

# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

MAY 2023



## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

### THE COLD WAR & BEYOND

- ★ Exhibit Guides in the USSR
- ★ Broadcasting Behind the Iron Curtain
- ★ The Journey to Expo 2020 Dubai

# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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Mexico



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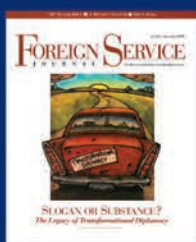
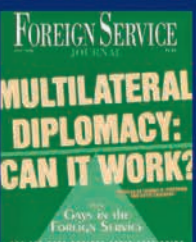
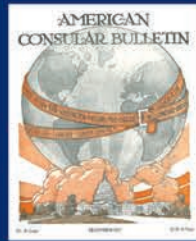
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# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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**On the Cover**—Photo by Paul Schoellhamer. It is of exhibit guide Kathleen Rose (also his wife) speaking to visitors of the Photography USA exhibit in Novosibirsk, 1977.

# Cold War Lessons

BY ERIC RUBIN

**T**his month's *FSJ* includes a series of remembrances by Foreign Service colleagues who participated in U.S. exhibit programs reaching out to the peoples of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc during the height of the Cold War.

The stories they tell are inspiring. They remind us that even at the height of the conflict between the two superpowers, the U.S. worked hard to engage with the peoples of the communist world through exchanges, public diplomacy, and personal engagement.

Today, as we navigate a dangerous and worrisome period of renewed conflict in Europe, sparked by the Russian Federation's return to imperialism and rejection of the central principles of the post-World War II and post-Cold War settlements, as well as its flagrant violations of the United Nations Charter and international law, it is worth looking back on those efforts.

It is sad and painful to acknowledge that our relations with today's Russia are far worse than they were with the USSR at the height of the Cold War. And while it is hard to conceive of a return to normal people-to-people outreach and step-by-step diplomacy at a time when Russia has invaded Ukraine and violated

every principle of the international system, we can learn much from the stories told in this edition of the *Journal*.



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

**Diplomacy matters.** Even when we were waging a proxy war against the USSR in Southeast Asia, Africa, and much of the rest of the developing world, we prioritized progress on arms control, exchanges, and other people-to-people diplomacy. When our relations hit rock bottom after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, we continued to push for contact with the peoples of the Soviet Union and worked to reduce the threat of nuclear war.

The results were significant, including major arms control treaties that reduced the danger of nuclear conflict, and the Helsinki Final Act that committed the USSR to respect basic human rights principles including freedom of travel and emigration.

These major steps forward made the world safer and set the stage for changes in the communist bloc that culminated in the end of the Cold War and Soviet rule in 1991.

**People-to-people contacts matter.** Any study of the decline and fall of Soviet power must take into account the role of our efforts to reach out to the peoples of the Soviet bloc, starting in the 1950s and continuing through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Soviet dissidents have spoken at length about the importance of support from the West, and the U.S. in particular, in encouraging them to believe in a freer and better future.

Our exchange programs, cultural programs, and ongoing outreach mattered enormously, as confirmed by the first-person accounts in this edition of the *Journal*.

**We can agree to disagree.** Throughout the Cold War, we never refused to engage with citizens of the communist bloc, despite serious and fundamental disagreements with their governments. We understood that building people-to-people contacts could overcome the differences between our society and those of the Soviet-dominated world.

We also can reach agreements with governments we abhor. At the height of the Cold War, we negotiated the Helsinki Final Act and a host of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. None of those agreements signified U.S. acceptance of Soviet communism. To the contrary: We used these agreements to push back against totalitarian tyranny and found significant success. And yet ...

**Values matter.** The U.S. made mistakes during the Cold War in supporting dictatorial regimes that supported us against the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. We need to learn from the lessons of that time.

We can best advance our country's security and prosperity by working with and supporting governments that share our fundamental values, while still engaging with those that do not.

**Don't give up.** The world is a mess, and it is not wrong to be concerned about how things are going across the globe. We need to hold firm to our fundamental values and interests and insist that free people will, in the end, make the right choices if they are allowed to do so. ■

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*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](mailto:journal@afsa.org)  
**Phone:** (202) 338-4045  
**Fax:** (202) 338-8244  
**Web:** [www.afsa.org/fsj](http://www.afsa.org/fsj)  
**Address Changes:** [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org)

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Postmaster: Send address changes to  
AFSA, Attn: Address Change  
2101 E Street NW  
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# Public Diplomacy at Its Best

BY SHAWN DORMAN

This month, we shine a light on one of the best public diplomacy programs ever, the “American Exhibitions to the USSR.” For a focus on public diplomacy and countering disinformation, there is no better place to look for inspiration than the stars of those exhibits, the young Russian-speaking American guides who traveled across the Soviet Union to introduce its people to the United States.

In “Up Close with American Exhibit Guides to the Soviet Union, 1959-1991,” we meet nine of the 300 guides who served on the front lines of the Cold War, offering Soviets (who were also Ukrainians, Georgians, Uzbeks, Russians, etc.) a glimpse of American life, work, innovation, and values. Collectively, the guides interacted with more than 20 million exhibit visitors over the course of more than 30 years and 19 exhibitions (on medicine, industrial design, agriculture, photography, hand tools, architecture, education, and more). It was a big and bold example of people-to-people engagement behind the Iron Curtain.

Thank you to the nine former guides who shared their experiences and perspectives (and awesome vintage photos!)



on these pages— John Beyrle, Rose Gottemoeller, John Herbst, Mike Hurley, Laura Kennedy, Allan Mustard, Jane Picker, Tom Robert-

son, and Kathleen Rose. And thank you, as well, to all the other former guides who served their country in a meaningful, lasting way.

That so many of the exhibit guides went on to stellar diplomatic careers is remarkable but not surprising. To this day, the best way to gain a global perspective and develop cultural competency is to be there, up close and personal, with friend and foe alike.

Referring to this special program in his President’s Views column, “Cold War Lessons,” Ambassador Eric Rubin emphasizes the significance of keeping ties between peoples and countries open even during the most challenging times.

The focus spotlight then turns to *Cold War Radio* author Mark Pomar, who offers insight on “Broadcasting Behind the (Opening) Iron Curtain.” The late 1980s Gorbachev era ushered in new opportunities for U.S. broadcasting, along with unfortunate “peace dividend” budget cuts to programming.

Next, we have a close look at today’s version of the world’s fair: the expo. In “The Journey to Expo 2020 Dubai and Its Legacy,” FSO Matthew Asada, who was deeply involved in the process of bringing Expo 2020 to life, tells us how it happened—and how it almost didn’t happen.

Amb. Rubin fills out this month’s public diplomacy theme with a review of the Cold War sports diplomacy book, *Ice War Diplomat* by Canadian Ambassador (ret.) Gary J. Smith, about the historic “Sum-

mit Series” ice hockey games between Canada and the Soviet Union in 1972.

In *Speaking Out*, veteran diplomats Todd Kushner and Paul Watzlavick pitch the need to identify and articulate your leadership philosophy in “How Will You Lead?”

Ambassador Dave Dunford reflects on FS life with beloved pets in “Dogging It in the Foreign Service.” The Local Lens by PD FSO Sarah Talalay captures women at Abu Dhabi’s Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque taking in the grand view, selfie-style.

Of special interest to the Foreign Service is a new book on the 2021 American evacuation from Afghanistan, *The Secret Gate* by Mitch Zuckoff. The review by Michael McKinley, a former ambassador to Afghanistan, describes how the author brings out the human dimension of the story through two main characters, an American FSO and the Afghan women’s rights activist and author he helped escape.

Spoiler alert for the FS community: The diplomats on the ground at the Kabul airport come off well in the book, doing all they can to help as many as they can in an impossible situation. (See also the March 2022 *FSJ* collection of first-person accounts from important characters not named in this book but who stayed behind in Kabul, flew in from other posts to help, and worked at the lily-pad landing countries and safe-haven U.S. military bases to receive evacuees.)

As always, we hope you enjoy this month’s edition. Write to us at [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org). ■

Shawn Dorman is the editor of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

## Gaming to Strengthen Diplomacy

Fred Hill's March Letters-Plus, "Gaming at State: Needed but Not New," and Robert Domaingue's November 2022 Speaking Out, "Why the State Department Needs an Office of Diplomatic Gaming," were most welcome.

As a participant in Mr. Hill's "war gaming" operations in the 1980s, I can testify to their utility and also register my regret that the State Department has not instituted and supported a mechanism within its organizational structure to carry out such operations.

The functional link between the Foreign Service Institute and the Office of Policy Planning that was created to carry out the exercises and extract policy-relevant insights from them was an added value.

I commend Robert Domaingue and Fred Hill for introducing this issue into our conversations about strengthening American diplomacy.

*James E. Goodby*  
Ambassador, retired  
Washington, D.C.

## Corridor Courage

Congratulations to Tanesha Dillard (March 2023 Speaking Out, "In the Corridors: Where Culture, Reputation, and DEIA Meet") for her courage in pointing out the unfortunate use of corridor reputation in determining assignments and promotions in the State Department.

Reputation and rumors are not facts; nor are they based on performance or results. EERs and awards are not failproof indicators, but at least are reviewed and hopefully objective.

Thank you, Tanesha, for the discussion.  
*Dale Giovengo*  
FSO, retired  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

## Undermining Professional Standards?

Kudos and thanks to Ambassador Rubin for writing so forcefully against the different efforts to undermine the merit-based selection and promotion of Foreign Service personnel in his March 2023 Presidents Views, "Back to the Spoils System?"

There is, alas, no mention of the current administration's efforts to undermine the integrity of the selection and promotion policy, and to skirt federal law regarding the norming of tests by race or sex, through the imposition of wholistic (vice objective) evaluation methods for selection and promotion.

Of course, as this is being done under the guise of enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, no one can be expected to speak out against this subtle means of undermining professional standards. Other than that, it's a great column.

*Ed Stafford*  
FSO, retired  
Brigantine, New Jersey

## Empowering Career Employees

The March 2023 *FSJ* was full of stimulating articles about reforming the State Department and the Foreign Service. Perhaps the most thought-provoking was "From Instinct to Evidence," in which Dan Spokojny advocates more scientific, less instinctual decision-making by the department—"an improved system of knowledge management."

Better methods of training are proposed, as well as more attention to after-action assessments of the effectiveness of policy decisions and implementation. Spokojny distinguishes between "tacit

knowledge" (more like "street smarts" and "common sense") and "explicit knowledge" (which is "captured and written down").

Unfortunately, policy decisions are often made by political appointees lacking benefit of the education and training proposed by Spokojny. The most egregious example of bad decisions made at the political level is the decision to go to war against Iraq in 2003.

Extensive State Department studies and recommendations ("explicit knowledge") were brushed aside, basically ignored, by decision-makers motivated by domestic political considerations or personal objectives.

"The State Department should set a goal to become the most highly trained decision-makers in the U.S. government," says Mr. Spokojny. Great objective, but if our political leaders—elected and appointed—don't take our expertise into account, then all our training will be to no avail.

Political appointees, alas, often have too much confidence in their own tacit knowledge and have authority to override or ignore recommendations of the career Service.

And sending career officers to Baghdad who have never served in the Arab world is not a formula for successfully dealing with situations they may confront on the ground. Unfortunately, some career officers, devoid of experience in the area, made decisions now seen as unwise. Whatever explicit knowledge was available, they did not embrace it, and their tacit knowledge did not compensate for this failure.

What is the difference between experience and tacit knowledge? I'm reminded



of the old saying:  
“Experience is what’s  
left over after you’ve for-  
gotten everything you’ve  
been taught.”

Experience is what  
we acquire in the career  
Service. Properly applied  
in the right place and at the  
right time, it is the essential  
element of successful policy  
formulation and implementation.

John Fer’s insightful analysis perfectly  
sums up the dilemma (“Why Senior  
Leaders Cannot Reform the State Depart-  
ment”). Until we figure out a way to  
empower a career Foreign and Civil Ser-  
vice, we risk blundering into more unwise  
wars and other misguided decisions.

Assigning empowered career employ-  
ees to the right place at the right time will  
be our salvation.

*Charles O. Cecil*  
*Ambassador, retired*  
*Washington, D.C.*

## 9/11 Attackers Were Not “Shia-Led”

My sincerest apologies to *The Foreign  
Service Journal* for the unintentional error  
in my letter to the editor in the March  
2023 *FSJ*, “Resigning in Protest,” in which  
I referred to the 9/11 hijackers as “Shia-  
led.” Bin Laden and his al-Qaida followers  
were, of course, Sunnis.

Saddam Hussein, who considered  
Osama Bin Laden a rival for influence in  
the region, was the wine-drinking, superfi-  
cially religious, brutal, Baathist, Sunni  
dictator of Shia-majority Iraq. My only  
excuses for this error are my aging brain  
and the memories of that shameful period  
in U.S. history that flooded in as I read  
FSO (ret.) Steve Walker’s powerful article  
on dissent in the December 2022 *Journal*  
 (“When Is It Ethical to Resign in Protest?”).



My own decision, 17 years ago,  
to quietly resign in protest over  
what I consider to be the “lies”  
proffered by the George W. Bush  
administration, resulted in the  
hastily written letter I sent to the  
*FSJ* in January.

*Patricia McArdle*  
*Senior FSO, retired*  
*Oceanside, California*

*Editor’s Note:* The *FSJ* regrets not catch-  
ing this error; we have corrected it in the  
online versions.

## Eyes on Hyphenation

Our *FSJ* is hardly the only offender,  
but I urge a human eye on hyphenation  
(a technique that has my full support).

In the January-February *FSJ*, in the  
Talking Point item “Soccer Diplomacy” on  
page 13, “ethnonationalism” is hyphen-  
ated for a line break between the second  
“n” and the first “a.”

I would consider making this a  
hyphenated word regardless of line  
breaks, but your version, surely inspired  
by software, implies a confusing and non-  
sensual pronunciation.

I do enjoy my union rag, and please  
take this constructive criticism from some-  
one who spends too much time working  
and editing. (EERs, here we come!)

And please, stay with the serif  
typeface.

*Derek S. Worman*  
*Management Officer*  
*U.S. Embassy Abuja*

## Hailing the Open Forum’s Revival

The December 2022 *FSJ* on Honoring  
Excellence and Dissent struck a spe-  
cial chord with me. The history of the  
State Department’s handling of dissent  
communications is long and sometimes

checked. But I want to point out a  
long-ago incident that very favorably  
impressed me at the time and has  
continued through the years to resonate  
positively.

I began my Foreign Service career  
following the election of Jack Kennedy.  
My first assignment was to Lima in 1961,  
and I was excited to be a part of the new  
Alliance for Progress program and to  
share the heady feeling of representing  
a U.S. policy of support for democracy  
and economic development in Latin  
America. I felt the same way in 1967-  
1969 in San José.

However, by 1971-1973 in Bogotá and  
1973-1975 in Medellín, I had become  
disenchanted with U.S.-Latin American  
policies under President Richard Nixon  
and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

I asked for a transfer out of the then-  
Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (ARA)  
to Europe. (I was assigned to Helsinki,  
which opened a whole new world to me  
and became the principal focus of most  
of the rest of my career.)

But before leaving Medellín in 1975,  
I wrote an “airgram” highly critical of  
U.S. policies in Latin America, which I  
described in sharp terms as supporting  
right-wing military or military-supported  
governments and discouraging nascent  
reformist and liberal-left movements on  
the grounds of anti-communism and  
countering Soviet Union maneuvering  
there.

I also contrasted what I saw as  
positive developments in the fields of  
education and health in Cuba compared  
to their limited availability in most of the  
rest of Latin America.

Because I was principal officer of  
the consulate in Medellín, I was able  
to authorize my own messages to be  
sent directly to State. I advised both the  
ambassador and deputy chief of mission

in Bogotá about what I was planning to do.

They thought it was foolhardy, but did not order me not to send the message. I had explained that I was in total agreement that no U.S. official should ever express *public* disagreement with U.S. policies, but that this Limited Official Use document was within formal official channels.

I sent off my message and proceeded with my family to Washington, D.C., for Finnish language training.

Sometime after my arrival in Washington, I was contacted by the Open Forum. They asked me if I would be willing to present my paper in an Open Forum discussion that included the highest officials of the regional bureau (now the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs) for an open give and take.

The event was arranged and resulted in a lively discussion. Issue was taken with some of my points, particularly my rather naive view of Cuba.

The State Department's willingness back in 1975 to permit—even to suggest—an open forum discussion on a highly controversial presentation critical of U.S. policy was refreshing and healthy.

Probably no policy changes can be traced to that event. And, in any case, looking at the overall situation in Latin America today, nobody on either side of that discussion can get much satisfaction from how events have evolved.

But we did have a great and open discussion where everyone could put forward their views. I remain grateful to the department for that marvelous experience and am delighted to learn the State Department has decided to re-initiate the Secretary's Open Forum.

*James Ford Cooper  
Senior FSO, retired  
Columbia, S.C.*

## Israel-Palestine: A One-State Solution or Confederation?

Following the late December 2022 formation of Israel's new government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, both President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated U.S. support for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conundrum.

Our position in favor of two democratic states living side by side more or less along the 1967 border mirrors the European Union's position and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

But after decades of Israeli settlement expansion into the West Bank, is the two-state solution even remotely feasible?

Some 30 years ago, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem and political scientist Dr. Meron Benvenisti predicted that Israeli settlement policy would soon result in a binational Arab-Jewish state stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. To avoid devolving into an apartheid polity, Israel would have to accord Palestinian Arabs under Israeli occupation equal political and civil rights commensurate with Israeli Arabs.

A growing portion (from 33 to 40 percent depending on the survey) of Palestinians now favor a binational state. Most Israeli Jews oppose it. However, one of Israel's most vocal settlement leaders, David Elhayani, recently said: "Whether we like it or not, the two-state solution is dead."

Elhayani went on to admit that Israel cannot annex the West Bank and Jordan River Valley without granting the Pal-

estinians full civil rights. "Anyone who says otherwise is in denial of reality," he concluded.

Would such a state be viable? Judging that Israel with a 20 percent Palestinian Arab minority has been a functioning democracy for nearly 75 years, the answer is "yes indeed."

Moreover, one could make the case that Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, especially Mizrahi, have much more in common than Walloons and Flemish in Belgium or Macedonian Slavs and Albanians in North Macedonia.

In fact, Belgium could serve as a model for a possible Israel-Palestine confederation should the majority of Israeli Jews continue to oppose a binational one-state solution.

The contours of a final settlement to this quandary, now more than 100 years old, should be decided by the Israelis and Palestinians themselves. Rightfully so. However, it is time for us to consider alternatives to the two-state solution as U.S. policy.

*George W. Aldridge  
FSO, retired  
Arlington, Texas ■*



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[journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org)**

## RESPONSE TO MARCH 2023 FOCUS, “FS REFORM: OUTLOOK AND CONSIDERATIONS”

## Moving in the Wrong Direction

BY JUDITH M. HEIMANN



The March 2023 *Journal*'s focus on Foreign Service reform inspired me, an elderly retired Foreign Service officer, to take this opportunity to present my curmudgeonly views on a series of basic errors or wrong turns that have overpowered the previous practices and priorities of the U.S. Foreign Service.

This series of errors began long before—but was aggravated by—various attacks on U.S. missions abroad. And the missteps have been put into overdrive by the ever-increasing power of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) and the overwhelming power of the White House in foreign affairs as compared to that of the State Department, as well as by the increasing role of well-funded missions of our armed services reducing the influence abroad of our diplomatic missions.

I write from the perspective of having been, straight out of college in 1957, the wife of an FSO serving chiefly in Southeast Asia. I then became, 15 years later, one of the first two FS spouses to become an FSO (in 1972) via the first FSO exam not barred to spouses. Then came 20 years as an FSO, mostly as a political officer in Western Europe, but also in East Africa, alongside my husband, until he retired to let me

get a couple of better jobs during my last FS years: consul general in Bordeaux, followed by being responsible for running a big Vietnamese “boat people” refugee installation in the Philippines.

I retired in 1992 as a brand-new Senior Foreign Service member, but then spent many years as a rehired annuitant, before and after my husband died of cancer. For months each year from 2001 to 2011, I worked under the spurious title of “senior adviser to the political section” in Brussels. There, I worked on European Union political affairs, all aspects of the conflict diamonds problem, and helped the U.S. embassy and our U.S. Mission to the European Union maintain and increase their access to local officials, including but not limited to diplomats.

In a nutshell, I always saw my job as getting to know useful and knowledgeable people in the countries I worked in and to report who they were and what they thought. I knew that what I focused on was only one aspect of what Foreign Service officers are supposed to do; they are also supposed to convince the right people in that country or organization of our policies and preferences.

Some of my colleagues at post did the latter job much better than I could, but

in many cases they got to be on terms of amity and trust with the people they needed to convince in part because of the social access that I could help provide them, drawing on my contacts. To do that, I also relied on the wise counsel and support I received from our locally hired staff, then known as Foreign Service Nationals.

In the past eight or more years, I have seen or sensed that virtually everything I had been permitted to do as an FSO or as a rehired annuitant and the people who helped me do it have almost disappeared from our posts abroad. Instead, FSOs in the field are being forced to spend most of their time presenting D.C.-provided arguments to host-country strangers with seemingly no thought given to the fact that the FSOs are living and working in a foreign country with its own priorities.

During these same years, FS staffing abroad has been drastically reduced in political and economic sections, with long staffing gaps between incumbents. The result has been that if an FSO assigned overseas is lucky enough to learn something useful, or to acquire a good local contact, the knowledge gained often gets forgotten or lost before that officer's successor arrives.

Instead of providing additional officers to reduce the inhumane workload answering endless urgent demands from Washington, our posts abroad have been given more than they need of DS officers whose major job appears to be to make sure that FSOs assigned to a post abroad don't make close friends or come



*Judith Moscow Heimann, before and after becoming a Foreign Service officer, has written nonfiction books, most of them about people and places in Southeast and East Asia. She helped write two TV documentaries, for the BBC and PBS (“The Barefoot Anthropologist” and “Headhunters of World War II”), drawn from two of those books. She divides her year between Washington, D.C., and Brussels, Belgium. Her son is a senior pilot at NetJets, and her daughter is a senior professor of modern European history at a British university.*

to trust any foreigners, not even those hired locally to help our missions abroad accomplish their goals. (Meanwhile, our heavily funded armed services have launched their own diplomatic missions abroad.)

The “local hires” who succeeded the ones who taught me and supported me are now, wherever possible, banned by DS from entering the buildings where FSOs have their desks. Thus, in many of what were formerly great political and economic reporting posts, it is as if the word “foreign” has been removed from the Foreign Service.

There are relatively few FSOs guiding our policies or even our information exchanges in the State Department. Most of what formerly were mid- and upper-

## In many of what were formerly great political and economic reporting posts, it is as if the word “foreign” has been removed from the Foreign Service.

level FSO jobs at State are now filled by political appointees. What political guidance D.C.-based FSOs get now comes directly or indirectly from the National Security Council (NSC), which, from its office in the White House, appears to focus much of its attention on what subjects will be in the top stories in tomorrow’s U.S. domestic media.

What the overstuffed NSC offers directly or indirectly to our overstretched FSOs abroad is often drafted in a hurry

in the White House with little input from the State Department, and is sent out to posts abroad with demands for the posts to respond faster than is reasonable given the posts’ staffing shortages.

I admit that I am exaggerating. Not all overseas posts have all the problems I mention above, but these problems are so serious and widespread that it is fair to say that our career Foreign Service is in a terrible state, with its critically low morale only one of its many problems. ■

## HONORING CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT

Nominations for  
AFSA’s 2023 Constructive Dissent Awards  
Are Now Being Accepted.

### DISSENT AWARDS

The W. Averell Harriman Award  
The William R. Rivkin Award  
The Christian A. Herter Award  
The F. Allen “Tex” Harris Award

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DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS IS 5/15/23.

Questions?  
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at [horn@afsa.org](mailto:horn@afsa.org) or (202) 719-9705.

## HONORING EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE

Nominations for  
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Are Now Being Accepted.

### PERFORMANCE AWARDS

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The Nelson B. Delavan Award  
The M. Juanita Guess Award  
The Avis Bohlen Award  
The Post Rep of the Year Award

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DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS IS 5/15/23.

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

## SFRC and HFAC Budget Hearings: Blinken Testifies

**O**n March 22, Secretary of State Antony Blinken testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), and on March 23, he testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC). Both hearings were to review the State Department Fiscal Year 2024 budget request to Congress.

The President's FY24 budget request includes \$63.1 billion for the State Department and USAID. Some congressional Republicans are calling for a return to FY22 funding levels, negating the significant increases of FY23.

The Secretary also testified in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Subcommittees in both chambers. In his opening remarks before HFAC and SFRC, the Secretary said the new budget would help the department meet two separate but overlapping challenges: facing off with strategic competitors like Russia and China; and overcoming global tests such as climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, and pandemics.

The Secretary talked in detail about the ongoing competition for global influence between the United States and China, pointing to a need for enhanced presence in Asia, where, unlike Beijing, the U.S. can offer support with maritime security, disease surveillance, clean energy infrastructure, and digital technology.

He said the new budget will “help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding.”

The full text of the Secretary's opening remarks for the HFAC hearing can be found online at [https://bit.ly/Secy\\_HFAC-FY24-budget-hearing](https://bit.ly/Secy_HFAC-FY24-budget-hearing).

Many of the Republican members of the HFAC used their time to criticize

## Contemporary Quote

**“**China's government is working to capture huge swathes of economic activity within its closed, authoritarian but fast-growing internet infrastructure. At the same time, much of the rest of the world is adopting open blockchain networks. ... Whether official Washington recognizes it or not, a digital land rush is on. The U.S. risks losing influence over the next era of the internet by ignoring it. **”**

—Foreign Service Officer Brandon Possin, *Politico*, April 3, 2023.

the Secretary and Biden administration's handling of the U.S. evacuation from Afghanistan in August 2021. Chair Michael McCaul (R-Texas) threatened to issue a subpoena to the Secretary if he did not share with the committee a confidential Dissent Channel message related to Afghanistan and signed by some two dozen diplomats in July 2021.

Rep. McCaul issued the subpoena on March 27. A March 28 *Foreign Policy* article by Robbie Gramer reports that the congressional grilling of the Biden administration over Afghanistan “is just getting started.”

## Human Rights Reports Released

**S**ecretary of State Antony Blinken released the “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022,” known as the Human Rights Reports, at a press conference at the State Department on March 20.

In his opening remarks, he described the purpose of these reports: “This report makes a factual, objective, and rigorous accounting of human rights conditions around the world, looking at nearly 200 countries and territories. And, importantly, it applies the same standards to everyone: our allies and partners, and countries with which we have differences.

“The goal of this report is not to lecture or to shame. Rather, it is to provide a

resource for those individuals working around the world to safeguard and uphold human dignity when it's under threat in so many ways. And while this report looks outward to countries around the world, we know the United States faces its own set of challenges on human rights.

“Our willingness to confront our challenges openly, to acknowledge our own shortcomings—not to sweep them under the rug or pretend they don't exist—that is what distinguishes us and other democracies.

“The report makes clear that, in 2022, in countries across every region, we continued to see a backsliding in human rights conditions—the closing of civic space, disrespect for fundamental human dignity.”

The Secretary called out governments in Iran, Afghanistan, Burma, the People's Republic of China, and Cuba for ongoing abuses of women, girls, protesters, and minority ethnic groups living within their borders.

Not everyone agreed with the State Department's assessments, with the president of Mexico calling the section on Mexico “lies.” That section reported on arbitrary killings by police, military, and other Mexican officials and criticized violence against journalists in the country.

