yourself seriously." Like all aphorisms, it has an attractive ring to it, and I realized when I first heard it that this had been my philosophy all along. The trouble with it is that, as someone else has said, "If you don't take yourself seriously no one else will," and diplomacy, for all its occasional ludicrous aspects, is a deadly serious business.

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The British diplomat Harold Nicolson, in his 1939 book *Diplomacy*, says that using humor or wit in reports may ensure they are more widely read, but will diminish the likelihood they'll be taken seriously. Worse, the temptation to be humorous or witty in one's reporting has gotten many of us in trouble over the years, because there is always someone up the line who doesn't appreciate it. You can get away with it for a time if you are in a job no one else wants because it's a dangerous post, or if you're very

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careful about sacred cows, but it's rocky territory and you risk annoying your seniors and colleagues, some of whom will think you are not to be taken seriously. This can be very frustrating if one is trying to affect a U.S. policy which is believed not to be in America's national interest.

Diplomacy is often thought of as the art of getting along with people. The Foreign Service's sparse professional folklore has little in the way of guidance as to how to accomplish that. Perhaps things have changed, but in my day there was little instruction on the social graces and even less on how to be an effective communicator. FSOs were perhaps told to mind their manners and avoid confrontation, to learn to speak the local language, to bear cultural differences in mind and to not mislead people, but I can remember no codified set of rules of behavior other than those contained in various protocol handbooks and the *Foreign Service Regulations*. Those might keep one out of trouble with the ambassador's wife and the U.S. government, but they didn't explain how to deliver a *démarche* or an unpleasant message. That one had to learn by observing and following — or avoiding — example. In any event, a sense of humor, or of proportion, helped one absorb these lessons, since they often involved giving way on one's pretensions or comfort in order to please or assuage anger.

I think back on the five, very different ambassadors with whom I served. All had a sense of humor. Admittedly, two of them tended to take themselves too seriously from time to time and this affected attitudes toward them, but it did not prevent them from being effective diplomats. Two of them were very relaxed about themselves and were the most highly regarded by the host governments. One, the most professionally competent of the five, seemed too austere to some people, but was highly respected and effective. Three of them got into some kind of trouble at one time or another because of a witty remark or two. I'm not sure about the other two, since I cannot cite chapter and verse, but it would not surprise me to learn that their remarks got them into trouble somewhere along the line.

I have searched my memory unsuccessfully for

anecdotes or humorous remarks these ambassadors made that somehow turned a difficult scene with a foreign official into a successful encounter. Instead, all I can recall are instances where a joke was unappreciated or misinterpreted. Perhaps we should compile a register of diplomatic jokes that succeeded and those that went wry. This might give us a clearer picture of what works and what doesn't, but its usefulness as a guide to future behavior would be problematical. The fact that a chicken joke worked in Smolensk in 1988 does not mean it will do the same in St. Petersburg in 1998, no two human situations being identical.

There are, of course, people who get away with repeating a stock of jokes whenever the situation permits. They can be genuinely funny at times, but it is no way to impress officials with one's seriousness. Aside from the obvious dangers of incomprehension arising from cultural and linguistic differences, there is always the risk that your pleasantries, even if they succeed, will detract from the gravity of your message.

On the other hand, I can think of several instances where an inability to engage in small talk or joke quietly about current topics of interest before getting down to business has been a serious liability to diplomats trying to establish a meaningful dialogue with Third World officials. Perhaps in some mythical North European country personal rapport is not all that important, their people being too cool and objective in their thinking to allow such considerations to affect their decisions. Personal rapport, however, has been very important in the places I have served.

Particularly at posts where life is difficult, a sense of humor, and specifically a willingness not to take oneself too seriously — which may mean a willingness not to get too worked up about local government inefficiency or unresponsiveness — is often essential to establishing a rapport with someone who expects the new diplomat to be a pain in the fundament, like some of his diplomatic colleagues.

It would be nice if the Foreign Service had a set of guidelines to hand out to new officers on how and whether to use humor. But whom shall we take as an

## TIPS FROM A MASTER WIT

BY EDWARD L. PECK

**D**iplomats in general have a perhaps well-deserved reputation for being a bit stiff, but that is at least in part the nature of the work: The issues they deal with are not often laughing matters. Dialogue between nations usually involves differing perspectives as well as objectives, and is therefore inherently contentious — or potentially contentious. An additional factor that tends to inhibit any inclination toward levity is that diplomats are expected to convey the views of their governments, clearly and precisely, without embellishment (read: carefully and dryly). The overall setting, therefore, produces a Foreign Service relatively restrained (read: stodgy), and is strongly reinforced by the impact of the subculture, which teaches that humor is seldom welcomed or encouraged.

To be sure, there are times when even a well-chosen witticism might be inappropriate, and judgement is the key ingredient: You have to know when, and how, and what and with whom. Nevertheless, an intelligent approach to humor does have a role in diplomacy, and can contribute to the achievement of personal as well as professional goals. It certainly worked well for me.

■ I arrived on the *MS Gripsholm* to take up my first post in 1960 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The ship came in quite early, and the restrained, formal Swedes waiting on deck for the first sight of their homeland expressed mild surprise that I was up at 4:30 a.m. just to see the ship dock. "Wouldn't have missed it for anything," I told them. "I have always wanted to see the natives paddle out in their little outriggers to dive for coins." Stunned silence was followed by protracted laughter. The subsequent on-shore invitations, which led to useful contacts and lasting friendships, would never have developed, I am absolutely certain, without that initial effort to break the ice.

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*Edward L. Peck, an FSO who retired in 1989, served as chief of mission in Iraq from 1977-1980 and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania from 1982-1985. His 32-year career also included assignments in Morocco and Algeria.*

■ I went to Tunis in 1964 to be the junior economic officer and was promptly invited to lunch at the home of Ambassador Francis H. Russell. He had a noisy parrot and I told the person seated next to me that I had just heard a parrot story. Russell overheard and asked me to tell it. *A little old lady had a parrot she loved dearly, even though all it could say was, "Awk. I'm a whore." She told the parish priest about this failing, and he said his own parrots could help: They spent the entire day saying the rosary, which is exactly what they were doing when the little old lady's parrot was put in their big cage. After a moment's silence, they heard: "Awk. I'm a whore," followed by "Awk. You can toss the beads, Harry, our prayers have been answered."* The matriarch of Tunisia's most prominent French family was present, was amused, and on subsequent occasions, introduced me into otherwise absolutely unreachable levels of government, business and society.

■ U.S.-Egyptian relations, poor since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, were on the upswing when I went to Cairo in 1974 to be the embassy's economic/commercial officer. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Anwar Sadat had discovered each other earlier in the year, Egypt had begun receiving massive assistance, and contacts were vital. I met the health minister at Ambassador Hermann Eilts' home, and switched an old story to then-current concerns over the quality of the drinking water. *President Sadat turns on the tap, does not like what he sees, and sends a water sample to Europe for analysis. A week later, he gets a telegram saying, "Sir, we regret to inform you that your horse has diabetes."* The minister, citing me by name, repeated the joke at a Cabinet meeting and brought down the house. When I met the finance minister shortly thereafter, he told me about the ministers' meeting, and asked if I knew any economic jokes. I had one — rather earthy, but extremely funny — and he also gave me full credit when he told it to the Cabinet, with devastating effect. All doors swung open, the assignment was made, and as a direct result, so was my career.

