

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

APRIL 2023



DIGITAL CURRENCY A NEW FRONTIER FOR DIPLOMACY



LOSING THE PEACE

EVALUATION EVOLUTION

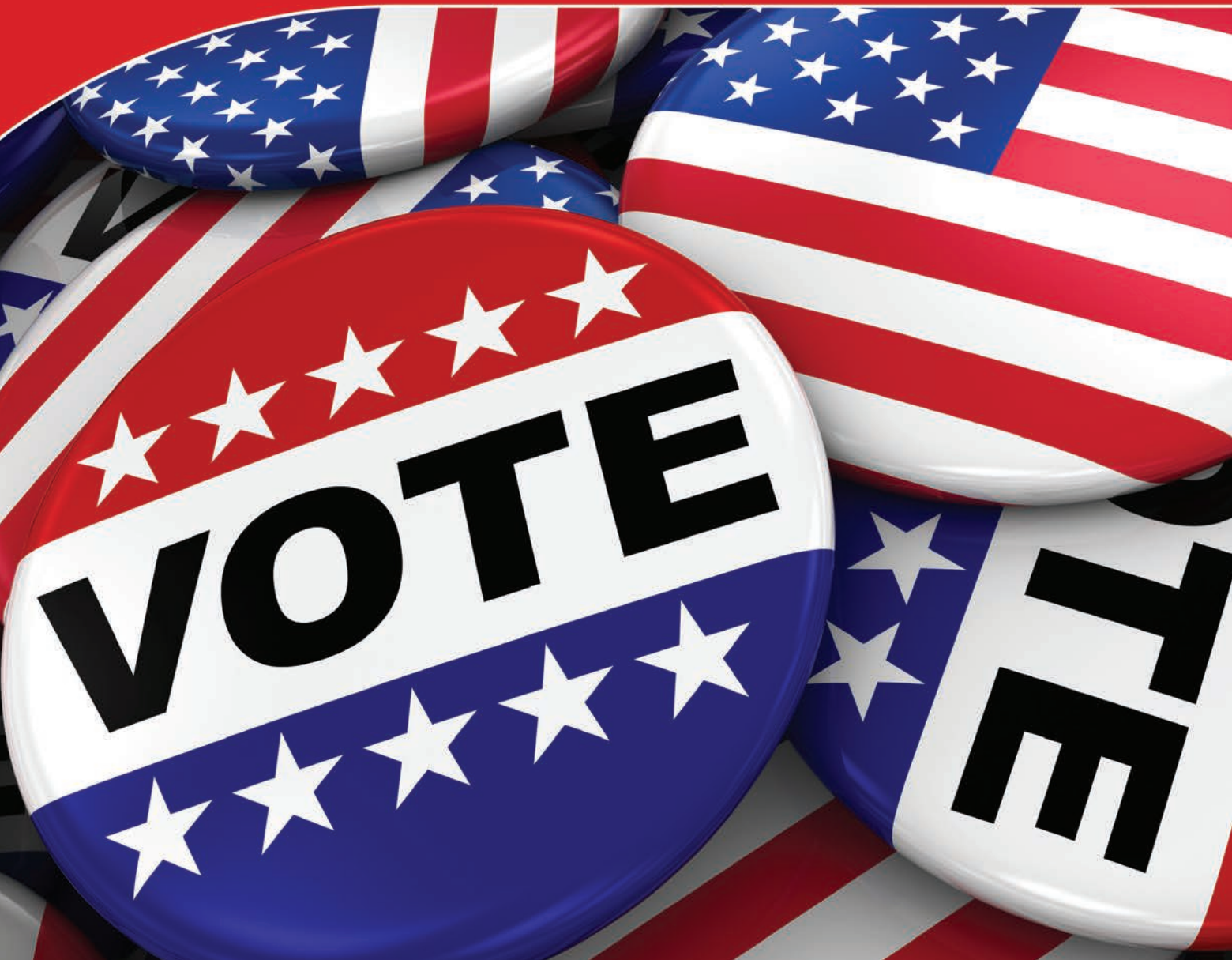
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MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT WWW.AFSA.ORG/AWARDS.

THE DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS IS MAY 15, 2023.

Questions?

Contact Theo Horn, Awards & Scholarships Manager,
at horn@afsa.org or (202) 719-9705.

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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Road Safety—A Clear and Present Danger

BY ERIC RUBIN

Rochelle Sobel's life changed when she received word that her son Aron had died in a bus accident in Turkey (now Türkiye) in 1995. Aron, an American citizen visiting Turkey, died along with 22 others. He was 25. The bus driver had been speeding down the wrong lane of a narrow, ill-maintained road with a sharp curve and no guardrail. The road had long been on a government list of "black spots" in need of repair. Aron's graduation from the University of Maryland Medical School would have taken place two weeks from the day he was killed.

Rochelle decided to take action to ensure that Aron's death was not in vain. From her first contact with our embassy in Turkey and then-Ambassador Marc Grossman, to her founding of the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT) nearly 30 years ago, Rochelle has propelled an international movement that has made great strides in improving road safety and reducing deaths and injuries.

Road safety is a serious issue for the Foreign Service. I know from per-

sonal experience: My best friend from A-100 died with his teenage daughter on a trip to a family wedding in Ukraine more than 20 years

ago. Other friends and colleagues have been involved in horrific accidents. I can count the losses on more than one hand.

We lost three dearly loved Foreign Service colleagues in 2022: Sarah Langenkamp, Timothy Fingarson, and Shawn O'Donnell. Two died in bicycle accidents, and one crossing the street. Two were in Foggy Bottom, one in Bethesda. I worked with Sarah's husband, Dan, and knew her personally as a giving person, a fantastic diplomat, mother, and spouse. The loss of these three colleagues is devastating. We mourn these senseless deaths, and we must resolve to do something to prevent future tragic losses from road accidents, both in the U.S. and overseas.

When we go overseas in the Foreign Service, we accept that we will face a certain amount of risk and danger. We know that terrorism is an ever-present threat. We know that more U.S. ambassadors have lost their lives in the past 100 years than U.S. military generals and admirals. We know that between the end of the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it was more dangerous to be in the Foreign Service than in the U.S. military.

We hope that the coming years are those of a peacetime military in which our service men and women face fewer threats and risks. We hope that our own Service and our colleagues will face fewer threats, as well; but we also know that service to our country means accepting risk.

There are risks we cannot eliminate.

There will always be those in this world who wish us harm and who target those serving our country. There is also crime and catastrophe. Life is unpredictable.

Road safety may be our biggest safety threat but also our biggest opportunity. We do not have to accept the loss of so many of our friends and colleagues who have died or been grievously injured in road accidents while serving our country.

Rochelle Sobel and her colleagues have identified dozens of steps that can be taken, and in some cases have already been taken, to reduce unnecessary deaths and injuries on the world's roads. To learn more about ASIRT, please visit www.asirt.org.

I hope you will consider joining this effort, starting with participating in an overseas road safety survey AFSA is conducting this month.

Also, ASIRT is offering AFSA members a 20 percent discount on their comprehensive, country-specific Road Safety Reviews for individual travelers, \$40 each, vice \$50. (Note: To get a report, fill out the form at <https://bit.ly/Register-ASIRT> and enter \$40 in the "Subscription Level Amount" field. The form says "subscription," but it gets you to the one-time purchase.)

AFSA will continue to engage with the leadership of all the foreign affairs agencies to urge greater efforts to reduce road deaths and injuries, and to prevent the tragedies that too many of us have experienced during our careers of service. ■



Ambassador Eric Rubin is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

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THE MAGAZINE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

The Foreign Service Journal (ISSN 0146-3543), 2101 E Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037-2990 is published monthly, with combined January-February and July-August issues, by the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), a private, nonprofit organization. Material appearing herein represents the opinions of the writers and does not necessarily represent the views of the *Journal*, the Editorial Board or AFSA. Writer queries and submissions are invited, preferably by email. The *Journal* is not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, photos or illustrations. Advertising inquiries are invited. All advertising is subject to the publisher's approval. AFSA reserves the right to reject advertising that is not in keeping with its standards and objectives. The appearance of advertisements herein does not imply endorsement of goods or services offered. Opinions expressed in advertisements are the views of the advertisers and do not necessarily represent AFSA views or policy. *Journal* subscription: AFSA member—\$20, included in annual dues; student—\$30; others—\$50; Single issue—\$4.50. For foreign surface mail, add \$18 per year; foreign airmail, \$36 per year. Periodical postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Indexed by the Public Affairs Information Services (PAIS).

Email: journal@afsa.org
Phone: (202) 338-4045
Fax: (202) 338-8244
Web: www.afsa.org/fsj
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© American Foreign Service Association, 2023

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Postmaster: Send address changes to
AFSA, Attn: Address Change
2101 E Street NW
Washington DC 20037-2990



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Exploring a New Frontier for Diplomacy

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Cryptocurrency, blockchain, fintech, digital currencies, CBDCs, Web3. What do all these technologies have to do with the Foreign Service? They are all new frontiers for diplomacy, which we begin to explore in this edition.

We turned to a knowledgeable guide, financial technology (fintech) expert Yaya J. Fanusie, to get oriented. As he writes in a Nov. 30, 2022, Lawfare report, calling this “a Sputnik Moment” for central banking: *To win in this global competition of digital finance, the U.S. must first realize that the race has already started and a plan is needed. The race won't be won by doing what is easy, but by doing the visionary things that are hard.*

In spite of the recent crypto currency crashes, digital finance is here to stay, and the ways it affects U.S. relations and interactions with the world are evolving. Fanusie leads the focus with “Playing Catch-Up with China's Fintech Strides.” He shows us why the United States government must pay attention to the evolution of China's work on digital currency, suggesting that the U.S. needs to “lead from the front.”

Next, we posed broader questions to



Crypto Council for Innovation CEO Sheila Warren. Find her answers in the Q&A, “What Should We Know About Digital Currency?”

This month's Feature from Ambassador Larry Wohlers is a sobering look at “Losing the Peace in the Central African Republic.” There are lessons here for the international community on stabilization efforts in failed or failing states.

In a timely Speaking Out, as evaluation season winds down, we bring you “actionable” suggestions from recently retired FSO Virginia Blaser on “Why Our Evaluation System Is Broken and What to Do About It.” Trying out some of the sample questions for running evaluation meetings from her new *Manager's Workbook*, I think she's on to something—whether or not we learn to love the EER!

In President's Views, Ambassador Eric Rubin raises a critical issue for the FS community: “Road Safety—A Clear and Present Danger.” And with a friendly reminder to review your retirement plan regularly, John Naland lays out “12 Things to Do” to stay on track.

As the junior public diplomacy officer in Copenhagen 35 years ago, Dan Whitman had a portfolio that included covering Greenland. In this Reflection, he tells the story of “A Greenland Friendship” that started on the job and lasted a lifetime.

This month's Local Lens is a stunning shot from Grand Harbour, Malta, by FS Regional Psychiatrist Mike Regal.

As always, we welcome your comments and submissions. Write to journal@afsa.org. ■

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

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Hats Off to the Young Turks

Thanks for the excellent history of those foundational years of AFSA as described by Ambassador Tom Boyatt in the January-February *FSJ*, “When Lightning Struck Twice: How AFSA’s ‘Young Turks’ Launched the Union.”

It brings back memories of my first years as an FSO. I am proud to have been a foot soldier in that fight. I returned from my first overseas assignment in 1969 and joined the Junior Foreign Service Officers Club (JFSOC).

As in the rest of my career, I was odd man out because I favored AFSA over AFGE in JFSOC, which was also conflicted. I don’t recall, but that may have been why JFSOC named me as its rep on the delegation Bill Harrop headed to negotiate with Bill Macomber; the meetings were aborted after Nixon decided to issue the executive order on federal unionization.

Those were heady years of change, but the Foreign Service benefited from the leadership of those Young Turks. The cream of the Service had come to the top early with Tom Boyatt, Lannon Walker, Charlie Bray, Bill Harrop, Tex Harris, Hank Cohen, and others, as demonstrated by their later careers.

My hat is off to all those who led that bountiful effort. They are as responsible for the advancement of the Foreign Service as were the 1924 Rogers Act and the 1946 and 1980 acts.

Ted McNamara
Ambassador, retired
Bethesda, Maryland

AFSA and the Junior Foreign Service Officers Club

From 1973 to 1975, I had the pleasure of serving on the AFSA Board that Tom Boyatt chaired, while concurrently

being a member of the leadership committee of the Junior Foreign Service Officers Club (JFSOC).

As Tom indicates in his article on how the “Young Turks” launched AFSA into union representation, JFSOC had shared the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) view on how the new union should be organized.

The AFSA view prevailed, however; and, to its credit, AFSA reached out to JFSOC to invite it to propose a candidate for the 1973 AFSA Board elections. In my pre-Foreign Service life, I had been both a Teamster and an unfair labor practices investigator for the National Labor Relations Board. My views on what labor representation entailed sometimes led even the Young Turks to blanche.

I remember once overhearing Tom remark, half jocularly and half plaintively, that he wasn’t used to being outflanked on the left. This may have been after I proposed putting a picket line up outside the C Street entrance to the building.

Tom also recounts the difficulty some elements of State management had in adjusting to negotiating with a union. As chairman of AFSA’s Members’ Interests committee, which dealt with dollars-and-cents issues such as per diem rates and moving expenses, I had a close look at those adjustment problems.

My management counterparts at one point put an “offer” on the table for a benefit and gave me two days to accept it as presented, claiming that was the deadline for the department’s budget submission and AFSA could either accept it as offered or the benefit would be lost.

I used “Teamster” rather than a Foreign Service term to let them know that they were not negotiating in good faith



and were committing an unfair labor practice. We were compelled to accept the offer, but the AFSA Board agreed with my proposal to file an unfair labor practices complaint, the first ever filed against the State Department.

In due course, we won the case, and the judge required State to issue a notice departmentwide and to all embassies admitting that it had been guilty and promising to sin no more. Larry Eagleburger, then the under secretary for management, had to sign the notice.

He was reportedly not happy about having to admit to an unfair labor practice that he had not committed. I suspect he had some choice words for lower management, which would have impressed them more than the notice itself.

I was happy with that win, but secretly would still have loved to see a picket line at C Street. Maybe sometime in the next 50 years.

Raymond Smith
FSO, retired
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Kudos for the Union Edition

The January-February edition of the *Journal* is an important and brilliant narrative honoring AFSA’s 50 years as a union. That event changed forever the shape, culture, and importance of the U.S. Foreign Service.

The *Journal* edition for the union anniversary comes at a moment when many of those who helped effect that change—the “Young Turks” and those who followed—are passing from the scene. It will enlighten their successor generations on how our unique employee management system came into being.

Ambassador Tom Boyatt and John Naland deserve special praise for their excellent descriptions of how lightning came to strike twice and what that meant for members of the Foreign Service, the State Department, and American foreign policy. And I also thought Bruce Gregory's letter provided interesting details of the origins of the grievance system. Kudos, my friends.

As one who was involved in these events at the margins, I noted that Tom failed to mention one rather important subgroup he formed in the post-election period to plan strategies for negotiating the labor-management agreement with the department. He waggishly labeled it the NSC (Negotiations Steering Committee), and I was privileged to serve on it.

The NSC had, as I recall, an ad hoc membership, depending on the issue. Among the members I recall were Tex Harris, Rick Melton, and Frank McNeil. There were several others, but I no longer recall their names (my apologies). I believe the results demonstrate both the value and relative success of that subgroup's work.

Kudos!

Jack R. Binns

Ambassador, retired

Tucson, Arizona

Protecting VOA Engineers

Ambassador Tom Boyatt's article, "When Lightning Struck Twice," in the January-February *Foreign Service Journal* reminded me of an episode I experienced and the support I received from AFSA President Tex Harris in 1995-1996.

I was AFSA vice president for USIA, and I and my colleagues were engaged in protracted negotiations with Voice of America management over its move to eliminate nine VOA engineer positions.

AFSA fought hard and long to keep

these positions. VOA management thought it could engage in perfunctory negotiations with AFSA; but as it turned out, we negotiated for nearly three months with a federal mediator helping to reach an agreement. Though the positions were eliminated on paper, every engineer was restored to his job by the end of calendar year 1996.

These negotiations came around the 1995 government shutdown that had kept most State, USIA, USAID, and Department of Commerce employees from working. During this time, Tex Harris and the respective AFSA vice presidents worked to protect all Foreign Service positions from being eliminated. This included VOA engineers, most of whom worked at overseas locations.

In my negotiating experience with VOA managers, I learned that they were every bit as tough and resistant as those in private corporations. AFSA persevered, and we succeeded in protecting the employees despite efforts to "right-size" Foreign Service jobs to meet White House mandates to save money and demonstrate to Congress that downsizing was an attainable goal.

Bruce Byers

USIA FSO, retired

Reston, Virginia

"When Lightning Struck Twice"—The Author Responds

I'm impressed by the degree to which the letters to the editor are expanding on the history of AFSA unionization. I am very grateful to Ray Smith and Jack Binns for their kind words regarding "When Lightning Struck Twice," and for extending the story to include the Boyatt Board years (1973-1975).

Because of space constraints and the need to bring the narrative into the pres-

ent, I had summarized the achievements of my board briefly by noting the number of contract agreements reached. Ray and Jack remedied the lack of detail by exploring our two major achievements.

First, as Ray detailed, in 1973 we reached out to our former competitors in JFSOC, asking them to nominate someone to run on our slate. This brilliant coup was conceived by AFSA Counsellor Rick Williamson, a tower of strength during my tenure as chairman/president.

JFSOC sent us Raymond Smith, who performed very effectively as a board stalwart, successful negotiator, and an amusing and loyal companion and friend.