The Secretary also took the opportunity to address the Xi Jinping–Vladimir Putin meetings taking place in Moscow that day.

## “Freedom in the World” Report Released

The 2023 edition of the “Freedom in the World” report was released in March.

Compiled by Freedom House, the report found that “global freedom” had declined for the 17th consecutive year, but the authors also noted that we could be reaching a “turning point” because some authoritarian countries loosened pandemic-era restrictions on free speech, and countries like Colombia, Kenya, and Malaysia experienced peaceful transfers of power.

The report also noted that in places like Moscow and Beijing, the “effects of corruption and a focus on political control at the expense of competence exposed the limits of the authoritarian models.”

Each country is assigned points on a series of 25 indicators, for a total aggregate score of 100. Finland, Norway, and Sweden all received perfect scores. Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and the Central African Republic were among the countries that received scores lower than 10.

## Havana Syndrome Cause Remains a Mystery

An intelligence report issued by Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines on March 1, 2023, claims it is not likely that Havana syndrome was caused by a foreign adversary.

A statement issued by Haines noted that most IC (intelligence community) agencies “have now concluded that it is ‘very unlikely’ a foreign adversary is responsible for the reported AHIs [anomalous health incidents].”

For the report, seven intelligence agencies reviewed approximately 1,000



cases of AHIs. Five of the agencies agreed that foreign involvement was “very unlikely”; a sixth (unnamed) agency determined it was merely “unlikely”; the seventh agency, also unnamed, abstained (but did not dissent).

AFSA released a statement the same day saying that the association continues to advocate for members who have been injured by the mysterious illness and that the report does not change that.

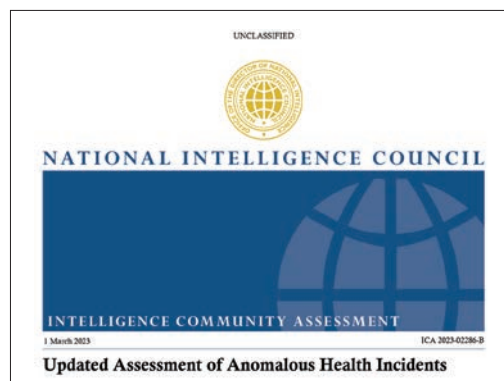
News outlets continue to cover the Havana syndrome story. On March 23, *The Washington Post* quoted CIA Director Ambassador Bill Burns, who said: “I want to be absolutely clear: These findings do not call into question the experiences and real health issues that U.S. government personnel and their family members—including CIA’s own officers—have reported while serving our country.”

Retired FSO James Schumaker, who wrote one of the *FSJ*’s most-read articles of 2022, “Before Havana Syndrome, There Was Moscow Signal” (January-February 2022), has been interviewed by various news publications including *Politico*, which ran a big story on Moscow Signal, the decades-long Soviet program that beamed microwaves at the U.S. embassy in Moscow and is suspected by some to be a precursor to the Havana syndrome.

*Politico* also reported on March 9 that the Pentagon awarded a \$750,000 grant to study radio frequency waves on ferrets to determine whether this exposure causes similar symptoms to those experienced by U.S. government personnel in Havana, Moscow, and elsewhere.

*Guardian* journalist Nicky Woolf released a new podcast, *The Sound:*

*Mystery of Havana Syndrome*, on March 13. One of Woolf’s guests, former National Security Adviser John Bolton, admitted that he did not brief then-President Donald Trump on the Havana syndrome: “We didn’t feel we would get support from President Trump if we said, ‘We think the Russians are coming after American personnel.’”



Woolf also interviews Schumaker, retired CIA officer (and syndrome victim) Marc Polymeropoulos, National Security Archive senior analyst Peter Kornbluh, and other experts.

On March 29, *Salon* reported that it had obtained a declassified report prepared for the DNI that “appears to show conclusively” that Havana syndrome is not naturally occurring and suggests that “an unknown device or weapon using ‘pulsed electromagnetic energy’ remains a plausible explanation.”

The James Madison Project, a non-profit dedicated to reducing government secrecy, sued to obtain the report. The project’s attorney, Mark Zaid, says the report shows “the U.S. government is covering up evidence” about AHIs. An anonymous source told *Salon* reporter Brian Karem that the department was caught “in the crossfire of this mess” and “likely knew very little” about any hypothetical operation against its personnel.



## Countering Russian Influence—OIG Report Released

In December 2022 the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released its “Countering Russian Influence Fund [CRIF] Report,” determining that the State Department has complied with legislative requirements for the fund, including submitting annual reports on programs and activities, incorporating fund goals into strategic planning efforts, and incorporating CRIF-designated funds into annual budget processes.

CRIF programs are intended to counter malign Russian influence according to the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). From 2017 to 2022, Congress designated \$1.5 billion to CRIF.

## New E.U. Platform Fights Russian Disinformation

European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell announced on Feb. 7 that the E.U. is launching a new platform to counter disinformation campaigns by Russia, China, and nonstate actors.

The new Information Sharing and Analysis Center, housed in the European External Action Service (EEAS), coordinates with all 27 E.U. countries and the wider community of nongovernmental organizations to track information manipulation by foreign actors in real time.

The European Union has been battling Russian attempts to manipulate and distort information since the start of the war in Ukraine, when Kremlin-orchestrated propaganda first sought to blame the E.U. for a global food crisis.

A first-of-its-kind report, “Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats” was released by EEAS in February. The report found, in part, that

Russia’s diplomatic channels are regularly used to enable foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) operations.

Sophisticated impersonations of trusted organizations and individuals are increasingly being used, in particular by Russian actors targeting Ukraine; incidents have been detected in at least 30 languages.

## Where Are the Women?

The fourth edition of the “Women in Diplomacy Index,” released in March by the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy in the United Arab Emirates, found that just 20.54 percent of ambassadors and permanent representatives worldwide are women.

The 2023 dataset tracks more than 12,000 ambassadorial appointments in 193 United Nations member states.

The study found that Europe has the highest average of women in top diplomatic posts, at 28 percent, with Finland

أكاديمية  
أنور قرقاش  
الدبلوماسية  
ANWAR GARGASH  
DIPLOMATIC  
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RESEARCH & ANALYSIS  
March 2023



### 2023 Women in Diplomacy Index

Dr. Sara Chehab

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA), an autonomous federal entity, or the UAE Government.  
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topping the list at 49.5 percent, while Belgium lags behind at a mere 11.5 percent.

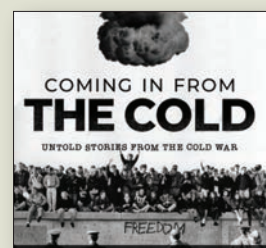
In the United States, 41 percent of these top jobs are held by women, up from just 33.1 percent in 2018, the first year the index was developed.

Canada has the highest global ranking—51 percent of its top diplomat jobs are held by women.

## Podcast of the Month: *Coming in from the Cold*

Produced by the Center for Naval Intelligence and hosted by Cold War historian Bill Rosenau, the podcast *Coming in from the Cold* explores mostly forgotten national security policy initiatives, incidents, and events from the Cold War. Topics include Chernobyl, the invasion of Grenada, napalm, the Lavender Scare, and more, with experts on each topic joining to add context and detail.

Episode 45 introduces National Security Archive senior analysts Peter Kornbluh and Bill Burr, who discuss the Moscow Signal and how that story parallels the Havana syndrome.



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

## HEARD ON THE HILL



### Foreign Service Quality

I want to add my thanks to all the panelists for your service to our great nation. And I also want to thank your families, as well, because I know they serve alongside you as you're serving our country, and especially to our members of the Foreign Service. Thank you. I was governor of Nebraska; I had the opportunity to lead about two trade missions a year around the world. And I've got to tell you, every time I was in an embassy, I was very impressed with the quality of people who are represent-

ing our country overseas.

—Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), *SFRC nominations hearing, March 1, 2023.*

### Security Assistance and Human Rights

For years the Pentagon has encroached upon the State Department's vital and statutory role in security assistance, which is a critical tool of foreign policy, which we've seen most recently leveraged in Ukraine. This has increasingly untethered our assistance from human rights and American values, which I believe damages our national security interests.

—Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), *SFRC review of Fiscal Year 2024 State Department budget hearing, March 23, 2023.*

## Women of Courage Award to Women and Girls of Iran

**A**t a March 8 ceremony honoring 2023 Women of Courage Award recipients, a new award—the Madeleine K. Albright Honorary Group Award—was given to “the women and girl protesters of Iran” for their grassroots protests across their country, which were inspired by the brutal killing of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini while in police custody in Tehran on Sept. 16, 2022.

Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield presented the award, saying: “Secretary Albright showed so many women, including myself, how to lead with moral clarity and with courage. Her legacy lives on in those still fighting for gender equality and universal human rights. It is fitting

that this award recognizes not just one woman, but the bravery, the fortitude, and collaboration of a whole movement.”

Other award winners hail from Afghanistan, Argentina, Central African Republic, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Poland, and Ukraine.

## ChatGPT Comes to Embassy Conakry

**C**hatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been all over the news recently—and at least one public diplomacy section is already putting the new tools to use in the office.

On March 13, Embassy Conakry sent an unclassified cable that was obtained by *Politico*, stating that the embassy's

public diplomacy section had started using ChatGPT to help locally employed staff with their grammar, spelling, and writing style, reducing the number of hours needed to edit final unclassified products.

The cable's author calls ChatGPT an “indispensable asset” and says the understaffed political/economic section may soon begin using it, as well.

A State Department spokesperson told *Politico*: “We want to go much further in our use of technology, innovation, and data to drive foreign policy and solve resource challenges. We encourage our embassies to experiment with using different technologies to best reach their audiences.”

## Road Deaths a Global “Pandemic,” U.N. Says

**T**he United Nations secretary-general's special envoy for road safety visited Washington, D.C., in March to encourage the United States to lead the way in advocating for and investing in road safety.

Special Envoy Jean Todt told *The Washington Post* that 1.3 million people a year die on the world's roads and another 50 million are injured, calling the problem a “pandemic.” The U.S. road fatality rate is among the highest in the developed world, but Todt says the solution is “pretty simple”: better education and law enforcement, improved road and vehicle quality, and post-crash care.

In 2022 alone, three Foreign Service members died while walking or cycling on Washington-area roads: Foreign Service Officer Shawn O'Donnell, former FSO Timothy Fingarson, and FSO Sarah Langenkamp. (Note: See AFSA President Eric Rubin's April 2023 *FSJ* column on raising road safety as a major Foreign Service and AFSA concern.)

## Commemorative Coin Proposed for FS Centennial

On March 14, Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) introduced the United States Foreign Service Commemorative Coin Act, bipartisan legislation to create a commemorative coin celebrating 100 years of the U.S. Foreign Service.

The bill mandates the U.S. Mint to release a commemorative coin in 2025 to mark 100 years since the enactment of legislation creating the modern-day Foreign Service.

Proceeds from sales of the coins would benefit the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), which is dedicated to preserving the history and sharing the experiences of Foreign Service members.

This legislation is supported by AFSA, ADST, the American Academy of Diplomacy, Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide, Association of Black American Ambassadors, DACOR, Diplomacy Center Foundation, Public Diplomacy Council of America, Senior Seminar Alumni Association, and USAID Alumni Association.

## State Settles 17-Year-Old Lawsuit

The State Department has agreed to pay almost \$38 million to settle a 17-year-old lawsuit between the department and more than 200 class action members who alleged that Foreign Service medical clearance policy illegally discriminated against applicants with disabilities.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission approved the settlement on March 17, after which the department was expected to offer immediate job opportunities to 100 class action members.

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### 100 Years Ago

#### Pleasing Appreciation

A call was made at the Consular Bureau of the State Department on February 20 by Mr. William A. Kenyon, an inspector of the Post Office Department, who has recently returned to Washington from an extended official visit to Europe in connection with the international mail service.

Mr. Kenyon desires to extend thanks on behalf of the Post Office Department to the Consular officers in France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Roumania, Greece and other countries visited for the assistance rendered him in his official investigations. He reports that desk space and interpreter's service were furnished him whenever required at all the Consulates, and his postal investigations were facilitated by this admirable cooperation on the part of the Consular officers.



The method of dealing directly with foreign postal administrations is an innovation on the part of the Post Office Department, and Mr. Kenyon reports that the improvements already effected, the cessation of enormous depredations, the recovery and return to senders of thousands of undeliverable parcel-post packages, and the return to the United States of mail equipment valued at over a hundred thousand dollars, has demonstrated the value of personal contact with the postal administrations of the other countries.

—Unsigned news item in the May 1923 American Consular Bulletin.

As reported in the March *Journal*, AFSA is strongly in favor of the decision by the State Department to be more inclusive of applicants with disabilities.

#### Less Than a Decade to Stop Climate Catastrophe

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a report on March 20 stating that the international community has a “rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all,” but this will require “deep, rapid, and sustained global greenhouse gas emissions reduction” over the next decade.

Report authors call for increased

international cooperation to improve access to adequate financial resources, particularly for vulnerable regions, and inclusive governance and coordinated policies, saying that our choices and actions in the next decade “will have impacts now and for thousands of years.”

If industrialized nations work together to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and then move to net zero emissions by the early 2050s, there is a 50 percent chance of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius—a number every nation agreed to pursue under the 2015 Paris Climate Accords. ■

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

# How Will You Lead?

BY TODD KUSHNER AND PAUL WATZLAVICK

**W**hat's your leadership philosophy? If you haven't given this much thought, you should. People who decide your onward assignments care about how you will approach leadership—your values and beliefs—especially if you are vying for a supervisory position. They know nothing has more impact on a unit's effectiveness and morale than the quality of its leaders.

Despite the value of knowing yourself as a leader, as Carol Walker wrote in the September 2015 *Harvard Business Review*, "Most managers live in a reactive mode, responding to issues based on gut feelings, past experiences, and examples set by others."

Developing and articulating a leadership philosophy is a valuable mechanism for moving out of the reactive mode and leading instead from a basis of self-awareness. Many people do not undertake this exercise until they are in a senior position, if ever.

We have found at National Intelligence

**At any career stage, or at any instance when tension and stakes are high, a leadership philosophy can be a tool for self-feedback.**

University (NIU) that it is very important to write out your leadership philosophy and reflect on it, even if you are early in your career. If possible, share your philosophy with people you trust and accept their feedback. It is natural that over time, your approach to leadership will change as you grow and develop.

## Crafting Your Philosophy

In our leadership and management class, students draft their leadership philosophy as a class assignment. They then get feedback from their classmates and their instructor and submit a revision. Most students, in their course assessments, tell us that crafting and revising their leadership philosophies was extremely valuable.

One student from the State Department said this exercise forced him to look

closely at his previous actions as a leader in the department and finally engage in critical self-introspection about beliefs, principles, and values that had guided him. Articulating his leadership philosophy resulted in important insights that will shape how he approaches future leadership positions.

Another State Department student related that crafting a personal leadership philosophy was valuable in helping to identify personal core principles and succinctly communicate them to her team. She added that exposure to feedback from students from other agencies helped to give her a broader perspective.

Crafting a leadership philosophy with the intention of articulating expectations to a unit can be powerful. As Adam Bryant wrote in the July 14, 2021, *Strategy and Business*: "Providing clarity about your leadership style will help you to build trust with your team. Think of it as your personal leadership brand—what you stand for, including the values that guide your behaviors as a leader, and what you expect from others."

A leadership philosophy can even be valuable if it is private. Some students write the philosophy primarily for themselves, as a document they can reference when challenges arise and they need



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*The views expressed in this article do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government.*

a reminder of their core values and key experiences.

## Questions to Ask

The higher people rise in the ranks of an organization, the less constructive feedback they receive, even though they need this feedback just as much as their lower-ranked colleagues, Robert S. Kaplan noted in his 2007 *Harvard Business Review* piece, “What to Ask the Man in the Mirror.”

At any career stage, or at any instance when tension and stakes are high, a leadership philosophy can be a tool for self-feedback: The values you wrote down in a quiet moment as a mid-level officer still hold true. But a reminder is a good thing. At NIU, we ask students to recall how they have lived their values in the past. This reflection helps students continue to live those values.

Bryant recommends those articulating their leadership philosophies reflect on the following:

- What are the three values that are most important to you as a leader and a colleague—that is, the consistent behaviors that everyone can rely on from you?
- How have you lived those values in your career?
- Why are they important to you for driving success?
- If you were recruiting someone to join your team, what would you say to them about your leadership approach and philosophy?

In our classes, we tell students to ask themselves the following questions:

- What significant events have shaped you?
- What are your beliefs about people and outlook on life?
- What core values describe and guide who you are as a leader?
- What traits, characteristics, skills,

styles, motivation, goals, etc., do you bring to leadership that makes you effective?

- What is important for groups to be effective?
- What is your preferred communication style (both in the way that you like to communicate and in the way you want others to communicate with you)?
- What are your expectations for yourself and others?
- What is your role in developing others?
- How do you want to be remembered?

## Leadership Styles

Whether you realize it or not, you probably have a preferred leadership style. Recognizing this can be an important aspect of your philosophy. Daniel Goleman laid out six leadership styles into which people’s leadership behaviors commonly fit.

**Coercive:** Issuing orders and expecting compliance

**Pacesetter:** Setting and living out high performance standards for oneself and expecting employees to live up to those standards

**Authoritative:** Setting a compelling vision for the organization and its goals and motivating employees by making clear how their work contributes to this vision

**Democratic:** Making decisions by developing consensus within the unit

**Affiliative:** Building emotional ties within the unit that takes precedence over achieving goals

**Coaching:** Seeking alignment of employees’ professional goals with the objectives and mission of the unit

Each of these styles is valid and appropriate in certain situations. An affiliative style, for example, can work well in a unit

when employees are motivated experts. Using the same style in a less experienced unit where employees need more direction may hamper goal achievement.

A pacesetter style can produce tremendous results in a unit where all the employees are capable, hard chargers. Being a pacesetter in a unit with less-motivated employees is a recipe for burnout.

How you decide to employ your leadership philosophy depends on a variety of factors. One option is trying to calibrate your onward assignment so that your preferred leadership philosophy matches the personality of the unit you hope to lead. Alternatively, perhaps you are emotionally versatile enough to lead in a style that is not your preferred style. These are important situations that will be influenced by your leadership philosophy as you move into positions of greater responsibility.

## Employing Your Philosophy

The most important element of the philosophy is to make it personal and unique to you. Authenticity is essential, or it will ring hollow to others. A philosophy heavy in buzzwords or prone to reproducing corporate values has the potential to alienate your audience—and make you seem insincere, as well.

Instead of delivering platitudes, use the philosophy to tell stories about how the values you espouse in your philosophy reflect your life. As management scholars Herminia Ibarra and Kent Lineback wrote in the January 2005 *Harvard Business Review*: “Telling a compelling story to coworkers, bosses, friends, or family—or strangers in a conference room—inspires belief in our motives, character, and capacity to reach the goals we’ve set.”

We hear moving stories from students about the importance of treating employees with dignity and respect, often citing experiences with former supervisors who,

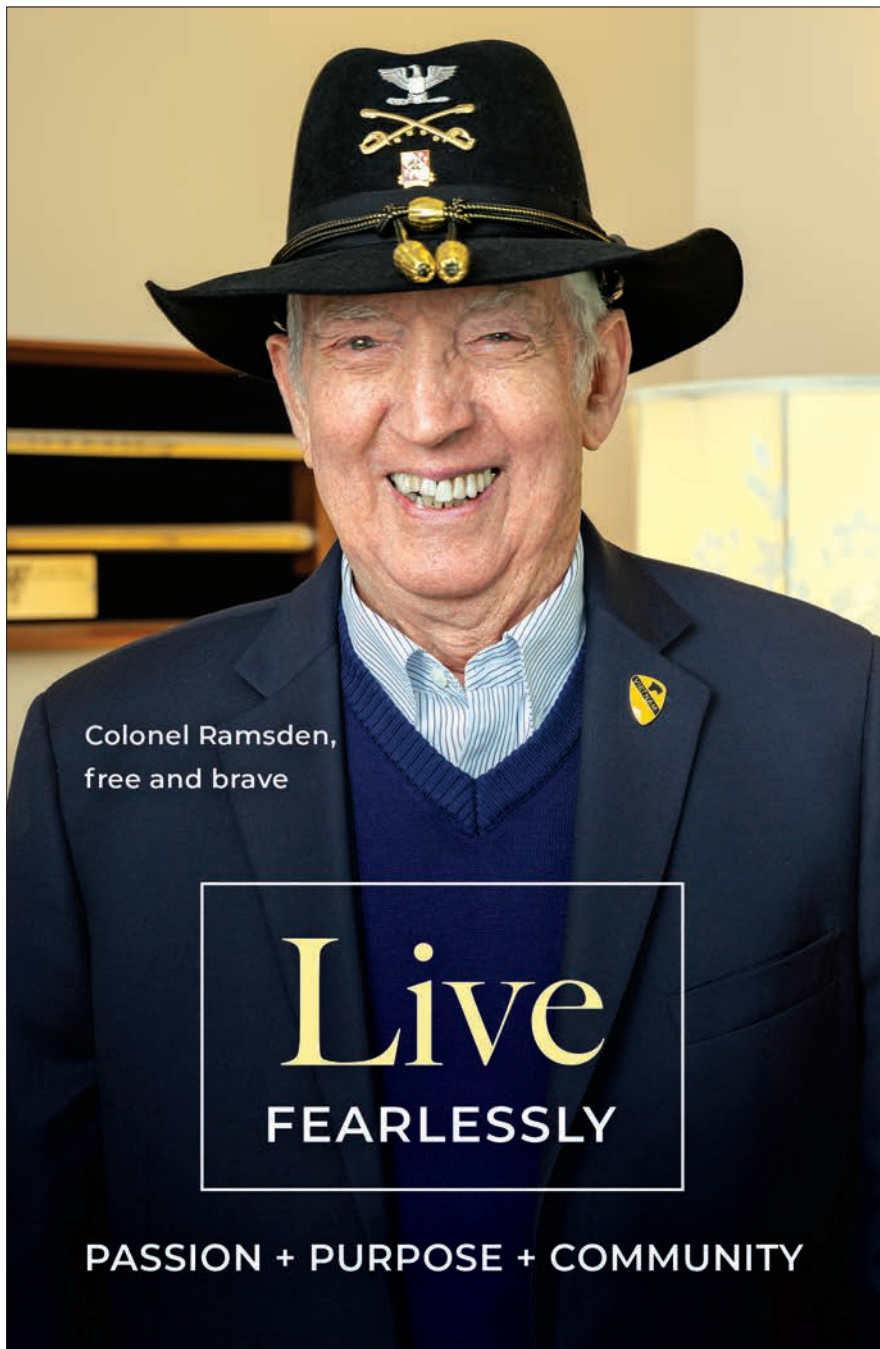
Speaking Out is the *Journal's* opinion forum, a place for lively discussion of issues affecting the U.S. Foreign Service and American diplomacy. The views expressed are those of the author; their publication here does not imply endorsement by the American Foreign Service Association. Responses are welcome;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

by refusing to do so, created performance and morale issues. Students have talked about becoming servant leaders during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure their team knew they were appreciated; the team often rewarded them in demonstrating renewed commitment.

Other students have related the importance of treating everyone in the workplace fairly. They have shared many stories emphasizing their commitment to public service and of holding other employees to the same commitment. Students have emphasized workplace flexibility and the importance of trust and good communication. Many have provided personal examples about how their leadership values were shaped and nurtured by their parents and mentors.

Foreign Service personnel regularly find themselves in new surroundings with new teams where they have the opportunity to clearly articulate their leadership philosophies. Having one ready that paints an honest picture of what new colleagues may expect can set a positive tone that promotes greater camaraderie and productivity within the group.

Seeing State Department students using their leadership and management coursework experiences at NIU to prepare themselves for future roles has confirmed our view that the university is an excellent choice for mid-career professional development, and we encourage those interested to pursue this unique opportunity. ■



Colonel Ramsden,  
free and brave

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# Up Close with American Exhibit Guides to the Soviet Union 1959-1991

**The USIA exhibit guides were young and enthusiastic, and they spoke Russian. Here's what it was like to be on the front lines of the Cold War.**



American traveling exhibits in the USSR between 1959 and 1991 were the centerpiece of the U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchange Agreement signed in 1958. Renewed annually, the agreement served as the basis for joint programming until formally abrogated by the Kremlin after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The “American Exhibitions to the USSR” program began with the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, the setting of the famous “kitchen debate” between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, and ended with Design USA in 1991. The exhibitions—meant to introduce America to Soviet citizens and to dispel misinformation about the U.S.—showcased American ingenuity in 87 separate showings of 19 exhibitions across 12 time zones of the Soviet Union. (See map opposite.)

On display across the exhibits were examples of American ingenuity, technology, and daily life—from graphic arts, photography, and agriculture to outdoor recreation, technology for the home, and medicine. The exhibits reached scientists, educators, government leaders, industrial managers, intellectuals, artists, and the average worker in some 25 different cities—from the cosmopolitan centers of Moscow, Leningrad



**Photography USA exhibit guides in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1977. See if you can find the future diplomats in this photo, among them Mike Hurley, Philippe DuChateau, Howard Clark, Dolly Harrod (Commerce), John Aldriedge, and Tom Robertson.**



COURTESY OF MIKE HURLEY



1959 American National Exhibition **Moscow** • 1961 Plastics USA **Kiev, Moscow, Tbilisi** • 1961 Transportation USA **Volgograd, Kharkov** • 1962 Medicine USA **Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad** • 1963 Technical Books USA **Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev** • 1963-64 Graphic Arts USA **Alma-Ata, Moscow, Yerevan, Leningrad** • 1964-65 Communications USA **Leningrad, Kiev, Moscow** • 1965 Architecture USA **Leningrad, Minsk, Moscow** • 1966 Hand Tools USA **Kharkov, Rostov-na-Donu, Yerevan** • 1967 Industrial Design USA **Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad** • 1969-70 Education USA **Leningrad, Kiev, Moscow, Baku, Tashkent, Novosibirsk** • 1972 Research and Development USA **Tbilisi, Moscow, Volgograd, Kazan, Donetsk, Leningrad** •

1973-74 Outdoor Recreation USA **Moscow, Ufa, Irkutsk, Yerevan, Kishinev, Odessa** • 1975-76 Technology for the American Home **Tashkent, Baku, Moscow, Zaporozhye, Leningrad, Minsk** • 1976-77 Photography USA **Kiev, Alma-Ata, Tbilisi, Ufa, Novosibirsk, Moscow** • 1976 USA 200 Years **Moscow** • 1978-79 Agriculture USA **Kiev, Tselinograd, Dushanbe, Kishinev, Moscow, Rostov-na-Donu** • 1987-89 Information USA **Moscow, Kiev, Rostov-na-Donu, Tbilisi, Tashkent, Irkutsk, Magnitogorsk, Leningrad, Minsk** • 1989-91 Design USA **Donetsk, Kishinev, Dushanbe, Alma-Ata, Novosibirsk, Volgograd, Baku, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk**

SOURCE: DATA FROM STATE.GOV ARCHIVE

LUCIDITY INFORMATION DESIGN, LLC



**The Photography USA brochure, at 64 pages, was given to each visitor as they left the exhibit, along with a pin called a *znachok*. The brochure always featured a greeting from the current U.S. president inside the front cover. Right: The Agriculture USA exhibit brochure.**

(now St. Petersburg), and Kiev (now Kyiv) to the far reaches of Tashkent, Novosibirsk, and Vladivostok.