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authority? There is a good deal of literature on the subject of humor, but I have read little of it, and what I have read has not been inspiring. Freud's book on jokes, for instance, provides the useful concept of the narcissism of minor differences as revealed in the jokes Viennese Jews told about those from Galicia, but it is not very helpful to someone who does not have a feel for humor or know how to use it in a social context. That is, of course, only one of the problems. People either have the gift of humor, or they don't, and those who don't are not likely to acquire it, short of a gene transplant. I doubt it can be taught.

Since a sense of humor is very useful in social interaction, we could conceivably weed out those who don't have it by requiring them to analyze a sequence or two from Dilbert or Zippy, but life would be dull if everyone were full of quips and cranks and wanton wiles, and no one was sober or morose. And indeed, lack of a sense of humor does

not seem to be a bar to advancement in government or industry. It is a serious handicap in American politics, but it has not prevented humorless people from rising to the highest offices in the land short of the presidency, and I'm not even sure about that. Did Herbert Hoover have a sense of humor? It's hard to visualize.

It is furthermore clear that it does not pay to be too witty, and a good case can be made for the argument that a humorless negotiator who does not realize how unfair or unreasonable is his position will be more effective than one who is empathetic and reasonable. The fatigue incurred in trying to wear down anal retentive persons is often the clue to their success.

There are also times and places where the self-important envoy will be appreciated and accepted at his own evaluation of himself. Taking oneself too seriously is no offense and can go down well in a place where the chief of state and his entourage do



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## F O C U S

the same and welcome connivance in their pretensions. Mutual admiration societies give much satisfaction to their members as long as they last.

Humor, then, is a quality that certainly has its social and personal uses. Given that much of diplomacy is about interpersonal relations, humor will inevitably find its way into the daily exchanges between those involved in the process. Those who handle it well will flourish when this occurs. On the other hand, diplomats can get away without it and should be very careful about using it because it can quickly get out of hand or go awry with serious consequences. The only rule I can offer is, "When in doubt about whether to use humor, don't."

If one is determined to be witty, however, in spite of, perhaps, being humor-challenged, one may find useful the services of Malcom Kushner, a self-described humor consultant whose skills were defined in the Aug. 9 issue of the *International Herald Tribune*. Kushner maintains there is no bet-

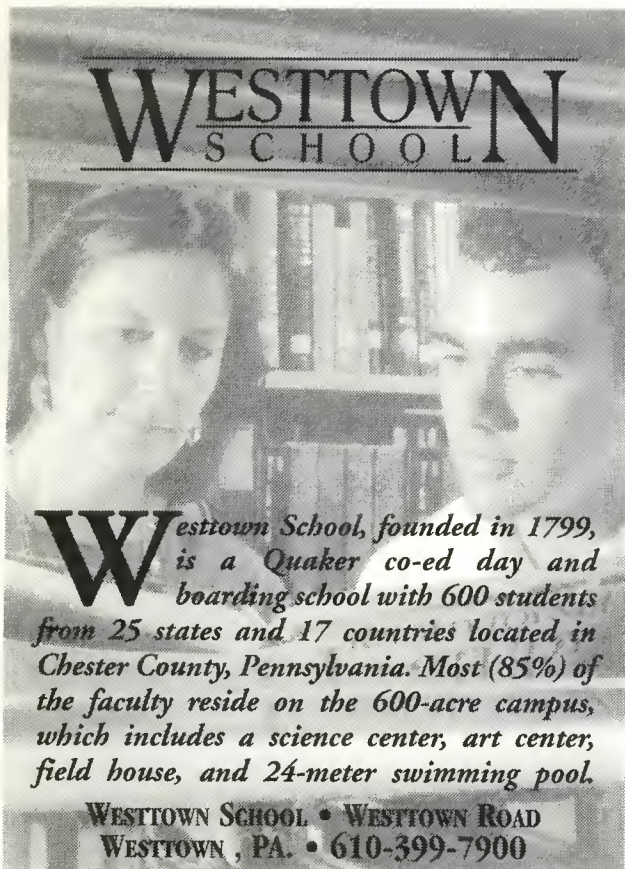
ter way to create instant rapport with people than by injecting a little humor into the conversation. His online service (<http://www.kushnergroup.com>) offers such gems as an automatic haiku generator, an interactive humor database, a surrealist compliment generator and a "tag line search that finds one-liners for over 700 light bulb jokes." Think what this could do for dialogue in the Big Palaver House.

Before visiting Kushner's home page, however, keep in mind three serious rules about a sense of humor:

■ Most people have at least some sense of humor, but others are incapable of seeing anything humorous about anything involving themselves.

■ Everyone with or without a sense of humor feels that certain subjects are not funny. Knowing what these are and avoiding them is the key to getting away with humor.

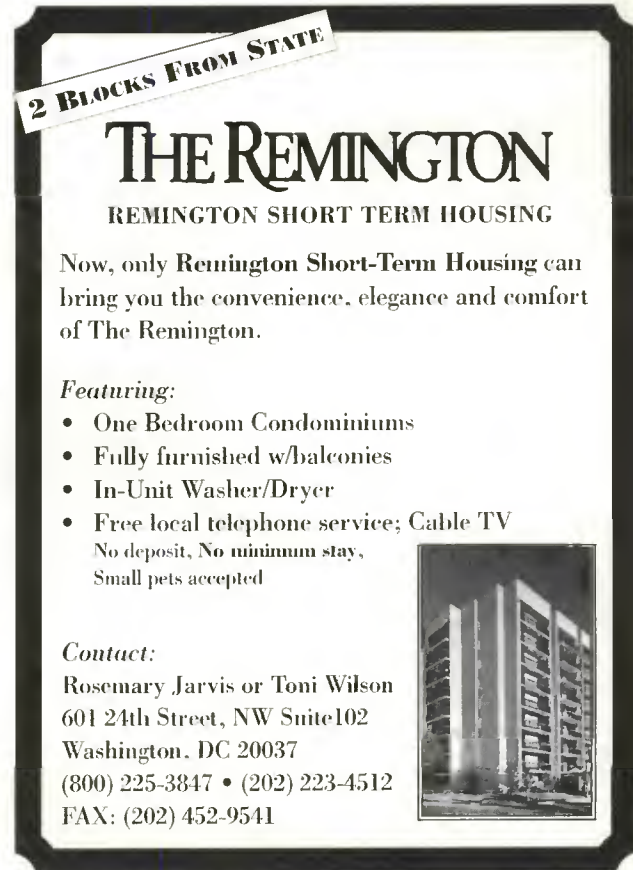
■ Timing, as they say, is everything. ■



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# IS THERE ROOM FOR A LITTLE FUN IN DIPLOMACY?