I also reached out to DACOR and asked them to nominate two of their members to serve on the AFSA Board. Our goal was to court the two constituencies most opposed to the "Achievement slate"—the JFSOCers and the retirees—to heal the breaches and to confront management as a single force. We needed to have the tribe's young warriors and its elders inside the tent. Eventually, we and later boards succeeded.

Second, Jack Binns refers to the activities of our NSC (Negotiations Steering Committee), the driver of our very successful initial negotiations with management. Neither AFSA nor management had any experience in negotiating "personnel policies and procedures."

The NSC established important procedural precedents: specifically, that AFSA, as well as management, could table changes to personnel policies to be negotiated to produce permanent agreements, and that the parties could agree on separate contracts via "linkage," i.e., you agree to my proposals, and I will agree to your unrelated proposals.

Of the many contracts negotiated in those years, the dues checkoff agreement stands out. Under these procedures,

management deducts AFSA dues from the paychecks of AFSA members and remits these funds to AFSA every two weeks. Checkoff has made AFSA a financial powerhouse.

Solidarity forever.

Tom Boyatt

Ambassador, retired

Troy, Virginia

Setting the Record Straight on Chile, Again

Elizabeth C. Davis' letter in the January-February *FSJ*, "Setting the Record Straight on Chile," was a needed corrective. One of the left's enduring myths is that the United States was behind the planning and execution of General Augusto Pinochet's 1973 coup that overthrew the government of Salvador Allende.

Unfortunately, that false narrative has penetrated much mainstream thinking, as well. I would like to add a couple of thoughts on the subject.

As was brought out in Senator Frank Church's 1975 Senate hearings on the CIA's intelligence activities, the CIA did provide \$8 million over a three-year period to various opposition groups in Chile to keep them going, including labor unions, the anti-Allende newspaper *El Mercurio* (which Allende was attempting to shut down by having the nationalized banks withhold credit for newsprint), and others. Nevertheless, the U.S. provided neither funding nor assistance in the planning and execution of the coup.

Anyone who has served in Chile and studied the 1973 coup would find it laughable to hear someone insist that the Chilean military would need assistance from the United States. The Chilean military was based on the Prussian model, was (and is) a very professional military, and was perfectly capable of planning and executing the coup on its own.

That the United States was glad to see Allende overthrown is undeniable. It does not follow, however, that the United States engineered the action that led to his overthrow. The left's narrative of U.S. involvement in General Pinochet's coup in Chile is one more example of the mental and ideological prison in which it dwells.

William H. Barkell

FSO, retired

Arlington, Virginia

Retirement 101

Those who write complaining about the Foreign Service retirement program today and the (perceived) reduction in benefits must not be aware of any businesses outside of government service. (See, for example, Tanya Brothen's November 2022 letter, "Retirement for the Rest of Us.")

Traditional (defined benefit) pension plans have been phased out in every kind of industry all over the United States. Programs such as 401ks and 403bs as well as IRAs and the federal government's own Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) are taking over as traditional pensions are eliminated. These are called collectively "defined contribution plans."

Not many people work for the same company their whole lives, which is how the traditional pension plan worked for our grandparents. Tax-deferred savings plans can move with the worker from employer to employer. There is no vesting period; your money saved is your money no matter how long or short your employment with any company or agency.

The defined benefit plan pensioner can elect survivor benefits, but this reduces

the payout from day one to the death of the spouse, and it's a gamble either way. Defined contribution plans have a withdrawal rate that is set by the federal government. You don't have to spend all of the withdrawal, and you can take out more if you need to. It does not matter if you are married, single, paired, or widowed.

I recommend that today's FSOs become financially knowledgeable, stop complaining, and start contributing the maximum allowed into the TSP, and also open an IRA or, even better, a Roth IRA.

Nancy Cunningham

FSO, retired

Savannah, Georgia

Classified Documents

While people focus on classified documents retained by President Biden and other high-level officials, past and present,

perhaps there is a simple explanation. An esteemed retired ambassador once mentioned to me that, on leaving a particular post in 1981, he asked his secretary to gather some documents for a book he planned to write.

In retirement, he opened a box including the documents and was astounded to find Top Secret SCI items included. He concluded that his secretary had been in a hurry.

Perhaps this also explains President Biden's situation today.

Frederic Maerkle

FSO, retired

Paris, France ■



Share your thoughts about this month's issue.

Submit letters to the editor:
journal@afsa.org

Russia Stops New START

During his annual address to the nation on Feb. 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced he was suspending his country's participation in New START, the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia.

Under New START, which first came into force in 2011, the two countries agreed to limit the number of nuclear arms on each side and to allow inspections and other forms of verification.

President Joe Biden called Putin's latest move a "big mistake," but added that he doesn't think it means Putin is considering the use of nuclear weapons.

Rose Gottemoeller, the chief U.S. negotiator for the treaty during the Obama administration, said on PBS NewsHour on Feb. 21: "It's not as if we are left blind by this action. But the mutual predictability that comes from the treaty really helps us to have that 24/7 understanding, backed up, of course, by what we know from our own intelligence."

Eric Gomez, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, said of Putin's announcement: "Right now the future of arms control looks bleak."

Tragedy in Türkiye Leads to Earthquake Diplomacy

On Feb. 6, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck central southern Türkiye, close to the Syrian border, killing at least 46,000 people and leaving many more without food, water, or shelter.

The Biden administration responded immediately, mobilizing federal agencies to provide aid to the government of Türkiye and humanitarian partners in Syria.

Other governments also responded, even those that have historically had trou-

bled relations with the stricken nations. Despite tense relations between Greece and Türkiye, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias visited the area hit by the quake with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu—an effort to normalize relations called "earthquake diplomacy" that was lauded by many in the Greek diaspora.

Even Armenia, which has had no diplomatic ties to its neighbor since 1993, sent humanitarian aid and a rescue team to Türkiye, leading Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu to suggest there could be a normalization of relations between the two countries.

"Armenia has extended its hand of friendship, showed solidarity and cooperation with us in this difficult time," said Cavusoglu. "We need to continue this solidarity."

Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad also seems to be using the earthquake as a

means to reenter global society—*The New York Times* called his overtures to other governments "disaster diplomacy." Al-Assad permitted aid convoys to enter opposition-controlled territories from Türkiye for the first time in 12 years.

Open Forum Relaunched

In a February town hall with Acting Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources John Bass, Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff (S/P) Holly Holzer announced that the Secretary's Open Forum was being officially relaunched with that event.

The Open Forum has taken different forms over various administrations, but always with the aim of serving as a platform for discussion and debate. Launched by Secretary of State Dean Rusk in 1967, it was intended to provide "opportunities for any employee to

Podcast of the Month: VICE World News' *Havana Syndrome* (<https://bit.ly/Havana-Syndrome>)

A new podcast from VICE World News had listeners tuning in both inside and outside the Beltway as award-winning journalists Jon Lee Anderson and Adam Entous sought to uncover the secrets of Havana syndrome, known officially as Anomalous Health Incidents (AHI), the mysterious illness that has struck CIA, State Department, and other government officials and family members and was first found in Havana, Cuba, in 2016.

The producers of this eight-part series traveled to Havana, Vienna, and Washington, D.C., to interview some of the White House officials, CIA operatives, and Foreign Service members who were afflicted. They came away with tragic personal stories about the effects of the unexplained illness on the lives and careers of these officials.

As a bonus, we get an inside account from former Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes on the efforts to restart diplomatic relations with Cuba during the Obama administration, before Havana syndrome was identified.



The appearance of a particular site or podcast is for information only and does not constitute an endorsement.

Contemporary Quote

ee This is an inflection point. The post–Cold War era is over and there is now a competition underway to shape what comes next. We believe strongly that the future for peace, for stability, for opportunity, requires that there be some general understandings about what the rules of the road are. We had those rules, we had those understandings. ... The whole purpose of the international order that grew up after WWII was to make sure we wouldn't have WWIII. That this couldn't be repeated. And we often hear from Chinese colleagues or Russian colleagues in different ways, that this is somehow invented in the West and they're not a part of it. That's absolutely wrong. ... This order was founded on the United Nations Charter and the basic principles in that charter. It was founded on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I'm emphasizing 'universal.' They all signed on to it. This system, for all its imperfections, worked. But now it's being challenged. ”

—Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NPR, Feb. 23, 2023.

express professional views (including dissenting views) candidly, free of bureaucratic constraints, and under safeguards against pressures or penalties,” as stated in 1 FAM 022.6.

Leslie Thompson, a member of the policy planning staff and the new chair of the Open Forum, said the relaunched Open Forum will include a series of conversations on topics such as economic statecraft, space and diplomacy, innovation, and specialist issues. Ideas for series topics are welcome. Write to openforum@state.gov.

China Balloon Delays SecState Beijing Visit

Diplomatic work usually takes place behind the scenes, but when a Chinese balloon floated into view over the United States in early February, strained diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China turned into edge-of-the-seat news stories.

An F-22 fighter jet shot the balloon down off the coast of South Carolina on

Feb. 4, but not before Secretary of State Antony Blinken had canceled a planned trip to Beijing.

On Feb. 9, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman briefed Congress on the diplomatic fallout from the downing of the balloon: “The PRC has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad.”

The Chinese government insists the balloon was merely a weather balloon gone off course; the U.S. government is analyzing the pieces that were recovered from the Atlantic Ocean to learn more about the balloon's capabilities, assuming that it was engaged in surveillance.

Sherman also briefed nearly 150 foreign diplomats from 40 countries about the balloon saga, as well as sending information to U.S. embassies to be shared with their local counterparts.

The State Department has promised to reschedule the planned meeting with the PRC; but as we go to press, no such meetings have been announced.

State Launches Welcome Corps

On Jan. 19, the State Department, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), announced the creation of Welcome Corps, a new program that enables American citizens to assist refugees as they resettle in the United States.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) at HHS has supported refugees since 1980; the Welcome Corps creates volunteer opportunities for Americans wishing to support this work and fulfills President Joe Biden's February 2021 Executive Order 14301, which called for rebuilding and enhancing programs to resettle refugees.

In the first phase of the program, private sponsors will be matched with refugees who have already been approved for resettlement. The second phase, beginning in mid- to late 2023, will allow private sponsors to identify refugees for resettlement and to then support those specific refugees.

Called by the department “the boldest innovation in refugee resettlement in four decades,” the program seeks to mobilize 10,000 Americans to sponsor 5,000 refugees in 2023.

Groups of at least five individual Americans can apply to the Welcome Corps to privately sponsor the resettlement of refugees in the United States. Private sponsors will be responsible for raising funds and providing direct assistance to refugees for their first 90 days in their new community, including help finding housing and employment and enrolling children in school.

Diya Abdo, founder and director of Every Campus a Refugee, welcomes the news. Her organization has spent the last eight years mobilizing colleges and

universities to partner with their local resettlement agencies as co-sponsors of refugees coming in through USRAP.

Abdo tells the *FSJ* she is “excited by the possibilities, under Welcome Corps, of being able to support colleges and universities to privately and directly sponsor refugee students and carry out all of the core services associated with refugee resettlement and integration.”

For more information about this new program, go to www.welcomecorps.org.

The Lighter Side of S on “Wait Wait ... Don’t Tell Me!”

On Jan. 21, Secretary of State Antony Blinken joined the hosts of NPR’s “Wait Wait ... Don’t Tell Me!” weekly program as their featured guest on the Not My Job segment, a regular series in which hosts invite a well-known person to try to guess which current event is real and which is made up.

The hosts chatted with Secretary Blinken about his children, his family—including his dad, Ambassador Donald Blinken—and his band, Ablinken, which has tracks on Spotify.

Want to know how the Secretary did guessing the news? Secretary Blinken’s segment begins around the 18:15 mark.

Women’s Health Working Group Progress Update

In December 2021 a group of more than 200 Foreign Service members sent a letter to then-Acting Under Secretary for Management Carol Perez, with copies to the director of the Bureau of Medical Services, the Director General’s Office, officials at USAID, and AFSA, calling for

greater access to reproductive health-care overseas.

The effort started with conversations online among female diplomats who had grown frustrated with the lack of consistency in care from the department’s Bureau of Medical Services. (For details about the group and their letter to Amb. Perez, see the May 2022 Speaking Out in *The Foreign Service Journal*.)

Initially, the letter drew no response from management. Only four months later, after the Speaking Out piece was coming out and the *FSJ* requested a response from MED, did the group receive a response to the letter.

Then the State Department and USAID launched a Women’s Health Working Group in October 2022 to “address the unique challenges our employees and family members serving overseas face with accessing high-quality, consistent women’s health care services.”

A survey was sent to all the foreign affairs agencies at the end of 2022. More than 2,000 people responded. The Working Group sent a readout on survey results and a progress update on Jan. 17, 2023. The survey results identified top concerns as: lactation issues, including standardizing lactation spaces and improving accessibility; perimenopause and menopause information and care; reproductive health; access to mental health services, including through telehealth; improved access to post-specific women’s health information; access to a MED OB/GYN provider for complex medical issues; medical evacuations (obstetric and otherwise); and regular access to preventative care.

Survey results also included personal input on a range of women’s health issues from routine health screenings to infertility, breastfeeding, menopause



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care, abortion access, sexual assault response, and access to gender-affirming care.

The Working Group announced that they had collaborated with multiple bureaus to reach out to managers about their responsibility to provide support for breastfeeding during work hours, including access to lactation spaces, etc.

"GTM also recently completed updates to the New Parent Guide, including lactation resources, information on federal insurance coverage for infertility treatments, and the extension of the New Child Emergency Visitation Travel (EVT) benefit to cover adoption, foster care, and surrogacy."

The message also included a list of actions the group would like to see completed, including the purchase of hospital-grade breast pumps for overseas posts and hiring D.C.-based contract OB/GYN specialists to support MED providers and patients overseas.

On Jan. 23, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) and Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and USAID Administrator Samantha Power calling on the Biden administration to "guarantee access to adequate healthcare services, including reproductive health-care and post-sexual assault care, for women employees at the State Department and United States Agency for International Development (USAID)."

The letter pointed to the first National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (2021), which affirms that access to health care is considered "a right—not a privilege."

The senators added that they "struggle to reconcile the National Strategy's vision with the experience of women working for the State Department and USAID

who are asked to carry out the important objectives of that strategy and yet lack access to adequate reproductive health-care themselves."

The Women's Health Working Group can be reached at M_communications@state.gov. If you are interested in engaging in this work at USAID, email health_equityworkinggroup@usaid.gov.



Special Inspector Questions Continuing Aid to Afghanistan

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) issued its 58th quarterly report to Congress in January 2023.

The congressionally mandated report gives an overview of reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and provides a detailed statement of the associated costs.

Since August 2021, the United States has made available more than \$8 billion in assistance to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees, including more than \$2 billion for humanitarian and development aid, \$3.5 billion to recapitalize the Afghan central bank, and \$2.7 billion for the Department of Defense to transport, house, and feed Afghan refugees.

However, the report notes, the Taliban's

HEARD ON THE HILL



War as a Last Resort

And make no mistake, we're currently in a struggle for the global balance of power right now. It's never been more important for us to strengthen our diplomats so they can succeed because when they fail, we go to war. War should always be the last resort. We want our diplomats to succeed.

—Rep. Mike McCaul (R-Texas), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, at the House Foreign Affairs Committee Organizational Meeting for the 118th Congress, Feb. 8, 2023.

The Power of Persuasion

The State Department you inherited is simply not postured for a global competition with China, and it's harder for us to argue for more resources or authorities if you are not out there arguing for more yourselves. The United States has to step up and defend democratic values, not just the might of our military, but the power of our diplomatic persuasion.

—Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, speaking to State Department Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman, a witness at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on Evaluating U.S.-China Policy in the Era of Strategic Competition, Feb. 9, 2023.

Foreign Service Families Act

I co-chair, along with Senator Sullivan, the Bipartisan Foreign Service Caucus, and we're very focused on trying to make sure we have strong morale in the Foreign Service and the State Department overall. We passed something called the Foreign Service Families Act as part of the last State Department authorization bill that was included in the NDAA. My staff has asked for a report on the implementation, and so I look forward to working with your team on that process. The idea is to extend some of the same benefits to Foreign Service families that military families enjoy. I look for your commitment to make sure that we fully implement that act.

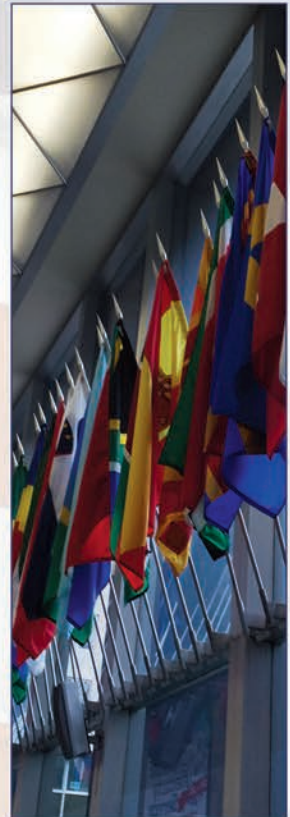
—Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), to Ambassador Richard Verma at his SFRC confirmation hearing to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Feb. 16, 2023.

"institutionalized abuse of women" raises the question of whether the United States can or should continue to provide aid. The Taliban banned women from working for humanitarian organizations during the reporting period, leading the U.N. and several nongovernmental organizations to suspend their work in the country.

USAID said the ban means their implementing partners will no longer be able to serve the female beneficiaries who currently make up 70 percent of the participants in USAID-supported activities.

Read the complete report at www.sigar.mil/pdfquarterlyreports/2023-01-30qr.pdf.

FOREIGN SERVICE DAY



May 5, 2023

Email
foreignaffairsday@state.gov
for information.

Please save the date for AFSA's complementary Foreign Service Day programming on Thursday, May 4.

Sixty Years of Art in Embassies

On Jan. 31, the State Department's Art in Embassies (AIE) office launched their "Democracy Collection" campaign, a yearlong art diplomacy initiative to promote democracy through art.