Some 20 million Soviet citizens saw the exhibitions and enjoyed the opportunity to speak openly with the young Russian-speaking American guides, who candidly discussed the basic values and beliefs of American society. Approximately 300 Americans worked as guides in this historic outreach effort. Many went on to careers in diplomacy, business, law, academia, and the arts where their

language skills and overseas experience were a plus.

The primary outreach to the people of the Soviet Union, the exhibitions dramatically illustrated how cultural exchange can be the starting point for increased understanding and more constructive relationships between citizens of the world. The program, which also included less well-known Soviet exhibits to the U.S., required the participation of people from all spheres of American life and was only possible through the close cooperation of the former United States

Information Agency (USIA), the American private sector, and the intrepid guides who brought the exhibits to life.

The experience of being a guide, and being connected to the exhibits, was life-changing for all those who participated. In addition to becoming more fluent in Russian, they also came to understand the Soviet Union in a way few others could in those years. And like A-100 orientation classes who enter the Foreign Service together, many of the exhibit guide cohorts from different exhibits remained in touch, some for decades and until today.

We want to thank all the former guides who shared their reflections with us: John Beyrle, Rose Gottemoeller, John Herbst, Mike Hurley, Laura Kennedy, Allan Mustard, Jane Picker, Tom Robertson, and Kathleen Rose. And special thanks to Ambassador John Beyrle for assisting with reaching out to this outstanding group and sharing his collection of exhibit pins.

In the following, the nine former exhibit guides mentioned above reflect on their experiences and the significance of the program. Seven of the nine went on to careers in the Foreign Service, and six became ambassadors.

The pieces appear in chronological order according to the exhibit dates. Each guide wrote in response to a set of prompts from the *Journal*:

- When were you an exhibit guide, and for which exhibit?
- What were your in-going instructions? Was there a basic script for your engagements?
- How much of a priority was countering disinformation?
- How did audiences react? What kinds of questions did they ask?
- How did you establish credibility/rapport with your audiences?
- Please describe what was most memorable and striking about your experience.



COURTESY OF JOHN BEYRLE

Each exhibit had a small pin (*znachok*) that was given out as a souvenir with the exhibit brochure as attendees left the exhibit. Pictured here are the small pins (1" diameter), along with the outer ring. Each exhibit also had a big pin (*bolshoi znachok*, or "BZ") worn by each guide as a badge. The two BZs in the middle are from the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow and 1989-1991 Design USA. These were sought after as prize souvenirs. Soviets had a long tradition of trading pins (*znachki*).

- What were the expected/anticipated outcomes of this engagement? Any unexpected or unanticipated outcomes?
- What were your primary difficulties as a guide, and how did you overcome them?
- What insights and lessons can we take from the exhibits experience to address today's influence challenges?

—Shawn Dorman, Editor in Chief

For a full exhibit chronology and interviews with former guides, see the 2009 collection put together by the State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs for the 50th anniversary of the start of the program, archived at <https://bit.ly/Exhibits-50th>. Also see the excellent Fall 2016 *Wilson Quarterly* articles by Izabella Tabarovsky, including photos and interviews with guides from the Photography USA exhibit in Novosibirsk, found at <https://bit.ly/WilsonExhibitsCollection>.

## We Never Felt Like Strangers

Jane M. Picker

Medicine USA / Moscow and Kiev / 1962



Politically it was a period of great tension between our two governments: Gary Powers and his U-2 spy plane had been shot down two years earlier over Russia (and he did not use the poison pill that he had been told to take if captured). It was during our exhibit that the United States ended its moratorium on nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere. The crowds visiting Medicine USA the day after this announcement were unnaturally subdued but recovered within a day or two. The most popular song being sung throughout Russia while I was there was “Do the Russian People Want War?” The answer sung was nyet! Despite the strains, the U.S. Information Agency’s Medicine USA exhibit in 1962 was clearly a success in Moscow and Kiev (now Kyiv, the capital of independent Ukraine), at least from the perspective of the U.S. government.

We exhibit guides had a training session in Washington, D.C., in February before leaving for Moscow. However, as we later realized, we were much too excited to listen very carefully to whatever rules were being read to us. There was certainly no recollection of a basic script of which we were later reminded, including that we should never meet with a Russian citizen more than once. If this was a rule, it was never observed.

As guides we each had very different jobs: Those who were medical doctors were expected to be talking with Russian doctors, while some of us were more likely to be speaking to members of the general public. My job was to demonstrate a mock-up of an American drugstore. Members of the audience would ask me questions and would often joke. For example, a question about the use of rubbing alcohol elicited laughter with the comment, “We would drink it!” A very large mock-up of a toothbrush elicited the question of whether it was meant for the use of elephants. Personal questions were common: Why was I not married? And how large, in square meters please, was the apartment that I lived in back home, and why would I be living in it alone?

There were never any questions raised challenging our credibility. Except for a few professional agitators in the audience (who were overwhelmingly told to be quiet by the rest of the audience), everyone wanted to listen to us and

ask questions. The most striking and unexpected aspect of the experience was the joviality of the crowds, and the requests of those of our own age asking to meet with us after the exhibit closed (which was usually at 7 p.m.), which we all did. Striking, too, was the warm welcome that we always received everywhere from those of our own age. Unwelcome experiences involved being followed in the streets by KGB agents and their attempts to prevent Russian citizens from befriending us. But even strangers would try to help us, like taxi drivers quietly trying to lose KGB cars (easily recognized by their make and radio antenna) that would try to follow us.

The conclusion I drew from my experience was simply that we and the Russians with whom we met never felt like strangers. We were always completely comfortable with one another. A renowned Russian law professor years later contrasted this with his experience with the British lawyers with whom he had interacted for 20 years. When I asked him why he thought he was more comfortable with Americans, he said that we were very much alike in our personalities. As evidence, he said that we would laugh at the same jokes. He did not find this surprising, he said, since it was basically Yiddish humor.

I have returned to Russia many times since 1962, most recently in 2019. Although I have traveled to and lived in a number of countries outside the United States, I feel most at home in Russia. No two peoples in the world are more alike than Russians and Americans.

The conclusion that I draw now from my months with Medicine USA and subsequent visits to Russia is this: We should continue to try to maintain our friendships with old friends still in Russia as well as those who have now left the country. And within the United States we should fight as hard as we can against the culture wars that so many in the U.S. are now trying to promote.

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*Jane M. Picker is a retired American law professor. From 1969 to 2002, she taught international law in Cleveland, Ohio, and also litigated women’s rights cases via the Women’s Law Fund, a nonprofit she helped found. She lives in Sanibel, Florida, where she heads the Russia-U.S. Legal Education Foundation (RUSLEF), a nonprofit that brings Russian law students to study for a year at U.S. law schools that agree to waive tuition for them. Ms. Picker and her late husband, Sidney, founded RUSLEF in 2001.*

## Who Had It Better?

*Tom Robertson*

Technology for the American Home / Zaporozhye, Leningrad, Minsk / 1975-1976



I served as an exhibit guide with Technology for the American Home from September 1975 to March 1976. We were involved in building and taking down the exhibit in the Soviet cities of Zaporozhye, Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and Minsk, as well as in working on the exhibit floor five to six hours a day explaining and answering questions about the exhibit and any and all questions about life in America.

We met in Washington beforehand for a three-week training period. This was to brief the guides, most of whom only had knowledge of the Russian language in common, about American housing and all of its elements. We had architects and builders brief us, and we had sessions on the Russian terms for housing. We also had experts brief us on various statistics about life in America (e.g., average salaries for Americans; costs of items, including higher education and health care; unemployment benefits). We were given printed materials with this information included, as well as long vocabulary lists.

Early on we were assigned two different stands each on the exhibit floor. For each stand, there was a script in Russian that we were encouraged to memorize. In fact, after working a couple of weeks on any stand it would get tiring answering the same questions over and over, so usually we would exchange stands with other guides every few weeks.

Each of the stands had panels with average prices for the various items on display, so that Soviet visitors could see what these would cost the American consumer. We had three kitchens (a country kitchen, a modern kitchen, and the kitchen of the future). For almost all urban Soviets, housing had improved immensely after World War II, with plumbing and electricity; but it still consisted of modest apartments, and the idea of having your own house in the suburbs with an expansive kitchen was simply incredible.

There were no scripts on combating disinformation, just facts and your own personal experience. I recall that my friend and eventual roommate (John Herbst, a future U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan and Ukraine) and I did an Econ 101 tutorial for the other guides, a simple macroeconomic



PAUL SCHOELLHAMER

**After serving in 1975-1976 as an exhibit guide for Technology for the American Home, Tom Robertson was deputy director of the Photography USA exhibit in 1977. Here he is, during that latter assignment, mixing it up with Soviet visitors in Novosibirsk.**

briefing on inflation, GDP, unemployment, and how the U.S. economy worked because most in the group had no background in economics.

Not surprisingly, most of the questions visitors asked weren't directly related to the exhibit but were more generally about life in America. Most Soviets knew from their press about unemployment and the fact that many in the U.S. had limited access to health care, and that college education was "horribly expensive." But they had no context and, of course, were missing critical facts. So we tried to provide that context and those facts.

I think we gained the most credibility by telling our own stories. We told visitors how much each of us was being paid (much more than the average Soviet!), how unemployment benefits and health insurance worked, and how we had

paid, if at all, for our college education. These were often complicated stories: You'd tell them about the different costs between private and state universities, for example, and then you'd tell them how you (and your parents) paid for it—in my case a combination of scholarships, loans, and jobs. It was a long explanation, but crowds of as many as 50 persons would stand there fascinated by the discussion. Then, if they were really interested, they could go to a different guide and hear their story and compare.

And the guides' approaches were often very different. For instance, we would be asked about the war in Vietnam. One guide might say he opposed the war completely and had demonstrated against it in the States; another would say he supported the war as a battle against communism. Soviets had a hard time believing that an American hired by the U.S. government could flatly state that he opposed the war and had fought against it.

I recall that not long after we arrived in Zaporozhye in September 1975, there was an accident at the city hall where scaffolding had come tumbling down, and a couple of people had been killed. We only knew about this because our Russian friends and contacts told us. The next day in the paper there was no mention of the accident, but there

was mention of a train accident somewhere in the United States where 8 people had been injured (but no one was killed). When Soviet visitors would argue that the Soviet media always told the truth, and never shied away from covering a story, that was the case I would mention. People, and not only in Zaporozhye, would nod their heads knowingly and move on.

Over the years I worked with exhibits (1975-1981), my reading of Soviet newspapers and periodicals led me to the conclusion that Soviet propaganda got more sophisticated in reporting on the trials and tribulations of life in America. In 1975 the tale was pretty simple: unemployed Americans with no income, sick Americans with no health care, high school students unable to go to wildly expensive colleges and universities. Over time the stories had to get more sophisticated; they had to mention unemployment benefits, health insurance and free health care, scholarships and loans for poorer students.

Ironically, although the wealth of American society came through, to many Soviets, American life seemed too insecure and too complicated. It was not uncommon for a matronly visitor to listen to our stories and then walk away with the comment, "*U nas luchshe* [We've got it better]!"

What was most memorable about the experience was that so many Soviets saw the exhibits as a meaningful moment in their lives, much as I am sure Americans did in the late 19th century when the circus came to town. It was a part of your life you would never forget. In many cities visitors would come to the exhibits with the brochure and exhibit lapel pin they had gotten years earlier at a previous exhibit. We guides joked among ourselves about being "rock stars," because on the exhibit stand we would command audiences of enormous size. In addition, it afforded us direct access to everyday Russians and their thinking, something I could not get enough of later in postings as a diplomat to Moscow.



ROBERT FEINTON HOUSER

**Tom Robertson suited up to help out on Photography USA, while serving as deputy director for the exhibit.**

It was not uncommon for a matronly visitor to listen to our stories and then walk away with the comment, "*U nas luchshe* [We've got it better]!"

Among the unpleasant experiences we had were those with “crowd controllers” who would monitor visitors who might seem overly friendly with the guides or who might visit the exhibit “too many times.” We heard back occasionally from these visitors that they had been called in by officials or the militia and asked about their behavior, a clear attempt to intimidate them and discourage their engagement with us.

In addition, I recall that in Minsk we would run into “agitators” who we learned had been recruited and coached to ask questions that might embarrass or at least befuddle us. As guides we would note when a number of us would get the same question, posed exactly the same way. In one case we got the same question, with exactly the same words, about remarks President Gerald Ford had made about some declining economic indicator. Only a few of us knew enough about the economy that we could answer and explain what it, in fact, meant. With guides who could not address the question, the agitator would then dismiss the guide as simply a propagandist who was only trying to pull the wool over the visitors’ eyes.

Looking back, the exhibits were an effective tool: They gave Soviet citizens a more nuanced appreciation for life in the United States and countered disinformation from the Soviet media about American policies and history. It was one part of a triad of USIA products to counter Soviet propaganda, together with the Voice of America and *Amerika* magazine.

The magazine is now gone, and the radios, including Radio Liberty, have devolved into internet media that are easily blocked by the Russian government. Furthermore, because the wartime generation in Russia has largely died off, the goodwill created by our alliance in World War II is gone today. So providing facts and perspective on life in the United States is not nearly as easy as it was 40 years ago.

One can only imagine how an exhibit discussion, an open and uncensored dialogue, about the Russian invasion of Ukraine might go today! And that’s one reason why it’s hard to fathom the Russian government ever allowing American exhibits to come again.

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*Tom Robertson served with the exhibits division in the U.S. Information Agency from 1975 to 1981, working in the USSR, Central Europe, and Africa. In 1981 he became a Foreign Service officer and served in the State Department and National Security Council, as well as in embassies in Moscow (twice), Bonn, Budapest (twice), and Slovenia, where he was ambassador from 2004 to 2007. His last assignment was as dean of the Leadership and Management School at the Foreign Service Institute, from 2007 to 2010.*

## A Firsthand Look at “Agitprop”

*John Herbst*

Technology for the American Home /  
Zaporozhye, Leningrad, Minsk / 1975-1976



Working as a guide was the second of three steps I took toward becoming a Foreign Service officer focusing on the Soviet Union. This career idea first occurred to me in high school when I read George Kennan’s 1958 book *The*

*Decision to Intervene*. The first step was to attend Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service and take the intensive Russian course in the language school. Studying there for three years and one summer at Leningrad State University gave me a great grounding in Russian.

My planned second step was to get a master’s degree in international affairs. But while a college senior, I read a flyer that offered the opportunity to “travel around the Soviet Union and to be paid money for the privilege”—an advertisement to work on the U.S. Information Agency’s Technology for the American Home exhibit. I put off my plans to attend the Fletcher School, took a job as a legal assistant in New York City, and applied to work at the exhibit. I reported to USIA in Washington, D.C., in August 1975.

That was perhaps the most important decision I ever made. It not only facilitated a career in diplomacy, but it introduced me to my future wife, Nadya Christoff, who was also hired to work the exhibit.

Seven months as an exhibit guide in the Soviet Union turned my solid grounding in Russian into fluency. We spent five hours a day, six days a week for over a month talking to Soviet citizens in each of the three cities where we opened the exhibit.

But experience as an exhibit guide was far more than an excellent language lesson. It also provided a fascinating window into Soviet society. The exhibit comprised rooms in a typical American house. Guides would stand in the rooms to talk about both that room and any other subject the visitors chose to raise. Often these questions would focus on life in the United States, but at times it would also include political issues. This provided all exhibit guides a firsthand look at Soviet “agitprop” (agitation and propaganda). This was the elaborate Soviet program to sell their ideals, policies, and goals at home and abroad.

Naturally that also included undermining the adversaries of the Soviet Union and the messages stemming from those adversaries (the U.S. was adversary number one). While most visitors to an exhibit were simply interested Soviet citizens—and their thirst for unvarnished information about the U.S. was attested by the long lines to get in—government agents were in the crowd to monitor the conversation and at times to ask questions meant to embarrass the U.S.

When guides proved persuasive passing information to the crowds, the Soviets were quick to act. On one occasion in Leningrad, my visitors called into question the veracity of American media. I responded that since their information came from state-controlled media, they were not in a position to make informed judgments. I asked if they knew that during Stalin’s time, the Soviet Union suffered from a cult of personality. When they responded affirmatively, I said that, of course, during the cult of personality, the Soviet media did not reveal it, but in fact contributed to it. They agreed. What, I asked, had changed in their media to prevent dissemination of bad information today? This prompted a protest from the Soviet side of the exhibit that I was spreading anti-Soviet propaganda.

My future wife, Nadya, provoked more rigorous countermeasures from government agents. She was one of two native speakers of Russian in our group, and she had a

background that contradicted Soviet narratives about the dismal lot of poor people in the United States. Her grandparents had fled Bolshevik Russia, and her parents moved to the U.S. shortly after World War II. Her father died when she was young; and she, her mother, and two siblings lived in straitened circumstances. But, as she explained to the crowd, she went to college on a full scholarship. In Minsk, our minders decided that they could distract her by approaching in groups and shouting hostile questions. When we noticed this, we began to pay attention to her stand, and guides who were not on duty would come to help her when she was besieged with questions.

Working the exhibit only increased my interest in the U.S. Foreign Service. I started grad school the year I came back from the Soviet Union, took the Foreign Service exam my second year at Fletcher, and joined the Foreign Service 18 months later. At that time, the Foreign Service did not encourage new officers to take their first assignment in a familiar location. So my first assignment was to Saudi Arabia, followed by a stint on the Israeli desk. I made it to the Soviet Union on assignment three, working in Embassy Moscow’s political section. Things worked out.

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## Getting to Know the Real USSR

*Rose Gottemoeller*

Photography USA / Kiev, Alma-Ata / 1976



I was a U.S. Information Agency guide on the Photography USA exhibit from June to December 1976. The first city we opened in was Kiev (now Kyiv, capital of independent Ukraine). I was terrified. Although I had studied Russian at Georgetown University and could handle dialogue in the classroom, I had rarely encountered native Russian speakers “in the wild.” I didn’t know how well I would perform speaking with hundreds of them every day, in the exhibit hall and on the streets.

However, as anyone knows who studies a foreign language, the best way to get good at it is to speak with hun-

dreds of native speakers every day, or to get a lover. I never got a lover—we weren’t supposed to go that far in our cultural exchange—but I did speak Russian for hours every day at the exhibit and far into the evening. During that period, young people were very curious about our small band of Americans, and they wanted to meet with us after hours, to walk in the park, to sit by the river drinking beer, to take us to one of the few nightspots then operating in Kiev. Some of them even cooked me dinner—I remember one young man who had remarkable eyes, one blue and one green. He cooked me a pan of fried potatoes served up with shots of vodka. It took me a while to realize that meal was probably all he had.





ROBERT FENTON/HOUSEER

The November 7 Revolution Day parade in Alma-Ata, 1976.

Kiev was also the city where I first realized that Ukrainians are distinct from Russians, with their own nationality. In the 1970s, the solidity of the Soviet empire was not much questioned in the West. We tended to use the homogenized term “Soviets” to describe the citizens of the USSR. I give the USIA and the U.S. government credit that they did not accept that idea and always tried to send along at least one guide who spoke the language of the Soviet republic where we were stationed. In Kiev, her name was Elie Skoczylas, and she was a wonderful personality, lively and confident, not at all afraid to take on all comers.

I didn’t understand Ukrainian, but I loved to watch Elie on the exhibit floor. She gave as good as she got and evidently was plenty entertaining, because before too long she had huge crowds of up to 100 people gathered around her. By contrast, I don’t think that I, speaking Russian, ever gathered more than 30. Waves of laughter would rise around Elie as she evidently commented on everything, told jokes and stories, and pushed back against security service provocateurs who tried to heckle her.

Pretty soon, travelers were coming from western Ukraine, from Lviv and the regions around it, to visit the exhibit and talk with Elie. On one memorable, hot Sunday (no air conditioning in those days), the line stretched for a mile outside the exhibit hall and many of them were coming to hear Elie. At that point, I understood fully that Ukrainians are not Russians, a fact that they registered clearly in their vote for independence from the USSR some 15 years later.

On Dec. 1, 1991, 90 percent of Ukrainians voted in favor of independence with 84 percent of the electorate participating.

The results made sense to me after my exhibit experience in 1976. Wherever Elie Skoczylas is, I am grateful to her for bringing it home to me so early.

It was in our second city, Alma-Ata (now Almaty), that I realized the Soviet Union was more fragile than I thought. By the time we arrived there, winter was soon to be setting in, and a very cold and snowy winter it was. It didn’t help that the exhibit was set up in an ice rink. Of course, the ice had been melted and water drained away, but the heating system was weak, and the concrete floor might as well have been ice. The sensation I remember most from our time there was unrelenting cold.

I did enjoy the beauty all around us, though. We arrived in October at the height of the apple harvest, when the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains were golden and full of apple orchards. Alma-Ata means “father of apples,” and the origin of the species, the first apple trees, are supposed to have come from the region. The markets were stuffed with the most delicious bright red apples. What none of us realized was that with no cold storage, within a week or two, they had disappeared from sale. No more apples. We always could find kimchi, however, what the locals called *Koreiskiy salat*—Korean salad. It turns out Koreans had come to Kazakhstan to work in the timber industry, so there was quite a large population of them in Alma-Ata.

I had rarely encountered native Russian speakers “in the wild.” I didn’t know how well I would perform speaking with hundreds of them every day.



COURTESY OF JOHN BEYRLE

**A typical crowd at the Photography USA exhibit. Inside the dome in Novosibirsk, June 1977.**

We set up the exhibit in a snowstorm and opened in early November, just in time for the Nov. 7 Revolution Day celebration. Of course, we got the day off and were offered the chance to sit in a grandstand with local dignitaries to watch the parade. It was cold and snowing hard, so I opted instead to roam along the parade route, knowing that I could escape inside if it got too unbearable.

At some point, I was standing on top of a snowbank watching the parade go by when a group of World War II veterans holding signs of Politburo members hove into sight. When they got to my snowbank, one of them, holding a portrait of Leonid Brezhnev, signaled to the others. “*Khvatit uzhe* [Enough already],” he said, and shoved Leonid headfirst into the snowbank. The others followed suit with their placards, and then they clambered over the snow and headed off into the storm. I can’t swear that they pulled out a bottle of vodka on their way, but I wouldn’t be surprised.

That is the day I realized that the Soviet Union was not so sturdy and homogenous as I had been led to believe

during my studies back in the United States. When Kazakhstan exploded in student riots in December 1986, among the first as the USSR began to melt down, I was not surprised. I remembered that snowbank 10 years earlier and heard in my mind the old man say, “*Khvatit uzhe.*”

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## Agitators Abound

Mike Hurley

Outdoor Recreation USA, Photography USA, USA 200 Years /  
Yerevan, Kishinev, Odessa, Tbilisi, Ufa, Novosibirsk, Moscow / 1973-1977



My first visit to the Soviet Union was in 1972 as a college student participating in the summer Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) program to study Russian language in Leningrad. Language immersion in Leningrad paved the way for my guide experience with USIA's exhibits program (1973-1977). I experienced three different exhibits as a guide: Outdoor Recreation USA in Yerevan, Kishinev (now Chisinau), and Odessa; Photography USA in Tbilisi, Ufa, Novosibirsk, and Moscow; and USA 200 Years in Moscow.

The training in Washington prior to an exhibit was primarily about the technical side of the theme: photography, outdoor recreation, and a thorough grounding in the U.S. Constitution for USA 200 Years. It included pointers on how to engage Soviet audiences (e.g., don't provoke with ques-

tions about Soviet atrocities), but I don't believe there was ever a "script" or rules that restricted our ability to speak our own minds. This lack of rigid instructions surely was one of the important aspects of our ability to make points with the Soviet audiences. We actually believed what we were saying.

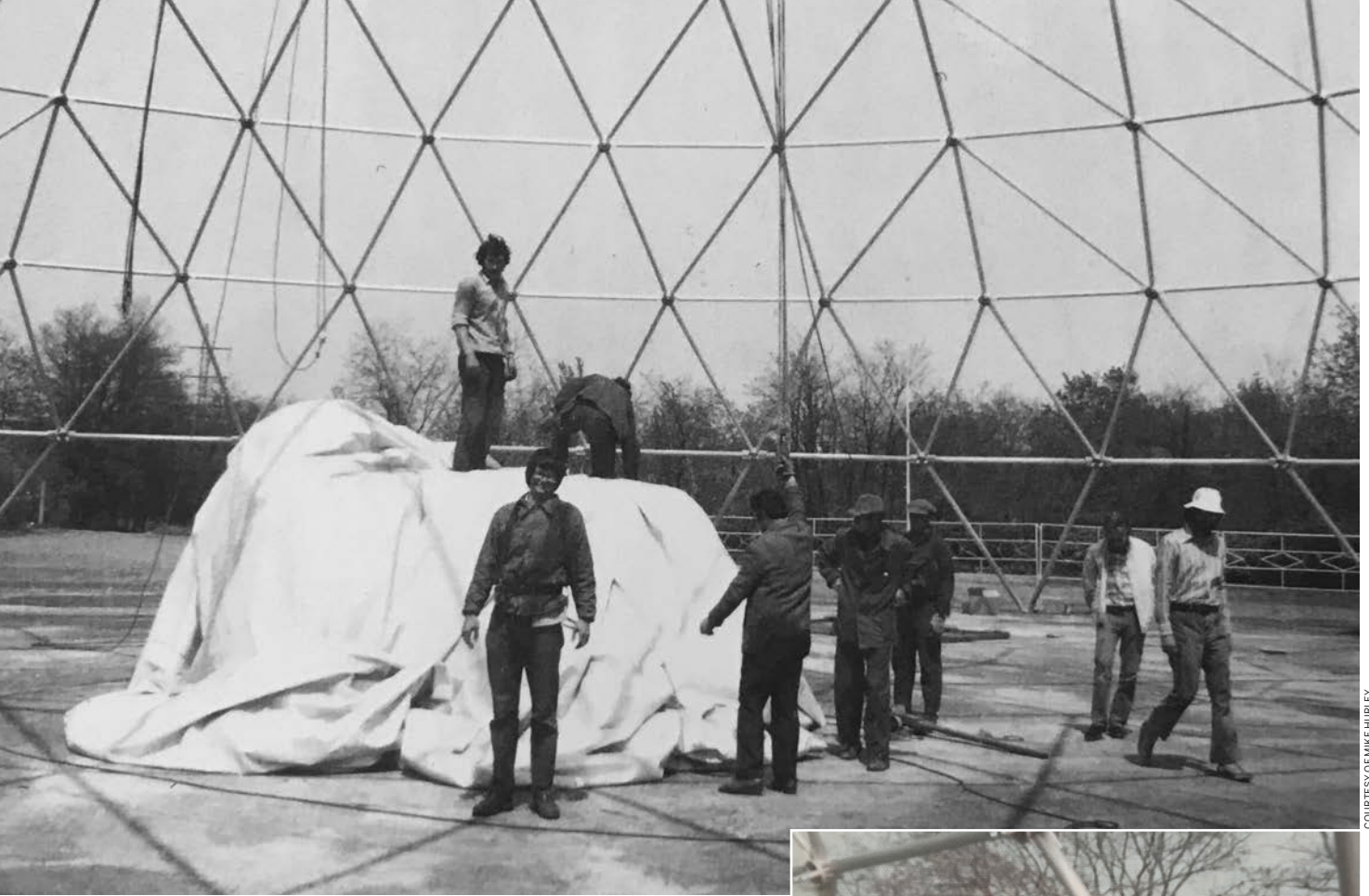
We were often confronted with agitators whose job it was to ask us pointed questions. The exhibits were visited by 10,000 people per day. As a non-native speaker, I found this emotionally and physically draining, so the added provocation compounded the encounter. Taking a "warts and all" position, however, was part of the strength of our presentations. I did not disagree directly with an interlocutor, but rather tried to explain the context of their questions.