BRIAN AGGELER

## MEMBERS OF FS COMMUNITY DABBLE IN DELIVERING THE DUMB DÉMARCHE

**D**émarches, which can run the gamut from proposals to threats, are one of the oldest forms of diplomatic discourse, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the French word first appeared in intra-country communications in 1678. The textbook definition of a démarche is “the official raising of a matter with host country officials, often accompanied by a specific request for action or decision.” Those who have played this diplomatic game will remember démarches may range from relaxed sessions at the Foreign Ministry, where a predictable position is recited and met with a standard rebuttal, to hastily arranged midnight meetings where the response requires urgent, high-level consideration. The *Journal* recently asked readers to respond to this challenge: “As FSOs know, U.S. embassies often receive inappropriate démarche instructions. As the political officer in a small, poor country bordering the Sahara, you receive a State Department cable instructing you to deliver a démarche to the Foreign Ministry announcing U.S. concern about high tariff restrictions on imported sand from U.S. companies. Although this country has plenty of its own sand, you need to make the case for Nevada sand exporters.” Responses included:

We beg you to reconsider the high tariff restrictions on U.S. sand. Your superior quality sand is so pure and fine that our aging equipment breaks down with its use and we are forced to import coarse Nevada sand in order to remain operational. Thank you for your kind understanding.

*Sandra Byrnes*

*FS Spouse*

*U.S. Embassy Bridgetown*

## F O C U S

The U.S. government views with concern the GOSPCBS' high tariff duties on American sand. We propose elimination of these duties because:

■ Greater competition in this established market would offer both countries valuable lessons in marketing, which could be applied to advancing economic development and regional stability.

■ International media attention on US-SPCBS and trade would surely promote greater direct foreign investment in SPCBS.

■ Finally, some U.S. sand could be provided from nuclear testing sites unavailable in SPCBS. Use of radioactive sand for outdoor lighting could provide significant energy saving for SPCBS.

*James L. Bullock*  
*Public Affairs Officer*  
*U.S. Information Service (USIS)*  
*U.S. Embassy Rabat*

The U.S. government is pleased to present the Government of Sandia the case for the Silica Association of Nevada Dunes. SAND members rightly argue that your burgeoning cement industry needs, in contrast to the super fine silica of Sandia, the special elastic property of Nevada granulite, to wit, glutinous maximus.

*Michael Canning*  
*Retired FSO*  
*Washington, D.C.*

The United States of America realizes that your independent country has plenty of sand. First, however, high tariff restrictions on imported sand will infringe on the democratic freedom of importing countries. Second, high tariff restrictions on American sand is wrong because it is different from domestic ones: American sand is multi-colored.

*Edward Hirabayashi*  
*Retired FSO*  
*Glen Ellen, Calif.*

Respectfully, if you don't knock off that sand tariff we'll really mess up your exports — assuming you have some.

Also the Las Vegas Mafia is ticked that you won't take their Nevada sand, if you catch my drift. Wishing you continued good health.

*Ed Howatt*  
*Retired FSO*  
*Oro Valley, Ariz.*

The rich sand from Nevada sparkles with gold and silver flecks and would enhance the areas surrounding public buildings in Ouagadougou, reflect light at night on landing strips at the international airport and would reduce dependence on expensive power sources. Likewise, use of this coarse sand along the sides of roads would cut down on dust during Hamattan season from motorbike traffic.

*Barbara B. Jacquin*  
*Vice Consul*  
*U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou*

I deliver this démarche on the subject of your government's elevated tariffs on sand with some trepidation and embarrassment as follows:

We propose you consider a reduction  
Of your tariffs on sand at this juncture  
"We've lost out marbles," you say, exhibiting deliria,  
And we're ASAP exporting ice to Siberia!

*Lewis W. Lucke*  
*Mission Director*  
*U.S. Agency for International*  
*Development (USAID)*  
*U.S. Embassy Annan*

Your tariffs on sand are too high  
Your domestic wheat and yield production too low  
Your tariffs had better come down  
Or our future food assistance is no go  
We know you have sand to spare  
And need more like a hole in the head  
But importing desert from Nevada  
Is a must to keep hungry people fed

*Alexander H. Margulies*  
*Chief of Political Section*  
*U.S. Embassy Asuncion*

## F O C U S

Your Excellency, too many of your citizens think of the state of Nevada only as a gambling resort. This impression is incorrect. Nevada has many important commercial interests, among them the export of high-quality sand at very competitive prices.

My government is concerned that the Republic of Sandalia has imposed a prohibitive tariff in this item, so that Nevada's sand exporters cannot sell their products in your country.

If action is not taken soon to correct this situation, my government may be obliged to reconsider the present duty-free status of imports of camel dung into the United States.

*Bonnie M. Lincoln*  
*Retired FSO*  
*Ft. Myers, Fla.*

Feldspar's license to export ski attachments for Chevrolet snow-plow conversion kits to the U.S. was

contingent upon duty-free entry into your country of Nevada Test Site Nite-Glo Sand and Glitter Gulch No-Gamble Sandbags. Unless these conditions are met, the U.S. government will impose trade sanctions and bar Chev Ski.

*Michael Mates*  
*Political Officer*  
*U.S. Embassy Canberra*

Nevada firms offer sand, cheaper, freer of camel dung than Sablonia president's Monopoly. If asked, you can say that although more radioactive, it's only marginally carcinogenic. The president may recoup sales losses if his airline, Saharair, carries a 100-pound bag in each empty seat. Shippers with advance purchase may obtain group excursion rates.

*Robert G. Morris*  
*Retired FSO*  
*Ashland, Ore.*

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## F O C U S

We find it quite impossible to see,  
Why a tariff guards what's now for free.  
For who would pay for Nevada sand,  
When all you want is now on hand.  
When considering your sudden ban,  
We're in the mind of Tallyrand  
*Entente cordiale* needs not the grit,  
That's added by your export writ.

Hank Merrill  
FSO and Director  
Office of Business Development  
U.S. Agency for International  
Development (USAID)  
Washington, D.C.

Tariff restrictions on U.S. sand imports are impacting unfavorably on USAID allocation decisions being made by a congressional committee chaired by a Nevadan. The committee fails to understand why a

USAID-recipient country effectively bars U.S. sand sales. The embassy urges relaxation on sand imports before the chairman's visit next week.

James R. Wachob  
Retired FSO  
Chevy Chase, Md.

The U.S. government regrets the sand levy, which violates the Sahel Agreement on Negating Desertification (SAND). Imported sand tariffs disastrously impact employment in the sectors of sandbox, sandblasting, golf course maintenance and feline waste disposal. The U.S. government regrets the tariff's negative impact on the endangered sand-grouse's habitat, and urges reconsideration of this unnecessary action.

Eric P. Whitaker  
Economic/Commercial Officer  
U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa ■



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# THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

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AS CLINTON AND YELTSIN BEGIN SECOND TERMS,  
RUSSIA PRESSES FOR MORE EQUAL RELATIONSHIP

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By VICTOR ISRAELYAN

**P**resident Bill Clinton and President Boris Yeltsin have at least one thing in common: They were both elected to second presidential terms by campaigning on domestic issues and shying away from foreign policy, which disinterested both American and Russian voters.

During the Russian campaign, though Yeltsin proclaimed that, "all the world is the sphere of Russia's interests," he didn't bother to expand on what he really meant. Similarly, Clinton's foreign policy pronouncements were not the center of his campaign rhetoric.