The initiative includes "artist exchanges focused on rights, freedoms, and equality, hosted by U.S. ambassadors in various cities around the world; a traveling exhibition that reflects the story of U.S. democracy; a worldwide art competition for middle and high school students on the topic of democracy; and an expansion of the Art in Embassies repository of art."

The AIE program marks its 60th anniversary this year. The anniversary will be celebrated on Sept. 19, 2023, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.



Ninety Seconds to Midnight

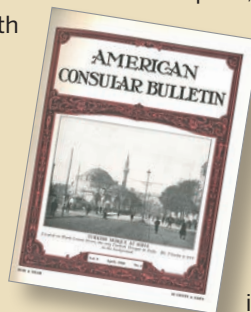
At a Jan. 24, 2023, news conference, the board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists announced that the organization is moving the hands on their "Doomsday Clock" for the first time since 2020.

Updated annually since 1947, the clock gives a metaphorical sense of how

100 Years Ago

What Is a Field?

"Why go to the *field* this time of year?" demanded the inquirer when hearing that a Consul was about to leave for service abroad in the month of December, and with the destination having been referred to indefinitely as the *field*. ... But then, realizing that the expression had been taken literally, I enlarged upon the definition, "I do not mean that he is going on a daisy-plucking expedition in the valley of the Yangtse nor seeking edelweiss on the wind-blown slopes of the Alps. That field ... which sounds so calm and peaceful, ... includes all the industrial and commercial centers in the whole world—the busy places on all continents. ...



"So when you see a Consular officer starts off with his commission in one hand, in the other he may take, so to speak, the most luxurious of trappings or he may require his Delco plant, a collapsible bathtub and bouillon cubes in order to properly establish himself and proceed to develop his romance of finding new markets and protecting old, and of learning the why, how and whence of all that may pass within his observation."

That is a *field*, and the questions about it are sufficiently numerous to keep several hundreds of officers well occupied in every corner of the globe.

—From an editorial by the same title in the April 1923 FSJ.

close humanity is to "self-annihilation." This year, in large part due to the war in Ukraine, the hands on the clock were moved to 11:58.30—just 90 seconds to midnight, and closer than ever to "global catastrophe."

Facebook Groups Spotlight FS Transitions

If you ever doubted the strength of the Foreign Service community, you need look no further than the numerous Facebook groups dedicated to various FS life and work topics. Two related to career transitions stand out.

Former & Transitioning FSOs, which numbers more than 2,900 members, was founded by former FSO Molly

Montgomery, who saw a need in the foreign affairs community to share information about how to navigate the next phases of their careers and lives.

FS-Retirement Planning, with more than 6,000 members, was founded by former FSO Jaime Fouss, who started the group to educate himself on the retirement process. The group focuses on retirement benefits and regulatory issues (but often strays into other salient topics) and is moderated by former FSO Mark Mayfield. Colleagues Sandy Switzer and Joe Zadrozny manage the page. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Donna Scaramastra Gorman.

Why Our Evaluation System Is Broken and What to Do About It

BY VIRGINIA BLASER

April means many in the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies are deeply engaged with annual evaluation writing ... and the dread, the pressure, the angst, and the work that it brings. A significant part of the stress comes from the knowledge that our promotions and those of our staff depend almost entirely on the words in an annual form.

Many of us also share a concern that success isn't about who actually performed the best, but rather the ability (yours, your rater's, and your reviewer's) to document that performance along a spectrum of written and unwritten rules.

In my experience, many people in the State Department feel negatively about employee evaluation reports (EERs), counseling meetings, and our promotion process because they have had minimal engagement with their supervisor around evaluation and counseling or have had prior bad experiences with counseling and evaluation.

During my three decades in the State Department, I saw how some extremely poor evaluation practices entrenched in our culture disadvantaged those

An evaluation is as good as it is genuine and reflective of the effort and time all parties put into it during the year.

who may not be strong writers, are not familiar with how to game the evaluation system, or who have supervisors who are not fully engaged in the evaluation process or poor writers themselves.

The result: Our best are not necessarily the ones getting promoted.

Almost two decades ago, a group of first-time deputy chiefs of mission gathered informally on the margins of a regional military conference. Giddy in our excitement to embrace our new leadership roles, we talked about the future of the department, expressing what we wished "they" (meaning the higher-ups) would do to make our Service better.

One colleague stopped us in our tracks: "You do realize that 'we' are now 'they,' and it is on us to make things better now, don't you?" It was a humbling lesson that stayed with me; for the rest of my career, I always asked myself what power I had to make things better right then and there.

The experience underscores that each of us has the opportunity to make our evaluation and promotion system better. We don't have to wait on (much-needed) policy improvements from the department. Indeed, if each of us doesn't embrace a better way of doing things, our system will continue to fail us all. So here are a few things *you* can do today.

What You Can Do

1. Don't consider an evaluation a singular moment in time; consider it as part of a continuum. Great counseling, evaluation, and performance all tie together in a *performance management feedback loop* that constantly builds strength and aids the growth of both the supervisor and the employee. This runs from a first performance counseling session all the way to a formal evaluation; then the process begins again.

A substantial number of studies reinforce this, noting that a manager who engages employees in the evaluation process has a striking influence on the employee and the workplace. For example, a 2013 Gallup "State of the American Workplace" report found that employees who had goal-focused conversations with their manager in



Virginia Blaser is the CEO of a global tech and open-source intelligence company. She recently retired from 34 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, where she served four tours as a deputy chief of mission and principal officer, including five years as chargé d'affaires. With dozens of commendations for State Department employee evaluation report writing, Ms. Blaser turned her passion for the evaluation process into a newly released book, The Manager's Workbook, available for free on Amazon Kindle Unlimited. This article is based, in part, on excerpts from that book.

the past six months were almost three times (!) more likely to be engaged in the workplace.

I created a workbook for each of my employees, making sure we went through the evaluation process a step at a time throughout each evaluation period (usually a year or less). Walking through the process each year, I learned a lot, came to understand my staff better, and was better placed to mentor and support them and the organization.

A key was robust counseling sessions that built one upon the other, with the employee speaking at least 80 percent of the time during each session. I applied my worksheet process to all of my employees equally, across specialties and cones, from local staff to direct hires and to embassy family member employees.

One critical element of inclusion and support to diversity is a need for managers to give equal support, attention, and opportunities to all without bias. My worksheets helped me do that.

2. Or, consider evaluation writing like the harvest season. Another way to think about the evaluation cycle is as EER “season.” I always considered the weeks we write, review, and submit evaluations to be a bit like the harvest—when we reap what we have sown, nurtured, and cared for over the previous year. This works for our own evaluations and for those we write for our staff.

Our bounty this year depends on the skills, techniques, strategies, and lessons we learned or tried in prior years. We may choose to leave some areas fallow (for example, taking a job that may not allow you to supervise others but gives you substantive experience) in order to improve other aspects of our skill set or career. In other years we have amazing rains at all the right times and enjoy a

Studies reinforce that a manager who engages employees in the evaluation process has a striking influence on the employee and the workplace.

bumper crop; and those are very “promotable” years/evaluations.

3. Put in the time. An evaluation is as good as it is genuine and reflective of the effort and time all parties put into it during the year. To the “season” analogy, if you don’t appropriately leverage other parts of the year—including planting thoughtful goals and position descriptions, and regularly tending to performance through focused counseling sessions—there will be very little of value to harvest at the end of the growing season.

The time put into the evaluation cycle is important. I routinely set aside hourly sessions with each of my direct reports three to four times a year. To those who say, “I don’t have time for that!” my response is that you need to make time, just as you make time for other important priorities. If I could do it as a DCM and chargé, including during periods of political or other crisis, so can you.

Indeed, there is no better investment you can make into your staff, your office, your post, or the future of the department than these hours.

Let me put it another way: Imagine your own supervisor prioritizing time with you a few times a year, a regular meeting you can count on where, uninterrupted, your supervisor sits one-on-one to ask you thoughtful questions and genuinely listens. How would that make you feel? Seen? Recognized? Respected? Valued? Heard? Would it impact how you worked with your supervisor? Or how you felt about the job?

Data suggests strongly that it would. And you have the power to do that today for each and every one of your direct reports. Why wouldn’t you do it? What could possibly be more important?

4. Be consistent. Leverage evaluation forms. Eliminate surprise. Many workplaces, including the State Department, have required forms for counseling. They may require you to write a narrative once or more a year, prior to a final evaluation. Or perhaps you are only required to submit an annual evaluation and no other paperwork.

Final, formal evaluations should never contain surprises for the employee. Low rankings or areas for improvement should have been raised, documented, and addressed with guidance and time to show improvement during the rating period. Anything less is simply unfair to the employee and the workplace.

If your office does not require (or does not enforce the requirement for) written or formal counseling sessions prior to periodic evaluations, do them anyway. Providing both written and verbal counseling and evaluation is your responsibility as a fair supervisor. People absorb information differently, and as a supervisor you should adapt your methodologies to support your employees and their growth.

When your employee has multiple mechanisms and opportunities to benefit from counseling, they are more likely to grow and improve their performance.

5. Always write for the right audience. Having chaired a specialist threshold panel, served on countless post-based EER review panels, and written hundreds of EERs for staff from every cone, specialty, grade, and foreign affairs agency, I would urge writers to produce a document for the only audience that matters: the panel.

Consider the task panels shoulder: reviewing hundreds and hundreds of EERs for 6 to 12 hours a day nonstop. The review process is fatiguing because it requires intense focus. Making EERs easy for caring but tired colleagues to read so that they reach the appropriate conclusion about each employee is important. Writing for the review panel, however, is also a skill that requires practice and training.

What the State Department (and Other Agencies) Can Do

1. Provide formal training in performance counseling and/or EER writing.

In more than three decades of government service, my training spanned from shooting guns to writing contracts, conducting television interviews, and interpreting complex immigration laws. Throughout my career, I spent hours every year in mandatory (and repetitive) classes on cybersecurity, counterintelligence, and retiring documents. But never—not once—was I offered formal training in performance counseling or EER writing.

If the future of our Service depends on our ability to support performance of staff and promote the best, then genuine training in this space isn't just important, it's vital. It is important for leadership across the foreign affairs agencies to correct this oversight and find ways to address the bias and inequality that is baked into our current processes.

2. Enforce good rules already in place. Some good practices are already required on paper, but because they are not embedded in our culture, they do not occur in practice.

For example, the “mandatory” counseling session date required by our evaluation system. Typically this date is set to line up with when evaluations are due to make it appear on paper as if a counseling session had been held, when in fact no genuine counseling occurs.

Similarly, when performance issues arise, many supervisors elect not to document concerns or discuss them with the employee as is technically required.

3. Embrace new technologies. One aspect of evaluation writing that will be intriguing to watch evolve is the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to expertly draft complex text, including EERs. On the assumption this is already well underway in the Foreign Service, I predict that AI text generators (like GPT-3) will evolve into the modern-day equivalent of spell check and Microsoft editor (easy tools that I wished more staff would use with regularity!).

As far as EERs are concerned, this kind of assisted writing doesn't concern me as a negative trend because the act of *writing* an EER is the last of a series of tasks needed to arrive at a genuine and meaningful evaluation. Because AI is only a tool, the need for the “human in the loop” becomes more important than ever, including in the counseling and evaluation process.

AI writing may even help defeat bias in our evaluation writing, eliminating the trend that “good writers” (or those whose bosses are good writers) get promoted over others. As long as the rest of the feedback loop includes appropriate personal and human engagement between supervisors and employees,

Speaking Out is the *Journal's* opinion forum, a place for lively discussion of issues affecting the U.S. Foreign Service and American diplomacy. The views expressed are those of the author; their publication here does not imply endorsement by the American Foreign Service Association. Responses are welcome; send them to journal@afsa.org.

I urge the department to embrace the opportunity AI text generation represents and get ahead of the inevitable by teaching people how to use such tools.

4. Train and equip promotion boards. My experience serving on a promotion panel is that the vast majority of our colleagues take the responsibility seriously. They want to be fair and follow the rules and do a good job. But given the seriousness of the task, boards need better equipment and tools and more training—before they open the first EER.

Windowless rooms and bare-bones computer setups are not conducive to the best outcomes. And as technologies grow, many of our panel members may need specific training on how new technologies impact our traditional system, so that the bias inevitably created between those who use new tech and those who don't is fairly addressed.

It is time for the State Department and the other foreign affairs agencies to acknowledge that evaluation writing is a skill that requires new tools, practice, and training. The good news is that our evaluation and promotion systems can be quickly improved if the agencies and individual supervisors make the effort to change poor practices at the individual, managerial, and policy levels.

This isn't just important for diversity, morale, inclusion, and performance—it is critical to the survival and legitimacy of the Foreign Service. ■

Playing Catch-Up with China's Fintech Strides

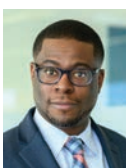
The evolution of financial technology will likely determine the future of money, not to mention the world balance of power. China's work on digital currency is a pointer.

BY YAYA J. FANUSIE

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is implementing a long-range strategy to challenge U.S. dominance in international finance without directly trying to compete with the U.S. dollar in the short run. China is a few years into a pilot of its central bank digital currency (CBDC), a digital version of the Chinese yuan or renminbi. While still in its early stages, the pilot shows part of the PRC's approach to global economic competition: to advance and gain influence in technologies that it deems will be strategically important in the future of global commerce. Financial technology (fintech) is one of those areas.

By prioritizing digital financial innovation, the PRC is not seeking to make the yuan immediately more attractive than the dollar. Rather, it is aiming to lead a global push for alternative payment rails running on new technology that would, over time, obviate the need to go through U.S. banks, or to at least reduce the need to go through financial infrastructure and institutions highly influenced by the United States.

The United States' best response to this PRC strategy is a strong offense of digital finance innovation in its own right, because the future of money will likely depend on how fintech evolves.



Yaya J. Fanusie is a former CIA analyst. He is the director of policy for anti-money laundering and cyber risk at the Crypto Council for Innovation. He is also an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Fintech and National Security

The United States has led the global financial system for more than 70 years. It maintains this position of primacy because of the strength of the U.S. dollar in international currency markets and the high relevance of U.S. banks in facilitating cross-border trade. The dollar is the leading global reserve currency. Any foreign bank that wants to operate broadly in the global financial community needs access to dollars and, thus, needs U.S. banking relationships. This gives the U.S. tremendous leverage in economic statecraft and gives U.S. financial coercion tools like sanctions their potency.

In 2016 I began looking closely at the national security implications of new technologies like cryptocurrencies and blockchain. My research inquiries first focused on non-state actors, like terrorist groups using Bitcoin and other digital tokens. But I soon found that U.S. adversary nations like Russia, Iran, Venezuela, and China were also exploring blockchain. In some cases, politicians in these states claimed openly that they wanted to use blockchain systems to evade U.S. sanctions.

Early attempts were not so fruitful, with Venezuela being a perfect example. In late 2018, the Nicolas Maduro regime created a simple cryptocurrency it called the "petro," which it marketed as a way to conduct international trade outside the global banking system. But the launch of a crypto token did not change the fundamentals of Venezuela's disastrous economy or offset its political corruption and instability. Nor did the regime build the necessary digital infrastructure to support its proposed alternative payment rails. There was no well-developed system for dispersing the token to citizens, nor were domestic businesses set up to accept it.



The U.S. quickly added the petro to its sanctions list, making the token an untouchable asset for anyone wanting to remain in good standing in the international banking system. Observing the failed petro project, I turned my attention to other nations, like China, that were going about things differently. In early 2021, I coauthored a report with my colleague Emily Jin at the Center for a New American Security unpacking China's digital currency project. A second report, looking at the pilot's progress, is forthcoming.

The PRC's digital currency project is not motivated by immediate sanctions evasion, but by a longer-term vision for the future of money. Since 2014 the People's Bank of China (PBOC)—the nation's central bank—has been researching digital currency technology. By 2020 it had launched its first trials of the CBDC, called the electronic Chinese yuan (e-CNY). This digital fiat currency is also called the digital renminbi. In watching this project, I've become convinced that while the pilot is a tiny experiment relative to China's overall economy and will not alter the renminbi's international competitiveness (which is based on many other economic and political factors outside its technology stack), the U.S. needs to track its development closely. The geopolitical implications of the e-CNY are less about currency and more about what China is doing with data innovation.

The e-CNY Up Close: A Central Banker's Dream

The electronic Chinese yuan is a payment instrument that is the digital version of China's fiat currency, and it is created and managed by the People's Bank. It is a retail central bank digital currency available for individuals and institutions to use and will coexist with physical renminbi. The e-CNY architecture is a two-tiered digital payment system. The PBOC is Tier 1 of the e-CNY system, and it issues digital renminbi to Chinese financial institutions that provide the currency directly to users through digital wallets. These institutions make up Tier 2 of the system. Typically, the way users acquire digital renminbi is by downloading the People's Bank's e-CNY app. Then, users must select one of the financial institution wallets within the app in order to begin transacting in the digital currency.

The e-CNY is a digital currency, but it is not a cryptocurrency. Its main operating system is not blockchain or distributed ledger technology. The People's Bank is planning for permissioned, state-controlled distributed ledger technology elements to support the e-CNY operating ecosystem, such as where the central bank conducts large-scale settlement operations to reconcile transfers between financial institutions. But the day-to-day retail transactions at the Tier 2 level use a centralized ledger, with a

single point of control. People's Bank calls the e-CNY a hybrid system, borrowing from blockchain architecture in parts, but allowing for flexibility in design as the system evolves.