They'd ask things like, "Why do you hate Black people?" "Why do Americans eat out of garbage cans?" "Why are you



Exhibit guide Mike Hurley on the fishing stand at the Outdoor Recreation exhibit in Yerevan (now the capital of independent Armenia), 1973.

COURTESY OF MIKE HURLEY



COURTESY OF MIKE HURLEY

oppressing people around the world?” I found this early training to be of great use in my subsequent 30-year Foreign Service career.

An early formative experience was arguing with ideologues in the Soviet Union, people who say they believe something because their ideology explains reality in ways they might not have experienced. In Leningrad I asked one of my Russian teachers how she could be an atheist if she could not obtain a Bible. What came back were various quotes from Lenin. At one of the exhibits, a Soviet argued thus: “Of course North Korea is democratic—just look at the full name of the country, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” Recalling early encounters like these helps me understand U.S. politics today, where people with different political points of view often find opposing views anathema.

Although we did not think of ourselves as overtly political, the Soviet security apparatus surely did.

A decade later, as a U.S. Embassy Moscow employee from 1987 to 1990, I saw a completely different aspect of misinformation on the exhibit floor. I visited a few of the exhibits in cities I had scouted for the program. There were far fewer unpleasant agitators; and, in fact, the issue was almost completely reversed. The same number of curious visitors came through the exhibits, but they would often ask leading questions that had to be dealt with differently. Someone would ask, e.g., “Isn’t it true that anyone in the U.S. can buy 25 pairs of jeans (a much sought-after commodity in the

Soviet Union) at any time?” Well, yes, but few people would find that practical. The questioner was trying to impress upon his fellow visitors that the U.S. is a country of great abundance. Once again, it was important to give some context so our visitors would have a realistic idea about the U.S.

Although we did not think of ourselves as overtly political, the Soviet security apparatus surely did. There were



COURTESY OF MIKE HURLEY

**Mike Hurley, other exhibit guides, and local engineers building the geodesic dome in Odessa (now part of independent Ukraine) for the Outdoor Recreation exhibit, 1974.**

numerous articles in the media warning local citizens that the guides were somehow dangerous and up to no good. They were especially hard on our local guides in non-Russian areas such as Georgia and Moldova. We were sometimes followed by *druzhiniki*, watchers who threatened some kind of retribution against families of individuals we were trying to date. Dating usually consisted of walking along the river, as there was very little else to do.

That we were able to see things with our own eyes as guides was crucial to debunking myths about Soviets and, later, about Russians. I learned early that there was never going to be “a level playing field”—that is, if we played nice with the Russians, they would respond in kind—and that it was naive to think so. Russians are wonderful people and have a rich culture and abundant resources, but subsequent work in the region solidified my early impressions that they seem to need an “other.”

Someone asked me recently if I thought that things are worse now in Russia than in Soviet times, and whether we might do any of the old exchanges or cultural programs to ease tensions. On the whole, it’s worse now in Russia, but not quite Stalinesque (people do seem to fall out of windows, but wholesale murder of political dissidents is not the norm). At least in Soviet times starting in the 1950s, the Soviets saw a purpose in displaying their advances in science and culture. We were the enemy, but there seemed to be some sense to engaging us, perhaps handing us the rope to hang ourselves. That doesn’t exist today.

Today we’re still the enemy, but the sense of engaging us to score their own points is gone. Today, with President Vladimir Putin, there is a former KGB officer, a *silovik* (a member of one of the various security services), converted to a Russian imperialist in charge in what he sees as a winner-take-all existential struggle. The U.S. government should not stop trying to engage the Russians through our cultural and exchange programs, but with Russia passing laws to label all organizations that administer such programs foreign agents, I’m not holding my breath.

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*Michael Hurley joined the Foreign Service with the U.S. Information Agency in 1985, and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Moscow (three times), Surabaya, and Budapest. As an information officer in Embassy Moscow’s Press Office (1987-1990), Hurley advanced the Information USA and Design USA exhibits. Later, he was the chief architect of a two-year celebration of culture in the U.S., raising \$2 million in the private sector in Russia to create “American Seasons in Russia” (2011-12). Hurley retired from the Foreign Service in 2015.*

## Excellent Exposure

**Kathleen Rose**

Photography USA /  
Ufa, Novosibirsk, Moscow / 1977



COURTESY OF KATHLEEN ROSE

**A Polaroid print of exhibit guides Kathleen Rose and John Beyrle taken by a fellow guide on the floor at Photography USA in Novosibirsk, 1977.**



I was a guide on the second half of Photography USA in 1977. At that time there was a bit of a lull in the Cold War, known as *détente* in the West and *razryadka* in the Soviet Union. There had been successful SALT talks, a joint U.S./

USSR space mission, and a number of cultural initiatives. That is not to say there were not still significant disagreements over conflicts around the world, but there was some relaxation of tensions between the late sixties and 1977, and that is how it felt to me on the exhibit. There were still visitors who wanted to spar with us on what was wrong with America, but it was always possible to defuse the situation and to get the crowd on your side.

The first city we opened in was Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan in the Ural Mountains. Ufa was close to a thousand miles east of Moscow, but it seemed like it was on another planet. I had been a student in Moscow and Leningrad in 1972 but had never been to a provincial Soviet city that saw few, if any, tourists. Ufa had hosted a U.S. Information Agency exhibit five years earlier, but other than that it had seen few foreigners. I remember that the hotel we stayed in still had the smell of recent varnish with a top



PAUL SCHOELLHAMER

**Kathleen Rose talking with Photography USA exhibit visitors.**

note of insecticide. They had clearly gone to some trouble to make things presentable for the visiting exhibit.

There is an apocryphal quote attributed to Andy Warhol that says something to the effect that everyone should have the experience of being famous for 15 minutes. That is a little of what it was like to be an American guide in a city where few people had any expectation of coming face to face with someone from the United States. I found the crowds to be mostly friendly, hungry for information, and fascinated with the exotic American guide creatures in their midst.

I was asked by visitors if the guides were picked for their intact white teeth. People were surprised that we had gotten to our mid- to late-20s and beyond without acquiring any metal teeth. Another day I was asked if American women could have babies in five months.

The questioner probably figured that Americans were so efficient at everything else that we must have been able to streamline childbirth, as well.

In all three cities we worked, the people I interacted with were dubious about the American “melting pot” and very interested in guide ethnicity. I would tell them I was 100 percent American, but that did not satisfy them. They would persist, “But what is your origin?” When I told one Russian visitor that my father was Greek, he replied, “Yes, I saw a hint of the East [*namyok vostoka*] in your face.” He promptly followed that up with “I want to talk to a real American!” and headed over to the guide next to me who was a WASP poster child.

During our training in Washington, D.C., we were given a lot of exposure (pardon the pun) to photography of all kinds and were provided with an extensive vocabulary list of photographic terms. At the same time, we were told that Soviet visitors would be most interested in talking about social, cultural, and political issues.

I found that while many of the questions we got were not about photography, there was actually a great deal of interest in detailed information about it. I thought that I was prepared to talk about amateur photography because I had spent a lot of time taking photographs with an SLR and printing my own photos in a darkroom. But I wasn’t prepared for many of the questions, including questions about the formula for the developer D76. It turned out that not only



PAUL SCHOELLHAMER

**Kathleen Rose talking with Soviet press and officials at the exhibit opening for Photography USA.**

did Soviet amateur photographers not have access to a store that could print their photos, they had to mix their own darkroom chemicals.

In Novosibirsk, I was asked to explain in detail the 12-step process by which an image becomes a print in a Polaroid camera. At every photo stand I worked on, there was a hunger for that kind of detailed information. At one point I asked a visitor why he was asking so many technical questions. He said that it was his impression that in America we all swam in this vast sea of available information and wide-ranging opinions, and that we took it all for granted. In the USSR, he explained, information was rare and precious, and he was always hungry for more.

Every USIA exhibit was a spectacular and compelling display that got across the message that America was a pretty amazing place. I certainly didn't dispute that, but I decided early on that I also wanted to be honest and engage with visitors on some of the more difficult aspects of living in a relatively free and open society. I talked about race issues. I talked about gun violence. I talked about some of the disadvantages of an agricultural system that did a phenomenal job of trucking produce vast distances, but bred tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables that were sturdier than they were tasty.

I often had repeat visitors. One time a young man who had come to my stand on a number of occasions called out from the back of the crowd: "Every day you criticize your country, and the next day you are still here. We are so impressed!" I had gone out of my way to be honest and truthful about the pros and cons of life in America and to not just spout propaganda. It was pretty ironic that my candor turned out to be some powerful propaganda, at least to that young man.

Over the decades, the USIA exhibits were a feast for the senses and a source of valuable information. Wonderful as the exhibits were, there was no doubt that the Russian-speaking American guides were a major draw and were very effective at building bonds with the millions of Soviet citizens who came to the exhibits. In my view, these interactions were not only transformative for the visitors but for the



**Kathleen Rose (center) on the Polaroid stand with future FSO Kaara Ettesvold (to Rose's right, engaging with visitors) in Novosibirsk, 1977.**

American guides, as well. Back then Americans didn't have a lot of opportunities to meet citizens of the USSR face to face. It was certainly a powerful and moving experience for me to get to make real connections with the exhibit visitors, and those memories have stayed with me for more than 50 years.

I worked as a guide in the time before the World Wide Web, when information (and disinformation) was not as accessible as it is now. Even though it is a very different world today, I believe that the power of those face-to-face connections has not diminished. It may no longer be practical to resurrect traveling exhibits, but I do hope that in the future there will be more opportunities for cultural exchanges between the people of our two countries, as challenging as that appears to be now.

It was pretty ironic that my candor turned out to be some powerful propaganda.

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*Kathleen Rose worked on a U.S./USSR net assessment project at the Tempo Center for Advanced Studies, before joining the Photography USA exhibit in 1977. After returning from the exhibit, she worked as an interpreter for Soviet groups visiting Washington, D.C., as well as interpreting for Russian visitors at the Smithsonian, the Folklife Festival, the National Gallery of Art, and several educational organizations. In addition, she resumed teaching yoga at a number of government and private venues around the Washington area until she and her husband, Paul Schoellhamer (who accompanied her when she was an exhibit guide), moved back to California in 2007. Since 2007, they have run an organic avocado farm.*

## Tapping an Intense Interest in America

*Allan Mustard*

Agriculture USA / Kishinev, Moscow, Rostov-na-Donu / 1978-1979



From October 1978 to June 1979, I was an exhibit guide for Agriculture USA. The exhibit director was Tom Craig, deputy director was Tom Robertson, John R. Beyrle was general services officer, and information officer was Jocelyn Greene.

I was on the second half, which visited Kishinev (now Chişinău, capital of independent Moldova), Moscow, and Rostov-na-Donu. My assignments were the milking parlor stand, with a horrible dummy cow covered in flower-patterned fabric, and as an interpreter in the library. The only script we had was a canned speech we had to memorize related to our specific stand on the exhibit, which we used for opening day ceremonies when dignitaries walked through.

Our instructions going in were to be ourselves, and to express our opinions freely. We had a two-week crash course in agriculture organized by the University of Illinois,

which for the guides with no farm or ag background proved very useful. I was mostly familiar with dairying, so learning about Midwest agriculture—corn and soybeans—was useful. After that training, we were pretty much on our own, but we always had Tom Robertson, John Beyrle, and Jocelyn Greene, who were experienced former guides, to go to for advice.

Maybe a maximum of 10 percent of the questions were rooted in disinformation. Some of them came from professional agitators we assumed were employees of the KGB. Audiences asked all kinds of questions: How much does food cost in America? How much do you earn? Do you have brothers and sisters? What do your parents do for a living? What kind of music is popular in America? Very basic stuff.

Because it was an agricultural exhibit—and many Russians in the 1970s had private plots, and if they were not



COURTESY OF JOHN BEYRLE

Three Agriculture USA exhibit guides in Rostov-na-Donu in 1979. From left: Allan Mustard, Mark Bloom, and Richard Vogen.



themselves involved in production knew somebody who was—we got lots of questions about agriculture. A couple that stick in my memory were about herd yields, the average volume of milk produced per cow in the United States, and whiskey. When I told Soviets that the U.S. herd average was 5 metric tons of milk per cow per year, they accused me of lying. I would then reply that the United States had only the second-highest average herd yield in the world, that Japan was number one, which was true. Soviet herd yields were less than half that.

In Kishinev, a rather ragged fellow dressed in a typical cotton batting coat asked me: “Just what is American whiskey?” The crowd laughed and hooted at him, but he turned to face them and said, “I rode a bus from Odessa all night to come here to ask this question, and now this young man will answer me.”

He was very dignified in his ragged clothing. I did my best to describe corn sour mash Bourbon whiskey to him. If questions got too technical for a guide, the guide could give the visitor a library pass—in each city we had three specialists, usually university professors from the United States, who could answer technical questions.

We kept a weird question list. One of the women guides was asked where she got her teeth. I was once asked why I speak Russian “almost well” (I started studying Russian too late in life to be a native speaker, so have an accent and make stylistic errors).

We established rapport with our audiences by conceding that America is not number one in every category. They were shocked that we would admit that. Japan had higher herd yields in dairying. Other countries had higher yields in crops. You could always find categories where we could point out that we’re good, but some other countries are better. That stunned visitors.

The first days were rough, but in time we got better at knowing what statistics we needed to memorize to get our points across—Soviets loved numbers. I had an easier time establishing credibility than most other guides because I had grown up on a dairy farm and had been in 4-H, so I actually knew a fair amount about dairying and could talk knowledgeably about it. One agitator put his foot in his mouth when he loudly declared to the crowd, “He doesn’t know anything about agriculture,” then ended up being laughed at by the audience when I showed that I did. That said, you couldn’t reach everybody, and some people went away having swallowed Soviet propaganda whole.

The deeply intense interest in America on the part of Soviets was the most striking aspect of my experience. Most of them knew they were not getting the whole story or the real story from Soviet state-controlled media, but they didn’t know what the story was. The exhibit was an extremely rare opportunity to converse with a real, live American who spoke Russian, even if KGB minders were observing the entire time. The Soviet information space was dominated by state-generated propaganda, not unlike Putin’s Russia today, with real information coming mostly from shortwave radio broadcasts by VOA, Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle, and BBC World Service, which were jammed. So the curiosity was intense.

We were there to give our version of what America is. You knew you had won an argument when the Soviet interlocutor said, “*U nas luchshe* [We have it better here]!” That was grasping for the last straw.

In really heated moments, if a visitor was being nasty or obnoxious, I might ask, “Where do people immigrate? How many immigrants come to the Soviet Union, and how many to the USA?” That was a hard question for the agitators to deal with, because everybody knew that Soviet Jews were immigrating by the hundreds at that point, some to Israel, but many to the United States, and virtually nobody in those days immigrated to the USSR.

In one case, a visitor asked if I could read Russian, not only speak it. I assured him I could read Russian. He asked what Russian authors I liked to read, and I replied, “Nobel Prize laureates.” He smiled, “Ahh, Sholokhov!” to which I replied, “Also Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn.” Even though *Dr. Zhivago* and *The Gulag Archipelago* had been banned, everybody had at least heard of them if not had a chance to read a *samizdat* (clandestine) copy of them, and the crowd around me burst out laughing.

In general, people were simply curious, and most were friendly. There were, of course, hard-core communists who were anti-American, but you simply had to take them in stride. At one point I was arguing with a fellow who claimed the USSR was much freer than the United States, so I asked him how many communist parties the Soviet Union had. “One, of course,” he answered. “We have it better,” I said. “We have three: the CPUSA headed by Gus Hall, the Revolutionary Communist Party headed by Bob Avakian, and the

Our instructions going in were to be ourselves, and to express our opinions freely.



ALLAN MUSTARD; INSET: JOHN BEYRE

**The Soviet army belt traded for a U.S. flag patch to Allan Mustard in Kishinev (today's Chisinau, Moldova). He wears the belt today as a Cold War trophy. Inset: the large bolshoi znachok guide badge from Agriculture USA.**

Socialist-Workers Party.” That dumbfounded Soviets, that we could have three communist parties, and that they were allowed to stand for election.

On impulse, before leaving the United States, I bought a bunch of American flag patches. I stitched one on my denim baseball cap and carried a few in my shirt pocket. Periodically someone would come up and ask how to get one of those patches, and I would say that I had a few to swap for souvenirs. One fellow swapped me a flag patch for his Soviet army belt, not just the buckle, but also the leather belt he had worn as a soldier. Another swapped a collection of matchboxes commemorating Soviet farm tractors and implements, and one fellow swapped me a catalog from a farm machinery exposition.

Every exhibit visitor received a button and an exhibit brochure. A lot of visitors loved anything related to America,

which to them was a mysterious country that evoked enormous curiosity and, to a certain degree, envy.

Many years later, in the 2000s, while in Rostov-na-Donu on embassy business, I met the executive of an agribusiness firm who remembered me from the exhibit in that city. He was a little boy in the 1970s, and he distinctly remembered the tall guide in a jean jacket and denim cap with an American flag patch on it talking about dairying. So we left some impressions.

As for unanticipated outcomes, I didn’t expect to be recruited into the Foreign Service, but in Moscow one evening at the embassy’s Marine Corps bar, one of the agricultural attachés, Jim Brow, suggested that I join the Foreign Agricultural Service. He said, “You know agriculture and speak good Russian; you should come work for us. You just need a master’s degree in agricultural economics.” I got my M.S. in 1982 and started work at FAS in April of that year.

As far as lessons for today are concerned, we should bring exhibits back. President Carter canceled the exhibits after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the program was only restarted late in the Reagan administration for two more exhibitions. Then the program died, and USIA was absorbed into State Department, which was a mistake. We closed the regional programs office in Vienna that served our posts in the Soviet bloc.

USIA needs to be reestablished, exhibits need to be restarted, and Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty need a big boost in both funding and staffing. These programs were hugely successful in countering Soviet propaganda. We know how to do it, but we’ve unilaterally disarmed ourselves in the information war. When the war in Ukraine finally ends, we also need a massive exchange program, ranging from summer work/travel to high school and college academic exchanges, not just Fulbrights for post-docs.

Russians believe what they see with their own eyes, just like everybody else. But because not everybody can visit America or the West, we need exhibits and VOA to reach out to the rest of Russia.

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*Allan Mustard started his Foreign Service career as an FSS-9 guide-interpreter on the U.S. International Communication Agency’s Agriculture USA exhibition (1978-1979) and capped 38 years of public service as U.S. ambassador to Turkmenistan, retiring in 2019 at the rank of Career Minister. A Foreign Service officer with the Foreign Agricultural Service, he served in Moscow (twice), Istanbul, Vienna, Mexico City, and New Delhi, in addition to Washington, D.C. He is currently chairman of the board of American Youth Philharmonic Orchestras, a nonprofit.*

## Developing a Cadre of Russia and Other Area Specialists

Laura Kennedy

Agriculture USA / Kiev, Tselinograd, and Dushanbe / 1978



My 1978 participation as a guide on the Agriculture USA exhibit was a small link in the 50 years of official U.S.-Soviet exchange exhibits. U.S. exhibits garnered huge crowds and even greater word of mouth over the half century

of the program, made famous by the Nixon-Khrushchev “kitchen debate” engineered by William Safire at the 1959 inaugural exhibit. I had thousands of conversations with Soviet citizens over the course of six months in the cities of Kiev (now Kyiv, capital of independent Ukraine), Tselinograd (now Astana, capital of independent Kazakhstan), and Dushanbe (now capital of independent Tajikistan). These were multiplied thousands of times more by my fellow guides over the decades in one of the most successful U.S. government public outreach programs conducted in one of the modern era’s most rigidly controlled countries.

This type of face-to-face public diplomacy may seem obsolete in today’s digital world, but it had extraordinary reach behind that old iron curtain. Because of the Soviet state’s monopoly of information means and its citizens’ skepticism about the veracity of often false official reporting, conversations with these exotic emissaries from the outside world were eagerly traded and amplified privately by Soviet citizens.

When I returned years later to the newly independent states in Central Asia, I met countless citizens (including some who became senior officials in these former Soviet republics) who remembered the exhibits and had saved the little pins we gave out there. We may not have changed minds, but we certainly gave these Soviet citizens a direct sense of the freedom, individuality, and dynamism of American society. Most effectively, the American guides represented a range of backgrounds, spoke without a script, and certainly

exploited their license to speak freely and critically of their own government.

This lack of an official line and the guides’ candor made a distinct impression on our audiences, who were eager to hear our views on all manner of topics, including opinions on the USSR. Of course, many Soviet citizens were hoping to hear validation of their own lives. While I may have been critical of Soviet government policies, I always sought to speak honestly about American shortcomings and find something positive to say about the (often dreary) lives of our citizen hosts (e.g., the richness of host nation culture, the generous hospitality shown us by host nation citizens).

All of us citizen diplomats found our own ways to build rapport with our interlocutors and disarm hostile exchanges. The most effective means of deflecting the officially directed “provocateurs” was by developing a rapport with your audience so that they would turn on the attackers and tell them to “let the young person talk” and “show some hospitality to our guests.” In fact, despite the fact that the Cold War was a hard reality, there was a basic reservoir of popular Soviet interest in their American guests that surely frustrated Soviet propaganda officials. I encountered very little animosity among



COURTESY OF LAURA KENNEDY

**Laura Kennedy demonstrating a seeder to opening day crowds for Agriculture USA in Dushanbe, September 1978. The crowds were scant at first, because many citizens were still doing enforced cotton picking during the all-important harvest.**



JOHN BEYRLE

**The dome that housed Photography USA also housed Agriculture USA in 1978 in Tselinograd. A small provincial town then, today it is Astana, the ultramodern capital of Kazakhstan. The small red, white, and blue structures are grain silos in which agricultural equipment and information were displayed.**

COURTESY OF LAURA KENNEDY



**Agriculture USA exhibit guide work crew in Tselinograd in June 1978. Exhibit guides physically put up and took down the exhibits, which surprised many Soviet visitors. From left: Robin Seaman, Larry Sherwin, R.D. Zimmerman, Laura Kennedy, Lance Murty.**

nonofficial Soviets toward Americans; sadly, that is no longer the case in today's Russia.

In one notable case I remember, the medium was easily as powerful as the message. Our sole Ukrainian-speaking guide in Kiev, as we called it then, made such a powerful impression that Ukrainians flocked from hundreds of miles away to hear him speak their native tongue (the other guides all spoke Russian). The crowds were so intense that visitors daily implored this guide, Walter Lupan, to climb on top of our showpiece Ford pickup truck so that more could hear him. This was an early lesson to me of both Ukrainian nationalism and the intense Soviet neuralgia to it—the guide was declared persona non grata by Moscow.

For someone like me, who later developed a specialty in arms control and nonproliferation, the exhibit also provided early lessons on how the Soviet government sought to instill its views on nuclear weapons in the popular sphere. Soviet “agitprop” (agitation and propaganda) seized on the “neutron bomb” (an enhanced radiation weapon reported to be

under consideration by the U.S. for deployment in Europe), which I (and probably 99.99 percent of American or Soviet citizens) had never heard of before. The Soviet leadership began attacking it as a “capitalist weapon” (because it would rely more on lethal radiation and less on blast, which would theoretically minimize property damage).

This heretofore obscure type of weapon was injected into the questions posed to us by Soviet visitors, although we knew that what they were really interested in were the perennial questions such as what did such and such cost in the U.S., and *nyet neytronnoi bombe* (no to the neutron bomb) became a familiar phrase that still rolls around my head 40 years later! This manufactured outrage (the Soviets themselves were developing these bombs) presaged the massive propaganda campaigns the USSR mounted in Europe in the early 1980s in an attempt to block U.S. intermediate range nuclear deployments.

The nuclear issue leads me to one huge benefit of the exhibits program—the fact that it helped develop a talented cadre of Russian-speaking specialists in Russia and other areas of the former Soviet Union who gained direct experience on both official and popular attitudes and how one could most productively engage or counter disinformation. Former guide Rose Gottemoeller, negotiator of the New START treaty and NATO Deputy Secretary General, springs immediately to mind.

Guides later rose to prominence in a wide array of specializations, ranging from literature professor and international gastronomy expert Darra Goldstein to CNN Moscow Bureau Chief Jill Dougherty, to U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle, and a number of other ambassadors and U.S. government officials. My own early guide experience in Central Asia led me toward a career-long interest in Central

Asia (office director, deputy assistant secretary, and ambassador). Countless numbers of experts in the field emerged from the exhibit guide ranks.

A number of us have long discussed the value of a conference that would bring together generations of guides to explore further lessons learned. Although this has never materialized, a number of books have examined the history of the exhibits, the Carnegie Institution held a conference in Moscow in 2007, and Ambassador (ret.) Ian Kelly undertook an interview project of former guides in

2008. Such a conference still ought to be held; but in the meantime, thanks to the *FSJ* for this look at a major U.S. success story in public diplomacy.

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*Ambassador (ret.) Laura Kennedy, a career FSO, served as chief of mission in Turkmenistan, ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Vienna. She currently serves on various boards, including Foreign Policy for America and the Arms Control Association, and is a member of the Secretary's International Security Advisory Board.*

## Diplomatic Training on the Exhibit Floor

**John Beyrle**

Photography USA / Ufa, Novosibirsk, Moscow / 1977



I served as a guide on the Photography USA exhibit in 1977, when I was 23. For Americans studying Russian language, literature, or history during the Cold War, working on an exhibit in the Soviet Union for six months—and getting paid for it, even at the GS equivalent of minimum wage—was the dream job everyone wanted. For many of us, it opened the door to a career in the U.S. Foreign Service that we might otherwise have missed. For all of us, it was singular experience of an intellectual and emotional intensity that we can still feel vividly, even 50 or 60 years later.

The whole point of the exhibits program was to offer a counternarrative to Soviet propaganda and disinformation about “the West” in general, and the U.S. in particular, through direct personal interaction with ordinary people in the USSR. Everything, from the name and design of each exhibition down to the glossy brochure given out at the exit, was designed to encourage visitors to question the Soviet view of the world, or to reinforce the doubts about the storyline that we knew many of them already had. But the 25-30 guides—the centerpiece of each exhibit—were not trained polemicists. We were young adults in our mid-20s, many fresh out of college, of varied backgrounds, and with unpredictable political views. How could the U.S. Information Agency be sure that we would be persuasive in “telling America’s story,” as a USIA motto put it? And to what extent should our interactions with Soviet visitors follow a script, even a rough one?



PAUL SCHOELLHAMER

**Exhibit guides John Beyrle and Kathleen Rose on the stand at Photography USA in Novosibirsk, 1977. “The awestruck kid looking at the Polaroid photo Beyrle had just taken really conveys the fascination that so many had,” says Kathleen Rose.**

By 1977, when I joined the program, USIA had been designing and sending exhibits to the USSR for nearly 20 years. My exhibit, Photography USA, was the 15th in that series. Recent archival research has uncovered files showing that in the early years of the program during the 1960s, there was internal debate among USIA, the State Department, and other



COURTESY OF JOHN BEVRELE

A typical crowd at the Photography USA exhibit, inside the dome in Novosibirsk, June 1977.

agencies regarding how much latitude the guides should be given to criticize U.S. policy or events—in particular, the Vietnam War and, later, the Watergate scandal. Over time, the experience gained with each new exhibit made it obvious that giving Soviet visitors a chance to see true “free speech” in action was much more valuable than trying to “script” the guides, which would have been difficult to accomplish in any case.