Still, it would be a mistake to think that Yeltsin and his advisers are not concerned with foreign policy or that the U.S.-Russian relationship will remain the same in Clinton and Yeltsin's second terms. Yeltsin may refer to Clinton as "my old friend, Bill," but the U.S. president should expect a new, more intractable Yeltsin across the negotiating table this term. New diplomatic overtures and statements of Yeltsin and

his advisers indicate serious alterations ahead in U.S.-Russian relations. Add to that mix the ever-worsening Russian economy, the recent crisis over Yeltsin's heart problems, questions about who's in charge in the Kremlin and who would succeed Yeltsin if he should die or become incapacitated — and the result is a diplomatic mine field that the United States will need to carefully wind its way through.

**S**o far, the most serious foreign policy problem faced by the United States in the post-Cold War years has been the political, military and economic collapse of the former Soviet Union. As a new president in 1993, Clinton opened new pages in the relationship with America's one-time adversary. Both countries affirmed a new era of partnership, friendship and neighborly relations as the United States pumped \$2.4 billion into Russia and the former Soviet republics between 1992 and 1996, according to figures provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

What started as a promising partnership, however, has disappointed Russia. From the Russian point of view, the two countries have failed in their attempts to establish an equal, beneficial partnership based on mutual interests. Russia has blamed this failure not only on its internal political and economic instability, but on the repeated U.S. exclusion of Russia in the decision-making process of major international problems, such as the Middle East peace process.

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*Victor Israelyan, a visiting professor of Russian foreign policy at Pennsylvania State University, was Soviet ambassador to the Geneva Conference on Disarmament from 1979-1987. He is the author of more than 10 books on diplomacy and international relations. His most recent book, Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War, was published in 1995.*

In addition, Russia was not invited to participate in negotiations between North Korea and South Korea, talks that determined an agreement to limit North Korea's nuclear development. American policymakers regard Russia as important, with its huge repository of poorly safeguarded nuclear weapons, but Russians saw the snub as disrespectful.

A new U.S.-Russian relationship will have to be negotiated by accounting for Yeltsin's campaign promises, his advisers' attitudes and the tenuous political situation in Russia today. The country faces a complicated situation, and probably more coup attempts. Since 1992, the Kremlin has fended off more than a dozen low-level coups and one bloody, open revolt in October 1993, when more than 140 people died, according to Russian government officials.

When Clinton and Yeltsin meet in March at their first summit since their reelections, the United States needs to clearly state its preference for dealing with democratically minded leaders, but must be careful not to tie itself too tightly to any one world leader.

Therefore, it is important to understand the cast of political characters now active in Russia — from the Russian point of view. Boris Yeltsin won a second term as Russia's first popularly elected leader in the post-Communist period by vowing, in essence, to make Russia great again. His electoral tactics — overseen by a cabal of American campaign consultants closeted in a government hotel — froze out his nearest rival, communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, by offering up the specter of a return to the "bad old days" of communism. Old-style Kremlin politics helped Yeltsin neutralize his next closest rival, Alexander Lebed, by offering him a place in his administration, an alliance that fell apart four months later when Yeltsin fired Lebed. Zyuganov remains a threat to Yeltsin and Lebed, now free to build his own constituency, has emerged as one of Russia's most popular politicians. By campaigning already for the presidency, he is in a position to challenge Yeltsin in the same way that Yeltsin once challenged Mikhail Gorbachev.

Of those politicians now in the Yeltsin administration, Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin exercises many of the duties and responsibilities of the president, along with his Chief of Administration Anatoly Chubais, whom Western diplomats hold out as the "Great Western Hope" because of his pro-democracy, pro-West philosophy. Chubais wields tremendous power within the Kremlin, but isn't popular with the Russian people, who regard him as a hatchet man for Yeltsin.

The United States must abandon all hope of bringing U.S.-style democracy to Russia, particularly in light of the increasing anti-West, anti-American sentiment in the country. Last January, Yeltsin fired pro-American Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, and during the campaign Yeltsin kept his American political advisers a secret, fearing an anti-American backlash at the polls. But during the elections, as long as Russians could still get Western goods at reasonable prices, anti-American sentiment has been kept in check. Still, Russian politicians continue to speak of the "specialness" of Russia, implying it is not compatible with the Western model of democracy. All across Russia the attitude is the same: We must develop ourselves in our own way, and we do not want any foreigners telling us what to do.

The worsening Russian economy will also play a key role in future U.S.-Russian relations. The large-scale promised U.S. aid has not materialized, and has failed to support economic reforms. That aid, which peaked at \$1.6 billion in 1994, has been steadily decreasing, with only \$343 million given in 1995 and \$143 million in 1996, according to figures provided by the USAID. Therefore, anti-American opponents of economic reforms have taken advantage of the discrediting of Western aid. If the economy continues to deteriorate, anti-American senti-

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*The United States faces a diplomatic mine field in Russia. Throughout the country, the attitude is the same: We must develop ourselves in our own way, without foreigners telling us what to do.*

---

ment will escalate even more, which Clinton would be wise to address early in his second term.

The United States should also expect new emphasis in Russia's foreign policy. In the past, Russians may have conceded some issues to Americans for the sake of a diplomatic partnership and to the detriment of Russian national interests, but no longer. I have known very well two Russian foreign ministers: Andrei Kozyrev, who was fired by Yeltsin, and Yevgeny Primakov, the current minister. The emotional Kozyrev, who was my aide in the 1970s, prides himself on an open relationship with the United States and Americans in general. Primakov, who I have known since childhood, is not so frank with foreigners, particularly U.S. citizens.

After Yeltsin's strong showing in the 1996 presidential campaign, he persistently repeated his intent to continue democratization of Russia's foreign and domestic policy. However, he also complained that Russia has been too supine. Avoiding ideological confrontation, Yeltsin will seek to restore the lost spheres of influence both with the states of the former Soviet Union and countries outside the region.

**E**mphasizing the global interests of Russia, Yeltsin can be expected to focus on three main goals in his second term.

His first priority will be to develop and reinforce the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the loose association of former Soviet republics that replaced the Soviet Union, as he tries to reintegrate them into an economic and legal association that would counteract chaos and enable them to collectively vie for a worthy place in the world. Belarus has been among the first to welcome the renewed attention, trading its loyalty and cheap labor for \$50 million in subsidies of imported Russian oil, raw materials and food.

Moscow hopes to model its relationships with other former Soviet republics on its friendship with Belarus, which is also part of the proposed Alliance of Four, a single ruble-based economic and legal bloc among Russia, Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan. The United States should encourage this bloc, which would help economically stabilize the region.

Yeltsin's second goal is to advance the progress Russia has already achieved in its relationship with the West. Russia's participation in the G-7 summits of industrialized nations, termed the "Great Eight" in Russia, is viewed by Russian politicians as a means to stabilize relations with the West by including Moscow in an elite group of world leaders and decision-makers.

Thirdly, in an effort to equalize the global balance of power, Yeltsin can be expected to pursue a foreign policy more independent of Western influence by developing closer ties with China and the rogue states of Cuba, Iran, Iraq and Libya, as well as with terrorist organizations. It's no accident that special solemnity surrounded Yeltsin's 1996 visit to China to discuss a "Treaty of Friendship," as well as the trips of several top Russian politicians to Middle Eastern and Far Eastern countries. Russian diplomats will also strive for at least partial re-establishment of Russia's influence in a Middle East peace settlement. If these kinds of overtures work and Russia establishes relationships with states as a counterbalance to U.S. power, then Moscow can expect to revive its superpower status.