The electronic Chinese yuan will use "smart contracts" for programmable transactions, especially in wallet technology. Users can access various types of wallets in the e-CNY system; software wallets, hardware wallets (including wearables), and wallets associated with personal machines (like cars) and other devices. Users can also have sub-wallets for different types of payment categories. For example, they can create a sub-wallet specifically for electricity bills to make fiscal management easier for payers and payees.

The People's Bank does not publish up-to-date statistics about the e-CNY pilots, but it reported that in late 2021, 123 million individuals had e-CNY wallets and there were 9.2 million corporate wallets. As of August 2022, e-CNY pilots in 15 provinces handled 360 million transactions totaling 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion), involving roughly 6 million retail merchants. By December 2022, the pilots spanned 17 geographical areas including municipalities and provinces.

Architecturally, the e-CNY is groundbreaking because it is government-run infrastructure whose transaction data go straight to financial authorities. This is not how banking and fintech work generally. Today's legacy payment systems are built on private financial institutions' infrastructure. Governments, whether democratic or authoritarian, always have to acquire transaction data by going through those private firms. Until the exploration of central bank digital currencies, governments have never had the technical potential to capture all transaction data in real-time. A CBDC designed in such a way might be considered a central banker's dream.

In China, private sector mobile apps like Alipay and WeChat Pay have dominated the payment landscape for more than a decade. In recent years the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been wresting control of data silos from the private sector, seeing data as a factor of production that the state must harness to advance a more digital economy. The People's Bank calls the e-CNY a backup system for retail payments; but I believe it is more accurate to call it the government's preferred default system, one that gives it direct insight into the activities of the domestic population. In its pilots, People's Bank is seeding e-CNY payment capacity into everyday services like groceries, public transportation, utilities, and health care.

People's Bank claims that e-CNY transactions are de-identified so that the central bank does not have direct access to the personal identification information attached to transactions

unless there is a reason due to suspected criminal activity. But given the CCP's power to deem activity criminal at will, this is a paper-thin assurance against government abuse. People's Bank describes the privacy protection within the e-CNY system as "controllable anonymity." Users can be anonymous to the government only as long as the state allows them to be. The e-CNY is a boon for CCP tracking and monitoring of residents, and its programmability will make it easier to cut off citizens' access to basic services if they run afoul of the state. For example, it is theoretically possible to program wallets of certain users (by location, demographic, or some other designation) to block certain types of transactions.


China's Digital Currency Activity and the U.S.

While the electronic yuan won't displace the dollar, it certainly will give the PRC an easier tool for economic retaliation against U.S. firms doing business in China. As the pilot expands and U.S. firms in the country accept e-CNY payments (as many probably will do given the allure of the retail market), they will need to understand that the People's Bank will be able to block

their e-CNY wallets at the proverbial flip of a switch. Such retaliation is not theoretical. In 2021, the PRC pushed a successful campaign to remove Swedish apparel store H&M from major Chinese e-commerce sites and geolocation and ride-sharing services after the firm posted concerns about forced labor in the Xinjiang region on its company blog.

Also, U.S. firms using e-CNY will be providing data about their company spending and operational patterns directly to the PRC government. The PRC will likely analyze that data and use the insights gained to advance domestic competitors. The collection of more, finer-tuned data overall gives the government much more consumer information than other governments can glean from their own populations. If "data is a factor of production," as the CCP has said in state planning documents, Chinese firms will benefit greatly from a wealth of digital inputs.

Although the e-CNY is primarily for domestic retail use, the PRC is simultaneously developing a way to leverage it for cross-border trade. As a participant in the Bank for International Settlements' mBridge initiative, in late 2022 the PBOC com-



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THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

pleted a series of transactions on a pilot blockchain platform that allows different countries to use CBDCs to conduct international trade. mBridge is a pilot sponsored by the Bank for International Settlements in collaboration with the People's Bank of China and the central banks of Hong Kong, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates. It uses a private, permissioned blockchain that only participating central banks can access and reflects a rising aspiration among central bankers around the world to develop more efficient cross-border payment systems.

The pilot only transmitted \$22 million worth of value, but it is a proof-of-concept revealing the seeds of a new way for companies to finance large-scale international transactions without going through the U.S.-influenced correspondent banking system. This multilateral activity is in its infancy, but China's progress with the e-CNY positions it to lead further experimentation and to shape the standards discussion around CBDCs that will occur in the coming years. If a system like mBridge expands and serves as a viable global payment rail outside U.S. influence, it would undermine U.S. sanctions power and fundamentally alter the world balance of power.

The U.S. is taking small, cautious steps on its own to explore the possibility of a U.S. CBDC and to innovate around payments. The U.S. Federal Reserve has made it clear that it has no current plan to launch a digital dollar, but is conducting research to help U.S. policymakers understand if it would even be in the interest of the U.S. to create one. The Boston Fed teamed up with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a research initiative called Project Hamilton looking at a theoretical design for a U.S. CBDC. Notably, their project envisioned a framework where users' transaction details would not be archived by the system.

The New York Fed recently teamed up with several global commercial banks and a blockchain software firm to devise a proof-of-concept for banks to facilitate trade through digital versions of commercial bank assets on a distributed ledger platform. That proof-of-concept aims to use blockchain to "tokenize" assets without creating a formal CBDC. And the Fed has been planning for a few years to unveil an instant payment service called FedNow that will help U.S. financial institutions make faster payments to each other around the clock. It should be live in mid-2023.



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These efforts notwithstanding, the U.S. is not very prominent in the global policy discussion around CBDCs, probably because it has less incentive to push for drastic shifts to the global payments order. China, on the other hand, with its wide range of data and experience from its e-CNY trials and multilateral collaboration, is becoming well positioned to influence other nations that are seeking domestic payment innovation and new cross-border transaction efficiencies.

What the U.S. Should Do

The U.S. needs to warn U.S. citizens and firms against the risks from using the e-CNY in China and also to message other nations about the geopolitical dangers of expanding PRC-influenced financial rails. But the most effective defense against the growth of CCP-influenced global financial infrastructure is a more concerted offense of digital finance innovation from the United States. The Fed's current innovation projects are a drop in the bucket compared to the rising appetite for innovation by central banks and the high pace of international exploration.

My current personal view on this rapidly evolving, highly complex issue is that the U.S. does not need to create its own central bank digital currency. The risks and complications around privacy are a key factor, but another is that the private sector is much better suited than government bureaucracies for building and refining internet applications. (Imagine the threat to future innovation if an update to CBDC software ended up requiring an act of Congress.)

What the U.S. needs to do, however, is lead from the front—with a determined push into digital finance design and development. That means offering alternatives to the one-dimensional approach of building solely on government infrastructure. The U.S. should leverage its robust and creative private tech sector as it envisions the future of money. New global payment systems *should* be built, but they should grow on digital rails that are open and adaptable. Countries will continue to explore the benefits of digital assets and internet innovation. The United States needs to invest in research and development and international collaborations to construct a digital economy aligned with values of openness, privacy, and freedom. ■

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What Should We Know About Digital Currency?

In this Q&A, Crypto Council for Innovation CEO Sheila Warren offers a primer on newly emerging, complex financial technologies like digital currency and blockchain. A nuanced and informed approach to policymaking and regulation is needed.



Sheila Warren is the CEO of the Crypto Council for Innovation, the premier global alliance for advancing the promise of this new technology through research, education, and advocacy. A Harvard-trained lawyer who started her career as an attorney at Cravath, Swaine & Moore, she most recently ran the tech strategy division of the World Economic Forum, regularly briefing heads of state, ministers, and CEOs. Here are her responses to questions posed by the FSJ in January.

FSJ: *What do U.S. diplomats working with governments and nongovernment entities around the world need to know about blockchain and digital currency?*

Sheila Warren: First, blockchain and digital currencies represent foundational technologies. A digital currency is a form of money that exists only in digital or electronic form. It's a broad category—including crypto, central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), stablecoins, and other emerging models. It may or may not be underpinned by blockchain technology, which is a form of distributed ledger that has cryptographically secured records. We should be thinking of these technologies much like the internet, as layers that will underpin the exchange of value, interaction with applications, and management of our online identities in the future.

People often get tied up in the technicalities, but those should be secondary. It's more important to understand the unique properties of these innovations and what they *enable*. We don't need to understand the inner workings of the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) to know what value email brings to our lives. The same applies here.

Second, there is a diversity of projects in crypto. Blockchain protocols and digital currencies make different decision choices around governance, economic incentives, and more. Thus, a nuanced and informed approach to policymaking and regulation is needed.

Japan led the G20 countries in being the first to adopt stablecoin legislation in the summer of 2021.

Third, blockchain and digital currencies are not something to fear. Use leads to understanding, and we encourage individuals to “play” with the technology to understand its unique features and applications—doing so doesn’t require monetary investment. For example, creating a wallet, looking at a block explorer (an online record of blockchain transactions), and tracking the provenance of an NFT (a non-fungible token) can all be done without spending a cent.

Fourth, now is the time to get up to speed on the fundamentals. We have seen the devastating consequences of people waiting to see what happens; after-the-fact actions are too little, too late. If we are going to effectively balance consumer protection and innovation, education and comprehension are key. This space moves quickly (even as someone focused on this innovation, I find it can be hard to keep up with all the developments), but a little investment of time will go a long way. Education is also key to differentiating between hype and real value.

Fifth, adoption of the technology varies greatly around the world, driven by different use cases and regulatory environments. Notably, there has been high uptake in emerging markets, places where people are living under authoritarian regimes, and countries experiencing instability and hyperinflation.

FSJ: *What are the challenges of cryptocurrency adoption for U.S. national security?*

SW: Cryptocurrency’s emergence as a new way to transmit value over the internet adds a new dimension to the U.S. national security landscape. It can give everyday people a way to move and hold digital funds safely without a centralized intermediary; but it can also offer illicit actors a new way to transact for nefarious purposes, making it not unlike other transaction methods that have been co-opted by bad actors for decades.

The permissionless nature of crypto systems can offer users the ability to transact pseudonymously. Thus, when Russian military intelligence officers aimed to disrupt the 2016 U.S. presidential election, in an attempt to shield their true identities, they used cryptocurrency to pay for the online tools, such as Virtual Private

Networks (VPNs) and website domains, that they needed. However, the publicly viewable ledger of blockchain transactions for major cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum gives national security investigators a trail of data to track and analyze at all times. In fact, it’s this transparent record that has enabled U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials to uncover and disrupt illicit operations by many state and non-state threat actors.

There is, in addition, a growing segment of tech firms specializing in blockchain forensics that provide the U.S. government software to support that mission. They use public records to identify bad actors within the system. In February 2022, the Justice Department said they “followed the money” via blockchain to retrieve \$3.6 billion linked to the Bitfinex hack, the agency’s biggest financial seizure to date. Going back to 2020, analytics firm Elliptic saw that about \$1 billion was moving out of a Bitcoin wallet. As a result, U.S. agencies tracked these illicit funds, helping to lead to the closure of the Silk Road case. Finally, the Department of Justice recovered the \$2.3 million ransom paid by Colonial Pipeline in one month in 2021. This case points to the “underlying traceability of crypto, which can be used as a powerful tool and asset against criminals,” according to a risk management expert.

At the end of the day, bad actors typically want to convert out of cryptocurrency and into fiat currency, or government-created currency. To do that, they have to go through a money services business that, according to global regulatory standards, is obligated to identify its customers and monitor for criminal transactions. These “off-ramps” into fiat are heavily monitored, as are the “on-ramps” by which users convert fiat into cryptocurrency. Both are where bad actors are deeply vulnerable.

Cryptocurrencies and their underlying technology are spurring significant innovation globally. The U.S. urgently needs to understand this technology, harness its potential, and cultivate leading expertise onshore to keep pace with the quickly evolving global digital economy. Failure to do so would jeopardize the U.S. position in the highly competitive digital future. Lagging behind other nations in our understanding would pose the biggest threat to U.S. national security.

FSJ: *What is Web3, and what do diplomats need to understand about it?*

SW: Web3 is an industry term that represents the vision for a “decentralized” internet. Enabled by technical advancements in blockchain technology and crypto, it is a model for our online interactions that aims to shift power from centralized intermediaries back to individuals. Its ambition is broad—using new

models for incentives and governance to rethink the fundamental relationships like the customer to the bank, the musician to the streaming platform, or the individual to their identity documents. As I've mentioned, the models and advancements in crypto—like NFTs, decentralized finance (DeFi), and self-managed identity, among other cases—are asking us to rethink *who* controls what data, value, and information, and *why*.

In the past few years, Web3 and crypto have been ubiquitous topics in conversations around digital innovation—but what are they exactly? Broadly speaking, we can think of Web1 as the “Read” era, Web2 as the “Write” era, and Web3 as the “Own” era. So, in the first iteration of the internet, we could view information from across the world. In the second iteration, we could add to it—largely through platforms and intermediaries. Now, we can own assets and transfer value, without the need for the intermediaries of the past.

From an overarching perspective, Web3 represents a vision for the future; it focuses on creating solutions to issues associated with centralized economies such as lack of privacy protection,

data ownership, and misuse of data by intermediaries like social media platforms or financial services companies, which we have seen many examples of in recent history.

At its core, Web3 describes a decentralized future—one where tech serves as a tool designed to empower users to protect our data, along with greater transparency regarding privacy and usage policies within our digital economy.

Crypto factors into this movement, positioning itself as not just another technological advancement but instead seeking to reimagine the relationship we have with technology in general (among many other implications). The Web2 and platform era was based on centralization of ownership and data, while Web3 is focused on putting these aspects back into the hands of the users. Crypto-enabled incentive and governance models are central to that shift. The key takeaway here: Web3 and crypto are intertwined.

In an ever-connected world, Web3 will allow for global seamless value transfer and access across industries and sectors: in creative fields such as music, art, and others; in financial use



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cases such as cross-border remittance and basic financial access. At its core, Web3 guarantees ownership over digital identity and privacy.

The technological improvements made within the Web3 industry are constantly advancing, as the space seeks to solve some of the most challenging questions in the world of cryptography and mass-scale coordination: technical improvements such as zero-knowledge cryptography or effective and fair ways to align incentives across organizations.



FSJ: *What else do you think our readers should know about digital currency?*

SW: In 2022 crypto made a huge leap into public awareness as individuals and governments alike considered the implications of digital currency.

But—and I won't mince words—it was an unforgiving year. It's easy to take notice of numbers, but we must not forget that there are people behind them. Sadly, those affected

by unethical decisions made at the highest levels felt them most acutely.

Many have, understandably, asked whether the risks of crypto outweigh the benefits. We need to be clear: People were at the center of the negative press, not the technology involved. And the alleged bad acts committed mirror similar bad acts that have happened throughout the course of history: fraud, misuse of assets, and egregious breaches of trust. Keep in mind that crypto emerged out of the financial crisis. It was designed with these very human failures that come with centralization in mind. While we still have a way to go, it's important to highlight that the technology is *designed* to avoid these types of events. This is why so many remain excited about its potential. At its best, the technology mitigates centralization risks, and it provides a much-needed option in vulnerable contexts (like hyper-inflation, authoritarianism, and high-friction financial markets).

As the crypto market continues to survive through numerous headlines, both good and bad, it's clear that governments are taking digital currencies seriously. They have been slowly waking up to the undeniable reality of crypto being here, and their recent focus on policy and regulation is a sign that they acknowledge its potential.

Japan led the G20 countries in being the first to adopt stablecoin legislation in the summer of 2021 and in 2022 announced investment into NFTs, the creation of a decentralized autonomous organization (DAO) for Web3 exploration, and overall investment in services that utilize the metaverse.

The European Union followed by endorsing its landmark legislation, Market in Crypto Assets Regulation (MiCA). This is the first time a major player moved to legislate digital assets and the wider crypto ecosystem. This regulation will have global implications because a majority of the companies in this space are headquartered outside the region.

G20 countries are also coordinating on the regulation of crypto assets through the Financial Stability Board (FSB) and other international standard-setting bodies in financial regulation. The FSB proposed nine recommendations that provide oversight, supervision, and regulation of stablecoins. On the technical side, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) partnered with four central banks around the world on Project mBridge to explore digital currencies as a more efficient mechanism for cross-border payments.

In the United States, President Joe Biden's Executive Order on Digital Assets led to the release of several reports and a framework. On the legislative front, crypto saw broad, bipartisan support throughout 2022. Notable bills include the Bipartisan Responsible Financial Innovation Act from Senators Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), and the Digital Commodities Consumer Protection Act. Although the new Congress brings different actors and priorities, the trend overall demonstrates the growing importance of the sector and the interest from across the political spectrum in securing the future of the U.S. digital economy.

Digital currencies—in some form or other—are here to stay. The crypto space is firmly on the global radar, and these examples represent a handful of the activities that happened around the world in 2022. Worldwide, governments have realized that the technology is not going away. They are making investments in the technology and are making moves to protect consumers with sound regulation. To ensure that the U.S. continues its role as a leader in innovation, government officials and diplomats should pay close attention to this quickly evolving space. ■



LOSING THE PEACE

in the

Central African Republic

How the international community spent its way to losing the peace—and opened the door to Russian mischief—in the Central African Republic.

BY LAURENCE WOHLERS

The international community has amassed a great deal of experience in failed-state stabilization in Africa in recent decades. Sadly, it has had a remarkably poor return on its investment. In South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and the Central African Republic, to name a few, stabilization efforts have dragged on for decades and spent vast sums. Yet

in each of these conflicts, not only have years of effort and expense failed to enhance stability, but the roots of conflict have actually become deeper and more entrenched.

To understand why, this article reviews the sad fate of a country I have followed closely: the Central African Republic (CAR). For the last decade, this desperately poor country of fewer than 5 million inhabitants has been mired in chronic violence. The international community's response has been robust, spending more than \$1 billion annually—a sum that represents 50 percent of CAR's GDP—on a multifaceted stabilization effort. And yet the conflict in CAR has descended into a stagnant and dysfunctional status quo, a dysfunction that Russia has recently succeeded in adroitly exploiting for political and commercial gain.