After our group assembled in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1977, we began an intensive month of training designed by USIA to prepare us for what lay ahead. We were given material in Russian to help us describe in detail the photographic equipment or processes we were demonstrating, but the scripts we studied were technical in nature, never political. We also spent time studying lists of typical questions that visitors would be asking, so that we could personalize our responses in describing our educational and family backgrounds, the size and layout of our houses, what we paid for basic goods and services, and many other aspects of daily life back home.

This proved an absolutely essential part of our training because, though many visitors wanted to know the concrete details of how people did photography in America, they were overwhelmingly interested in asking about *us*. For the vast majority of Soviet citizens, who often stood in line for an hour or more to get into the exhibit, this was the first (and for most the only) chance they would have to speak to a real live breathing American who, as a bonus, spoke some approxima-

tion of Russian. We used to joke that USIA could design an exhibit called “Paper Clips USA”—and as long as there were Russian-speaking Americans staffing it, huge crowds were assured.

My experiences on the exhibit, although I didn’t realize it at the time, amounted to my earliest training as a diplomat. The keys to being effective as a guide on the stand or as an FSO making a demarche are basically two, I think. First, you must be a master of the subject matter: inside and

out, backward and forward, until you can speak at length, in detail, and with self-confidence about any aspect of what is at issue. And second, you need to be able to understand the motivations of and demonstrate some empathy toward your interlocutor. As a guide, I found that a bit of humility and humor always helped “humanize” me in the eyes of the crowd (and there was almost always a big crowd, sometimes up to 30-40 people, surrounding us).

Although our pre-departure training in Washington was comprehensive, nothing could prepare us for the stark reality of the job, standing on the floor of the exhibit trying to engage intelligently with the ceaseless stream of visitors, up to 15,000 per day. In my early weeks out on the stand as a guide, it quickly became evident that I was seeing a vast cross-section of Soviet people. Many of the visitors were highly educated, but others clearly were not. Their outlooks ranged from sophisticated or even worldly to naive and crudely provincial. Most interestingly, on the political spectrum, I was engaging every day with both the truest of true believers in the Soviet system, as well as people who were essentially “closet dissidents.” These opposite types sometimes came into prickly contact with each other, right in front of us.

One typical day I was out on the stand trying *not* to be drawn into an ugly argument with someone who kept loudly insisting on his ill-informed views about the many faults of U.S. society. He was, of course, only repeating (and embellishing on) the propaganda that everyone was being fed by the Soviet press; my job was to marshal some facts and

figures and try to speak persuasively in Russian to rebut his claims. This was near the end of a two-hour stretch of similar encounters on the exhibit floor, and I was utterly exhausted mentally—like a boxer in the 12th round of a fight who could barely keep his arms up to prevent being clobbered. My loud friend started off on a new tack, going on about how America was an imperial, colonialist power.

Before I could even begin to refute this, a man standing next to him broke in and started haranguing him: “You know nothing about America! Historically, the United States has always been an *anti*-colonialist nation!” He went on, recounting our early history as a colony, the roots of the Revolutionary War, and later our support for decolonialization after World War II. After the loudmouth moved on, my defender smiled and winked at me in an avuncular way, as if to say, “Don’t worry about that idiot—you and I know the *real* score here.” I never saw him again and have no idea who he was. But it was an unforgettable moment, an early reminder that I was privileged to have a front-row view into a society that was much more complex, deep, and multilayered than most Americans—including, as it turned out, me—understood.

As U.S.-Russian relations worsened over the past decade, even before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, I was sometimes asked if I thought the onset of a new “Cold War” meant we should start thinking about reviving the USIA exhibits program. I think the answer is clearly no. Those exhibits were a product of the unique times that gave birth to them—a highly effective means of giving millions of Soviet citizens a meaningful encounter with a world that was otherwise entirely inaccessible to them. Today, or for now at least, millions of Russians can and do travel freely in what was once “the outside world” on business, vacations, and family visits. Many millions more inside Russia can access streams of information from Russian media outlets that are not controlled by the state. There would thus be little value in sending teams of specialized Americans to Russia (even if we could) to try, at the retail level, to put a more human face on the United States. In a world of global connectivity unimaginable during the Cold War, there are far more sophisticated and effective ways to counter the Kremlin’s mendacious narrative and shine a spotlight on their aggression against Ukraine.

What we *learned* from the exhibits program, and what I think is still relevant to today’s Russia, is that people’s desire for the truth grows in direct proportion to the extent to which the truth is denied them. We need to offer our strongest support for the hundreds of thousands of Russians who now live



COURTESY OF JOHN BEYRLE

**As Embassy Moscow’s deputy chief of mission in 2004, John Beyrle visited Ufa and met two local residents who had attended the Photography USA exhibit there in 1977 and still had the brochure. They estimated close to 100 people had read it over the intervening 27 years; it was still in good shape but had been carefully re-stapled and taped at some point.**

in exile outside Russia—civil society activists and independent media journalists, scholars, and legal experts—who seek a different future for their country, and have both the skill and the will to ensure that the truth continues to reach the largest number of people inside Russia as possible. ■

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*John Beyrle is chairman of the U.S. Russia Foundation. He first visited the USSR in 1976 as a university student in Leningrad before working on the U.S. Information Agency exhibits program (as a guide on Photography USA in 1977, and as logistics director for Agriculture USA in 1978-1979). He joined the Foreign Service in 1983 and served his first tour in Moscow, attending the funerals of Soviet leaders Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, and accompanying Vice President George H.W. Bush to his first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev. Later assignments included the Secretariat staff and the U.S. delegation to the Conventional Arms Forces in Europe arms control negotiation in Vienna.*

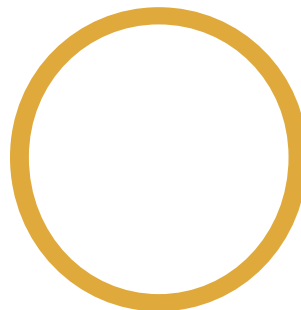
*After the breakup of the Soviet Union, he served on the National Security Council staff, helping design assistance and exchange programs with the newly independent states and leading preparations for the early summit meetings between Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin. He served as ambassador to Bulgaria (2005-2008) and as ambassador to Russia (2008-2012).*

*Amb. Beyrle is married to Jocelyn Greene; the two first met as guides on the 1977 Photography USA exhibition and joined the Foreign Service together as a tandem couple. Also a Soviet/Russia expert, Ms. Greene was an FS information officer with USIA, serving as a cultural and press officer abroad and an exchanges specialist in her Washington assignments. Secretary Hillary Clinton personally presented her with the State Department’s Career Achievement Award when she and her husband retired as FSOs in 2012.*

# Broadcasting Behind the (Opening) Iron Curtain

**The era of open communication following the end of the Cold War has thrown up new, more complex challenges.**

BY MARK G. POMAR



of cultural activities, exchanges, and exhibits. Building on the success of the May-June 1988 Moscow Summit—when President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev final-

On Sept. 26, 1988, Valentin Falin, the chair of Novosti Press Agency, and Charles Z. Wick, director of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), opened the U.S.-USSR Information Talks, a three-day conference in Moscow aimed at expanding free access to information and increasing the number



*Mark G. Pomar, a senior fellow at the Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas, Austin, is the author of Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Potomac Books, 2022). He taught Russian studies at the University of Vermont (1975-1982) and then joined RFE/RL as the assistant director of the Russian Service. He later became director of the USSR Division at the Voice of America and executive director of the Board for International Broadcasting, a U.S. federal agency that oversaw Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. From 1993 to 2008, he was a senior executive and president of IREX, a large U.S. international nonprofit that administers programs in education, civil society, and media, and the founding CEO and president of the U.S. Russia Foundation, a private U.S. foundation based in Moscow, from 2008 to 2017.*



ized the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)—the information talks brought together high-ranking Soviet officials and 67 U.S. government officials and private-sector leaders to begin a new era of communication between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The past 40 years have shown the importance and complexity of U.S.-Russian relations in the area of public diplomacy. After an initial burst of freedom of information, starting in the late 1980s, today's Russia (along with other authoritarian regimes) has again reverted to dictatorial rule, anti-Western rhetoric, and disinformation campaigns.

## A Shaky Start

Despite a general warming of U.S.-Soviet relations, reflected in the initial pleasantries exchanged by Falin and Wick, the plenary session of the U.S.-USSR Information Talks got off to a shaky start. In his opening remarks, Wick immediately raised the question of Soviet disinformation, stating that it should be deplored by everyone professing a belief in *glasnost* (openness) and reform. "Under new thinking," Wick noted in a declassified memcon, "how could the Soviet side knowingly approve the dissemination of such patently false and misleading stories as the alleged invention of AIDS in a U.S. military laboratory, the alleged invention by the U.S. of an ethnic weapon, or the alleged U.S. responsibility for the Jonestown massacre? The continuation of patently false stories when facts are readily available poisons the relationship between our two countries, contributes to the enemy image, and robs leaders of the element of trust."

Soviet disinformation campaigns were a serious point of contention between the U.S. and the USSR, and it was proper for Wick to raise the issue forcefully. As other U.S. officials chimed in with more examples of disinformation, a heated back-and-forth discussion ensued with Soviet officials vigorously denying the charges. But as the plenary session progressed, I began to see moments of honesty. (I was there as an executive of the Board for International Broadcasting.)

Leonid Dobrokhotov, head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, admitted that Soviet scientists had long ago rejected the notion that the United States invented the AIDS virus. Vadim Perfiliev, deputy chief of the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conceded that there were times his department had issued "incorrect information." Those small concessions ensured that the session ended on a positive note and that both sides were able to draw up plans for another round of information talks.

The next day, Steve Forbes, chair of the Board for International

Faced with an aggressive Stalin regime in the late 1940s, the U.S. undertook a comprehensive strategic review of the tools, methods, and institutions needed to successfully wage a Cold War.

Broadcasting; Bruce Porter, the board's executive director; and I met with Valentin Falin to discuss the jamming of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. A longtime Soviet official, who had served in the KGB and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Falin greeted us in a cold and perfunctory manner. There were no pleasantries to exchange, and he seemed visibly uncomfortable sitting down with three representatives of RFE/RL, acting as though he had been sent to deliver a message he did not agree with. His first words caught us by surprise. "We have noticed," he said, taking a long pause, "a distinct improvement in the broadcasts of Radio Liberty." What followed those important words was the usual litany of RL sins: unfair criticism of the Soviet role in Afghanistan, lack of respect for the democratization of Soviet society, and the encouragement of nationalism in the Soviet republics.

As I listened to Falin's criticism, all standard Soviet fare, I felt he was simply going through the motions, reading from a list prepared by his staff. He knew the decision to stop jamming RL had already been made, and he was just the messenger. The world that he and his colleagues had strived to build was crumbling before his eyes. Radio Liberty—vilified for decades, emblematic of a non-communist Russia—was now being treated in Moscow with respect as an important international broadcaster. How awkward that meeting must have been for him, a lifelong party apparatchik and a diehard opponent of *glasnost*.

We dutifully noted his criticism, politely stood our ground regarding specific broadcasts, and reminded Falin that jamming was a violation of international law and contradicted the spirit of Gorbachev's reforms. Falin did not respond, and the meeting ended abruptly. But as we walked out, we all had a sense of jubilation. Just by sitting down with us, Falin communicated that it was only a matter of time before jamming would cease. Knowing that the Soviet authorities had recently approved a VOA news

## The end of all Soviet jamming marked the beginning of a new era for U.S. broadcasting.

bureau, we even wondered if RFE/RL would be able to open its bureau and hire freelance correspondents. It was at that moment that I began to believe that the USSR had indeed embarked on an unprecedented path of reform, and that no one, least of all senior Soviet officials, knew where it would lead.

### A New Era

On Nov. 21, 1988, two months after our Moscow meeting, George Woodard, the director of engineering at RFE/RL, received a call that all jamming had suddenly stopped. “So unbelievable was this development,” Woodard reminisced, “that all I could think of was to keep listening—it must be a mistake. Throughout the night, into the next day, and the days following it was confirmed ... RFE/RL programs were clear of jamming noise.”

The end of all Soviet jamming marked the beginning of a new era for U.S. broadcasting. Within several months, VOA and RFE/RL opened news bureaus and hired freelance correspondents in the Soviet Union. In addition to comprehensive news broadcasts, VOA introduced many new programs that explained the workings of a market economy, a free press, and a modern banking system. It also established “radio bridges” that brought Americans and Russians together to explore the challenges facing a reforming Soviet Union. Significantly, VOA was able to place many of its new programs on local Russian radio stations, thereby increasing its audience reach, and to establish training sessions for young Soviet journalists, helping them to acquire the skills needed for independent professional journalism.

A growing network of freelance journalists throughout the USSR allowed RL to report on local events and review the regional press, making those stories accessible to the entire country. New programs, such as “The Soviet Union and the Nationality Question,” “Baltic Journal,” and “Jewish Culture and Social Life,” included discussions with Western experts on how other societies coped with the complexities of a multiethnic population.

On the cultural front, RL introduced a new program, “Ex Libris,” which presented works by promising young writers. Among the more memorable broadcasts was an interview with an aspiring writer, Svetlana Alexievich, about her new book, *Zinky Boys* (W.W. Norton, 1992), a collection of firsthand

accounts of the war in Afghanistan. The future Nobel laureate noted that the Soviet military tried to suppress her book, but RL gave her the opportunity to address her growing readership directly. Rounding out the slate of new initiatives was a lively program, “Broadway 1775” (the address of RL’s New York bureau), which communicated the dynamism of American life through interviews with Soviet visitors in the United States, reviews of the American press, and timely discussions of political and economic issues of interest to a Soviet audience.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, RFE/RL gained wide public recognition. Newly elected leaders, including Vaclav Havel, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and Boris Yeltsin, praised the broadcasters for promoting human rights during the Cold War. On behalf of the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Poland, Lennart Meri, foreign minister of Estonia (and later, president), nominated RFE/RL for the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, citing its unique contribution to the rebirth of democracy. And in March 1993, Radio Liberty celebrated its 40th anniversary in Moscow with the who’s who of the Russian cultural and political elite, including Mikhail Gorbachev.

The euphoria at the end of the Cold War, however, signaled dangers for the broadcasters. Campaigning on a platform that promised a “peace dividend,” President Bill Clinton proposed to cut the VOA budget and zero out funding for RFE/RL. This radical move caused turmoil on Capitol Hill, especially as leaders in Eastern Europe weighed in, stating boldly that the broadcasts were fundamental to the development of democratic rule. One senator, Joe Biden, took up the cause of international broadcasting, became personally involved, and forged a bipartisan bill—the International Broadcasting Act of 1994—that consolidated all U.S. broadcasters under one Broadcasting Board of Governors. However imperfect that legislation, it saved RFE/RL.

Unlike broadcasting, which saw deep budget cuts, other elements of public diplomacy enjoyed dramatically increased funding. The U.S. Congress passed two major bills—Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Act (1989) and the Freedom Support Act (1992)—that provided the State Department, USIA, and other agencies with more than \$1 billion to assist former communist countries in their transition to democracy. As those countries opened their borders, American NGOs, universities, and associations began to implement many different U.S. government programs, ranging from business training and study tours to the establishment of internet centers in rural libraries.

Of major significance were high school, undergraduate, and graduate programs offering tens of thousands of young people the opportunity to study in the U.S. and even earn American

degrees. So expansive was this funding that USAID set up enterprise funds that invested hundreds of millions of dollars in small and medium-sized businesses with the purpose of teaching Western business practices.

### Today's Challenges

In time, many U.S.-funded programs wound down as East European countries joined the European Union and NATO. In Russia, they continued, albeit on a smaller scale, until 2012, when Putin adopted a harsh, anti-Western stance, accusing American organizations of "brainwashing Russians." Two Russian laws targeting so-called "foreign agents" and "undesirable foreign organizations" led to the closure of U.S. programs. After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin even formally abrogated the 1958 U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchange Agreement that had been renewed annually and served as the basis for joint programming.

In a parallel move, the Kremlin unleashed a vitriolic campaign against international broadcasters, eventually forcing Radio Liberty to suspend its operations in Russia. Again, as in pre-glasnost

times, VOA and RFE/RL became "external broadcasters." They continue to produce outstanding programming, especially about the war in Ukraine, through their joint project, "Current Time," but their access to Russia is limited.

The challenges facing the United States today are more daunting than the ones facing us in the waning years of the Cold War. By the 1980s, communism was a lifeless ideology, the Soviet state inefficient, and the economy in stagnation. Most important, Soviet citizens were eager to learn about the West and become part of the modern world. They sought out foreign broadcasts, despite jamming; and when opportunities arose, they applied for grants to study in the West. Now, under Putin's rule, Russia has turned inward, drawing on age-old xenophobia and nationalist imperialism. According to recent polls, a large majority of Russians have bought into Kremlin propaganda and adopted a virulently anti-Western stance.

Likely, we will need to confront a hostile Russia for years to come. But not just Russia. China, North Korea, Iran, and other authoritarian states are also engaged in aggressive



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In 2022, the Kremlin even formally abrogated the 1958 U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchange Agreement that had been renewed annually and served as the basis for joint programming.

disinformation campaigns that pose a direct threat to the United States. In addition, there are global news networks that are increasingly controlled by nonstate actors. After decades of peace and open communication, we are back to a highly dangerous and unpredictable world.

When faced with an aggressive Stalin regime in the late 1940s,

the U.S. undertook a comprehensive strategic review of the tools, methods, and institutions needed to successfully wage a Cold War. That review resulted in a new national security structure and operations, including the creation of the U.S. Information Agency, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and a strengthened Voice of America with new Russian and Ukrainian language services. Those new institutions helped bring the Cold War to a peaceful end.

Today, the Biden administration should begin a similar strategic review by establishing a high-level bipartisan commission that would be charged with analyzing current U.S. capabilities in public diplomacy and international broadcasting and making specific recommendations about restructuring current institutions, creating new ones if needed, and setting funding levels. By drawing on a diverse set of experts from the private and government sectors, the Biden administration can revitalize U.S. foreign policy and effectively make the case to the American people that public diplomacy and international broadcasting are fundamental to our national security. ■

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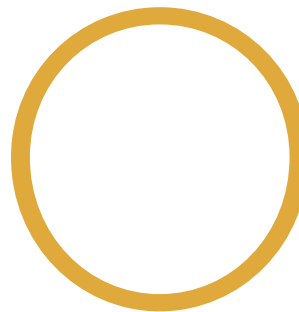
Authors from the Foreign Service community whose books have been published in late 2022 or 2023 are invited to send us a copy of the book—either printed or digital—along with a press release or backgrounder on the book by August 18.

For more information, and for instructions on how to submit your book and materials, email [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org).

# The Journey to Expo 2020 Dubai and Its Legacy

**Expo 2020 Dubai set a precedent for future U.S. participation in world's fairs, the "Olympics of public diplomacy."**

BY MATTHEW ASADA



In March 31, 2022, the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai celebrating “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of the Future” closed its doors. Our last visitors, a local Indian family, exited the pavilion as the U.S. Air Forces Central Band brought down the house with a rousing “God Bless the USA.” Over on the main Expo 2020 stages, Christina Aguilera, Yo-Yo Ma, and Norah Jones finished their concerts, and fireworks rounded out the night.

No fewer than 1.5 million visitors from 164 countries had visited the pavilion in six months. There were 5,440 distinguished “protocol” visitors from 109 countries. Seventy-two youth ambassadors representing 37 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico participated in telling America’s



*Matthew Asada is a U.S. Foreign Service officer currently assigned as the public diplomat in residence at the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy. His research focuses on the delivery of global mega events such as the World’s Fair, World Cup, and the Olympics. He served for five years as the project manager and then deputy commissioner general of the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. He is a former AFSA State vice president. The views expressed in this article are his own and not necessarily those of the U.S. government.*

ISTOCK/IREM SOYLER



USA PAVILION EXPO 2020 DUBAI

The USA Pavilion illuminated at night in Dubai, 2021.

story to the world. There had been 378 performers and speakers, from all 50 states, and 175 events attended by almost 9,000 individuals. It was all put together and managed by the USA Pavilion team of more than 300 colleagues, who engaged our diverse guests in more than 30 languages.

By all accounts, U.S. participation in Expo 2020, the first world's fair to take place in the Middle East–North Africa–South Asia (MENASA) region, was a resounding success, not least because it almost didn't happen at all. From long-standing issues of funding and the inertia of several decades of U.S. government dithering to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the obstacles were daunting. In overcoming them, we proved that the State Department could manage this \$60 million project, and that it was worth doing again in the future.

Significantly, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 President Joe Biden signed into law on Dec. 29, 2022, to fund the government enables the State Department—for the first time ever—to spend money on a U.S. pavilion at a world's fair.

This is the story of the journey to Expo 2020 Dubai and its legacy. It is a tribute to the hundreds of colleagues who brought the pavilion to life against all odds in the midst of a global pandemic. And it is a testament to our private partners who contributed to creating a pavilion experience that the American people, regardless of political affiliation, could be proud of.

For me, it is the story of a 30-year journey from my first visit to a world's fair in Taejon, South Korea, to serving as the deputy commissioner general at the USA Pavilion in Dubai.

## A “Tent in the Desert”?

Today, many are unaware what a world's fair is, that it still exists; and even fewer have ever been to one. It is curious, too, that so few colleagues—public diplomacy or otherwise—have

worked on what is arguably the world's largest public diplomacy event. There are many reasons why this is so. Historically, the fairs were executed by a different agency that no longer exists (USIA, the U.S. Information Agency). Also, there are legal limits on domestic messaging regarding foreign policy (Smith-Mundt). Further, the public-private partnership model of the last three decades meant that few State colleagues had the opportunity to work on the project. And the last world's fair in the United States was in 1984, nearly four decades ago, in New Orleans. But when a colleague in the regional bureau asked, “Why do you need so much money to build a tent in the desert?” the extent of our public awareness challenge became clear.

My introduction to world's fairs was Taejon Expo 1993, a specialized exposition and one of the first held in a developing country. I joined the Foreign Service after visiting Hannover Expo 2000 as a 20-year-old intern at U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt. Seeing that empty, grassy field where the USA Pavilion should have been—due to funding challenges, the United States had missed the fair altogether—changed my life forever. I became expo-obsessed and have attended every world expo since. In college, I wrote an article for Frankfurt's Community Liaison Office newsletter and a letter to my congressman advocating federal funding for U.S. participation in world's fairs.

As a newly minted junior officer, I wrote to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) encouraging participation in Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan, and later to the executive secretary about Expo 2010 Shanghai. After Expo 2015 Milan, I wrote about the history of U.S. participation in world's fairs, events that I have referred to as the “Olympics of public diplomacy” (see “World's Fairs Today: A Visit to Milan, Lessons for Dubai,” in the October 2015 *FSJ*).

Since the end of the Cold War, federal law (22 U.S.C. 2452b) has limited the State Department's ability to spend appropriated funds on a pavilion, and financing U.S. participation in expos has proved challenging. The U.S. did not participate at all in the 2000 world's fair in Hannover, and in 2001 it withdrew from the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), the intergovernmental organization that administers and certifies six-month-long world's fairs every five years and shorter-duration specialized international exhibitions in between. Congress viewed a U.S. pavilion as a private-sector responsibility, ignoring the public diplomacy angle and the prevailing practice of other governments that provided public financing.

With the 1999 merger of USIA into the State Department, ECA assumed responsibility for participation in world's fairs, but without federal funding it remained a non-priority. For Expo 2015 Milan, ECA delegated authority to the regional bureau, continuing a regional bureau rotational arrangement that has hampered delivery (see Beatrice Camp's Speaking Out, "Neglecting World's Fairs Does Not Make Them Go Away, So Let's Do It



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket replica at the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai.

USA PAVILION EXPO 2020 DUBAI

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**At the Nov. 18, 2020, Pavilion Handover Ceremony, from left: Marc Carlson, Counselor Ulrich Brechbühl, Jim Core, Assistant Secretary Marie Royce, Consul General Phil Frayne, Expo 2020 Director General Reem Al Hashimy, Carlos Diaz-Rosillo, Caroline Casagrande, Ambassador and Commissioner General John Rakolta Jr., Deputy Commissioner General Matthew Asada.**

Right,” in the September 2016 *FSJ*). Following the bankruptcy of the private partners behind the USA Pavilion at Expo 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry created an internal task force to address whether and how the United States should participate in world’s fairs in the future. The task force’s recommendations included creating an International Expositions Unit and exploring federal funding.

## A New Start

In January 2017, task force member Jim Core was selected to lead the new “Expo Unit” housed in the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The office set to work with Minnesota officials to bring a three-month specialized exhibition to the state in 2023. Among other things, the bipartisan Minnesota delegation worked with the House Foreign Affairs Committee, aided by the committee’s entrepreneurial Pearson Fellow Sean O’Neill, on legislation authorizing the United States to rejoin the BIE.

On May 8, 2017, President Donald Trump signed into law the “U.S. Wants to Compete for a World Expo Act” (P.L. 115-32). Two days later, Jim Core was dropping off the treaty re-accession documents signed by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at the French embassy in Washington, D.C.

On Nov. 15, 2017, the United States lost the race to Argentina for the 2023 specialized international exposition. But the United States had done better than anyone expected; six months earlier it was not even a BIE member. The experience, and lessons learned captured in a Foreign Service Institute case study on

multilateral diplomacy, would form the basis for a renewed bid by Minnesota for 2027, as well as raising hopes for Expo 2020.

On Feb. 16, 2018, the Federal Register published the Department of State’s request for proposals (RFP 2018-03116) for the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. This formally kicked off our search for an implementing partner that would design, build, operate, and disassemble the pavilion—not to mention raise the funds! We knew this would be especially challenging given the Expo 2015 Milan partner’s bankruptcy and the limited number of organizations with experience in the design and building of world’s fair pavilions.

The Expo Unit worked with the U.S.-UAE Business Council on an RFP roadshow with in-person events in New York City, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Houston, San Francisco, and Palo Alto in addition to virtual webinars. Our work paid off—we received multiple qualified bids. On June 5, 2018, Acting Under Secretary Heather Nauert announced the selection of a consortium to deliver the pavilion. Unfortunately, the group was unable to raise the money, and the department severed ties.

Throughout 2019, State continued its quest for a viable partner. The Bureau of Global Public Affairs created a two-minute video extolling the importance of participation in Expo 2020, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosted a reception in State’s 8th floor diplomatic reception rooms. However, companies were reluctant to contribute to a pavilion without dedicated federal support. After a second organization failed to raise sufficient funds, the department concluded that federal support was required. That summer, the Department of State secured White House support to make



the ask, and the Trump administration’s Office of Management and Budget sent Congress the first prospective request for appropriated Department of State funding for the USA Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. Within the White House, senior presidential adviser Jared Kushner and his chief of staff John Rader advocated for the project and marshalled administration support.

As the department pursued federal funding and briefed OMB and congressional staff—my previous American Political Science Association (APSA) congressional fellowship really came in handy!—the Expo Unit made contingency plans and preparations. Expo 2020 Dubai was scheduled to open its doors in less than one year. Other countries had begun construction a year ago; and here we were, going back to the design drawing board. Department leadership leaned into the saddle and supported a series of workshops in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Dubai with the experiential design firm Thinkwell Group and architectural advisers Woods Bagot to identify a creative design and construction program that could still be achieved—if we received the federal money.

After a second organization failed to raise sufficient funds, the State Department concluded that federal support was required.