"We have no territorial claims on anybody, and we will not accept anybody's territorial claims," Yeltsin said during the runup to the 1996 election. Statements like this signal new toughness from Yeltsin in protecting what he perceives as Russia's territorial claims, particularly in the face of NATO expansion. For example, Yeltsin

has said that he will resist all attempts to allow NATO to use the Black Sea as a naval base. He believes Russia should remain the dominant power in the area, particularly in its sole waterway to the south — the Black Sea.

Similarly, Yeltsin is determined to maintain a toehold in the Baltics, in Kaliningrad. As one of the great naval powers, Russia wants to maintain its legitimate presence with its naval base in a Russian oblast west of Lithuania on the Baltic Sea, its main waterway to the north. He has said that he will reinforce Russian military bases in Baltisk, Kaliningrad, and that if any of the now independent Baltic countries — the former Soviet states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — were to become NATO members, he would consider their membership a threat to Russian domestic security due to large Russian populations in those states. The Baltics' deep roots with Russia began centuries before the Soviet period, when they were part of the Russian empire.

Yeltsin has not yet publicly railed against the American plan to expand NATO into Eastern Europe, a plan he has strongly opposed on other occasions. While opposition to NATO expansion is growing within Russia, Yeltsin and his advisers understand that Russia does not have any tools to stop the expansion of NATO into Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Though there is talk of developing an "adequate response" to NATO expansion, in reality this response would probably be limited to Russia's non-recognition of former Warsaw Pact members in NATO.

Along with general declarations, Russia, despite the repeated objections of the United States, also is determined to carry out nuclear technology agreements with Iran and India. Russia has also been able to deliver a wide range of weapons to very competitive markets in that region of the world.

These important shifts in Russian foreign policy will undoubtedly require a U.S. response. The nature of the Russian-American pseudo-partnership formed in the post-Cold War era might have suited Washington, in general. These relations match the American elite's idea of turning the United States into the world's lone superpower. Indeed, foreign policy debates in Washington in the post-Cold War period have never even touched upon the possibility of Russia's revival as an equal competitor in international affairs, an apparently unanimous view in the White House and in Congress.

Still, Russia's new foreign policy approaches could be considered by Washington as a potential source of military threat, both in the former Soviet republics and Eastern Europe. In that case, America could employ an effective system of military and political deterrence using Western defense alliances like NATO. In addition, President Clinton might make an

effort to set up political, economic and military counterweights in the CIS to balance Russia's influence, particularly in the Western-leaning countries of the former Soviet Union: Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. Why not try using them against Russia?

One area where cooperation might be established between the two countries is in the area of nuclear arms reduction and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. However, even here, a delicate balance must be achieved, since any noticeable infringement by one country on another might develop into nuclear confrontation.

There is still potential for a Russian-American partnership, but it must be a more mature partnership devoid of the romantic expectations of the post-Soviet period. If Russia is to respect traditional U.S. interests, then the United States should respect Russia's interests in the former Soviet republics. The United States should be free to establish relationships with

these now independent states, but should be careful to make cooperation with them not appear anti-Russian. Unquestionably, Russia would interpret this as a challenge to its national interest, much in the same way that America would interpret interference by Russia in Latin America as a challenge to its national interest.

The United States should do all it can to encourage Russia's transformation into a democratic power, or it will indeed become an empire-building threat to U.S. national security. For its part, Russia needs to guard against threatening U.S. national interests by, for example, supporting anti-American policies of states, such as Iran, Iraq and Libya.

While Boris Yeltsin and his advisors will seek a more equal partnership with the United States, there is one point on which my Russian diplomatic colleagues agree. The United States and President Clinton will have the upper hand in this process. ■



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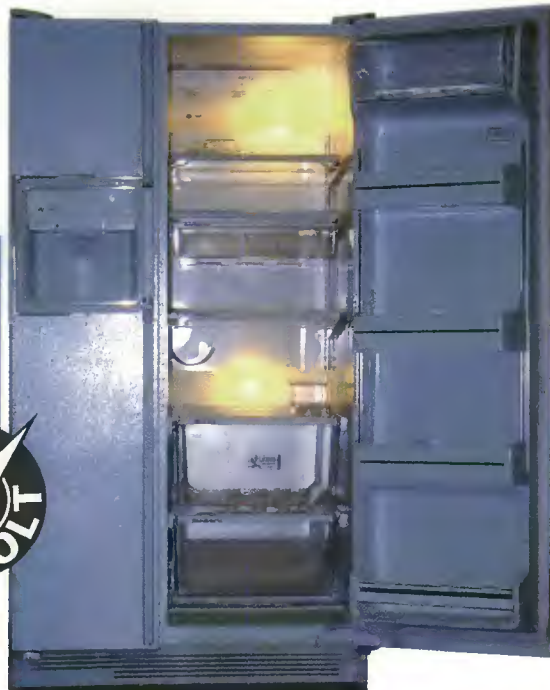
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# THE DAME AMONG THE DANES

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AMERICA'S FIRST FEMALE ENVOY REMEMBERED  
AS BELOVED, ELOQUENT AND CONTROVERSIAL

---

BY ANN MILLER MORIN AND KRISTIE MILLER

**B**y the early 1930s, Ruth Bryan Owen, the South's first congresswoman, had become a star speaker on the Chautauqua Circuit, booked coast to coast at town and city lecture halls. When Franklin Roosevelt tapped her to be the first woman chief of mission overseas, therefore, he received an irate letter from one of Owen's fans in Lincoln, Neb., berating him for sending her to a foreign country. "We don't feel we are so deeply indebted to any country that we need give them the prize of all American women," the writer protested. "Heavens knows it's seldom enough we have a taste of the white meat. So why send the choice bit to the Danes?"

Louis Howe, the president's secretary, replied that FDR was sorry she felt that way but was "very glad indeed that Mrs. Owen [accepted] this very important post." So off Owen went, in May 1933, with three of her four children and three grandchildren in tow.

---

*Ann Miller Morin is the author of Her Excellency, an Oral History of American Women Ambassadors, published in 1995 by Twayne Publishers. Kristie Miller is the author of Ruth Hanna McCormick: A Life in Politics, 1880-1944, published in 1992 by the University of New Mexico Press.*

She had become very fond of Denmark and the Danes, having toured the country one previous summer in a van with her family, during which time she tried to learn enough of the language to communicate with ordinary people. This curiosity, coupled with industry, was typical of Owen. She was a "people" person, like her father, William Jennings Bryan, the silver-tongued orator from the West whose rousing populist speeches changed the course of American politics.

Being Bryan's daughter had given her several advantages, among them name recognition, eloquence as a speaker, and a handsome physical appearance. But in 1932 those advantages were overtaken by the disadvantage of her father's notoriety as a prohibitionist (which she was not), and cost her her re-election bid as a congresswoman from Florida, despite the Democratic victory that swept Roosevelt to power.