What accounts for this failure? It would be easy for the international community to shrug its collective shoulders and bemoan the challenges of working in “failed states.” And certainly there is some truth to that. Is that, however, the only reason? Is it possible that the very size and complexity of the response created an illusion of progress, thereby blinding the international community to deep conceptual flaws in its stabilization strategy? Could it be that



Laurence Wohlers is a retired Foreign Service officer. He served in the Central African Republic as public affairs officer (1985-1987), ambassador (2010-2013), and as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for MINUSCA (April-July 2014). He was also the interim U.S. special representative for the African Great Lakes (2017-2018) and served as a team leader for the Security Governance Initiative in Mali and Niger (2015-2019) and for a separate security governance agreement with the Central African Republic (2018-2019).



Central African Republic, 2011.

the political “cost” of chronic failure in CAR has simply been—for us—too low to force a hard look at our own mistakes? And did the international community’s failure inadvertently create the perfect conditions for Russia’s hybrid military-business force to succeed?

CAR Bursts into the Spotlight

We begin with a little history. In December 2012, CAR burst into global headlines when an armed group suddenly emerged on the country’s sparsely populated northwest frontier. Initially the origins, motivations, and funding of the group that called itself “Seleka” were a mystery. But the group quickly proved itself a formidable force and, in a series of ferocious pitched battles, won decisive victories. By Christmas, the Central African army had ceased to exist as a fighting force. Although the region’s leaders managed to negotiate a temporary truce, three months later Seleka’s forces marched into the capital, sending then President François Bozizé fleeing into exile.

Seleka proved far more proficient at fighting than governing. Its fighters, largely Chadian and Sudanese veterans of the Darfur conflict, had been promised payment in pillage. And pillage and killing is precisely what they proceeded to do, for months on end. The very scale of the group’s atrocities, however, would prove to be its undoing. A horrified Western public demanded an international response, and in December 2013, a French expeditionary force sent Seleka’s fighters fleeing north out of the capital. Ultimately, however, neither the French nor a subsequent African

notably from the European Union, France, and the United States, as well as an array of development and humanitarian initiatives.

The traumatized Central Africans greeted this response with jubilation. They felt certain that a professional U.N. force would make quick work of armed groups, reestablish order, and create the conditions for reconstruction. At first glance, that optimism did not seem unfounded. In those early days, not only did the various armed groups number only a few thousand, but they were on the defensive and desperately short of revenue to pay their fighters. Further, the Central Africans had themselves rallied around a new transitional government, which in turn quickly organized a national forum to provide popular support for the rebuilding process. In short, if a robust international stabilization effort could have succeeded anywhere, it should have been in CAR in 2014 and 2015.

Sadly, it was not to be. Despite the deployment of MINUSCA garrisons around the country, over the next eight years, the armed groups became both more numerous and more deeply embedded while the democratically elected government never succeeded in reestablishing its authority. Instead of peace, a dysfunctional but resilient status quo emerged: The government (supported by MINUSCA) controlled the capital and surrounding countryside, and various armed groups controlled and exploited regional fiefdoms, while chronic low-level violence occupied the lands where government and warlords’ spheres of influence ebbed and flowed.

Union peacekeeping mission was large enough to stabilize the countryside.

So long ignored by the world, CAR had now become a hot topic in peacebuilding circles. Demands for a full United Nations peacekeeping mission quickly multiplied, and by early 2014 an initially reluctant U.S. government finally agreed. Known by its acronym MINUSCA, the mission would eventually grow to a combined military and civilian force of 12,000—far outnumbering the country’s own army. It was not, moreover, alone: Indeed, it was robustly supported by bilateral security assistance programs,



REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Seleka fighters, mostly from neighboring Sudan and Chad, roll marijuana while waiting outside a meeting between their commander and African Union (FOMAC) peacekeepers in Bossangoa, Central African Republic, Nov. 25, 2013.

What Went Wrong

Certainly, Central Africans themselves, especially their political elite, must accept a share of the blame. Political squabbling over power and control of rent-seeking opportunities has made the government much less effective than it should have been. Outside actors, initially CAR's neighbors and later Russia, have also manipulated and profited from the violence.

In hindsight, however, early signs of the likely failure of the international community's game plan for stabilization should have been evident. The international community failed to accurately identify the security—but especially the political—challenges to durable peacebuilding. Among its mistakes are the following four.

The stabilization strategy lacked a sense of urgency. The scope and size of the international community's security, economic, and humanitarian intervention beginning in 2014 gave a sense of inevitability to the stabilization process. The influx of outsiders even led to a mini-construction boom in Bangui. True, the international community's deployments were complex, ponderous, and slow, measured in years rather than months. Yet, it was easy to believe that time was on the side of the peacebuilders.

The reality, however, was that security was in fact not improving for most Central Africans outside the capital. And the problem was not just the original armed groups. Even after MINUSCA's garrisons deployed to major cities, the surrounding countryside

remained remarkably lawless. In that power vacuum, local militias proliferated. An attack on one village led to a response, creating a cycle of retaliation and counterretaliation that both spread and entrenched violence at a level too localized for MINUSCA's forces to engage. Whether for profit or just to settle grudges, violence became the principal currency of community relations.

Without enforcing a cessation of hostilities at the local “granular” level, time was never going to be on the side of peace. By failing to recognize that quickly, the international community missed its window of opportunity.

The international community's peace strategy was fundamentally flawed. Initially, the violence in CAR was not an especially difficult military challenge in a traditional sense. The armed groups were neither numerous, highly motivated, nor militarily sophisticated. MINUSCA's mandate, however, was limited. It did have the authority to use force in certain situations, such as for civilian protection, but it had neither the mandate nor the forces to disarm all the militias and broadly enforce peace.

From the beginning, therefore, the international community's preferred solution to the violence was an inclusive peace deal, one negotiated by all parties to the conflict—including the armed groups. This peace strategy had a fundamental flaw, however: The armed groups had no interest in any deal that would have meaningfully reestablished the rule of law. Indeed, their business model depended on the absence of law.



In Bangui, on July 18, 2014, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Laurence Wohlers is interviewed after the ceremony launching the disarmament and relocation project of 2,000 ex-Seleka combatants.

They were, however, perfectly content to pretend to negotiate. Over the ensuing years, therefore, the “peace process” would fruitlessly reinvent itself several times, with involvement eventually expanding to CAR’s neighbors, the African Union, and finally the Russians. Yet there was never any prospect of a durable peace “deal” as long as no force capable of enforcing it existed.

The international community did not consistently counter the destabilizing agendas of CAR’s neighbors. Both Sudan and Chad not only sought to profit from CAR’s economic assets (gold, diamonds, and cattle), but manipulated the cross-border movements of armed groups for their own political purposes. Chad’s late president, Idriss Déby, in particular, strove to be a political kingmaker in CAR, and his opportunistic support for the armed groups, although never explicit, made it easier for them to withstand outside pressure.

Unfortunately, the international community mostly ignored the neighbors’ contribution to CAR’s instability. Partly it was because the world had larger fish to fry with those two countries. Partly, however, it was simply a function of bureaucratic disconnect—Western officials working on CAR were often not the same ones who were responsible for Chad and Sudan, and the concerns of the former were not those of the latter.

Most importantly, the international community failed to build a political partnership with the CAR government. From the beginning, the international community was reluctant to be too closely tied to the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), partly to maintain its posture of neutrality toward all the “parties to the conflict” and partly because of legitimate worries about FACA’s professionalism. Training, yes; support for FACA deployments, no.

The truth, however, was that a strong FACA was critical to stabilization success. After all, if MINUSCA could not impose order,

the only plausible option was for the Central African security forces to play that role. At a minimum, a stronger national army would have put pressure on the warlords to take peace negotiations more seriously.

The election in 2015 of a new president, Faustin Touadéra, offered the perfect opportunity for a new security partnership between the international community and the government. Having won handily in what all observers agreed was a free and fair election, Touadéra offered a partner with real legitimacy. Moreover, he was eager to demonstrate to the population that he could get the FACA out into the field and become a force for better security. To do that, he needed support from the international community.

Unfortunately, a deal was never made. Touadéra wanted the international community to provide arms and logistical support to the army quickly; the international community resisted, insisting that various reforms had to come first. Both sides had arguments on their side, but the impasse dragged into months and then years. If the international community had hoped to push him toward better governance by withholding its support, it was mistaken. Weakened politically, he instead leaned ever more heavily on a corrupt and highly partisan political circle—and began to search for a new outside partner.

Enter Russia

By 2017, not only Touadéra but much of population was disillusioned by the lack of progress toward peace. The international community’s massive presence and profile made it easy to blame. It was a perfect opportunity for Russia to exploit. Beginning with a shipment of Russian arms, the relationship rapidly expanded, with a grateful President Touadéra accepting first military trainers,

and then fighters under the Wagner brand. Wagner was easy to underestimate initially; its first fighters were lightly equipped and short on professionalism.

For Touadéra, however, Wagner's willingness to deploy directly with the FACA gave him the military relevance the rest of the international community had denied him. And for that, he was willing to overlook Wagner's disdain for civilian protection rules, its steadily increasing demands for payment (mainly in the form of lucrative mining concessions), its growing reach inside his own government (a Russian "national security adviser" sits in the presidency), and its pervasive social media disinformation (targeting the French for especially ugly attacks).

All of this caught the rest of the international community flat-footed. The Russians may have been brazen, brutal, and mendacious, but they were also politically nimble. Largely self-funded (both directly by the Central African government and indirectly by their local "businesses"), the Russians could be extremely opportunistic. Moreover, their hybrid official/commercial model also allowed the Russian government to shrug off Wagner's most egregious actions as just a private business affair.

Burdened by ponderous, headquarters-driven decision-making and unprepared for this kind of political competition, the rest of the international community was simply outmatched. Even the French, despite deep ties to most of the Central African elite, found themselves outmaneuvered. After struggling for months to fight back against Russian disinformation, and finding their complaints ignored by Touadéra, the French finally just gave up. By the end of 2021, France—the one external actor with the means to challenge Russia politically—had begun to pull out of CAR.

A Bleak Future

Today we are a long way from the hopeful days of MINUSCA's inception. A considerably strengthened Wagner has made the Touadéra government a force to be reckoned with in the countryside, but the armed groups still flourish. Indeed, a loose coalition of armed groups that includes the former president, François Bozizé, even talks provocatively of mounting an attack on Bangui itself. In the meantime, most of the population live in a state of low-level but unpredictable violence.

At the same time, Touadéra's relationship with the Russians has proved a Faustian bargain, and his margin for acting independently is increasingly thin. For the moment, his presence is sufficiently useful to them that they are heavily supporting a constitutional amendment to allow him a third term. However, the Russians have so cleverly entrenched themselves among the Bangui political elite that they could just as easily arrange for him to be deposed.

Without enforcing a cessation of hostilities at the local "granular" level, time was never going to be on the side of peace.

The international community, therefore, now finds itself in a quandary: Prospects for peace are dismal, and its relationship with the government has been largely supplanted by Russia. In response, the international community has cut off much-needed budgetary support. Yet just "pulling out" security and humanitarian presence would likely unleash even more instability and greater violence.

What the international community should do now in CAR and what an effective stabilization policy generally would look like are complex questions that do not have simple answers. Certainly, the problem was not and is not a lack of courage and commitment at the level of individual members of the various multilateral and bilateral missions in CAR. I will always remain in awe of the many who each day coolly calculate the risks before them, and then set off to work.

The "International Community" as an Actor

But as an actor, the "international community" has some distinct disadvantages, especially when it comes to the need to devise and implement policies based on the integration of economic, military, and political tools. In the CAR effort, the international community was hardly united, either in terms of grand strategy or day-to-day operations. There were certainly regular coordination meetings, but coordination is not integration. Each institution, each government, and each subgovernmental agency pursued independent strategies, with separate funding streams, based heavily on internal bureaucratic constraints.

A case in point is the U.S. government's own inconsistent attention to the crisis. Given the U.S. role as lead contributor to U.N. peacekeeping and the international financial institutions, as well as its dominant presence in humanitarian funding, the American government was the single-largest funder to stabilization efforts in CAR, at least indirectly. (Indeed, the American taxpayers' spending on CAR probably added up to \$2-3 billion over the decade, but it is hard to know for sure because it is nobody's job to do the math.)



REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

At the first Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum, held in Sochi, Russia, Oct. 23-24, 2019, President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with CAR President Faustin Touadéra at the welcoming ceremony. (Inset) Putin and his team hold talks with the CAR delegation separately at the summit.



REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

However, the U.S. did not act like a dominant presence in the stabilization effort. To be sure, staff members in several parts of the U.S. government worked hard on discrete projects for CAR, several of which were extremely effective. What was largely missing was an approach both whole-of-government and political, one that not only tied together the U.S. government's own efforts, but fostered an equal level of coordination among the international community as well.

The U.S. government is simply not structured to do that; nor are our like-minded national partners. Indeed, once MINUSCA was formed and the initial crisis faded, a junior State Department desk officer was the highest level of consistent political attention that the crisis received within the Washington foreign policy machinery. There were just too many other higher-profile crises competing for limited senior attention.

ship, however, that the international community did not know how to navigate.

As a result, in allowing stabilization failure to become chronic in CAR, the international community created the perfect environment for Russia's hybrid military/business strategy to succeed. It is too soon to say if Russia's strategy is sustainable. It is possible that Central Africans will eventually understand that the Russians have come to exploit instability rather than solve it. Or it is possible that the country may explode into a new cycle of violence that no one will be able to control.

The place to start an honest reassessment of policy in the CAR, however, is by recognizing that it is the international community, as much as the Central Africans themselves, that is responsible for stabilization's failure. Only then can a true search for better outcomes—in CAR and elsewhere—begin. ■

AFSA President on the Road

It's been a busy start to 2023 for AFSA's president, Ambassador Eric Rubin.

In January, Amb. Rubin visited Sarasota, Florida, where he attended the Foreign Service Retirees Association of Florida's (FSRA-FL) annual board meeting. This local retiree association contains AFSA's largest constituency of retirees. The State's Diplomat in Residence for Florida, Mignon Houston, also attended.

As a keynote speaker along with Paula Jakub, president of the American Foreign Service Protective Association (AFSPA), Rubin presented remarks on the state of the Foreign Service, highlights and challenges of AFSA's work, and key retiree issues, such as the ongoing disruption of the Annuitant Express online portal.



Eric Rubin speaking at Point Park University in Pittsburgh for the WAC event on Feb. 7.

While in Florida, Rubin also met with the local chapter of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC). In addition, Rubin met with Heather Kasten of the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce.

In February, Rubin was invited to speak at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA)

by Charlie Skinner, a retired Foreign Service officer and professor at UPitt.

Rubin joined Julia Santucci, senior lecturer in intelligence studies, at an open-to-all event on "U.S. Diplomacy in the 21st Century." He also joined Santucci's intelligence studies class for a small group discussion on "Diplomacy and Intelligence," and later had dinner with the dean of GSPIA, Carissa Slotterback.

While in Pittsburgh, Rubin joined the Pittsburgh World Affairs Council (WAC) for an interactive Q&A on "The State of U.S. Diplomacy." The event, which was sponsored by WAC, Luminari, Global-Pittsburgh, and Pittsburgh Global Shapers, kicked off with a performance by Cuban percussionist Hugo Cruz. A recording of the event is available on the WAC YouTube channel.

Rubin then attended a lunchtime discussion hosted

CALENDAR

Please check www.afsa.org for the most up-to-date information.

April 3
Deadline: High School Essay Contest Submissions

April 3
AFSA Board Election Ballots Mailed

April 18
Federal and State Taxes Due AFSA Tax Guide: afsa.org/taxguide

April 19
12-2 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

May 4
AFSA Foreign Service Day Events

May 5
Foreign Service Day

May 17
12-2 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

May 18
Final Day for AFSA to Receive Ballots

by the Carnegie Mellon University undergraduate history department, headed by Emanuela Grama, chair of global studies at CMU.

Topics covered included the Russia-Ukraine war and its effect on European Union and U.S. relations, the E.U. response to rising populism and nationalism in European nations, and career advice for those considering the Foreign Service. ■

Volunteer Your Voice!

Help guide AFSA's flagship publication, *The Foreign Service Journal*, into the future.

Active-duty and retired AFSA members are invited to apply for two-year terms on the FSJ Editorial Board.

See the Call for Volunteers notice on page 24 for information on how to apply. ■





The Vibe from Foreign Service Orientation Classes

As you may know, AFSA hosts lunches for new Foreign Service orientation classes at AFSA HQ to introduce them to our organization and hopefully get them to sign up as dues-paying members. As of this writing in mid-February, we have just hosted the latest State Department orientation class of 230—the largest in State Department history.

The priorities that each class will face have changed since I joined the Foreign Service in 1991, but the commitment to the mission and work of the department has not.

Since I became AFSA's State vice president in summer 2019, I have had the opportunity to participate in more than 10 orientation lunches. Here are some of my observations:

- When I joined, the average age of orientation classes was 28. Now, the average age is 34. Current FS members have greater work experience, and more of them have prior government service.
- During COVID, the department combined FS generalists and specialists into virtual orientation classes and chose to keep these combined classes when in-person events restarted. AFSA has strongly supported this change. New FS members now have a deeper appreciation for the

critical role of each group. Relationships have been forged that will likely pay dividends in making the department function more smoothly and collegially. I wish that had been in place when I joined.

- The vast majority of my orientation class saw the Foreign Service as a 25- to 30-year career. This is what we were going to do for the rest of our working lives. But that has changed. More new members, especially the increasing number coming from the military, have already had a career or are thinking of a career beyond State.

- New FS members appear more willing from the start to take on equity and work-life balance issues. At one of our recent lunches, I sat next to a newly minted economic officer who made a strong case for making the FS oral assessment virtual.