On Dec. 17, 2019, Congress released its final consolidated spending package; it did not include the anticipated Expo funding. The outlook was gloomy. The State Department released a statement: “U.S. Participation in Expo 2020 Dubai in Jeopardy.” As the then project manager, I went home for the holidays and started thinking about my next assignment.

But sometimes Christmas wishes do come true. Less than a month later, on Jan. 15, 2020, the United States announced its

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USA PAVILION EXPO 2020 DUBAI

**Youth Ambassadors with (front, from left) Pavilion Director Kevin Solon, Consul General Meghan Gregonis, Commissioner General Bob Clark, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. Sean Murphy, Deputy Commissioner General Matthew Asada; (back, from left) Jim Core, Maya Ndao-Fall, Deputy Pavilion Director Sawyer Franz, and Youth Ambassador Project Manager Shannon McNaught.**

participation in Expo 2020 Dubai “made possible by the generosity of the Emirati government.” Our new ambassador in the UAE, John Rakolta Jr., and Senior Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Michelle Giuda had delivered. Now it was our turn. The team had less than nine months to produce a pavilion that would be ready on opening day, Oct. 20, 2020.

### A Ticking Clock, and COVID-19

Ambassador Rakolta was the right man to have in Abu Dhabi at the right time. A builder by profession, he was used to getting it done on time and on budget. Back in Washington, Secretary Pompeo had asked State Department Counselor and then Senior Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs T. Ulrich Brechbühl to drive the project home. I moved to Dubai on temporary duty and was permanently assigned as the deputy commissioner general.

Through biweekly video conferences and agile project management software, Ambassador Rakolta and Counselor Brechbühl tracked the project’s accelerated timetable. In March 2020, they (Ambassador Rakolta now dual-hatted as the commissioner general) poured the pavilion’s first concrete. They engaged with and reassured the UAE business community, which had grown a bit frustrated by the “will-we-won’t-we” nature of U.S. participation. (The Consul General’s 2018 event to unveil the now-discarded design from the now-discarded first partner was still fresh in their minds.) We were all moving as fast as we could, but would we make it on time?

On March 13, 2020, COVID-19 struck. Flights between the United States and the rest of the world were halted, and the UAE went into a restrictive at-home lockdown. BIE members convened virtually and voted to postpone the global mega event by one year; Expo 2020 Dubai would now open on Oct. 1, 2021, and with the same name. We, and the rest of the world, would have to figure out how to safely construct and operate the pavilion during a global pandemic, but at least we had some extra time to figure it out.

On Nov. 19, 2020, Counselor Brechbühl returned to the UAE with an interagency delegation for a pavilion handover ceremony and celebration in front of Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest building. Although we were one of the last countries to start construction of our 40,000-square-foot building, we were one of the first to finish the shell and core. It was now time for our exhibit designers to fabricate and install the 20,000-square-foot exhibition.

During 2021, alongside exhibit fabrication and installation, our pavilion operator was hiring employees and identifying contractors to staff the pavilion and its retail, food and beverage, and event teams. My colleagues in Washington and Dubai, especially Maya Ndao-Fall, were working with our cultural partner, Global Ties USA, to select the youth ambassadors who had been nominated by local chapters as pavilion guides (see the dispatch from Caitlyn Phung, “Expo 2020 Dubai: A Youth Ambassador’s Perspective,” in the March 2022 *FSJ*) and the cultural acts that would perform at the USA Pavilion. Our foreign commercial and agricultural teams were busy recruiting cities, states, companies, and associations to join trade delegations to visit the UAE during the expo in the midst of a global pandemic. All of us were trying to answer the question: “Was it and would it be safe to travel?”

We brought in colleagues from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from Muscat and Riyadh, along with our regional medical officer from Abu Dhabi, to create COVID guidelines for operations and events. We recognized that we could never completely ensure visitor and staff safety, but we could mitigate risk through vaccinations and testing protocols, capacity limits, and social behavior and communications. We would continuously reassess the COVID guidelines and kept the pavilion open throughout the six-month event for visitors, only temporarily suspending indoor and outdoor representational events during the January 2022 Omicron spike.

The COVID guidelines we developed would serve as a model for the U.S. Mission to the UAE’s own representational events, as well as a benchmark for other international participants. I’m still amazed that we were able to do as much as we did, without any


COVID hospitalizations or serious incidents. At a time (2021-2022) when most U.S. embassies and consulates had suspended all representational and in-person public diplomacy activities, we welcomed more than 1.5 million people to the USA Pavilion.

### From the First Guest to the Last

With the January 2021 change in administration, and Ambassador Rakolta's departure as chief of mission and commissioner general, we waited to hear from the White House about new appointees. In August, we learned that the White House intended to appoint businessman Bob Clark as commissioner general. Like Ambassador Rakolta, Clark was a builder and, again, the right man, at the right time, for the job. Clark and his wife, Jane, arrived a week before the pavilion's opening to participate in the series of test events that the pavilion's director, Kevin Solon, and deputy director, Franz Sawyer, had organized. When the expo opened on Oct. 1, 2021, the USA Pavilion also opened its doors with a fully functional exhibit including food, beverage, and retail, all ready for our first guests: the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, his sons, and ministers.

Unusual for a world's fair, Expo 2020 Dubai had a very strong business program. The UAE leaned into its location as a regional hub for trade, travel, and commerce. The organizers put together 10 theme weeks to curate cultural and commercial programming, aligning the weeks with Dubai's regional trade shows such as Gulfood and Arab Health. Our pavilion organized an average of one business event a day, including small meetings, all-day conferences, and marquee events. My deputy, Nadia Ziyadeh, organized our speakers program (53 speakers!) and put her Arabic to good use managing the local and international media (600 published pieces across 200 outlets) and the pavilion's almost one million digital engagements (see her May 2022 *State Magazine* article).

One of the pavilion highlights was U.S. national day on March 6, 2022, and the nine-person presidential delegation led by Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. Throughout the six-month event, every day one or two participating countries would celebrate its national day with a series of cultural, commercial, and political events. Accompanied by the Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade and then Director General of the Foreign Commercial Service Marisa Lago, Secretary Raimondo kicked off Commerce's premier overseas trade mission, Trade Winds, held for the first time in the Middle East, with more than 100 American companies. The University of Minnesota marching band led our national day parade through the Expo grounds, raising further public awareness about the U.S. bid to host Expo 2027, a specialized exhibition on health and wellness, in Minnesota.



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SATURDAY, JUNE 17TH  
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FIRST CONSULTATION FREE

We deployed every single public diplomacy tool available in our toolkit to reach new audiences and tell America's story to millions who would never make it to the U.S. We partnered with the private sector: with Disney on memorable programming, with the PepsiCo Foundation on a new young leaders program for the region, and with SpaceX on a replica 1-1 model of the Falcon 9 rocket. The rocket replica was the tallest object of any country on the expo grounds and remains in the UAE as a legacy item.

We partnered with the Library of Congress for a loan of Thomas Jefferson's Quran and with NASA for a touchable lunar sample and Martian meteorite sample. The National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities supported cultural programming and research. We created a virtual navigable USA Pavilion visited by more than 300,000 people that is still online, and we archived our cultural speakers and performers on our website ([www.usapavilion.org](http://www.usapavilion.org)).

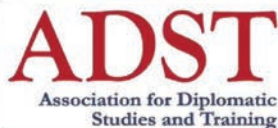
On the ground in the UAE, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Sean Murphy and Consul General Meghan Gregonis had mobilized

the entire mission so that the pavilion was a platform for sections and agencies to achieve their goals through more than 50 U.S. government visits.

### A Living Legacy

Those of us who were involved will never forget Expo 2020 Dubai, a world's fair for the ages. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction, though, is knowing that the USA Pavilion in Dubai served as a successful proof of concept and U.S. senators, representatives, and congressional staff were able to experience it and draw their own conclusions about its importance. Congress had passed legislation not once, but twice, authorizing and then appropriating funds to be spent on a pavilion at a world's fair. It was a watershed moment. With bipartisan congressional support, planning for the U.S. pavilion at Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan—the next world's fair—is now underway.

The world's fair wasn't a trade show, our pavilion wasn't a tent in the desert, and the entire endeavor was worthy of federal funding to tell America's story. ■



## URGENT ADVOCACY ACTION NEEDED

FOREIGN SERVICE COMMEMORATIVE COIN INITIATIVE  
*in honor of the*  
100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. FOREIGN SERVICE

On March 14, 2023 Senators Van Hollen (D-MD) & Sullivan (R-AK) introduced S. 789, *the United States Foreign Service Commemorative Coin Act*. This bipartisan legislation calls on the Secretary of the Treasury to mint a coin to commemorate the upcoming 100th anniversary of the United States Foreign Service. The coin will recognize a century of Foreign Service contributions to American diplomacy, from the first entry classes of the Foreign Service in 1925 to today and commemorate the sacrifice made by 320 of its members who gave their lives while promoting American diplomacy on the front lines abroad. The sale of the coins will support the collection, curation, and sharing of United States diplomatic history via oral history, books, social media, and other means.

We need **67** Senators to cosponsor S.789 and **290** Representatives to agree to cosponsor a House companion bill by **June 30, 2023**.

#### WE NEED YOUR VOICE!

1. Email your Senator to urge they cosponsor S.789; AND
2. Email your Representative to advocate for the introduction of a House companion bill and their cosponsorship of that bill.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:** [info@adst.org](mailto:info@adst.org)

**OR SEE:** <https://adst.org/united-states-foreign-service-commemorative-coin-act/>



## AFSA Pet Transport Survey Shows High Costs



Loyal FSJ reader Bark Twain.

AFSA partnered with the Overseas Briefing Center and the Bureau of Administration at the State Department

to conduct a survey in December 2022 and January 2023 on the financial costs of and hours spent planning

for transporting pets during Foreign Service Permanent Change of Station (PSC) moves.

The survey results have already been used to inform AFSA's early advocacy on Capitol Hill and a February 2023 consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We will continue to work with the CDC and with agency management to streamline what is now an extremely complicated, expensive, and time-consuming aspect of Foreign Service life. Additionally, we are tracking current legislative efforts on Capitol Hill to address these issues, including possible exceptions to the Fly America Act. Related to this, we will also continue

*Continued on page 66*

## CALENDAR

Please check [www.afsa.org](http://www.afsa.org) for the most up-to-date information.

May 3

12-1 p.m.

**AFSA Book Notes:**  
*The Secret Gate*

May 4

**AFSA Foreign Service Day Events**

May 5

**Foreign Service Day**

May 17

12-2 p.m.

**AFSA Governing Board Meeting**

May 17

6:30-8:30 p.m.

**Book Event: Boots and Suits: Historical Cases and Contemporary Lessons in Military Diplomacy**  
Hosted by/at the Center for Maritime Strategy

May 18

**Final Day for AFSA to Receive Ballots**

## FSJ Wins Gold!

*The Foreign Service Journal* won big at the TRENDY Awards on March 17, taking home the gold in the Monthly Professional Society Magazine category for the October 2022 Ukraine focus issue.

Presented by Association Trends, the TRENDY award honors the best marketing and communications pieces in the association and non-profit community.

The October *FSJ* issue featured articles from diplomats and policymakers who have been active in Ukraine and the region. Authors included former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bill Taylor, who wrote about "Understanding Ukraine"; Rose Gottemoeller, who previously served as undersecretary for arms control and international security at

*Continued on page 64*



Managing Editor Kathryn Owens and Publications Coordinator Hannah McDaniel were on hand to accept the award at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., on March 17.



## The Dreaded Washington Assignment

We have heard from entry- and mid-level colleagues about how difficult it is to come back and work in Washington, D.C., after the housing and other benefits (hardship pay, danger pay, COLA) of serving overseas. Even with locality pay, it is hard to make ends meet, especially for members with families.

I remember having to watch every penny I spent when I returned to Washington, D.C., in 1996, after the relative financial ease of my first two tours, in Panama City and Bratislava.

Don't get me wrong: I loved the work in Washington from 1996 to 2000, first serving as a staffer in the PolMil Bureau, as Czech desk officer, and finally as Balkans program officer on loan to the National Democratic Institute.

And Washington assignments are a key means to knowing how the department and the U.S. government decision-making process work.

But even though I am very frugal, I was at times close to asking my parents for financial assistance. Back then, locality pay was just beginning to be phased in, so it was not really much help.

Fast forward 25 years, and it hasn't gotten much better. Some of our newest colleagues have told us that they struggle to pay D.C.-area rents or mortgages and have other financial obligations

that may put them in real jeopardy if an emergency comes along.

One member on her first tour back in the department wrote us recently that she could only afford living in an area not served by Metro or bus lines and consequently had to pay for unsubsidized parking near State, which has been a real hardship.

### What Can Be Done?

#### Parity with the military.

Our military colleagues do not have this financial burden when returning stateside. They can live on military bases, where they receive benefits from subsidized goods and services, or subsidized housing on the local economy.

As the Foreign Service with its up-or-out and personal rank system is patterned on the military, is it out of the question to see if there is a subsidy possible for our own people, even if it is partial and based on need?

I realize this is a tall order these days, given the partisanship around increasing federal spending in Congress. But we have already had success with the Foreign Service Families Act of 2021, which allows us to break leases and other financial obligations when going abroad on official orders and to receive in-state tuition for our children.

On a related matter, AFSA will ask Secretary Blinken to encourage Defense Secretary

### The bottom line is that Washington assignments should not have to be avoided because they are too expensive.

Austin to allow FS members to have PX/Exchange privileges not only while abroad, but here in the U.S. Currently, it is only at the discretion of the local commanding officer.

**Things State could do on its own.** It has always rankled me that we must pay market rates when parking to work at the department. This is even true for those who do critical shiftwork in the Ops Center at Main State, although that rate is subsidized.

Of course, everyone should be encouraged to use public transportation, for which there is a subsidy, but not everyone can. AFSA has been told that there is nothing the department can do about the parking rule because it is set in legislation. Okay, but even a partial subsidy could be provided for those who cannot benefit from using public transportation.

It is good that in 2021 the subsidy for childcare was expanded to include those employees with a total family income of less than \$170,000. But what else can the department do to support FS employees, especially those at the lower end of the pay scale, who need access to daycare or other dependent care?

One thing State can do

right now is to put the provision of Emergency Backup Care on a sound, financial footing. We know that is important to all our members. We've heard that doing this needs to have the proper legal authorities, and that the department must find the funding.

Even smaller things like finding ways to bring down the cost of lunch in the cafeterias at Main State and in State annexes should be examined.

### Making Washington Tours Affordable

The bottom line is that Washington assignments should not have to be looked upon with fear by our entry- and mid-level colleagues, as something that should be avoided because they are too expensive. In my own experience, once I had been overseas for several tours after my early Washington assignments and could start saving, I was in a better place.

I would be grateful to hear from you all about what else could be done to make these early Washington assignments less financially burdensome. This matters for morale and retention. Please write us at member@afsa.org with your ideas. ■



# The Global Community Liaison Office—A Valuable Resource for All

The Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO), formerly called the Family Liaison Office, is a fantastic resource for the Foreign Service community, providing a range of valuable services over the course of your career and life events.

With so many new FSOs joining USAID, I wanted to use this column to raise awareness of GCLO and its offerings and to encourage all FSOs and their families to get to know their respective GCLO offices and colleagues. (Spoiler alert: I'm a fan of GCLO.)

**What is GCLO?** Based at the State Department, GCLO serves U.S. government direct-hire employees and their family members, from all agencies under chief of mission authority, while they serve overseas and when they return to the United States.

GCLO's mission is to improve the quality of life of all demographics they serve by identifying issues and

advocating for programs and solutions, providing a variety of client services, and extending services to overseas communities through the worldwide Community Liaison Office (CLO) program.

**What kinds of services are offered?** There are too many to list—and some I likely don't know about—but here is a sample: telework overseas guidance for family members, family member employment, post evacuations, education and youth, unaccompanied tours, naturalization of foreign-born spouses, pregnancy, divorce and separation, eldercare, adding a family member to orders, and so much more.

**Support for tandem couples.** Being a tandem couple has grown more complicated, challenging, and stressful in many ways. USAID offers some support and guidance for tandem couples, with appreciation. But our colleagues in the Office of Human Capital

## Connect with the Global Community Liaison Office

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and Talent Management (HCM), which supports tandem needs, would benefit from more resources: Let AFSA know your ideas. That said, GCLO has many useful resources to help navigate these challenges in the spirit of a modern workforce.

**Where do I find more information?** If you are at an overseas mission, drop into the CLO office and look for their events—I am sure you will find many.

I will let GCLO speak for itself on the many other ways to keep in touch: “Stay

informed by subscribing to the GCLO Weekly newsletter, liking GCLO's Facebook page, and following GCLO's YouTube channel. Check out GCLO's webpage ([www.state.gov/global-community-liaison-office/about-us/](http://www.state.gov/global-community-liaison-office/about-us/)) for current information. Contact us with questions and feedback at [GCLO@state.gov](mailto:GCLO@state.gov). Wherever you are on your Foreign Service journey, let GCLO be your companion and help guide you along the way.” ■



## AFSA Governing Board Meeting, February 15, 2023

The Governing Board met in person at AFSA headquarters.

The Board approved the AFSA Investment Policy and Procedures as amended. ■



## AFSA Governing Board Meeting, March 15, 2023

The Governing Board met in person at AFSA headquarters.

The Board approved applications for two new associate members. ■



# Threats to Retirement Benefits

Multiple showdowns between Congress and the Biden administration over federal spending and the debt ceiling are likely in the next 18 months. As events play out, we will probably see proposals for draconian cuts to federal employee retirement benefits. Here is a preview of the issues at stake.

Congress and the president have the power to cut retirement benefits for future federal retirees. As unfair as it may be, they also have the power to cut benefits being received by current retirees.

Proposals we may see that affect federal employees include reducing the future annuity calculation. Proposals

affecting both employees and retirees could include reducing the government's share of federal retiree health care premiums, lowering the rate of return of the TSP G Fund, and eliminating the annuity supplement paid to federal retirees under age 62.

Proposals having an impact on current retirees could include reducing annual cost-of-living adjustments for federal pensions.

AFSA, of course, opposes cuts to our earned retirement benefits. Because such cuts would affect all federal employees and retirees, AFSA's advocacy is primarily through the Federal-Postal Coalition, which is made up

of 30 organizations, including the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association and the large Civil Service unions.

The coalition represents 2.7 million federal employees and 2.6 million federal retirees, with members living in every congressional district. The coalition sends letters to Congress, with AFSA as co-signer, and holds monthly meetings, with AFSA participation, to plan advocacy efforts.

The good news is that it appears unlikely that significant cuts to federal employee retirement benefits would be endorsed by the current Senate and signed by President

Biden. But the longer-term outlook depends on the outcome of the 2024 congressional and presidential elections.

What can you do to protect your benefits? You can maintain your AFSA membership in retirement, so your dues help support the association's congressional advocacy efforts.

You can monitor major developments as reported in AFSA's Media Digest, digital Retirement Newsletter, and this column.

And you can write to your representative and senators urging them to oppose cutting the benefits that you earned over a long, challenging career. ■

FSJ Wins Trendy Award  
Continued from page 61

the State Department and as deputy secretary general of NATO; retired Foreign Service Officer Ken Moskowitz; and Michael Lally, currently the minister counselor for commercial affairs at the

U.S. Mission to the European Union.

The design (thank you, Driven by Design) incorporated artwork by Ukrainian folk artist and national icon Maria Primachenko (1909-1997).

Her fantastical creatures, like the peace dove that has become an anti-war emblem in Ukraine and elsewhere, are vivid and



At the TRENDY Awards ceremony.

whimsical and, much like this award-winning edition of the *Journal*, offer hope for the future of Ukraine.

Read (and share) the winning edition at [www.afsa.org/foreign-service-journal-october2022](http://www.afsa.org/foreign-service-journal-october2022). ■



## Diplomats at Work Speaker Series

# FSO-Journalist on Countering Disinformation

On Feb. 7, Steve Herman, Foreign Service officer and chief national correspondent with Voice of America (VOA), was the featured guest for AFSA's Diplomats@Work series, where we talk to active-duty diplomats about their work and life in the U.S. Foreign Service. VOA is a branch of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Herman's job is unlike any other in the Foreign Service. As an active journalist and Foreign Service officer, he frequently serves overseas, but does not fall under chief of mission (COM) authority or work out of the embassy, which allows him to maintain his independence as a journalist.

"We are government employees," says Herman, "but because of the congressionally enacted firewall, any particular administration cannot tell us what to



Steve Herman

report or what not to report. We have a mission to report about America to the rest of the world. And that also means reflecting the different viewpoints in the United States as well."

Herman discussed his role as a journalist and diplomat in fighting disinformation, explaining that VOA was originally founded in 1942 to combat wartime disinformation, or "propaganda," as it was called at the time.

He suggested that his approach to countering disinformation is simple, saying: "VOA was founded on a very novel concept, which was just to tell the truth." If you make the facts available, he said, your listeners can discern the truth.

Herman called the spread of disinformation "a question of news literacy," saying that when he returned to the United States in 2016, he was "a bit disheartened to find that a lot of people, including educated people, seemed to be relying on their Facebook page for information and weren't really discerning in where they were getting their information."

A way to counter this, he suggested, is to teach students at an early age how to consume news. "We're adults; it's incumbent on us to self-educate, but what do we do with the next generation coming up? It's a huge question that needs to be addressed."

VOA is not broadcast in the United States—its mission is to target more than 278 million listeners outside the U.S., who might otherwise not have access to truthful news broadcasts—but it is accessible online at [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com) in 48 languages, including Russian, Mandarin, and Farsi.

Herman also got personal, telling the audience why his Twitter account was once banned by Elon Musk, and sharing the story of when former Vice President Mike Pence barred him from traveling on Air Force Two for truthfully reporting on a vice presidential visit to the Mayo Clinic at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

So how does one get a job with VOA? The process is different than it is for other foreign affairs agencies. "Unlike other agencies ... where they're recruiting significant numbers of fresh, newly minted Foreign Service officers every year, that's not how it works at VOA," Herman explained. Most VOA positions are Civil Service, and the few Foreign Service positions are almost all engineers, not correspondents.

VOA looks for experienced broadcasters who are fluent in other languages and are skilled in editing video. "A USAID Foreign Service officer could not transfer over to VOA or vice versa. ... That was different back in the USIA days, when people did flow from State into VOA."

To listen to a recording of the talk, go to [bit.ly/countering-disinfo](http://bit.ly/countering-disinfo).

## Check Your Facts

Wondering if something you heard is true? Herman recommends VOA's own fact-checking site, [polygraph.info](http://polygraph.info). VOA journalists research quotes and stories released by government officials and other high-profile individuals, debunking lies or adding context as necessary. The site covers topics including human rights, economics, and military affairs, including the war in Ukraine. ■

**POLYGRAPH.info**

AFSA Pet Survey Results  
Continued from page 61

to highlight the effects of agency travel practices on Foreign Service members and request greater flexibility in complying with agency travel restrictions.

Pet transport has now become a significant factor in bidding decisions; it has a systemic effect on the Foreign Service and should be given appropriate attention by management.

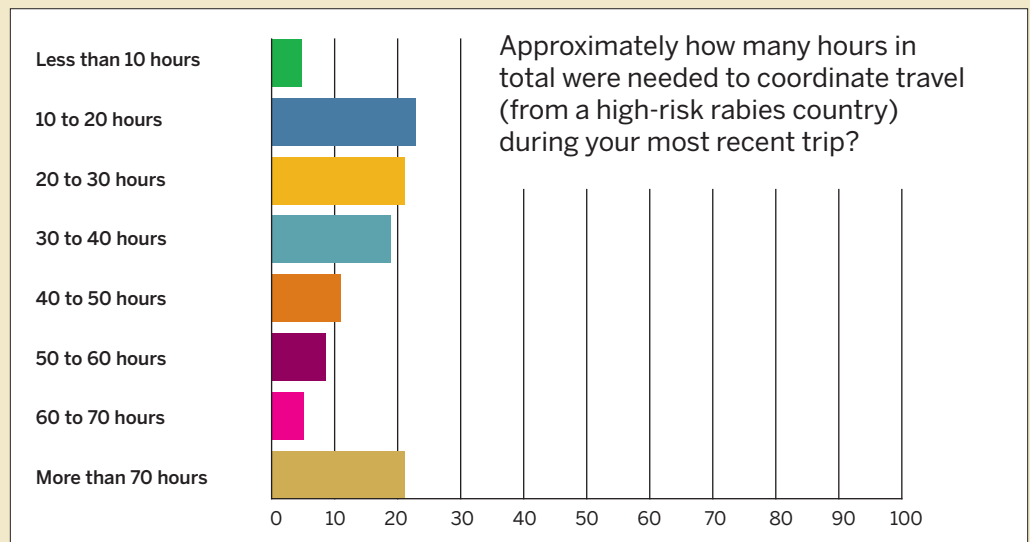
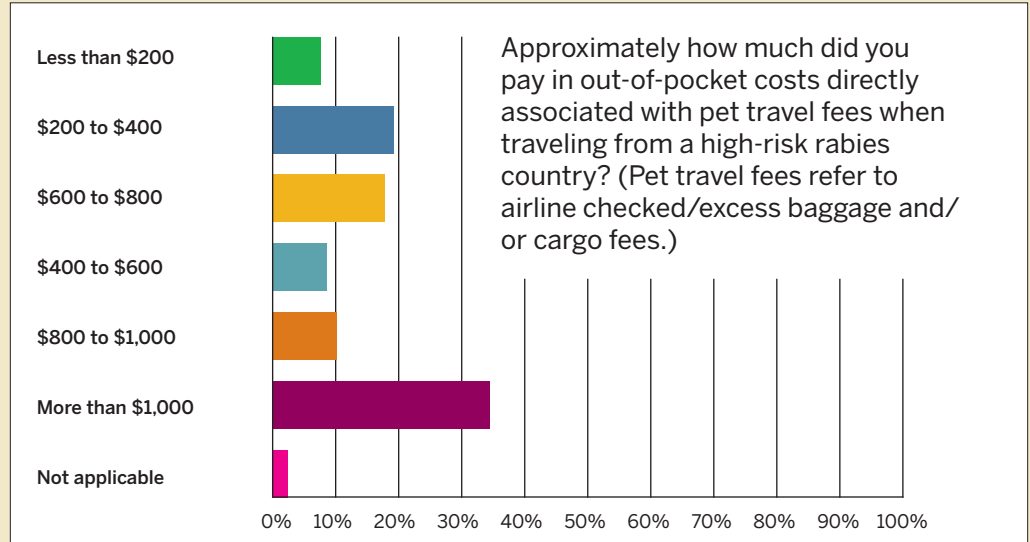
As we go to press on this article, the State Department has just announced updated transfer allowances, including a pet shipping allowance. See page 68 for more on this development, which is the culmination of years of effort by AFSA, both within the department and in Congress. AFSA hopes all foreign affairs agencies will adopt this new allowance for their employees.

**Structure of the Survey.**

The survey was created primarily to focus on the financial costs and effort expended in transporting pets from high-risk rabies countries.

However, the largest bloc of respondents had transported pets from non-rabies countries. We found that these respondents faced many of the same hurdles as those who came from countries on the CDC’s high-risk list, which is in effect through July 2023.

That said, the effort and expense required were higher for those coming from high-risk countries, and those respondents were more likely after the experi-



ence to tell us that pet transport will figure prominently in future bidding decisions. Here are the main survey findings.

**Financial costs from a high-risk country.** There were three main costs for respondents transporting a pet from a high-risk rabies country: the rabies titer test process, extraordinary veterinarian costs, and airline pet travel fees. In addition, some

paid for separate air tickets on non-American carriers, third-party shippers, and/or quarantine fees.