**R**uth Bryan was 5 when her father was elected to Congress (D-Neb.) in 1891, and she sometimes rode to the Capitol on his shoulders. Bryan became a power in the Democratic party, and at the age of 35 was nominated to run for president against William McKinley in 1896. Despite his loss, the party chose him as its presidential candidate two more times, in 1900 and 1908, only to watch him defeated

each time. President Woodrow Wilson, who triumphed over William Taft in the 1912 election, chose Bryan as his secretary of State in 1913, a position he held for two years.

The oldest of three children, the precocious Ruth Bryan participated in her father's presidential campaigns. In 1896, when she turned 11, she answered some of his correspondence, and by age 22 she had become his campaign secretary.

Her mother, born Mary Baird, was unusually well educated for her time and had passed the Nebraska bar exam. An ambitious and energetic woman, she felt compelled by social convention to use her talents to help advance her husband's career. She was an early supporter of women's liberation and encouraged her eldest child to believe she could achieve a career in a male-dominated society.

Ruth Bryan attended the University of Nebraska but left before graduating to marry William Leavitt, an artist twice her age, in 1903, one day after she turned 18. The couple divorced in 1909, leaving Ruth the single mother of two children. She had met a British army officer, Reginald Owen, while studying voice in Europe, and they married in 1910. They were stationed in Jamaica, where she bore a son, but when World War I broke out, Owen was sent to serve in the Egyptian-Palestine campaign. Ruth Owen herself spent nearly a year in London and then moved to Cairo, just before civilian travel was stopped, to be near her husband. She worked as a nurse in Egyptian war hospitals. Her husband, suffering from kidney disease, known as "trench nephritis," became one of her patients, and remained an invalid for the rest of his life.

The Owenses moved to Florida near Ruth's parents, where the warm climate was thought to be good for her husband's health. Now with four children and a dependent husband, she earned the bulk of the family income as a speaker on the Lyceum and Chautauqua lecture circuits. Her biographer Sarah Vickers

reports she was often torn between family and career. After her father's death in 1925, Ruth Bryan Owen became active in politics, an uphill battle given that Florida had not even ratified the 19th Amendment allowing women to vote. She ran for Congress in 1926 from Florida's fourth district, losing the race by a narrow margin. Major Owen died at the end of 1927 and, as a distraction from grief, she plunged into a second campaign, touring her large district in a new green 1928 Ford coupe. She was elected in 1928 by a substantial margin, although her opponent promptly challenged her right to serve in Congress.

The Constitution requires a member of Congress to have been a U.S. citizen for seven years. As a woman who had married an alien in 1910, she was forced to forfeit her American citizenship under the terms of a 1907 law. Although the Cable Act, which reversed the 1907 law, had been passed in 1922, it didn't take effect until 1925, and her defeated opponent claimed Owen had therefore been a citizen for only three years. Owen argued her own defense before the House Elections Committee on the grounds that no such liability had ever affected a man, and her election was unanimously approved. The case led to legislation correcting the flaws in the Cable Act and may have been her most important contribution in Congress. The House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to increase their membership by one, in recognition of her familiarity with foreign affairs, to make room for her as the first woman to sit on a major congressional committee.

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*When Ruth Bryan Owen was named ambassador to Denmark in 1933, there was still resistance to women entering diplomacy; among the most chauvinistic of male preserves. But 12 years after women won the right to vote, there was clamoring for their right to serve abroad with men.*

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Although in 1930 Owen was able to fight off a challenger who favored repeal of the prohibition amendment, by 1932 the tide was running against her. Although not personally a teetotaler, she had always supported prohibition. In 1932, she ran on her record in Congress, and her belief that unemployment was the more important issue, but a repeal candidate defeated her in the primary.

Owen's service to the Democratic party and especially to President Roosevelt, for whom she had campaigned vigorously, led to her diplomatic appointment. There was, as ever, resistance to women entering all-male preserves, among which diplomacy was one of the most chauvinistic, but it was 12 years after passage of the equal suffrage amendment, and women were clamoring for the right to serve abroad with men. The Roosevelts, especially Eleanor, were eager to increase women's representation, and Owen was an excellent example of American womanhood to send overseas.

Owen not only appreciated the charm and culture of Denmark, she found it to be "a laboratory of progressive social legislation." Her enthusiasm for all things Danish, her remarkable energy and her handsome appearance made her popular with the Danish people. She claimed Denmark as her "motherland," based on limited evidence that the first Bryan in America (circa 1620) had an Irish father and a Danish mother. One of her most important tasks was to improve trade relations hurt by the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, and she even managed to convince the Danes to overlook her vote for its 1929 passage in Congress.

In addition to her efforts to

improve U.S.-Danish commercial ties, much of her energy was devoted to dealing with economic hardships in her own embassy. She earned a salary of \$12,000 a year, not nearly enough to entertain properly and to travel as extensively as she wanted. Therefore, she used her annual leave giving lectures for the Chautauqua organization, earning \$1,000 a week for eight weeks, two-thirds of her entire annual ministerial salary. On her visits to the States she spent weekends with the Roosevelts at their home in Hyde Park, N.Y.

In 1936, Roosevelt was running for re-election and his campaign manager wanted Owen to return to the States to use her considerable oratorical skills in the campaign. Owen had ambitious plans to make her campaign tour by plane, piloted by a woman. Furthermore, she envisioned the word "Roosevelt" in neon under the wings of the plane, to be illuminated when they landed and took off at night, while loudspeakers blared campaign music. Unfortunately, the plan had to be abandoned as too costly and impractical. Eventually, she settled for an automobile tour.

Ruth Owen announced she was coming home early for a rest before she began campaigning. What Democratic headquarters did not know was that she was arriving early to marry a Dane, Borge Rohde, a captain in the Danish King's Life Guards, eight years her junior, whom she had first noticed because he ordered the King's Life Guards to play American tunes whenever they passed the U.S. legation. The wedding of Ruth Owen and Capt. Rohde took place at Hyde Park in the picturesque Episcopal church to which the Roosevelts belonged.

Flowers from their Hyde Park estate decorated the church, and the Roosevelts hosted the couple's wedding supper in their mansion overlooking the Hudson River.

Members of the Democratic Party and the State Department were not so supportive. Democrats worried her controversial marriage would affect FDR's re-election. A letter to New York City's James Farley, chairman of the National Democratic Executive Committee, from a judge in Montgomery, Ala., expressed the typical reaction: "Mrs. Ruth Bryan Owen is making a spectacle of herself and is being ridiculed all over the nation ... it's up to some of you ... to squelch her. A 52-year-old widow who marries a 41-year-old man is ridiculous enough ... but when a 52-year-old fool widow, who represents the greatest nation on earth as an ambassador, marries a 41-year-old foreigner and parades him across the front pages of all the papers in her own country, [she] brings ridicule not only on her, but upon the administration which sponsors her. ... This escapade will cost Mr. Roosevelt his election, unless he promptly removes her." Although the judge got their ages wrong — she was 50 and he was 42 — he accurately captured the attitude of the general public.

Even more serious were the supposed implications of the marriage for her ministerial appointment. Secretary of State Cordell Hull weighed in with two complaints. He first questioned the legality of the new Mrs. Rohde remaining U.S. minister to Denmark. Once more, the question of citizenship had arisen to bedevil her. By marrying a Dane, Mrs. Rohde had acquired Danish citizenship under Danish law.