She argued that making people pay to travel to Washington, D.C., for the FS assessment was inherently inequitable. Some people, she said, could not afford it or could not take time off from work. Plus, they would likely not be as “fresh” for the assessment as someone who lived in the Washington area.

I informed her that State had already decided to make this assessment virtual for the very reasons she out-

Our newest FS colleagues prize flexibility, work-life balance, and diversity in a way that just was not conceivable back in the day.

lined. (Note: AFSA is aware that this change is momentous, but the equity argument does make sense to us. That said, after receiving a preliminary briefing from the department, we will seek more in-depth data and information before we weigh in on this change definitively.)

- These orientation classes are some of the most diverse—in terms of background, gender, ethnicity, and race—that I have ever seen. This is particularly true of those hired under the Limited Non-Career Appointments (LNA) program.

Serving primarily as Consular Fellows and bringing a wealth of language skills, LNAs work for a period of up to five years and are eligible for AFSA membership during that time.

At one of our orientation lunches, LNAs said many would like to join as FSOs after their first tour of duty. LNAs have asked if they could be included in the Mustang program, a highly competitive process that allows tenured FS specialists and qualified civil servants to forgo the Foreign Service Officer Test and

move directly to the qualifications evaluation panel and, if successful there, to the oral assessment.

AFSA has asked State to investigate if this is feasible and what effect, if any, it would have on the FS workforce. It would be a shame to lose this highly talented and experienced group.

Flexibility, Creativity Are Key to Retention

From what I gather, our newest FS colleagues prize flexibility, work-life balance, and diversity in a way that just was not conceivable back in the day.

They are interested in creative solutions for spousal employment, flexible work schedules, pursuing advanced degrees and bringing that knowledge back to the department, and ensuring that the Foreign Service looks like the rest of America at all levels, including at the mid- and senior levels.

To retain this talent, the State Department must make a concerted effort to find these creative solutions.

Please let us know what you think by writing us at member@afsa.org. ■



OECD Peer Review: PEERing into the Future

In November 2022, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) published its latest Peer Review of the United States. For those unfamiliar with this exercise, every five to six years the DAC conducts peer reviews of individual members, seeking to improve development cooperation, highlighting good practices, and recommending improvements.

Many FSJ readers, including myself, have participated in these exercises in Washington, D.C., or at a mission overseas. Per the DAC: “Peer reviews hold DAC members accountable for the commitments they have made, monitor implementation of recommendations from previous reviews, track adherence to OECD and DAC Recommendations and instruments, and recommend actions to improve performance.” This is all familiar language to development practitioners.

The review has a wealth of data, including some nifty infographics, and I encourage you to read the entire report and explore the broader DAC site. For this column, I want to highlight a couple of pertinent findings from the 2022 report, including the progress made since the 2016 review.

As part of its “Findings

and Recommendations,” the review highlights this: “Matching human resources to agency needs is a work in progress.”

The authors explain: “USAID does not have a global strategic workforce plan as recommended in the 2016 peer review, and an interim plan is in effect only until the end of FY 2022. While USAID did not provide a timeline for replacing the interim plan, its new Global Development Partnership Initiative is a hiring effort to rebalance the proportion of Foreign Service officers, civil servants, and contractors in its workforce.”

It is now 2023, two years into the administration, and the DAC and I remain unclear on the agency’s strategic workforce plan. That said, I have had the great privilege of welcoming fantastic new FSO candidates and applaud the agency’s continued hiring.

These newest colleagues must be mentored, both in Washington, D.C., and in the field. And bureaus, offices, and missions must receive the additional financial, human, and bureaucratic resources necessary to sustain a larger Foreign Service; doing “more with less” is not a strategy.

One interesting part of the 2022 review is the United States’ own Self-Assessment, in which it dis-

We are once again undergoing another series of smaller reorganizations absent a strategic workforce plan.

cusses a range of items such as “Recent Changes in the Context of the United States’ Development Cooperation,” “Challenges and Opportunities,” and a chart looking at “Implementation of 2016 DAC Peer Review Recommendations.”

On this last piece, one of the 2016 recommendations was that USAID should review the extent of institutionalization of recent reform efforts and prioritize remaining reforms, including fully resourcing implementation of the human resources transformation plan to improve staff recruitment and progression.

(A reminder: Prior to the previous administration’s “transformation” of multiple USAID bureaus and offices, USAID had a robust HR Transformation Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021 filled with milestones, timelines, resource estimates, and a focus on institutional nuts and bolts like strategic workforce planning, development of career paths, gap analysis, retention planning, and diversity and inclusion, among other items.)

The U.S. self-assessment on meeting this recommendation: “Partially.”

Surely USAID can do better—and yet we are once again undergoing another series of smaller reorganizations absent a strategic workforce plan or HR reform agenda.

Finally, the peer review notes that the Biden-Harris administration is in the process of developing a national policy on Development (capital “D”), building on former President Barack Obama’s “2010 Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6).”

This policy development process would be an excellent opportunity to address some of the peer review findings, push for a bold increase in USAID hiring, and secure White House support for long-overdue USAID reforms aligned with the president’s directive to “protect, empower, and rebuild the career Federal workforce.”

I hope that USAID engages with these goals in mind so that the next DAC Peer Review is an entirely (not “partially”) bold and inspiring read. ■



Cultivating the Next Generation of Ag Leaders

As Dr. Benjamin Hooks, former executive director of the NAACP, eloquently stated: “If you think you are leading and turn around to see no one following, then you are just taking a walk.”

From violent geopolitical conflicts to internal challenges, Foreign Service officers often face serious obstacles at home and abroad. Given that FSOs in all agencies tend to be a high-performing bunch, we have high expectations of our leaders. Watching them deftly navigate seemingly impossible situations with poise, principles, and humanity inspires us to rally behind them, and to step into their big shoes one day. A perception of less than stellar leadership can demotivate and fragment an organization instead of uniting it.

In FAS, we are very skilled at, for example, analyzing wheat production, supply, and distribution, and articulating how agricultural innovation will help a country’s farmers adapt to climate change. However, acquisition of the soft skills that are necessary to be a true leader—which boil down to both strength and empathy—may not occur as naturally.

Especially since many of our current Senior Foreign Service (SFS) officers plan to retire in the next few years, AFSA applauds FAS’ recent focus on developing

AFSA looks forward to thoughtful discussions with FAS and its FSOs about the prerequisites that unlock the elusive window to our most demanding and sensitive roles.

its future cadre of leaders. Earlier this year, the agency launched its third semester-long leadership course for mid-level officers, which includes a 360-degree assessment and multiple coaching sessions.

This well-regarded program will pay dividends as those FSOs rise through the ranks, and it should continue. Since executive leadership is a journey and not a destination, FAS should also align with the State Department and require its senior officers to take the Senior Executive Threshold Seminar, paired with executive coaching.

In addition, as we embark on collective bargaining agreement renegotiations, AFSA is evaluating the prerequisites to cross the SFS threshold. Currently, FSOs in Class 1 are required to have been assigned and served as the most senior agricultural officer in an overseas office and as a supervisor or management official in Washington, D.C.

Neither eligibility criterion has an explicit time requirement, but FSOs must have also served in Class 1 for at least one year. They may then open their window for entry into the SFS in hopes

of flying through it within a 12-year period.

AFSA does not envision changes to the overseas head-of-office requirement: it’s essential, and FSOs have ample opportunities to meet it. However, as I’ve explained in this column previously, supervisory positions can be hard to come by in FAS Washington, especially since we don’t have many FSO-designated positions. This can lead to FSOs having to take lower-ranked positions or delay their eligibility for SFS, which is neither fair nor in the agency’s best interests.

Historically, some FSOs have checked this box by serving in a qualifying position for only a few months, or by sharing supervision of one administrative staff member at HQ. This does not appear to meet the spirit of the requirement, which is intended for FSOs to gain substantive experience in a broader agency context while encumbering a relatively senior position at HQ.

At the same time, AFSA agrees that experience supervising Americans and serving in a relatively senior position at HQ should be prerequisites. However, we think some changes to the

HQ service requirement would provide some flexibility, for both the agency and FSOs. One solution could be to require that FSOs serve in a Class 1 or 2 HQ position or as the AFSA vice president and manage an American anywhere in the world.

Many FSOs would satisfy both requirements at the same time by serving in a supervisory position at HQ. However, they could also accomplish this via two separate roles: (1) managing FSOs overseas, and (2) serving in a nonsupervisory HQ position, e.g., as a senior adviser or as the AFSA vice president (in my humble opinion, an important role that FAS has a hard time filling).

Serving in a hardship post, while a norm, should also be an explicit requirement for eligibility into the SFS. All prerequisites should have a one-year minimum.

AFSA looks forward to thoughtful discussions with FAS and its FSOs about the prerequisites that unlock the elusive window to our most demanding and sensitive roles, and ensuring the agency provides ample opportunities to meet them.

FAS and AFSA have a shared goal to ensure that we are cultivating not just strong export numbers, but also effective leaders with cohesive teams behind them to achieve our agency’s priorities. ■



The Foreign Service Honor Roll

Retirees who have not visited Main State's C Street lobby in the last few years may not appreciate the dramatic changes there in the AFSA Memorial Plaques honoring colleagues who died in circumstances distinctive to overseas service dating back to 1780. The once-in-a-generation expansion and refurbishment of the AFSA plaques in 2021 and 2022 had several components.

First, because the sad toll of the deaths of colleagues had left room for just eight additional names on the existing memorial plaques, new space was needed. Back in 2011, Under Secretary of State for Management Patrick Kennedy reserved the six lobby columns near the interior courtyard for future AFSA plaque expansion.

Because a successor could reverse that decision in the future, AFSA decided that the time had come to claim all six of those high-visibility locations. Thus, in May 2021, AFSA placed a large (approximately 1.5 by 7.5 feet) black granite panel on each of those six columns on their courtyard-facing side.

While we hope for no new names to be added to the panels, if the pace of Foreign Service deaths continues as in recent decades, the new panels should provide space for 50 years of additional inscriptions.

Second, AFSA removed and replaced the four side

panels situated beside the two historic large plaques that dominate either end of the lobby. Many of the names on those side panels had been inscribed out of chronological order following AFSA's decision in 2001 to expand plaque criteria to include, for example, colleagues in past decades who died in accidents during official travel.

Several dozen of those historical names were inscribed as they were identified in the early 2000s, with the result being that visitors to the memorial plaques saw a confusing jumble of dates with, for example, the inscription of a 2002 death listed above that of a 1978 death. In 2021 AFSA decided to remove and reinscribe the four side panels to produce a chronologically coherent, dignified listing.

Third, before reinscribing those side panels, AFSA decided to also inscribe 67 names of early diplomats and consular officers, plus additional 20th-century Foreign Service members whose deaths AFSA had not known about or had not recognized.

Those names were discovered by way of diligent archival research by several Foreign Service members and retirees during the 2010s. (See Jason Vorderstrasse's November 2020 *FSJ* article for more.) Thus, in May 2021, AFSA reinscribed the four side panels and

inscribed three of the six new column panels with the names of those fallen colleagues arranged in chronological order.

Fourth, anticipating that researchers in coming years will continue to document additional deaths of colleagues from past decades and centuries, AFSA in April 2021 created a virtual memorial plaque on the AFSA website to memorialize those historical names. The alternative of inscribing them on the physical plaques would have produced a new jumble of dates and left less room to inscribe future Foreign Service deaths.

Five such historical names already have been added to the virtual plaque in just the past two years, thus validating the concern that there are likely many more to be discovered. AFSA plans to see how many additional historical names come to light over the next decade and then decide whether to inscribe them on the three remaining column panels at the expense of space to honor future deaths.

Finally, in December 2022, AFSA refurbished the large three-column memorial plaque that was installed in the late 1960s on the east wall of the C Street lobby. Its gold leaf lettering had noticeably faded over the past half century, so AFSA had those 917 letters and dates repainted using a



One of the memorial plaques in the C Street lobby.

special gold paint containing gold dust that was imported from Europe. Hopefully, that new lettering will last another 50 years.

As the caretaker of the memorial plaques since 1933, AFSA will continue to hold its annual plaque ceremony on the first Friday of each May, when the names of newly fallen colleagues are unveiled, or existing names are commemorated. AFSA Governing Boards will continue to apply the long-standing plaque criteria when considering new nominations for inscription. Those decisions are sometimes controversial since all deaths—including from natural causes—are to be mourned, but AFSA 90 years ago reasonably decided to focus public attention on colleagues dying in circumstances distinctive to overseas service. ■

AFSA Welcomes Newest FS Members

It has been wonderful to welcome so many new members of the Foreign Service to in-person meetings at AFSA HQ in 2023.

On Jan. 19, we hosted 14 new USAID Foreign Service officers, 100 percent of whom joined AFSA at the event. The officers in this newest group speak 13 languages between them, and they have collectively traveled or worked in 43 countries. Their experiences include hiking to Mt. Everest

Base Camp, working as a ski patroller, and winning a corn-on-the-cob eating championship.

We welcomed more than 200 new State Department FS officers and specialists in three groups in February. The 109 generalists and 118 specialists included regional medical officers, security engineers, DS special agents, and FSOs from all five career tracks. The group included 59 former State Department



AFSA/HANNAH MCDANIEL

AFSA President Amb. Eric Rubin speaks to an incoming class of State Department FS members on Feb. 14, 2023.

employees, including contractors and family members.

It also included four Pickering Fellows, one Rangel Fellow, eight former Consular Fellows, four Foreign Affairs IT (FAIT) Fellows, and four Presidential Management Fellows. Class members were

previously attorneys, consultants, educators, engineers, IT specialists, medical professionals, and students.

We enjoyed meeting all these new FS members and look forward to many years of working on their behalf. ■

NEWS BRIEF

Save the Date

AFSA's Foreign Service Day Programming

This year, Foreign Service Day will be held on Friday, May 5. The AFSA Memorial Plaque Ceremony will also take place on that day.

In addition, each year AFSA commemorates Foreign Service Day through a series of events and activities. This includes a week-long social media campaign drawing attention to the work of the Foreign Service and a rolling moment of silence at embassies and consulates overseas to recognize those lost in the line of service.

On Thursday, May 4, as has become tradition, members are invited to stop by AFSA headquarters during our Open House to learn more about AFSA's outreach and advocacy work, meet AFSA staff, and network with colleagues.

In the evening, AFSA will co-host a reception with DACOR.

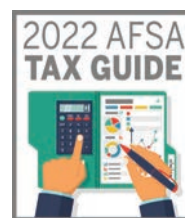
AFSA members will receive more information about all these initiatives later this month.

Members interested in receiving information about events taking place at the State Department May 5 for Foreign Service Day 2023 should email foreignaffairsday@state.gov. ■

NEWS BRIEF

Consult AFSA's Tax Guide Online

Don't forget! The filing deadline to submit 2022 tax returns or an extension to file and pay tax owed is Tuesday, April 18, 2023, for most taxpayers, with an automatic two-month extension to June 15 for U.S. citizens and resident aliens living outside the United States.



To help you navigate filing both federal and state tax returns, AFSA's 2022 Tax Guide is available online at afsa.org/taxguide. It summarizes many of the tax laws that members of the Foreign Service community will find relevant, including changes mandated by new legislation and laws regarding the taxation of Foreign Service annuities. ■

2022 AFSA Treasurer's Report

AFSA continues its track record of keeping the organization on a solid financial footing. AFSA's reserves are sufficient to cover expenses beyond the six-month window recommended for nonprofits. We ended the 2022 fiscal year with a \$50,000 surplus. At year's end, we were honored to receive a clean audit—the highest possible standard for a nonprofit organization—for the 13th consecutive year.

AFSA's \$6.7 million planned operating budget for calendar year 2023 is funded primarily from membership dues and advertising revenue. AFSA's membership base stood at approximately 16,450 as of year-end 2022. That number represents about 80 percent of active-duty employees across the foreign affairs agencies, plus approximately 25 percent of Foreign Service retirees. Dues increased by 8.5 percent for 2023 to match the third-quarter consumer price index.

Advertising revenue continues to be a bright spot for AFSA, rising to \$562,000 in 2022 (up from \$550,000 in 2021). Of note, nearly \$100,000 of that total comes from newer advertising opportunities, such as online ads and sponsorship of various AFSA messaging vehicles.

The Governing Board and the Finance Committee have revamped our investment policy statement, last modified 20 years ago, and the board approved the new

policy at its February 2023 meeting. Based partially on suggestions from the association's financial advisers and modifications by the Executive Committee, it strikes a balance among equities, other investments, and a small percentage in liquid assets. The policy sets minimum and maximum targets for large cap, small-mid cap and international equities, fixed income, and cash. The updated policy is on the AFSA website.

To uphold good business practices, AFSA bid out the contracts for its tax and auditing services as well as investment management services. There are no complaints about the current vendors, but this board and AFSA's executive management agree that a regular fresh look at these relationships is a good practice that will stand the association in good stead.

Drilling down into the financial details, AFSA ended 2022 with reserves totaling \$16.5 million in the following funds:

The Operational Reserve, which supports regular operations, salaries, etc., stood at \$3.8 million, vice \$4.4 million at the end of 2021. In all cases, declines in fund balances can be almost exclusively attributed to the challenging investment environment in 2022.

The Scholarship Fund stood at \$10.8 million, down from \$12.8 million in 2021. In 2022, AFSA provided \$406,500 in scholarships

and awards to Foreign Service children. The fund annually withdraws 4.5 percent of its five-year average value to fund scholarships and partially underwrite the program's operational expenses.

The Fund for American Diplomacy balance was \$515,000, down from \$582,000. This fund supports all AFSA's outreach and public education efforts, including the speaker series, Road Scholar programs, the national high school essay contest, the AFSA awards and plaques programs, as well as both member and public events.