For the main cost categories, approximately three-quarters of respondents spent between \$10 and \$600 for titers and \$10 to \$600 for vet fees. Forty-five percent spent \$10 to \$600 on pet travel.

However, others experienced very elevated costs:

14 percent spent more than \$1,000 on titers, and the same percentage of respondents paid more than \$1,000 for vet fees. Thirty-four percent of respondents from high-risk rabies countries spent more than \$1,000 on airline pet travel fees.

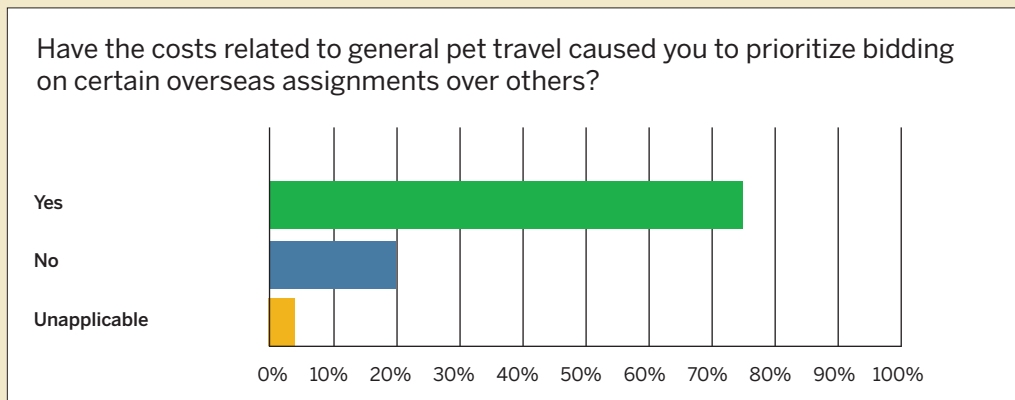
Separate air tickets, usually for transporting a pet on a non-Fly America airline due to the dearth of U.S. carriers willing to fly pets, was

another significant cost, with 17 percent of respondents paying more than \$1,000. For those who used third-party travel companies, only 10 percent spent less than \$1,000, and 5 percent of those who responded spent more than \$10,000. Some, but certainly not all, of the most expensive moves were paid for by those with multiple pets.

**Time and effort expended from a high-risk country.** For arranging pet transport from a high-risk rabies country, 57 percent of respondents spent from 10 to 40 hours; and 20 percent spent more than 70 hours—the equivalent of almost two full workweeks. When asked to gauge the degree of difficulty, 80 percent of respondents reported that it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to transport their pet(s) from a high-risk rabies country to their next posting, whether the posting was overseas or stateside.



Diplomat Kiwi on a layover in Amsterdam.



**Costs, time, and effort for general pet transport.** Reported costs were high, even when shipping a pet from a non-high-risk rabies country, with a range from \$200 to more than \$10,000. The percentage of those who spent from 10 to 40 hours was higher for general pet transport (69 percent of respondents), but only 6 percent spent more than 70 hours (vice 20 percent of those who transported pets from high-rabies countries).

The general pet transport process was still challenging: 78 percent of these respondents (vice 80 percent of respondents from high-risk rabies countries) rated the process “difficult” or “very difficult.”

**Effect on Bidding Decisions.** According to survey respondents, pet transport costs and complexity figure prominently in Foreign Service pet

owners' bidding decisions. Of those who had not been in high-risk rabies countries, 65 percent said the cost of general pet travel would lead them to consider pet transport in their bidding.

However, of the respondents who had transported a pet from a high-risk rabies country, 76 percent said the prohibitive cost in time and money of pet transport would affect their bidding going forward. From that, we can infer that the experience of transporting a pet from a high-risk country

has caused these bidders to seriously consider whether they should face that hurdle again.

**For More Information.**

The PowerPoint document with “all agency” responses for high-risk rabies countries and for general pet travel can be viewed at [www.bit.ly/Pet-Transport-Survey-Results](http://www.bit.ly/Pet-Transport-Survey-Results).

Please direct any questions on the survey to AFSA's Director of Professional Policy Issues Julie Nutter at [nutter@afsa.org](mailto:nutter@afsa.org) or Policy Analyst Sean O'Gorman at [ogorman@afsa.org](mailto:ogorman@afsa.org). ■

## CDC Extends Dog Travel Ban

The CDC has extended its ban on importing dogs from countries with rabies—including many overseas posts where AFSA members are serving—until July 31, 2023.

There is an exception for dogs that were vaccinated in the U.S. if their vaccination is still valid, they are micro-chipped, and they are more than six months old.

Employees can find more details in 23 State 15990.

AFSA will continue to engage with department management on this expensive and stressful process. Members will find the latest updates on our website. ■

## Great News on Transfer Allowances

Acting Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources John Bass announced that effective April 23, 2023, outdated State Department transfer policies will be updated to better cover the true cost of relocating.

### **Pet shipping allowance.**

These new allowances are the culmination of years of effort by AFSA, both within the department and in Congress, including the first-ever pet survey that AFSA conducted recently (see page 61 for details).

These new allowances—\$4,000 for pet transport

costs (including immunizations and blood tests) under the Foreign Transfer Allowance (FTA) or Home Service Transfer Allowance (HSTA), \$1,000 for Authorized/Ordered Departure (AD/OD) evacuation pet transport, and \$550 for quarantine expenses for FTA, HSTA, or evacuation travel—are separate from the Miscellaneous Expense Portion of the FTA or HSTA. AFSA continues to work with colleagues in Congress to remove the requirements of the Fly America Act when an American airline cannot or will not ship a pet.

**M&IE allowance.** Allowing employees and family to reside in permanent quarters and receive M&IE (meals and incidental expenses) until arrival of their household goods is a welcome change that will benefit many, particularly when lengthy shipping delays stretch into months rather than weeks. And the long-overdue changes to the wardrobe allowance will now provide reimbursement for a one-zone transfer in addition to the two-zone transfer.

**Expanded expense categories.** Expansion of the transfer allowance expense

categories for itemized reimbursement in the Miscellaneous Expense portion of HSTA and FTA will help meet some of the many costs associated with returning to the United States from an overseas assignment.

As prices rise and inflation continues, AFSA also hopes to see an increase in the caps presently imposed on itemized expenses.

AFSA hopes all foreign affairs agencies will adopt these new travel allowances for their employees. ■

## A Win on In-State College Tuition

The University of California system recently announced that it is implementing the AFSA-supported federal law granting in-state college tuition rates to Foreign Service members, their spouses, and dependents in their state of domicile. AFSA welcomes this change, and has long advocated for it.

The federal law is the Foreign Service Families Act in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022, which AFSA championed on Capitol Hill. While states are not mandated to implement that law prior to the first period of college enrollment that

begins after July 1, 2024, the U.C. system will implement it on July 1, 2023—in time for fall 2023 enrollments.

Foreign Service families who are seeking in-state tuition in their state of domicile should review the guidance on the AFSA website on how domicile is determined and should take steps to strengthen their case for qualifying if applicable.

Also on the AFSA website is a fact sheet that members can provide to public college admissions offices to help them understand how Foreign Service family members qualify for in-state tuition.

AFSA members who

receive an adverse determination relating to in-state tuition from a public college or university despite being able to present clear evidence of past and continuing ties to that state are asked to inform AFSA. AFSA will write to the college to make the case that you remain domiciled in the state and thus should be given the in-state tuition rate in accordance with federal law.

After July 1, 2024, states will be in violation of federal law if they deny in-state



tuition to a Foreign Service family that has clear evidence of their domicile in that state. AFSA members who encounter that situation should notify AFSA, which will contact that state's higher education authorities apprising them of their violation of law. Contact us at [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■

## The View from Washington Webinar

On March 9, AFSA President Eric Rubin hosted “View from Washington,” a periodic webinar that allows our retirees to hear directly from AFSA about current advocacy work on Capitol Hill and issues affecting the Foreign Service.

Amb. Rubin outlined our legislative wins, including the passing of AFSA-supported legislation granting in-state college tuition in one’s state of domicile to Foreign Service members and their families. A key element of AFSA’s current agenda—and a critical issue for retirees—is removing the hours and pay caps for re-employed annuitants (REAs).

Turning to modernization and reform efforts, Rubin described the newly designed entry process to the Foreign Service as allowing for a broader, more holistic view of candidates, and emphasized the continued high quality of our recruits.

In terms of retention and diversity, however, challenges remain. Retention is affected by generational hesitance to commit to any career over the long term, and the Foreign Service still has some way to go before it truly reflects the diversity of American society.

Looking forward to Foreign Service Day, Rubin reminded the audience that AFSA will be opening its doors to all members, both active duty and retired, for its traditional Open House on Thursday, May 4.

A recording of the webinar is available to members only at [www.afsa.org/video](http://www.afsa.org/video). ■

## AFSA Hosts Global Town Hall

AFSA hosted a Global Town Hall for all members on Feb. 16. More than 250 AFSA members listened in as AFSA President Ambassador Eric Rubin, joined by AFSA constituency vice presidents and staff, updated members on current advocacy priorities and concerns.


Members sent questions in advance and asked many questions during the event—an encouraging sign of interest in AFSA’s activities on behalf of members.

Amb. Rubin’s remarks covered a range of topics, including mental health in the Foreign Service; women’s health issues; pet transport; tandems in the Foreign Service; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (especially the question of worldwide availability upon entry); assignment restrictions; congressional advocacy; promotions; and USAID workforce issues.

AFSA uses all member questions, even those not addressed, to inform our future events.

The next Town Hall will be held in summer 2023. ■


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*If you haven't heard of us, you haven't been listening!*

## AFSA Next Stage Speaker Series

# Giving Back! Volunteering with an NGO

On Feb. 28, AFSA hosted the webinar “Volunteerism: How Can the Foreign Service Best Contribute?” The program was part of AFSA’s popular Next Stage series, which is designed to help retirees explore post-FS opportunities.

Guest speakers were invited to discuss how Foreign Service personnel can best contribute to the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector as volunteers.

Panelists were Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; Ken Patterson, director of grassroots impact

at Results, a nonpartisan citizens’ advocacy organization devoted to finding long-term solutions to poverty; and Patricia McArdle, a former Foreign Service officer who is now a member of the Global Advisory Council for Solar Cookers International.

Ms. Vignarajah, who served as a senior adviser at the State Department under Secretaries Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, said there is a “real opportunity for Americans to better understand the lives of immigrant families” by volunteering with organizations such as hers, which assists with refugee resettlement, aids

**A good volunteer opportunity is giving and getting.**

—*Krish O’Mara Vignarajah*

immigrants at our southern border, and cares for unaccompanied children.

“Our voices do matter with our elected officials,” Mr. Patterson, a former Peace Corps volunteer, said. But most people don’t know how to make themselves heard. His organization trains people in communication skills to influence elected officials to address poverty.

Ms. McArdle, a former public affairs FSO, said her

organization relies heavily on volunteers to help with everything from fundraising to creating videos and writing press releases.

All three panelists spoke about how the skill sets of a member of the U.S. Foreign Service can be useful to their organization. “You really are the perfect advocates,” said Mr. Patterson.

A recording of the webinar is available at [bit.ly/VolunteerPanel](http://bit.ly/VolunteerPanel). ■

## “Map for Change” Volunteer Opportunities

Looking for opportunities to volunteer wherever you are in the world?

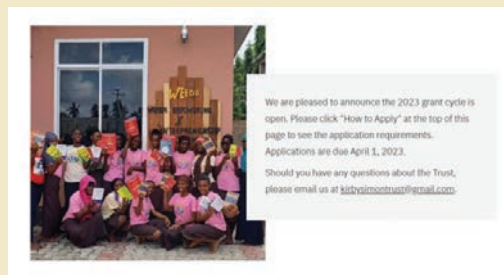
AAFSW (Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide) is excited to share Map for Change: Foreign Affairs Community Volunteers.

Administered by AAFSW and supported by the Cox Foundation, Map for Change literally maps out volunteer opportunities both overseas and in the D.C. area.

The map, housed on FS Hub, is billed by AAFSW as a “great community resource to learn about volunteer opportunities” that also promotes volunteerism as a form of diplomacy.

Go to [www.fshub.org/map-for-change-foreign-affairs-community-volunteers/](http://www.fshub.org/map-for-change-foreign-affairs-community-volunteers/) to find opportunities near you or submit your own ideas. ■

## Kirby Simon Trust Supports FS Volunteers



The J. Kirby Simon Trust supports Foreign Service members, local staff, and family members who are doing charitable work in their communities. For more than 25 years, the trust has provided small grants to enable these efforts and is proud to have given away close to \$1.9 million over that time.

Read more about the Trust’s work and how to support it at [www.kirbysimon.org/donate](http://www.kirbysimon.org/donate). ■

## Annual Report: Legal Defense Fund

BY LISA AHAMJIAN, LDF COMMITTEE CHAIR

The AFSA Legal Defense Fund supported two Foreign Service members in 2022, both of whom were seeking workers compensation benefits from the Department of Labor relating to anomalous health incidents.

This is consistent with the average number of requests for assistance AFSA has typically received annually (one to two) in the past; 2019-2020 saw 12 requests, an unusually high number by comparison, and all were impeachment-related.

Between donations and investment income, the fund did well financially during 2022. The fund began the year with \$341,963; at year's end, it contained \$361,000.

During the year, two disbursements were made in support of two AFSA members for a total of \$20,000. Over the same period, \$54,000 was raised through donations from members and supporters.

The LDF Committee, working with AFSA's Governing Board, has con-

scientiously invested the LDF funds to ensure the long-term sustainability of this vital member-centered program.

The Legal Defense Fund was created in 2007 and since then has provided financial assistance to members enabling them to retain an outside attorney with expertise in a particular area of law.

These cases have been—and will continue to be—limited to those with legal issues of far-reaching

significance to the rest of the Foreign Service, such as cases involving due process or fundamental fairness.

The governing documents for the Legal Defense Fund call for an annual report to AFSA membership on the main activities of the fund during the previous year. For more information about the fund, please contact AFSA General Counsel Sharon Papp at [papps@state.gov](mailto:papps@state.gov). ■



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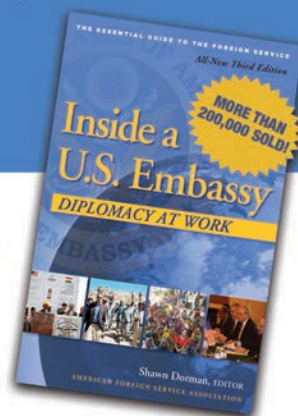
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■ **Janet Beik**, 69, a retired Foreign Service officer, died in Freedom, Pa., on Dec. 25, 2022, of cancer.

Ms. Beik was born in Fayetteville, Ark., on Nov. 24, 1953, to Leland and Ruth (McVay) Beik. She received a B.A. in history from Swarthmore College in 1975 and earned both an M.A. (1980) and a Ph.D. (1984) in African studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

During her studies at Wisconsin, Ms. Beik served two years in the Peace Corps in Niger, West Africa, and spent two additional years there under a Fulbright scholarship. She published her dissertation, *Hausa Theatre in Niger: A Contemporary Oral Art*, and several articles on Hausa theater traditions.

Ms. Beik began her 25-year career with the State Department in Khartoum, where she met her future husband, Robert Claus, who was also in the Foreign Service. Other overseas assignments included Montreal, Banjul, Kampala, and Abidjan.

While on sabbatical, Ms. Beik served as foreign policy adviser to Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and earned an M.A. in national security strategy at the National War College in Fort McNair.

In Washington, D.C., Ms. Beik's assignments included the bureaus of African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and International Organization Affairs, and the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.

Ms. Beik's last assignment was as deputy U.S. representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague.

The State Department awarded Ms. Beik three Meritorious and three Superior Honor awards for her work, and she was honored by having two children named for her in The Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Ms. Beik is survived by her sisters Donna Wulff, Paula Beik (and spouse Evan), and Linda Beik; brother David Beik (and spouse Patti); brother-in-law Greg Mack; and five nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, sister Carol Mack, and husband Robert Claus.

■ **Thomas Stanley "Stan" Brooks**, 91, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer, died after a brief illness on Feb. 2, 2023, in Denver, Colo.

Mr. Brooks was born in Rawlins, Wyo., in 1932 and spent his boyhood nearby in the remote refinery town of Parco-Sinclair with parents J.G. and Adele Brooks and older sister Betty.

In 1950 Mr. Brooks graduated from Rawlins High School. From 1950 to 1954, he attended the University of Wyoming, where he studied French and was a celebrated actor in the theater department. During his senior year at UW, Stan was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to continue his French language studies in Rennes, Normandy.

In 1958, after two years in the U.S. Army, Mr. Brooks joined the U.S. Foreign Service. His first post was Laos, where he met his future wife, Claire Stevenson, a young woman from Boston who was also working there.

In 1962 U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson presented Mr. Brooks with a Meritorious Service Award for his bravery in gaining the rescue of American hostages (including Ms. Stevenson) who were being held by rebels during the battle of Vientiane in 1960.

After two years studying Mandarin, Mr. Brooks was posted to Hong Kong as chief of the press monitoring unit and an economic officer. He was part of a new cohort of China specialists formed in the late 1950s following the decimation of the

China service during the McCarthy years.

He was then assigned as a political officer in Kathmandu from 1967 to 1971. There, he was informally known as the "mountain liaison officer," responsible for coordinating with U.S. climbing expeditions to the Himalayas, a role he loved.

After stateside assignments in Michigan (for advanced area studies at the University of Michigan) and Washington, D.C. (as a foreign affairs analyst), Mr. Brooks went to Beijing, where he served with then-Ambassador George H.W. Bush.

Mr. Brooks' diplomatic career centered on China; his fluency in Chinese served him well in multiple postings across the region from the early 1960s to the early 1990s.

He served as a political officer in Hong Kong, deputy director of the American Institute in Taiwan, and consul general in Shanghai. From 1988 to 1990, Mr. Brooks served as chargé d'affaires in Seoul. His last assignment was as director of the American Institute of Taiwan, capping three separate postings to Taiwan over his career.

During his 36-year career, Mr. Brooks received numerous awards. In addition to the award for his actions in Laos, he received a Superior Honor Award in 1977 for action taken in response to the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, which killed more than 750,000 people.

In 1987 he received another Superior Honor Award for the professional arrangements made for President Ronald Reagan's visit to China while Mr. Brooks was consul general in Shanghai.

In 1991 he received the Distinguished Honor Award for his performance as deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires in Seoul. Over the years, Mr. Brooks handled three presidential and three vice-presidential visits.



Mr. Brooks' wife, Claire, was his indefatigable partner par excellence throughout their long shared Foreign Service career. Upon his retirement in 1994, the couple returned to his beloved Wyoming, dividing their time between the family ranch in the Sierra Madre Range and homes in Saratoga and Laramie.

Mr. Brooks took up geology and natural resource conservation. But his main passion over his 29 years of retirement in southeastern Wyoming was working outdoors at his 1,900-acre mountain property near Saratoga. He expanded the acreage and placed the property under a conservation easement, protecting it for future generations.

Mr. Brooks loved to tell an anecdote about his "double life" as a retired Foreign Service officer living in a small town in Wyoming. One day while waiting in a local insurance office, he noticed two other customers looking at him. He overheard one lady say to the other, "Him over there? He used to be some kind of ambassador. Now he's a hermit back in the hills." Laughing, Mr. Brooks would say they didn't miss the mark by much in either characterization.

Mr. Brooks is survived by his wife, Claire Stevenson, of Malden, Mass.; his four children, David, John, Susan, and Jeffrey; and six grandchildren, Oliver, Madeline, Nicolas, Isabella, Lucas, and Whitney.

Condolences and reminiscences about Mr. Brooks may be sent to the family at P.O. Box 770, Saratoga, Wyoming, 82331.

■ **Candis Cunningham**, 73, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Jan. 15, 2023, at Stone Springs Hospital in Aldie, Va.

Born to Foreign Service parents in Germany, Ms. Cunningham spent her childhood in South Africa, Turkey, Italy,

and Washington, D.C. She received her bachelor's degree in English and a master's in journalism from Ohio University.

Ms. Cunningham spent her early professional years as a beat reporter for newspapers in Rome and in the U.S. (Ohio, Florida, and South Carolina) before joining the U.S. Information Agency as a writer and editor in 1975.

Ms. Cunningham served in various positions at USIA and the Department of State, including as press attaché in Bogotá and press officer at the U.S. Congressional Helsinki Accords Commission, where she founded and edited the *CSCCE* (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) *Digest*.

At the State Department, her assignments included director of the narcotics assistance unit in Panama City and in Lima, as well as numerous assignments in Washington, D.C.

In late 2022, Ms. Cunningham came out of retirement and returned to the department to work on winding down Afghanistan programs and to reprogram funding for those now-defunct efforts.

Ms. Cunningham often said that she was born in the wrong century. She devoured 19th-century English and American literature; and, as a confirmed Anglophile, she was addicted to Britbox TV.

But she never lost her affinity for Italy: She made a mean Bolognese, and the quickest way to gain her affection was through timely gifts of Baci chocolates.

She doted on her family, but especially granddaughter Paige, and their bottle and reading time were treats for them equally.

Although in later years she no longer rode, she was an experienced equestrian, who once almost turned a ragged little Colombian pony into a hunter-jumper.

Quick with a joke and a sometimes-caustic sense of humor, Ms. Cunningham

is remembered by colleagues and friends for her courage, kindness, straightforward manner, and willingness to tell truth to power.

She is survived by her husband, retired Senior Foreign Service Officer and Middleburg Town Council Member Morris "Bud" Jacobs; daughter Julia (and spouse Daniel Rossi); daughter Leigh Jacobs (and spouse Daniel Wilkinson); granddaughter (and light of Ms. Cunningham's life) Paige Evelyn Rossi; and canines Rosie and Cooper.

A celebration of this remarkable woman's life will be planned later. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Ms. Cunningham's favorite charities, the American Cancer Society and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

■ **Zandra Iona Flemister**, 71, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer, died Feb. 21, 2023, at Arden Courts in Kensington, Md., after a long battle with dementia.

Ms. Flemister was born on Nov. 21, 1951, in Frankfurt, Germany, to parents serving in the U.S. Army and the U.S. High Commission. She spent her childhood in Germany, France, and Connecticut before moving to Boston, where she earned a B.A. from Northeastern University.

In August 1974, she was sworn in as the first Black woman Secret Service agent. Her tenure was short and rocky in an organization that barely tolerated women and was unprepared for a Black woman. From Seoul in 2001, she gave testimony in support of the Black Secret Service officers class action suit, which was settled in 2017.

While in the Secret Service, during the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter administrations, Ms. Flemister guarded then-first daughter Susan Ford, discreetly, on her

dates; later she protected first daughter Amy Carter at the Thaddeus Stevens Elementary School. She laughed that there were lots of agent-to-agent calls of “she’s moving from the swings to the jungle gym.”

She deeply respected President Gerald Ford, whose intelligence she always judged as underappreciated. She had a wry fondness for Lady Bird Johnson, who asked for her as an escort to “visit the critters” at the National Zoo after Smithsonian Board discussions of new zoo additions.

In June 1978, she left the Secret Service to join the State Department as a consular officer, fulfilling a lifelong ambition for service and travel. She retired as a Senior Foreign Service officer in April 2011 after serving in Argentina, Spain, Pakistan (twice), the United Kingdom, South Korea, and many Washington, D.C., assignments.

Ms. Flemister earned a master’s degree at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in 2003, spent two years as a consular inspector in the Office of Inspector General, and two years as the senior State Department officer at the Terrorist Screening Center in Washington, D.C.

She juggled a tandem career while raising her autistic son, Sam, for whom she was a fierce and persistent advocate. In London, she reconstructed his schooling when the special needs school she had visited and prepped failed him.

In Seoul, after her year of careful groundwork fell apart, she tactfully persuaded a reluctant Defense Department bureaucracy to let the State Department fund an aide, who made the program work. Today, Sam thrives as an adult working at Walter Reed.

She loved the Foreign Service and consular work. In 2005 she attained her

career goal, becoming consul general in Islamabad, responsible for all consular services in Pakistan. She assisted American spouses and the Pakistani human rights activist Mukhtar Mai. She dealt with the aftermath of the October 2005 earthquake and the murder of FSO David Foy in Karachi. Her accomplishments earned her a promotion into the Senior Foreign Service in 2006.

In an earlier Islamabad tour, she met Joyce Barr, who would become her closest friend. Ambassador Barr recalls marveling at Ms. Flemister’s poise, her willingness to take on emotionally difficult disaster task force work, and her skill in managing inexperienced junior officers and challenging senior managers.

Ms. Flemister excelled in a crisis: In Seoul, on Sept. 11, 2001, she defused near panic in her section fueled by a young officer’s fears for her boyfriend, who was working in one of the World Trade Center towers. While also in Seoul, she was instrumental in breaking a visa fraud ring led by a fellow FSO, who later pled guilty.

In Argentina in 1979, she was slyly amused at the reactions of South African travelers who requested Vice Consul Flemister expecting a German American. She didn’t flinch when attacked in retaliation for U.S. human rights pressure on the Argentine dictatorship, becoming the subject of a diplomatic incident.

Ms. Flemister met John Collinge when they entered the Foreign Service together. During difficult first tours, they conducted a long-distance romance by snail mail while she served in Buenos Aires and he in Karachi, and then again after she transferred to Madrid and he to Khartoum.

Deciding to risk an interracial marriage, she flew to Khartoum, as Spain would not waive residency requirements for Mr. Collinge. Married in September

1981, they were separated for the first 15 months of their marriage. It was a complementary union that strengthened both as they surmounted many professional and health challenges along the way.

Their son, Samuel Collinge, was born in November 1983 and diagnosed as autistic in 1987, prompting Ms. Flemister to curtail her first Islamabad tour.

Ms. Flemister is survived by her spouse, John, and their son, Sam, both of Bethesda, Md.

■ **Jane Catherine Gaffney**, 75, a retired Foreign Service officer, died of stomach cancer on Dec. 7, 2022, at her home in Bethesda, Md.

Ms. Gaffney was born on July 30, 1947, while her father was serving in the Navy in Norfolk, Va. She spent her childhood in New York, New Jersey, Georgia, and Washington, D.C., and graduated from high school at Ursuline Academy in Bethesda, Md.

The film “Lawrence of Arabia” sparked her interest in the Middle East, including its visual and media cultures. She devoted her life to interpreting Middle Eastern politics and cultures, especially via Arabic-language television drama serials, and was an invaluable resource for diplomats and scholars interested in Arab culture.

Ms. Gaffney studied Arabic at Georgetown University and earned a bachelor’s degree in international relations of the Middle East at American University in 1968.

While pursuing an M.A. (1970) in applied linguistics at the American University in Cairo, Ms. Gaffney formed lifelong friendships with Arabist colleagues and notables like film director Youssef Chahine and architect Hassan Fathy.

In 1970 she joined the faculty at Haigazian College in Lebanon, where she

transformed the TESOL program into the College Skills Program.

She studied anthropology at the American University of Beirut and spent two summers conducting ethnographic fieldwork among the Beni Sakhar tribe near Amman, Jordan.

Her mountain home in Fayadiyyah, Lebanon, was a popular stopover for friends traveling in the Middle East. Acquaintances remember how Ms. Gaffney enjoyed connecting people even as she suffered from cancer.

In 1975 she joined the faculty at Kuwait University where she taught English for more than a decade. She traveled often to India and became an expert on Indian cinema while also following Arab media and popular culture.