While she did not lose her American citizenship, as she had with her marriage to Owen, she did become a bi-national, legally half-Dane, and therefore, Hull insisted, must surrender her legation. The second complaint was that it was deemed unsuitable for her to be speaking for Roosevelt on the campaign trail while remaining one of his emissaries. Therefore, for these two reasons, he said, she must resign immediately.

Having planned to take part in the presidential race, Ruth Bryan Owen Rohde had no contracts with Chautauqua and her \$1,000-per-month ministerial salary was her only source of income. Although she had hoped to retire at the end of the year to enjoy life with her new husband, she could not do without her ministerial salary because expenses for house and servants in Copenhagen continued while she was on leave, and her services to the Democratic Party would be unpaid. Roosevelt, recognizing her dilemma, wanted to allow her to stay on as minister until January, but Hull was adamant, and in the end, Ruth Rohde resigned immediately, on Aug. 29, 1936. Roosevelt reluctantly accepted her resignation the following day.

The couple spent many months helping Roosevelt in his re-election bid. The following year, Capt. Rohde applied for U.S. citizenship and Ruth Bryan Owen Rohde resumed her career as a lecturer and writer. In 1942 she published *Look Forward, Warrior*, a call for international cooperation that prompted Roosevelt to make her a special State Department assistant to help draft the charter creating the United Nations. In 1949 Truman named her an alternate delegate to the U.N. General Assembly, a term that ended in mid-1950. Afterwards, she continued her work

for world peace, founding the Institute for International Government in 1952, and serving as its president through 1953.

Even before the United States entered World War II, Borge Rohde wanted to join the U.S. Army training program and become a commissioned officer. His wife wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, who was told by the War Department that only men between 21 and 36 were eligible for regular army commissions. Borge was 46, and couldn't qualify for a reserve commission, either. However, once the United States entered the war, Rohde's experience was needed; he served as a major in the Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft Division and, later, as a staff member of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's invasion army.

In 1954, when the Rohdes were 68 and 60, they decided to retire, and bought property in Jamaica where Ruth had been happy so many years before. They began with an around-the-world cruise, planning to visit 25 ports of call. In July, they arrived in Denmark, where Ruth Bryan Rohde received the Order of Merit from King Frederick IX for furthering Danish-American friendship. A few days later, on July 26, still in Copenhagen, she suffered a heart attack and died. Fittingly, her ashes were buried in a cemetery in the countryside just outside of Copenhagen.

Although Ruth Bryan Owen served at a diplomatic post only slightly more than three years, in many ways she was an ambassador most of her adult life. As a woman in the world of men, she represented southern womanhood in Congress; as an American in Europe and for the last decade of her life, she worked on behalf of world peace. ■



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## BOOKS

### WHY FOREIGN NEWS BORES AMERICANS

#### International News & Foreign Correspondents

Stephen Hess, *The Brookings  
Institution Press, 1996, hardcover  
\$26.95, 209 pages.*

BY CAROLINE V. MEIRS

In this carefully researched, readable book, the fifth in the "Newswork" series, Stephen Hess, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, tackles the problem of why most Americans are ill informed on foreign affairs. *International News and Foreign Correspondents* offers insights into the dilemma that the American public's lack of interest in foreign affairs poses for policymakers by examining the problem from the points of view of foreign correspondents, the U.S. media and the public.

Hess divides the United States into two media societies. One small group has the interest, resources and education needed to tap into specialized foreign affairs news. The second, and largest group, relies on the networks and their local papers for international news and, as a consequence, their knowledge of international news is limited. Disturbingly, Hess writes that Americans are less informed about foreign affairs than Mexicans, Canadians or Europeans, and that the foreign media devote

more space to stories on the United States than do American media on foreign affairs.

It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that the U.S. media's coverage of international matters is uneven, flooding the American public with information on wars, disasters and crises, but largely neglecting social and cultural topics that would increase understanding of how and why other nations operate. "In terms of what gets covered, a distinguishing characteristic of American news operations, especially television news, is that they are so prominently concerned with violence," writes Hess, who says that half of international television news aired in America is about violence. Another imbalance is the type of international news covered for the American market. Coverage focuses on the Middle East while neglecting Asia and Africa; half of all stories ignore the larger picture in favor of governmental affairs.

In addition, American media are hampered by severe budget cutbacks, which have reduced the number of international bureaus and correspondents; three-quarters of the nation's largest newspapers have no foreign correspondents or only token representation abroad. Instead, news organizations rely on "parachutist" or "fireman" correspondents who, with little background, drop in to a country to cover a story, then move on to the next hotspot. Even CNN just looks like it

spends more on news because it gives longer footage, but it has the same inadequacies as the major networks, Hess writes. The one bright spot is international business news, which, he says, is increasingly in demand.

Increasingly, American newspapers are relying on the Associated Press for their foreign coverage, although very little actually makes it into newspapers. Most newspapers claim they give short shrift to foreign news because there is no consumer demand for it, an excuse which Hess believes is "a loosely convenient cover for journalists not to do what they don't want to do." On the bright side, Hess' research shows that U.S. foreign correspondents are better educated, have better foreign language skills and are better travelled than previous correspondents.

Still, having put together an impressive array of data and ample food for thought for foreign affairs professionals, Hess does not offer any conclusions. His book cries out for solutions like better public education on world affairs, better international relations training for all journalists — not just foreign correspondents — and greater exposure of Americans to other cultures and peoples through exchanges and travel.

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*Caroline V. Meirs, an FSO for the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) who retired in 1996, served in Italy, Finland, Germany, Peru and Colombia.*



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## BOOKS

### THE DISMEMBERING OF YUGOSLAVIA

**Origins of a Catastrophe:  
Yugoslavia and its Destroyers**  
*Warren Zimmermann, Times Books,  
1996, hardcover, \$25, 269 pages.*

BY GILBERT D. KULICK

If there is anyone who still wonders who killed Yugoslavia and several hundred thousand of its citizens, this book should put that puzzlement to an end. In this tightly written, fast-paced memoir — which might have been subtitled *Present at the Destruction* — America's last ambassador to Belgrade documents the step-by-step process by which Yugoslavia was dismembered.

In the book's most lucid piece of analysis, the author shoots down the array of spurious explanations offered by a variety of analysts, especially that most reprehensible of clichés, "ancient Balkan hatreds." Yugoslavia was killed by a relentless campaign of manipulation, incitement, and demonization — led by Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic and abetted by various other Yugoslavian "pyromaniacs" — that reignited long-dormant fears and homicidal nationalism.

Warren Zimmermann provides a narrowly focused, low-key account of his valiant and perspicacious, if ultimately futile, efforts to stem the tide, a goal that would probably have eluded even the most assertive envoy. At the same time, he observes that the United States and the West missed several crucial opportunities to turn back Milosevic from his genocidal course by its unwillingness to use force — when just a little force might have sufficed. And he is refreshingly candid in acknowledging his own diffidence in failing to recommend that NATO

bomb the Serbian artillery that was shelling defenseless Dubrovnik in late 1991. With regard to Bosnia, he forthrightly demolishes the self-serving rationalizations that kept Americans impotently on the sidelines.