The Sinclair Fund provides funding for the association's hard language awards, stemming from a generous bequest in the early 1980s. Its balance at the end of 2022 was \$482,000, down from \$629,776.

Finally, the **Legal Defense**

Fund balance was \$327,000 vice \$342,000 at the end of 2021. The LDF supports AFSA members who are facing legal or regulatory issues that may affect the Foreign Service as a whole and in cases where AFSA does not possess the specific expertise needed for such cases.

Market conditions took their toll on AFSA's investment portfolio in 2022, but the association's overall financial strength remains excellent. As of this writing in February 2023, balances are already on the rise compared to the end of 2022, so we remain hopeful for significant market gains this year.

As we look toward the remaining months of 2023, we will continue supporting our members in a variety of ways, including through scholarship funds, Sinclair language awards, bipartisan support for our legislative agenda, and other efforts. ■

2022 AFSA-PAC Report

Following the events of Jan. 6, 2021, the AFSA-PAC Committee paused contributions to members of Congress, like many PACs and other donors. The committee also decided not to contribute to any members who voted against certifying the 2020 election results. AFSA-PAC contributions resumed in early 2022.

From the broader member contribution list approved in the beginning of the two-year cycle, the AFSA-PAC gave to eight members of Congress (four Democrats and four Republicans). An AFSA-PAC representative attended seven in-person events because of those contributions. The PAC contributed \$1,000 to each of the following members: Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.), Rep. Ann Wagner (R-Mo.), Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Texas), Rep. Gerry Conolly (D-Va.), Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), and Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.).

In a quiet fundraising year, the PAC collected \$5,250 in donations in 2022. The fund balance stood at \$7,000 at the end of Fiscal Year 2022. ■

AFSA Seeks Award Nominations for 2023

AFSA seeks to highlight dissent, achievement, performance, courage, and sacrifice within the Foreign Service community. Our awards program began in 1968 with the first award for constructive dissent within the system and has continued to expand to recognize the work of members of the Foreign Service community.

Constructive Dissent Awards: AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards recognize Foreign Service members who work within the system to change policy and performance for the better.

Such dissent may be made in any non-public channel including meetings, emails to superiors, memoranda, telegrams, or via the State Department's formal Dissent Channel. Thus, AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards may be given to, but are not restricted to, employees who make use of the Dissent Channel.

Unique within the federal government, these awards remain the lynchpin of AFSA's awards program. There is no democracy without dissent, and the U.S. Foreign Service must remain a leader in the encouragement of respectful yet provocative constructive dissent.

As Secretary of State Antony Blinken put it in his October modernization address at FSI, "Dissent is patriotic. It should be and will be welcomed." We invite nominations for the four constructive dissent awards:

- **The W. Averell Harriman Award** for entry-level Foreign Service officers.
- **The William R. Rivkin Award** for mid-level Foreign Service officers.
- **The Christian A. Herter Award** for Senior Foreign Service officers.
- **The F. Allen "Tex" Harris Award** for Foreign Service specialists.

Exemplary Performance Awards: AFSA also invites nominations for exemplary performance awards. These awards are meant to highlight the professionalism and spirit of service and volunteerism within the Foreign Service community.

These awards honor Foreign Service employees, and in particular community liaison officers, office management



specialists, and family members for their important contributions at work, at home, and in the community.

• **The Nelson B. Delavan Award**

recognizes the work of a Foreign Service office management specialist (OMS) who has made a significant contribution to post or office effectiveness and morale, both within as well as beyond the framework of their job responsibilities.

• **The M. Juanita Guess Award**

recognizes a community liaison office coordinator (CLO) who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, dedication, initiative, or imagination in assisting the families of Americans serving at an overseas post.

• **The Avis Bohlen Award**

honors a Foreign Service family member whose volunteer work with the American and foreign communities at post has advanced the interests of the United States.

• **The Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy**

is bestowed on a member of the Foreign Service from any of the foreign affairs agencies, especially individuals at the early- to mid-career level, serving domestically or overseas. The award recognizes the promotion of American policies to advance democracy, freedom, and governance through bold, imaginative, and effective efforts during one or more assignments.

Note that we accept awards nominations all year, but the deadline for 2023 is Monday, May 15. Anyone may send in a nomination; self-nominations are also accepted for some performance awards.

AFSA is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that make our awards program possible through their generous support. Our thanks to the Ambassador William R. Rivkin family, the Avis Bohlen family, Dr. Sushma Palmer, and Clements Worldwide. We deeply appreciate their support and dedication to the Foreign Service community.

AFSA's awards programs are administered by Awards and Scholarships Manager Theo Horn. Contact him at awards@afsa.org, and visit www.afsa.org/awards for more information.

AFSA's Awards and Plaques Committee has institutional oversight over these programs and has primary responsibility for the recommendation of award recipients and plaque honorees. ■



Associates of the
American Foreign
Service Worldwide

Nominate Family Members for AAFSW and DACOR Awards

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2023 Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA) and the Champions of Career Enhancement for Eligible Family Members (CCE-EFM) Award, both sponsored by Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide, as well as for DACOR's Eleanor Dodson Tragen Award.

The nomination deadline for all awards is April 30, 2023, and all American U.S. government direct-hire employees under chief of mission authority and family members over the age of 18 are eligible.

Created in 1990 at the suggestion of Secretary of State James Baker and Susan Baker, the SOSA Award recognizes remarkable volunteer efforts and is given for activities performed while posted to a U.S. mission.

Winners receive a cash award of \$2,500, a certificate signed by the Secretary of State, and a one-year AAFSW membership.

The CCE-EFM Award was developed to recognize those who go above and beyond their job descriptions to expand and elevate job opportunities and long-term career enhancement for Foreign Service family members.

The winning individual or group receives a cash award of \$750.

Nominations for these awards should be sent as a Word document to sosa@aafsw.org and office@aafsw.org. More information can be found at www.aafsw.org/awards.

The Eleanor Dodson Tragen Award, sponsored and administered by the DACOR Bacon House Foundation, honors a spouse or family member who has promoted rights, programs, and benefits for Foreign Service families, as did the late Ms. Tragen.

The winner will receive a cash award of \$2,000 and, if outside Washington, D.C., paid travel to the ceremony and two nights of free lodging at DACOR Bacon House. Nominations and requests for additional information should be sent to John Bradshaw at jbradshaw@dacorbacon.org.

The three awards will be presented to recipients at the annual AAFSW awards ceremony in November 2023. Moises Mendoza (mendozamd@state.gov) and Jose Dorce (mijdorce@gmail.com) are chairs of AAFSW's SOSA Committee. John Bradshaw (jbradshaw@dacorbacon.org) heads the Tragen Awards. ■

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Join us for our annual Spring Reception co-hosted by AFSA and DACOR. The evening before Foreign Service Day, it's the perfect opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones while enjoying delicious food, drinks, a special wine tasting, and live music in the DACOR garden.

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AFSA Welcomes USAID Office Manager

AFSA is pleased to welcome Roslenn Richardson to the Labor Management team as the USAID office manager. Roslenn will provide operational and case management support to AFSA's USAID LM adviser and to our office at the Department of State.

Roslenn earned a master's degree in international affairs in 2021 from the School of International Service at American University. While at SIS, she worked with the Democracy Council to advance post-conflict reforms and investigated international labor standards as an intern with Project Hope.

Prior to that, Roslenn briefly supported governance policies in St. Maarten; she has also worked as a federal contractor at the Department of Labor and at U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Roslenn is excited to join AFSA as we commemorate AFSA's 50-year anniversary as the exclusive bargaining unit for the Foreign Service.

She can be reached at richardson@afsa.org. ■



ANNOUNCEMENT

EARTHQUAKE RELIEF FOR MISSION TÜRKİYE LOCALLY EMPLOYED (LE) STAFF

Following the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, many U.S. mission locally employed (LE) staff in Gaziantep and Adana, Türkiye, lost their homes or suffered other major damage.

If you are looking for a way to provide direct, meaningful assistance for earthquake survivors, consider donating to the Foreign Service National (FSN) Emergency Relief Fund. The extraordinary number of recent crises and disbursements to affected LE staff have left the fund in immediate need of replenishment.

As a reminder, 100 percent of all contributions are allocated for disbursement directly to LE staff in need, as the fund is administered internally by the department.

For additional information about the Relief Fund, please visit the Foreign Service National Emergency Relief Fund page at www.bit.ly/FSN-Relief-Fund. ■

AFSA Celebrates 50 Years as a Union

On Feb. 2, 2023, AFSA hosted our first in-person happy hour of the year. AFSA President Amb. Eric Rubin and Acting Deputy Secretary for Resources and Management John Bass—a proud career-long AFSA member himself—joined to welcome the more than 150 members who came

by AFSA headquarters to be together and celebrate AFSA's 50 years as a union.

In his remarks, Amb. Rubin noted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of AFSA's becoming a union, and he pointed the crowd to the January/February *Foreign Service Journal* focus on that.

He said that "The need for AFSA, whose sole mission is to defend the Foreign Service and its people, continues to this day. We are fortunate that we have the financial and political power, and the authority of a union to do this work." ■

Below and at right: Some of the more than 150 members who attended our first in-person happy hour of the year.



Acting Deputy Secretary for Resources and Management John Bass addresses the gathering.



LOLA MICHEL-INFANTE

Reviewing Your Retirement Plan

12 Things to Do

A helpful list of things to do to make sure your retirement plan stays on track, even after you turn in your diplomatic passport.

BY JOHN K. NALAND

Retirement planning does not end when you turn in your diplomatic passport and agency ID card. Below are a dozen topics that Foreign Service retirees should review from time to time to determine if course corrections are needed in their retirement plans.

1. Review Investment Allocations.

If you depend on the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), Individual Retirement Accounts, and/or other financial investments to fund a portion of your retirement spending, then you should occasionally review the risk-versus-reward balance of those investments.

A key factor is your time horizon. If you or your survivor's life expectancy makes it likely that 20 or more years from now one or both of you may depend on TSP



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/NUTHAWUT SOMSUK

income to live on, then investing mostly in stocks will protect the funds' purchasing power from erosion by inflation. But if your time horizon is shorter, and you are currently drawing down those funds to live on, then holding a good portion in bonds will protect that nest egg in the event of a major stock market decline.

As you weigh the best balance, keep in mind that you already have a functional equivalent of a large bond in the form of your federal pension that generates continuing payments like a bond does. Monthly Social Security checks do the same thing. That guaranteed base of income gives you the option of including

more stocks in your TSP portfolio.

2. Keep Informed. What you don't know *can* hurt you when it comes to rules, procedures, and deadlines for federal retirement benefits. So exercise due diligence by staying informed.

Be sure to review the Department of State's Foreign Service Annual Annuitant Newsletter posted online at <https://RNet.state.gov> under the "What's New?" tab. An updated version is posted each November.

AFSA, of course, offers a wealth of benefits guidance. Check out the Retirement Services web page at <https://afsa.org/retirement>, the first 25 pages of the AFSA Directory of Retired Members mailed to retirees each December, and occasional emails including the bimonthly AFSA Retirement Newsletter. See the text box on page 52 for a list of essential references.

3. Use Online Services. While logging in can be a challenge due to the recent change in procedures to defend against hackers, you can save yourself time if you maintain access to your Annuitant Employee Express account instead of having to call or email to request infor-



John K. Naland is the AFSA retiree vice president. He is a former director of the Office of Retirement at the Department of State.



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mation or update your Foreign Service annuity records.

The same is true for maintaining online access to your My Social Security, Medicare, and TSP accounts. You can also save time by finding answers to basic questions yourself in online guidance (see “Keep Informed” above). Instructions on how to log on to Annuity Employee Express are in the 2023 AFSA Directory of Retired Members and on the AFSA Retirement Services web page.

4. Know Who Does What. If you need to contact the government about your retirement benefits, knowing which office does what will save you time and frustration. An important fact to remember is that most support for Foreign Service retirees of all agencies is provided by the State Department, not by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

To make benefit changes, report divorce or remarriage, or report federal reemployment, retirees should contact State Department human resources staffers at HRSC@state.gov. For annuity payment questions, contact State Department finance staffers at AnnuityPaySupport@state.gov.

If your issue involves TSP, Social Security, or Medicare, then see those agencies’ websites for contact information. The only reason to contact OPM is for the OPM-managed Federal Employees’ Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) program.

5. Act on Major Milestones. Be sure to update beneficiary designations for TSP, FEGLI, and other benefits after marriage, divorce, or other relationship changes. Report post-retirement changes in marital status to HRSC@state.gov to revise survivor election and Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) coverage. If you move to a new state, have an



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attorney there review your will, power of attorney, and advanced medical directive to see if they need updating.

Decide whether to take out long-term-care insurance while you are still healthy enough to qualify. If you are approaching age 62, decide when to file for Social Security. If you are approaching 65, decide whether to sign up for Medicare Part B. If you are approaching age 73 (set to rise to 75 in 2033 under recent legislation), decide what to do about Required Minimum Distributions from taxable retirement accounts.

For more information, see relevant documents on the AFSA Retirement Services web page.

6. Reassess Health Insurance.

Review your FEHB coverage every few years during Open Season (mid-November to mid-December). Even if you feel satisfied with your current coverage, switching to another plan could potentially save you money. For example, some plans reimburse \$800 a year if you have Medicare Part B coverage.

AFSA helps you weigh your options by giving you access each Open Season to the Consumers' Checkbook, a great tool for comparing health plans.

7. Remind Family of Survivor Benefits. Because Foreign Service family members are often unfamiliar with offices and functions in the federal agencies, please make sure they know how to report your death to claim their federal survivor's benefits. The first step is to email HRSC@state.gov or call (866) 300-7419.

Detailed instructions on how to report deaths of Foreign Service retirees is contained in the Department of State's Foreign Service Annual Annuitant Newsletter and in the AFSA Directory of Retired Members. AFSA recommends that you make a copy of those instructions, show them to your next-of-kin,

and file them with your will. In addition, you could assist the executor of your estate by preparing a list of financial accounts, insurance, major assets, and other key information.

8. Avoid Financial Scams. The ever-proliferating number and ingenuity of financial scams pose a growing threat to retirement savings. Use caution when opening emails, clicking on internet links, and answering telephone calls from unknown numbers. Educate yourself and family members about scams and cyberthreats.

Many financial institutions, retail companies, and government agencies publish guidance on how to avoid becoming a victim. For example, on the State Department Federal Credit Union (SDFCU) website, click on Services and then Learning Hub, and then select the category Security in the filter menu.

9. Focus on Health and Wellness. Retirement planning is not all about money. To make the most of your retirement years, you can promote good health through diet, exercise, regular doctor checkups, getting enough sleep, limiting alcohol, and avoiding smoking. Promote wellness by maintaining your connections with family, friends, and social groups.

If you live in one of the nearly 20 states that have a Foreign Service retiree group, consider joining one to maintain social connections and keep intellectually engaged (see the AFSA Directory of Retired Members for a list). You could also volunteer your time at a local non-profit organization.

10. Downsize. If you have not yet thinned out all the stuff you accumulated over the decades, do not underestimate the amount of time and effort involved in downsizing—especially if you want to gift, sell, or otherwise recycle unused

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possessions instead of just trashing them.

It is best to start this process long before you face a deadline such as moving to a smaller residence. Many books and websites offer downsizing advice. For Foreign Service–focused suggestions, see Ambassador Eileen Malloy’s “The Big Downsizing: Retirement Lessons,” in the July-August 2015 *FSJ* (<https://afsa.org/big-downsizing-retirement-lessons>).

11. Get Assistance from AFSA.

Bureaucratic glitches do not end at retirement. Fortunately, AFSA has your back if you encounter difficulties with your federal retirement benefits. Contact AFSA Counselor for Retirees Dolores Brown at Brown@afsa.org. She has contacts in State’s Office of Retirement and the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global

Financial Services (CGFS) with whom she can raise individual cases when needed.

12. Maintain Your AFSA Membership. Help AFSA defend the active-duty Foreign Service and your earned retirement benefits by maintaining your AFSA membership. AFSA membership keeps you in the loop and keeps you in the

community. If your membership depends on you writing a check each year, please consider switching from annual billing to paying dues via annuity deduction. Switching will ensure that your membership does not inadvertently lapse due to lost or unnoticed mail. Email member@afsa.org for more information. ■

Essential References Available at <https://afsa.org/retirement>

- State Department Office of Retirement: Foreign Service Annual Annuitant Newsletter
- AFSA Directory of Retired Members: Guidance Section
- AFSA Tool: Retirement Planning Checklist for Current Retirees
- AFSA Tool: Financial Planners, Tax Help, and Estate Planners
- AFSA Tool: Retirement Benefits FAQ for Retired Personnel
- AFSA Video: Reviewing Your Retirement Plan



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Inside Vietnam-Era Foreign Policy Making

The Last Gentleman: Thomas Hughes and the End of the American Century

Bruce L.R. Smith, *Brookings Institution Press*, 2022, \$34.99, e-book available, 370 pages.

REVIEWED BY JOHN STARRELS

In *The Last Gentleman*, Bruce L.R. Smith provides the reader with an inside look into how one man, Thomas Hughes, helped shape U.S. foreign policy in the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. Hughes was director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research during the 1960s and an important adviser in major crises from the Soviet missiles in Cuba to Vietnam.

The value of this biography is two-fold. First, it should put to rest the widely held view that the diplomacy and international strategy—its success or failure, or a muddled combination of the two—of the United States rises or falls on the actions of key, highly celebrated Washington stars—say Dean Acheson or, more memorably, Henry Kissinger.

The author's meticulously crafted biography of a small coterie of less visible, but highly influential assistants, such as Hughes and countless others, proves otherwise: The real influencers reside within the ranks of an elite, largely invisible cadre of lower-ranking professionals who earn their modest salaries through their capacity to write the speeches, analyze complex papers and confidential documents, and, when necessary, provide political cover for their bosses.

The second reason why we might be inclined to pick up this particular book

is the unstinting light it sheds on one of the most colossal failures of U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of World War II—the Vietnam War.

That failure cannot possibly be placed at the feet of one precocious, young Tom Hughes who came out of Minnesota and helped mobilize the Farmer-Labor party; who was awarded a Rhodes scholarship; and who became a lifelong friend, strategist, and key aide and confidant to fellow-

Minnesotan and future Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

But, largely through no fault of his own, Hughes was on board when the Vietnam ship went down, wreaking destruction on Humphrey's relations with Lyndon Johnson and on the country at large.



Largely through no fault of his own, Hughes was on board when the Vietnam ship went down.

In perhaps the most gripping part of *The Last Gentleman*, the author describes in arresting detail how one memorandum—drafted by Hughes and sent out under the vice president's signature to the president on Feb. 17, 1965—triggered such an angry outburst from Johnson against his vice president that the foundations of their mutual trust and collaboration were largely destroyed.

In exquisite detail, Smith fashions a complex narrative detailing the reasons why. First was the content of the Hughes-Humphrey memo itself.

In thinly veiled terms, the vice president told the president that further escalation of the air campaign against the communist-led insurgency in Vietnam threatened to fatally undermine the Democratic party's

core constituency: Democratic liberals, independents, and labor.

In other words: Mr. President, stop the war. One would be hard put to utter such incendiary words into a more sensitive pair of ears.

Another, larger, reason for the rupture, writes Smith, was Johnson's towering but fragile ego that could not, would not, accept the presumption of rough political equality between himself and the man he—seemingly alone—had offered the job.

"He [Humphrey] spoke as a partner who had just helped Johnson to win the presidency. His remarks carried an implication of equality of experience and knowledge in the arcane arts of politics." This, Lyndon Baines Johnson refused to accept.

There is little to quibble with in Smith's biography of Hughes as a policymaker and

public intellectual. Hughes' subsequent, post-State Department career as a longtime president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is another important part of the story.

In the larger scheme of things, however, it is Hughes' career as a top-level, innovative, and loyal policy adviser during his years in government that deserves attention. For this, we have Bruce L.R. Smith to thank.

John Starrels, a Washington-based writer, was a senior public affairs officer at the International Monetary Fund from 1990 to 2006. His first review for the Journal (H.W. Brands, Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 2008) appeared in June 2009.

Breaking Apart Is the Right Thing to Do—Or Is It?

Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism

Edited by Arie M. Dubnov and Laura Robson, Stanford University Press, 2019, \$30, e-book available, 400 pages.

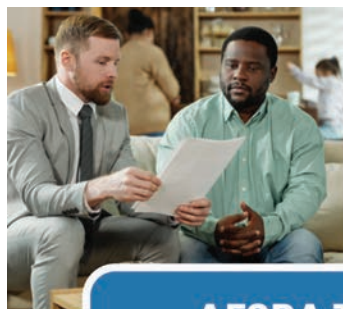
REVIEWED BY GEORGE ALDRIDGE

“Stronger Together” has been a recent rallying cry in the United Kingdom and Spain to stem separatist sentiments in Scotland, the Basque Country (Euskadi), and Catalonia.

Elsewhere, however, separatists in lands as dissimilar as Eritrea, the ex-Yugoslavia, Timor-Leste, and South Sudan have prevailed after years of bloody conflict drenched with sectarian and ethnic enmity. Brittle political institutions are barely keeping Bosnia and Iraq from splintering into ethnic-sectarian enclaves. Cyprus appears irrevocably divided.

The debate over the utility and viability of the heterogeneous, pluralistic, multi-ethnic, multiconfessional state versus a primarily homogenous one continues unabated—particularly as 2022 marked the centennial of the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty partitioning Ireland into the Irish Free State and Ulster, and the 75th anniversaries of the partitions of Palestine and India.

Given the subsequent persistent spasms of internecine violence and war involving Northern Ireland, Pakistan-India, Israel and the Palestinian territories, and Israel and its Arab neighbors, an appraisal of these three partitions should be instructive in answering the question posed in *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism*.



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That question is, as the editors put it: Did these partitions “intended to cure the sickness of ethnic violence” serve as a “long-standing or natural solution to the problem of pluralism” and the presence of national minorities seen as “demographic misfits”?

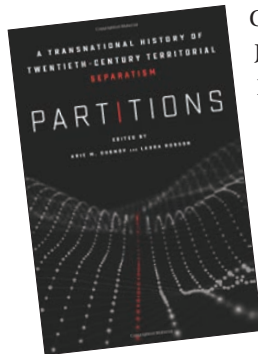
Editors Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson, professors of history at George Washington University and Portland State University, respectively, and their nine fellow contributors hold a unanimous view: The partitions did not lead to a “stabilization of conflict.”

Rather they unleashed a “toxic miasma” of communal carnage and ethnic warfare that included massacres, ethnic cleansing, widespread rape and pillage, and unresolved feelings of betrayal, revenge, and irredentism that continue to plague these former British territories.

As University of Sydney history professor A. Dirk Moses explains, instead of an “atrocity prevention measure,” partitions “paradoxically ... begat still more violence in the form of genocidal massacres and massive ethnic cleansings.” Prof. Moses adds, partitions are never “ethnically clean.” Suspect, even disloyal minorities usually remain within the new, ostensibly homogenous states.

The editors assert that the partitions are “among the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century” and were modeled after another, earlier painful “transfer of inconvenient populations”—the 1923 Greco-Turkish compulsory exchange and resettlement of populations sanctioned by the Treaty of Lausanne.

But in their etiology of these debacles, the editors deliberately forgo a comparative analysis tied to primordial antagonisms and aspirations between Irish



Catholics and Protestants, Zionist Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and Indian Muslims and Hindus, opting instead to focus on British imperial objectives to extricate His Majesty’s Government from these rivalries while maintaining a level of political and economic influence, especially on the Indian subcontinent.

Their treatment of these conflicts “from below” is disjointed and, in the case of Ireland, quite superficial. Noted Irish nationalists Michael Collins and Charles Stewart Parnell are mentioned just once in *Partitions*, while Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin and the chairman of the Irish delegation that negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, isn’t cited at all.

Much greater attention is paid to Palestine and India. With regard to both, several contributors lament that the British failed to promote movements in Mandate Palestine and Raj India that opposed partition.

Amherst history professor Adi Gordon provides a fascinating account of “bina-tional Zionism” led by the Ihud (Unity) Party and Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace), whose members campaigned for a joint Jewish-Arab Palestine. They rued that Chaim Weizmann and other Zionists aligned themselves with British imperialists and regretted that their organizations did not win over skeptical Palestinian nationalists.

Stanford University professor Joel Beinin, in turn, offers a thoughtful account of those Arab nationalists who vehemently opposed partition, notably Musa al-Alami, Jamal al-Husayni, Albert Hourani, and George Antonius, whose book *The Arab Awakening* is still regarded as the most persuasive presentation of the Arab side.

As for India, a “clean” partition was implausible. Indian nationalists argued

that their country was simply too ethnically and religiously mixed for a surgical partition. They were bitterly opposed to any territorial division of India. In an ironic twist, the Palestinians and other Arabs opposed Ali Jinnah’s and the All-India Muslim League’s quest for a Muslim-majority Pakistan, fearing that it would set a precedent for Palestine’s partition.

Likewise, Gandhi, Nehru, Hindus in general, and Sikhs—who feared being a discriminated minority in case Punjab would become part of Pakistan—opposed Palestine’s partition because it would set a precedent for India. They had a similarly negative opinion of Ireland’s division, denouncing an earlier short-lived British effort in 1905 to partition Bengal into Muslim- and Hindu-majority enclaves as an attempt to “Ulsterize” eastern India.

Zionists, on the other hand, supported Ali Jinnah’s ambitions on behalf of India’s minority Muslim population, assuming it would strengthen their argument that Jews, as a persecuted minority, needed their own Jewish-majority state.

For those interested in the partitions of India and Palestine, *Partitions* is timely reading. Those keen on Ireland will be left wanting. Further, the book would have been more instructive had the editors taken a deliberate comparative approach and offered a timeline of events and charts showing similarities and disparities common to the three case studies. ■

George Aldridge is a retired Foreign Service officer who served overseas in Jamaica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Belize, Morocco, Kenya, Tunisia, Sudan, and Lebanon, in addition to two assignments in Washington, D.C. Prior to joining the U.S. Foreign Service in 1990, he was director of the southwest office of the National Association of Arab Americans.

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A Greenland Friendship

BY DAN WHITMAN

I want to say “Dateline: Nuuk,” but that would be stretching the truth by about 35 years. “Covering” Greenland for the U.S. embassy in Copenhagen, I visited its capital, Nuuk, three times, twice in 1987 and once in 1988.

In the May 2021 *FSJ*, Nuuk Public Affairs Officer Eavan Cully artfully describes the wonder of this place and explains what the United States lost in pulling back direct diplomatic contact from 1953 to 2021. From my first visit, I considered Nuuk a dream post, never mind that such a post did not exist at the time.

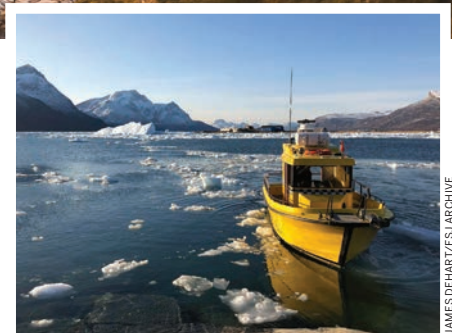
As the most junior public diplomacy officer in Copenhagen, I was assigned the miscellaneous portfolio, which included covering Greenland. This was to involve sketching out public diplomacy activities in Nuuk that might strengthen our relations with a mainly unknown area about the size of Western Europe or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Dan Whitman, a retired FSO, teaches at George Washington University. He served in public diplomacy posts in Copenhagen, Madrid, Pretoria, Port-au-Prince, and Yaoundé.



To this day, the Greenland-Denmark relationship evades definition: Is the former a “colony”? A “territory”? A “province”? A “country”? “Trusteeship”? Scandinavian conflict avoidance has bolstered the viability of all these terms through the decades, and Denmark has liberally subsidized nearly everything that happens on the island, granting Greenland representation in the Folketing and some measure of autonomy, while clinging to it sentimentally on claims of historical precedent. In 1989 Greenland celebrated 10 years of “home rule.”

The United States has had strategic and programmatic interest in this land mass, though, until recent years, it seldom went beyond the maintenance of the Thule Air Base. About 936 miles south of the base is Nuuk, back then a town of 5,000 or so souls huddled around a bay, surrounded by vast snowy plains. Even from New York or Washington, the way to reach it was to loop via an SAS commercial flight through Copenhagen, a detour of 5,048 miles



JAMES DEHART/FSJ ARCHIVE

Colorful homes dot the coastline in Nuuk, Greenland, circa 2019. In the background is the majestic Sermitsiaq mountain. (Inset) A boat rests in icy waters on a small fjord off Davis Strait, which connects the Arctic and Atlantic oceans.

but mercifully shorter in time and hassle than going up through various connections in Canada.



When I was in Nuuk, it had only one single institution of higher learning, the Ilinniarsissuaq, Greenlandic for “seminarium.” It was a teachers college, what the French call an *école normale*. Its rector was Ingmar Egede (“EY-uh-the”), and really, my story is about him.

A sharp skeptic of U.S. policy and world dominance, Ingmar showed me around the city out of courtesy. Our friendship was not immediate, but developed over three visits there and beyond, when he came to see me in Madrid, then later in Washington, D.C.



COURTESY OF DAN WHITMAN

A group of Greenlandic students, circa 1987. (Inset) A photo of Ingmar Egede, then rector of the Ilinniarsissuaq, the single institution of higher learning in Nuuk, Greenland.

The seminarians had such names as Niels Nikolaj Nathanielsen and Karlina Kirsten Kathrine Kleist—cultural mixtures of Danish and Inuit background. Their DNA seemed to come equally from both parts of the world. Their first language was Greenlandic, one of the most grammatically complex languages known, and all spoke at least some Danish. Ingmar was nearly alone in having mastered English (a little key to the coming narrative).

As I got to know Ingmar on my first and second trips to Nuuk, I learned about his youth on the northern coast of one of the coldest places on earth, when he “communicated,” he said, with walruses and other sea mammals from his tiny motorboat as they followed him through the Arctic waters.

Ingmar also shared how his parents had sent him to Copenhagen for high school in the early 1940s. At the time, Greenlanders and Americans saw the possibility of German encroachment, even invasion, of Greenland, as naval rivalry in the North Atlantic turned into war. They believed that Nazi-occupied Denmark might be safer for him.

Thoroughly Inuit, he became acculturated to Danish ways of doing and seeing

things, then had to *relearn* his native language when he returned to Greenland after the war. He never left his roots again. In fact, during the 1990s, he served as vice president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which includes all countries touching the Arctic, and traced Inuit oral tradition and storytelling to verify migration patterns from tens of thousands of years ago.



Late in 1987, on my second trip to Nuuk, Ingmar suggested we work together on a study tour to the United States for the entire graduating class. Each spring, he and the students visited a foreign country. For many, it was the first time they’d ever been outside Greenland. That year they had visited the Soviet Union. Previous trips had taken them to Japan and points east.

Thrilled, I built a case for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) backing in the form of “picking up” the group once they arrived in New York, and organizing contacts and events in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

Even lacking diplomatic presence in Greenland, ECA made a wonderful leap of faith and energetically took up the

task. As far as anyone could remember, this would be the first Greenlandic delegation visit ever officially sponsored by the U.S. government.

I reminded ECA that Greenlanders really do not speak English and would need a Danish interpreter to make the visit worthwhile. “No problem,” they said. “We can surely find one.”

I called every month or so to see if they had come up with an interpreter. “Nothing yet,” they said, “but you’ll see. We’ll get one.”

Three weeks before the trip, the happiest news came: ECA had given up trying to locate a Danish-English interpreter and asked if I would fill in. I quickly made plans and traveled from Copenhagen to New York to meet the group.

Imagine the culture shock of students who’d never been away from home, and suddenly had to negotiate the New York subway.

We also scoured the city on a chartered bus, the driver a thoroughgoing New Yorker proud to explain his town to newcomers. We drove past Yankee Stadium, which he pointed out with pride to the 30 students plus Ingmar. “Any questions?”

One student asked how many people could fit in Yankee Stadium.

“Oh, probably 70,000,” said the driver boastfully.

A long silence came over the group.

“Anything wrong?” said the driver as the three dozen youngsters stared, bewildered, out the bus window.

“70,000?” said one. “That’s more than the population of our country.”



Ingmar loved that trip, which included Ellis Island, Chinatown, and the Battery. One evening, he and I ventured through Greenwich Village.

ARCTIC SURVIVAL

SAS



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The way to get to Nuuk in 1987 was on U.S. military-reserved seats on SAS commercial flights. The impossibly cheerful Scandinavian security instructions in the seat back pocket said in pictograms: “Flight went down north of the Arctic Circle? Very sorry for any possible inconvenience. Put on your jammies, pull out the failsafe radio transmitter, and wait for imminent rescue. Enjoy the aurora borealis.”

He described in detail his encounters with sea mammals from his tiny motorboat off the north coast of Greenland, from recent times and years before. He told me how these creatures had language, and sought to understand his, or appeared to. Though immense and easily able to capsize his tiny boat, instead they befriended him and seemed to share fragments of knowledge and wisdom with him.

We rounded the corner at West Seventh Street and came upon a street musician playing a divine interpretation of J.S. Bach. The performance was mes-

merizing. I remember a stretch limousine stopping so the passenger could listen for a while. I asked the musician for his name, and I remember it to this day: James Grasseck. Grasseck appeared in *The New Yorker* some years later, after renting Carnegie Hall with his own funds for a public performance.

A string player at times, I was excited to hear this playing. I said to Ingmar, “It’s Bach—you know, the German composer.”

“I know,” he said. “The Chaconne in D minor. I played it in high school.”

So, it was everywhere.

Months later, he said, “Next time you come to Nuuk, bring your viola. We can do some chamber music.”

I did, and we did.



Cultural heroes are ones who toggle easily between multiple cultures and possess the vocabulary to explain and interpret the one to the other. They are villagers and anthropologists, both. You may meet a few, not many. Maybe Trevor Noah is one such.

These abilities came out gradually as Ingmar and I stayed in touch over the years, and on three continents.

Before his death in 2002, in one of his last letters to me, he wrote: “My boat has been taken up to be overhauled under the water line. I have replaced a number of ice protection plates, have had the propeller and rudder shafts checked, and now I am in the process of caulking the grooves above the deck.”

And after I mentioned I’d found a better bow for my viola, he wrote: “To get a good bow is nearly to have a good lover; you find new dimensions in your performance. Congratulations.”

Ingmar, it seems to me, was a true cultural hero. ■

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Since the 1950s, modern rowing races, or “regattas,” involving club rowers, aspiring and professional, have taken place in the Grand Harbour of Malta. Their heritage, however, dates back to the Middle Ages as part of the island’s strong rowing culture. Here a four-man crew in a *tal-pass* boat practices the traditional Maltese rowing technique at sunset, possibly in anticipation of the annual 8th September Regatta. On this day, also known as Victory Day, the public celebrates the end of three sieges that occurred on the Malta islands in 1565, 1800, and 1943, respectively. ■

Mike Regal is a State Department regional medical officer psychiatrist with 10 years in the Foreign Service. He is stationed in Bangkok, with previous tours in Mexico City, Cairo, and Nairobi. This photo was taken in April 2019 using a Nikon D5200 digital SLR camera with a Nikkor 24-70mm f/2.8E ED VR Lens.

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