Zimmermann was recalled in May 1992, as a protest against Serbian aggression in Bosnia. He landed at the State Department as Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, which gave him a continuing role in trying to mitigate the awful human tragedy in Bosnia. But as 1993 wore on, he became increasingly frustrated with administration officials who were giving public emphasis to humanitarian issues as a way of disguising the lack of a consistent political approach. Concluding that he was having no influence on the inside, and hoping that he would have more as a commentator on the outside, Zimmermann decided to retire in January 1994. In his letter of resignation, he noted his retirement was due in part to his disagreement with the administration over U.S. policy in Bosnia.

And yet, despite his desire to have more impact on policy, he inexplicably made no effort to use his resignation to draw public attention to the failure of that policy. Two years earlier, as Zimmermann notes approvingly, four mid-level Foreign Service officers had resigned in protest over Bosnia, and for a brief time these almost unprecedented acts of moral courage had raised questions about our shameful Bosnia policy. As to how much more controversy might have been aroused by publicity over the resignation of our former ambassador to Yugoslavia, one of the architects of that policy, one can only ruefully speculate and lament the lost opportunity.

*Gilbert D. Kulick, a retired FSO, served in Mogadishu, Addis Ababa and Tel Aviv.*

## CELEBRATING A LIFE OF WEALTH, POWER

**The Last American Aristocrat: The Biography of Ambassador David K.E. Bruce**

*Nelson D. Lankford, Little, Brown and Co., 1996, hardcover, \$27.95, 448 pages.*

BY CHARLES MAECHLING JR.

This highly readable biography of David K.E. Bruce (1898-1977) celebrates the life of an American patrician who in the post-World War II era became the East Coast establishment's model of the ideal U.S. ambassador. Bruce was a key figure in the Marshall Plan and served as ambassador to France, West Germany and Great Britain, as well as the first resident envoy to communist China.

Bruce was raised in Baltimore, attended Princeton and served briefly in the Maryland legislature, although transition to true privilege and wealth came with his 1926 marriage to Ailsa Mellon, daughter of Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon. He divorced her in 1945. Biographer Nelson D. Lankford makes clear — as does the unflattering book jacket photograph of Bruce as an affected fop — that in early adulthood Bruce was little more than a wealthy dilettante. He did, however, play an influential role in transforming the Mellon art collection into the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

World War II changed Bruce's life. A passionate devotee of French culture, and an Anglophile to boot, he first went to embattled Britain as a delegate of the American Red Cross. In 1943 he returned to London to head the European office of the fledgling Office of Strategic Services (OSS), where, as liaison to the British secret services, his duties were primarily

administrative. After D-day his responsibilities were so light that he had time to indulge in an adolescent caper with Ernest Hemingway in which they raced to the Ritz bar in Paris just ahead of the liberating French armored division.

Wartime London not only led to marriage to Evangeline Bell, his secretary at the OSS, whose diplomatic skills would make her one of the most accomplished hostesses of her time, but to a government career that started at the top. He served briefly as assistant secretary of Commerce and then headed the Marshall Plan in France. But his diplomatic career took off with his 1950 appointment as ambassador to France.

Paris was an ideal posting for the Bruces, whose stylish profile, language facility and social talents fitted the French image of cosmopolitan diplomats. In 1952 he was yanked back to Washington to be under secretary of State, where he spent the last six months of the Truman administration defending the State Department from assaults by a Congress poisoned by McCarthyism. He was then appointed as ambassador to West Germany, and in 1961, to Great Britain, where for eight years he was an integral part of the British upper-class world.

One curious feature is that, of the hundred of FSOs who served under Bruce and are now retired and free to talk, scarcely one appears in the skimpy oral interview list. The portrait of the perfect ambassador that emerges from this otherwise well-researched biography rests in part on Bruce's attractive personality, and on his undeviating compliance with even the worst aberrations of his masters in Washington. ■

*Charles Maechling Jr. is an attorney who served as special assistant to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Averell Harriman in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.*

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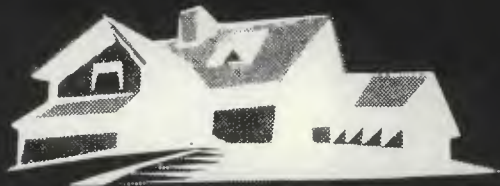
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# POSTCARD FROM ABROAD

## *One Consular Officer's Circle of Hell in Kingston*

BY WILLIAM ROEBUCK

When I entered the Foreign Service I did not suspect it had a small corner of bureaucratic perdition in store for me. I did not envision interviewing 100 impoverished, often irate Jamaicans in intense heat each morning at 60-second intervals and trying to decide whether to issue or deny each a visa. I had loftier visions, like negotiating a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Instead, I began my career with the dirty job — literally — of a consular officer at U.S. Embassy Kingston. I carried a stamp pad and a refusal stamp with me wherever I went, and the ink seemed to be on my hands permanently.

After six weeks of working in the non-immigrant visa-line inferno, I found myself waking up at night, asking myself, "Will, has it come to this? All those magnificent visions: to create beauty, to crusade for justice, to struggle for world peace — my God, you're just a petty bureaucrat." I tried to reassure myself with the knowledge that Herman Melville had been a lowly clerk in a customs office, and that William Faulkner had sorted mail on the night shift in Oxford, Miss. But I soon ran out

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*William Roebuck, an FSO who is a political officer at U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem, served at U.S. Embassy Kingston from 1992-1994.*

*I had petty power  
writ large, but I  
was some poor  
Jamaican's idea  
of the devil  
himself.*

of genius bureaucrats to fight off my doubts.

One night I dreamed I was stuck in a small room, surrounded by visa applicants of all ages. They pinched me and even tore off little pieces of my flesh. When I was awake, condescending remarks from political officers, secretaries and even Peace Corps volunteers didn't help elevate my mood. They all seemed to say: "When will you become a real diplomat and stop having to do the grunt work?"

Eventually my worries and nightmares faded, but there was always the "office," my little cubicle fronted by bullet-proof glass, behind which I stood each day looking out into a grimy waiting room filled with waves of visa applicants. Adjudicating visas for all those people was like trying to dam the Atlantic Ocean.

I could be humanized by a pleasant weekend at a north coast beach or an evening out in Kingston, but the cure did not last long. It would take a good article on Jamaican traditional religion or an encounter with a pleasant, dedicated local public servant to keep me going.

Still, I couldn't stop asking myself, "What am I doing here?" When I issue visas to the United States, people go to the promised land, and when I deny them, they hit Kingston's mean streets to figure out their other options. In a society where the right to travel is considered more important than such puny entitlements as the rights to free speech and assembly, I had petty power writ large. In refusing a visa, I was some poor Jamaican's idea of the devil himself.

The scary thing is, I began to like it. Maybe it was a variation at work of the Stockholm Syndrome — transforming a hostage hell of a vocation into a heavenly assignment. Perhaps within me there was a broader, more reasoned view of consular work struggling to be born, one that could look at a visa mill, in all its abysmal glory, and recognize in it a very small part of this huge, baggy monster called American diplomacy. What I know for sure is that in Jamaica, I was modestly successful in finding reason and order in a job that defied such attempts. ■

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