In 1987 Ms. Gaffney was recruited by the United States Information Agency for its mid-level-entry Arabist program. She coordinated U.S. diplomacy in Sudan from temporary offices at U.S. Embassy Nairobi, served as director of the American Cultural Center in Cairo and in Morocco, and lent her deep expertise in Arab society as a diplomat in Jerusalem.

In Washington, she served as director of the West Africa and Central Africa offices. Colleagues and interlocutors recall her work in Sudan, noting her grasp of culture and Sudanese style.

Ms. Gaffney was among the first to recognize the growing social and political significance of media and popular culture in the Middle East. She published one of the earliest scholarly treatments of Arab film, "Egyptian Cinema," in the *Arab Studies Quarterly* and spoke on representations of the Kurds in Turkish television at the University of Maryland.

Her newsletter "Expressions" offered colleagues and friends incisive analyses of Arabic-language entertainment media and music.

In 2010 Ms. Gaffney retired to Maryland, where she raised rescue dogs, most recently her beloved Mocha, with her sister Barbara.

Preceded in death by her parents, George and Catherine Gaffney, and her sister Margaret, Ms. Gaffney is survived by her sister Barb, brother Joe, nephews Brandon and Timothy (Kalie), and a great nephew, Wells.

Contributions in her memory may be made to the Jane Gaffney Reimagining the Peoples of the Middle East Fund at [www.ispu.org/janes-fund](http://www.ispu.org/janes-fund).

■ **Roger Kirk**, 92, a retired Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died of pneumonia on Jan. 18, 2023, at Sibley Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Kirk was born on Nov. 2, 1930, in Newport, R.I. He was the son of Admiral Alan G. Kirk, who commanded Allied Naval Forces at the invasion of Normandy during World War II.

He graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. from Princeton University in 1952 and then served in the United States Air Force from 1952 to 1955.

Mr. Kirk's Foreign Service career began in 1955. Fluent in Russian, Italian, and French, he first served as a translator at the U.S. embassy in Moscow when Josef Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union and Harry Truman was the U.S. president. He was posted in Washington, D.C., Rome, Moscow, New Delhi, and Saigon.

In 1972 Mr. Kirk was assigned on detail to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency as deputy assistant director for international relations during the SALT Treaty negotiations.

He was appointed ambassador to Somalia in 1973. From 1978 to 1983, he was U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations organizations in Vienna. Serving at the rank of ambassador, he led

the U.S. delegation on nuclear nonproliferation negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Amb. Kirk finished his career in 1989 as the U.S. ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Romania. Just after he was succeeded in that post, Nicolae Ceausescu was swept from power as the Soviet Union crumbled with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Colleagues and friends recall the fine example he set as a diplomat. "Roger Kirk was the kind of diplomat that many of us who have come after have sought to emulate," said U.S. Special Envoy to Yemen and family friend FSO Timothy Lenderking. "He served in the most interesting places at captivating times and did it all with grace. Roger Kirk was kind and humble and wrestled with the most important issues of our time, not for personal glory but to advance American interests and values at tumultuous times of history. He demonstrated why this profession can be so rewarding when we embrace the challenges involved."

Career FSO Ambassador Teresita Schaffer, a longtime family friend, observed: "In a service that tends to be geographically stovepiped, Roger Kirk's career spanned an amazing array of countries and subjects, from Somalia—then as now a tough post—to Romania, with assignments touching most of the important issues in U.S. foreign policy. Roger was truly a lovely guy with an elegant sense of humor."

In his retirement, Amb. Kirk continued an active role in U.S. foreign policy studies. He was an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a lifetime member of the Board of Directors at the Atlantic Council. He was also board chair of the Washington International School from 1985 to 2000.

Amb. Kirk was an avid squash player into his eighties. He and his wife, Betty, continued their love of international travel in the past two decades, adding time to guest lecture on Russian studies and international relations at cruise ship stops around the world.

He delighted in spending summer vacations at Rehoboth Beach, Del., with his family. Until the very end, he enjoyed good company, food, and wine, and was quick to share his wit with a familiar twinkle in his eye.

Amb. Kirk is survived by his spouse of 68 years, Madeleine “Betty” Yaw Kirk; children Marian, Sarah, Juli, and Alan; sister Deborah Solbert (age 100), of Cold Spring Harbor, on Long Island, N.Y.; 13 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren.

■ **Eric Robert Loken**, 71, a retired Foreign Service officer with USAID, died on Jan. 11, 2023, in New Bern, N.C.

Mr. Loken was born on May 28, 1951, in Urbana, Ill., to Robert Loken and Gloria Berg. He found his passion for travel, learning, and international development as a child visiting Ghana and Egypt, where his father worked for the Ford Foundation and World Bank.

In 1969 Mr. Loken graduated from Hollywood Hills High School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., as class president. He went on to study at Johns Hopkins University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in natural sciences and a master’s degree in environmental engineering. His graduate coursework included constructing a structure from which he studied the schooling patterns of fish.

Following graduate school, Mr. Loken worked for the Department of Environmental Regulation in Marathon, Fla., conducting environmental assessments for various infrastructure permits. It was during this time he met and mar-

ried Kathy Loken after being introduced through his stepfather.

In 1982 he was sworn in as a member of the U.S. Foreign Service. He and Kathy traveled to Colombo for his first post, followed by Rabat, where the couple welcomed their daughter, Casey.

In 1992 Mr. Loken was assigned to the regional mission in Nairobi and spent the next four years traveling extensively throughout east Africa.

Mr. Loken’s final post was Harare. He and his family fell in love with Zimbabwe, spending seven years there (1996-2003) through the country’s first presidential elections and subsequent economic collapse.

Mr. Loken was passionate about wildlife and habitat conservation, which showed in his dedication to his work in Africa and Asia through flagship programs like CAMPFIRE.

While overseas, Mr. Loken enjoyed golfing with friends on the weekend, going on safari with his family, and discovering new scuba diving spots.

In 2003 Mr. Loken returned to Washington, D.C., where he worked in the Bureau for Southern Africa, ending his USAID career as the director for natural resources in the Africa bureau.

After retiring from the Foreign Service in 2012, Mr. Loken invested his time in hobbies including restoring his 1952 Willys Jeep, birdwatching on the Neuse River, and spending time with his beloved dogs, Thor and Sadie.

Family members and friends remember Mr. Loken as intelligent, determined, witty, and passionate.

Mr. Loken was preceded in death by his parents, Robert Loken and Gloria Berg.

He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Kathy Loken, and his daughter, Casey Loken, who followed in his footsteps working in international development;

sisters Dia and Kristin Loken; niece Rayne Loken (and her spouse, Basel Hafez); and grandnephew Liam Hafez.

■ **Bernardo “Benny” Segura-Girón**, 79, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on June 13, 2022, of acute myeloid leukemia.

Mr. Segura-Girón was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, on July 8, 1942, to Onofre Segura-Limardo and Socorro Girón-Torres. He received a law degree from the Catholic University of Puerto Rico in 1967 and a master’s degree in criminal law from New York University in 1974.

Prior to joining the Foreign Service, he worked as an instructor of legal matters at the Police Academy in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. He then joined C.O. Masson, Inc., in San Juan, Puerto Rico, as a management trainee.

Later, Mr. Segura-Girón became a community relations officer for the Department of Justice in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

In 1971 he joined the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) under the U.S. Department of Justice in New York City as a program analyst, becoming a management analyst in Washington, D.C., in 1975.

Mr. Segura-Girón joined the State Department in 1982 and served until 2004. His first posting, at the U.S. embassy in Brasilia, marked the start of 14 straight years abroad.

He subsequently served in Caracas (1985-1987); Riyadh (1987-1988); Manama (1988-1990); Buenos Aires (1990-1994); and Panama City (1994-1997). He returned stateside in 1997, finishing his career with postings in Washington.

He received the Superior Honor Award three times during his career at State (1989, 1993, and 1996). He also received a Special Achievement Award

from the Department of Justice in 1979 and an Exceptional Performance Award from the Central Intelligence Agency in 2003.

Mr. Segura-Girón spent his retirement years as a consultant, giving him the flexibility to further explore the world with his wife, Frances. He also enjoyed golf, volunteered as a minister of the eucharist at St. Michael Catholic Church in Annandale, Va., and read avidly. He was equally comfortable chatting up the parking lot attendants at Nationals games and foreign luminaries at embassy receptions.

Mr. Segura-Girón is survived by Frances, his wife of 52 years; daughter Francesca Segura Schlesinger (and spouse Robert); son Bernardo (and spouse Christie); four grandchildren, Emmet, Alexander, Elena, and Nicolas; his “granddog,” Tivo; and brother Onofre. He was predeceased by his beloved dog Chuchi.

■ **F. Wayne Tate**, 76, a retired USAID Foreign Service officer, died on Jan. 2, 2023.

Mr. Tate was born in Queens, N.Y., on Jan. 26, 1946, to Ruth and Fred Tate.

He was in the U.S. Navy from 1968 to 1971 and the Army Reserves from 1969 to 1975. He joined USAID in 1971, serving overseas for more than 30 years.

Mr. Tate’s postings included the Philippines, Pakistan, and Bolivia. He was proudest of his work as mission director in Paraguay.

After returning home, Mr. Tate was a professor of national security strategy at the National War College in Washington, D.C.

Always well informed and holding a sharp opinion on everything, Mr. Tate was known for both his irreverence and his wit, often using the latter to ease the delivery of the former. He made a lasting impression on everyone he met.

Friends and family members recall Mr. Tate as a patriot who believed in the mission of this country. He was also a consummate historian, with an office filled to the brim with books, artifacts, maps, and medals.

More than someone who remembered facts, figures, and dates—though he did—he understood the mechanics of global change, seeing patterns and understanding the underlying human follies that cause history to repeat.

When not on assignment, Mr. Tate was happiest on the water. An avid fly fisherman and a nature lover, he could find the fishing in any country on earth—and carve out the time to throw in a line.

He was preceded in death by Rita, his wife of 47 years, and is survived by his mother, Ruth; sister Janet; and sons David and James.

■ **Lannon Walker**, 86, a retired Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died of peritonitis on Oct. 9, 2022, in Provence, France.

Mr. Walker was born on Jan. 17, 1936, in Los Angeles, Calif., to James Orville and Esther Walker.

He moved to France in 1947 as a young teenager, and returned perfectly bilingual a few years later as a noncommissioned officer of the U.S. Air Force, in which he served from 1953 to 1958.

Mr. Walker met his future wife, Arlette Daguet, while serving on an American base in Evreux, France; they were married on July 16, 1954.

In 1961 Mr. Walker earned a B.S. from Georgetown University. He spent 38 years in the State Department, starting out in 1962 as a political officer in Morocco.

He also served in Algeria, Libya, Cameroon, Vietnam, Zaire, and in Washington, D.C., where he was senior

deputy assistant secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs (1977-1982), special adviser for African Affairs (1983-1984), and acting deputy inspector general (1984-1985).

On his return to Washington from Algeria, his second post, Mr. Walker found himself frustrated by a tradition-bound Service and a bureaucratically weak State Department. In 1967 he joined with a number of like-minded officers to win control of the board of directors of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) and turn that staid organization into a noisy, vibrant vehicle for reform. He was AFSA’s chair until 1969.

He served as U.S. ambassador to Senegal (1985-1988), Nigeria (1989-1992), and Côte d’Ivoire (1995-1998). Amb. Walker was known for his keen intelligence, insatiable curiosity, and innate ability to find pragmatic and imaginative solutions to the most difficult problems and to present them in a simple and easy-to-understand way.

From 1988 to 1989, he was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment.

After retiring from the Foreign Service, Amb. Walker and his wife moved to L’Isle sur la Sorgue in Provence, France.

Amb. Walker is survived by his wife, Arlette; daughter Rachelle, of London, U.K.; and daughter Anne, of Seattle, Wash. ■



If you would like us to include an obituary in In Memory, please send text to [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org).

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, as well as details of the individual’s Foreign Service career. Please place the name of the AFSA member to be memorialized in the subject line of your email.

## Afghanistan Evacuation: The Human Dimension

### The Secret Gate: A True Story of Courage and Sacrifice During the Collapse of Afghanistan

Mitchell Zuckoff, Penguin Random House, 2023, \$28.99/hardcover, e-book available, 336 pages.

REVIEWED BY P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY

Contentious hearings on the August 2021 American withdrawal from Afghanistan are underway in the U.S. Congress; there is unlikely to be a timelier reminder or better exposition of the human dimension of what happened during those weeks than *The Secret Gate* by Mitchell Zuckoff.

The American-led evacuation of more than 120,000 people from the airport in Kabul as the country fell to the Taliban is seared into the memories of everyone who lived through it—Afghans, Americans, and the nationals of the dozens of countries that had assisted Afghanistan since 2001.

To that list we should add those who had served in the country over the previous 20 years and responded from wherever they were and in real time to the desperate pleas for help from Afghans they had come to know—and from those they did not.

In *The Secret Gate*, Zuckoff tells the story of the evacuation from Afghanistan through the eyes of Ms. Homeira Qaderi, an Afghan author and feminist activist who resisted leaving her homeland, and of Sam Aronson, a Foreign Service officer who volunteered to help with the evacuation. He relies extensively on interviews with both and makes clear none of the dialogue in the book is a fiction. (Zuckoff is also the author of *Thirteen Hours*, a best-selling account of the 2012 tragedy in Benghazi that claimed the lives of the

U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other American officials.)

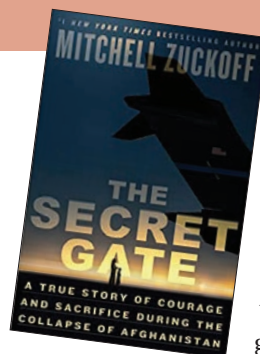
Zuckoff does not spend much time explaining the history of the U.S. engagement with Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks on 9/11—or on the politics of the withdrawal. He assumes a certain familiarity among readers of a wrenching event that is still fresh in so many minds.

### The Complexity of Individual Choices

In any case, he is not interested in scoring points; the book is an accessible account of how peoples' lives are upended in a moment and how they choose to react in extreme circumstances. The author's attention to detail helps crystallize the complexity and unpredictability of individual choices, from the moment the Taliban entered Kabul on Aug. 15 to two days before the final departure of American forces on Aug. 30.

One-sentence vignettes and observations expertly illuminate the universe of people caught up in the tragedy of the fall of Kabul: certainly that of Qaderi and Aronson, but also of Afghan families deep in indecision and fear; concerned friends trying to assist from afar; American security personnel both helping and constrained by a dangerous security environment; and State Department officers balancing the physical and emotional toll of implementing the guidelines on who qualifies for evacuation under an impossible deadline.

As Zuckoff describes Homeira Qaderi's growing awareness of just how dangerous the Taliban takeover of Kabul is becoming, he brings to life a residential quarter of the city where families live largely undisturbed in apartments and watch events unfold on still-uncensored news channels, where children continue to attend school,



and where women walk the streets to go to markets—until by the second week, the streets of Kabul grow quieter, shops close down, and the Taliban presence becomes more evident.

This is also a twilight world, where Qaderi continues to speak out against the Taliban on her social media accounts with half a million followers and in interviews on Afghan TOLONews, and where she is in touch with her American literary agent.

As Qaderi struggles with whether to leave Afghanistan, Zuckoff highlights how the conflict between political activism and personal safety is front and center. She directs anger at the Taliban—and the United States. At one point, she observes that “those who are leaving are leaving for the future. My future is now” in Kabul, in the fight she still believes possible against the Taliban.

The contrast with the experiences and motivations of Sam Aronson, the Foreign Service officer who helped her escape, is inspired. Aronson had spent seven years in the State Department, the first two with Diplomatic Security, and was between assignments when he seized the opportunity to volunteer for service at Kabul Airport. His motivations, candidly described as being a mix of wanting to be where the action was and doing important work, morphed into a compelling drive to help people.

Zuckoff's descriptions of the conditions inside the airport, and of the effort to provide some structure to the days will be recognizable to readers who have served in other conflicts around the world. The personal toll is significant at the airport gates, as officers decide who will be evacuated, and who will not, wondering if those they turn away will face retaliation or worse.

## Quiet Acts of Heroism

While not much more than a subtext, the professionalism of the Foreign Service, the important work of regional security officers, the quiet acts of heroism that gathered hundreds of embassy employees in the city, and the coolness of the leadership of Ambassador John Bass, his deputy Jim DeHart, and of others, stand out.

What also stands out is the transition Aronson underwent—from doing what he could within the official boundaries of the evacuation, to making a choice to bend the rules and respond to urgent requests for assistance from Afghan and American colleagues who reached out to him on the off-chance he could help their family members and persons at risk of retaliation from the Taliban. Most were not going to make the cut for evacuation or reach an entry point to the airport on time.

Across mostly one day and working almost on impulse, Aronson found himself stationed at the Glory Gate entry point, which is the subject of the book's title. The latter was a secret access point for the most at-risk Afghan contacts and employees of the U.S. government, but the number of people allowed to use it also increased over time. It was at some remove from the crush of thousands of people at other entrances, including Abbey Gate where a terrorist suicide bomb killed 13 U.S. military and more than 170 Afghans.

Access through Glory Gate was strictly controlled. Although Aronson was just on the inside, the people he was seeking to assist were either en route or across the street, and *not* on the lists of authorized evacuees. As Aronson juggled the career implications of violating instructions, he made the decision to get people through the gate and walk them through processing. He depended on the acquiescence,

assistance, and bravery of an interpreter and the Afghan and American security personnel at the concertina wire and barricades.

The final pages of Zuckoff's narrative race through the effort to convince Qaderi to leave her family, and Aronson's personal risk-taking to secure her entry, with her son and brother, into the airport. He, and others, would later receive heroism awards from the State Department for the extraordinary lengths they went to to save lives.

This book is not a hagiography, and some observations may grate. There is also the reality that many Afghans who should have been evacuated were left behind. The decision to withdraw from Afghanistan will continue to be hotly debated.

That said, *The Secret Gate* should resonate with Foreign Service audiences. So many of them, in less publicized situations, have had to make the personal decision to go well beyond guidelines, and take the risks to help people in danger. I served with many of them in Kabul, where I was once ambassador. Zuckoff's book, through Aronson's experiences, brings their sacrifices and commitment to life.

It may not have been his intention, but Zuckoff makes me proud of what Foreign Service personnel put on the line, away from the cameras, and for no personal gain. No congressional committee hearing, and especially one with partisan intent, will change that reality.

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*P. Michael McKinley was in the Foreign Service for 37 years until his resignation in October 2019. He served as the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Afghanistan. He has written articles on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, including "We All Lost Afghanistan" published in Foreign Affairs on Aug. 16, 2021. He is now with The Cohen Group in Washington, D.C.*

## Cold War Sports Diplomacy

### Ice War Diplomat: Hockey Meets Cold War Politics at the 1972 Summit Series

Gary J. Smith, Douglas & McIntyre, 2022, \$26.95/paperback, e-book available, 336 pages.

REVIEWED BY ERIC RUBIN

In 1972, despite President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's efforts at détente, the Cold War was a dominant factor in much of the world. Israel was only a year away from the devastating surprise attack that began the Yom Kippur War, which brought the superpowers to confrontation in the Middle East. The Soviet Union still completely dominated the satellite states of the Warsaw Pact and was winning new allies in post-colonial states.

Yet, a thaw in the Cold War was also beginning, one that saw intensive diplomacy at the highest levels and increased travel and human contact across the so-called Iron Curtain. Although there was the continuing threat of nuclear conflict between the two superpowers, there was also a consistent aspiration for ways to reduce tensions, to increase arms control negotiations, and to further people-to-people contacts.

That is the context for this superb book, *Ice War Diplomat*, in which former Canadian Ambassador Gary J. Smith tells the story of the historic 1972 "Summit Series," a Canadian-Soviet hockey competition that brought sports diplomacy to the fore.

Smith describes in great detail his arrival as a second secretary, together with his wife, Laurielle, in Moscow in winter 1971. He captures the grimness and darkness of Moscow at that time,

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with few cars on the streets, few goods in the shops, and shabbily dressed people shuffling along unshoveled sidewalks. There was no advertising aside from Communist Party billboards and banners, and Soviet citizens remained wary of talking to foreigners.

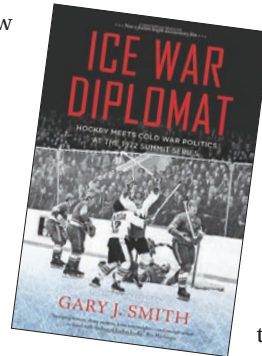
Smith also recalls the extensive bugging of Western embassies and residences, the strict control over local embassy employees enforced by the ubiquitous agency for foreign missions, UpDK, and the frequent harassment of Western diplomats by KGB agents on the street and in their homes.

He tells the story of coming back to his apartment to find his belongings ransacked, a common occurrence to this day in Moscow. Other extensive efforts the KGB went to included compromising NATO and other diplomats and staff with “swallows” (female seductresses) and “Romeos” (male suitors).

This is a tale of bureaucratic obstacles, mutual suspicion, frequent cultural clashes, and incomprehension that somehow—in significant part due to the efforts of Smith and his colleagues—culminated in the 1972 series of hockey matches that took place in both countries during the course of the year.

The summit between Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin marked a hopeful start for Soviet-Canadian relations, which involved a strong push by Trudeau to use the two countries’ shared love of hockey to make sports diplomacy literally (as reflected in the title of the documentary film based on this book) an ice breaker.

Great players like Paul Henderson and Phil Esposito on the Canadian team and Vladislav Tretiak and Vladimir Petrov



on the Soviet team clashed in a series of matches that resulted in a narrow Canadian victory in the final matchup, giving Canada the trophy and leading Kosygin and other top Soviet officials to complain of the Canadians’ rough play (nothing new there, then and now). The Canadian fans’ chant of “Da, Da Canada, Nyet, Nyet Soviet” was heard on

Soviet TV, and prompted more diplomatic protests.

Despite all, the series was lauded in both countries as a major breakthrough, and energized Trudeau’s own brand of détente, which led to a series of key grain and trade deals that brought the two countries closer.

What is most striking about this fascinating tale is the optimism about the future that clearly pervaded a still-tense and worrying time of superpower conflict across the globe. Official and people-to-people contacts continued to increase through the rest of the decade, until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the advent of more skeptical leaders—Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and in Canada’s case, Brian Mulroney.

Today as we ponder the collapse of our relations with Vladimir Putin’s Russia and Russia’s brutal invasions of Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, there is more than a twinge of nostalgia for a time when, despite all the obstacles, controversies, and clashes, people on both sides believed that our relations could continue to improve, and that contacts between people on both sides of the Cold War could help to lessen the risks of war. ■

*Ambassador Eric Rubin is the president of AFSA.*



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# Dogging It in the Foreign Service

BY DAVE DUNFORD

I've found being part of a Foreign Service family makes us at times strangers in a strange land. Dogs, for many of us, are integral members of the family. I believe that overcoming the challenges of shipping them to and from exotic places and finding reliable veterinarians were things I signed up for when I joined. I hope that governments and airlines will allow pets to continue to enrich the lives of those who choose a Foreign Service career. Here are a few who enriched mine.

## Pichi

We got our golden retriever puppy, Pichi, from a breeder in Virginia where we were living during my time in the A-100 course and Spanish language training. We knew when we got him that we were assigned to Quito. He was named after the mountain overlooking the capital city.

We left for Ecuador on December 31, 1966, and arrived 10 days later. Thanks to the shipping lobby's clout, my wife, Sandy, and I sailed on Grace Line's *Santa Magdalena*. Pichi traveled in a small compartment on the top deck. After nearly two years hiking in the Andes, Pichi flew back with us to Washington where I was transferred for Finnish language training at the Foreign Service Institute. Soon, he would be a trilingual dog, responding to commands in English, Spanish—and Finnish.

For my next assignment, in Finland, Pichi arrived in Helsinki by air but only after running amok at JFK for several hours and missing his scheduled flight. The Finnish vet at the airport kindly waived the quarantine requirement and paroled him to our custody. Pichi adapted to apartment living in the Helsinki suburb of Tapiola and the arrival of two rugrats named Greg and Tina. Sadly, his heart stopped on a Finnish veterinarian's table during a routine procedure.

## Doc and Jack

Back in the U.S., another golden retriever puppy came into our lives. As our time in Washington, D.C., extended to nine years, Doc was getting comfortable in his golden years when two cataclysmic events occurred: A yellow Labrador retriever pup named Jack arrived, and we all moved to Cairo.

Doc was good natured, lovable, and reasonably well behaved. Jack was far more intense, passionate about food and frisbees. Neighborhood kids would gather to watch him inhale his dinner. One day he got into a major cache of freeze-dried food bought for a backpacking trip. He then drank water and swelled up like the rat Templeton from *Charlotte's Web*. Jack advanced to the Virginia state finals in a dog frisbee event, and all agreed that he was national championship material



COURTESY OF DAVE DUNFORD

**Pichi on Pichincha above Quito.**

if only his thrower (me) had been more competent.

The move to Egypt marked the end of Jack's promising frisbee career. The dogs were on our flight to Cairo, in the cargo hold. When Doc and Jack led us out of airport security, the packed crowd parted as I imagined the Red Sea did for Moses. The dogs lived comfortably in Ma'adi, a southern suburb of Cairo, thanks to a generous yard, a household staff, and a gardener. Finding a vet in Cairo was always a challenge.

After three years in Egypt, I flew back to JFK with Doc and Jack in the hold. Sandy and the kids, who preceded me, met me as I retrieved my luggage and waited for the dogs. Eventually cages came up on an elevator. A customs official yelled, "Don't come near us. Take the dogs and go." Doc, now 12, had not



*Dave Dunford spent 29 years in the Foreign Service with assignments in Quito, Helsinki, Cairo, Riyadh, and Muscat (as ambassador). He is the author of From Sadat to Saddam: The Decline of American Diplomacy in the Middle East (2019). He and his wife, Sandy, and their yellow Lab, Buster, split their time between Tucson, Arizona, and Durango, Colorado.*



traveled well, and the stench was unmistakable. We loaded the stinky dogs in the car and fled, leaving the cages behind. When we were confident that sirens and flashing lights weren't following us, we pulled into a gas station and did our best to clean up the dogs.

## Jack and Moose

Four years later, it was time to transport two dogs to Saudi Arabia. Doc had died peacefully in Virginia at age 13. Moose, a black Lab, was Jack's new companion. Only guard dogs and seeing-eye dogs could enter Saudi Arabia. No worries. Declaring the two Labs as guard dogs was not a huge stretch. The paperwork was more daunting.

First, we needed health certificates from our vet in Fairfax. Then the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Annapolis had to certify that our vet was properly licensed. I took the certificates to a small office at State and took a number. After an hour, the woman behind the counter presented me with a formal document and unabashedly signed it George C. Shultz (then Secretary of State). At the Saudi embassy, an employee stamped the back of the Shultz document with an attestation in Arabic, tied the three docu-



COURTESY OF DAVE DUNFORD

**Moose and Jack in Riyadh.**

ments together with a ribbon, and added an impressive seal. Jack and Moose now could begin their assignments as guard dogs in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia is not ideal for two energetic Labrador retrievers, but the deputy chief of mission's residence, our home, was always filled with people, and dog walks in Riyadh's diplomatic quarter included splashing through the many fountains. Moose launched us on an adventure by swallowing a racquet ball. We drove him four hours to Aramco in Dhahran for the surgery and then returned to get him after he recovered.

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait turned Riyadh into the center of the world for several months and, arguably, contributed to my nomination as ambassador to Oman. In what seemed sensible at the time, we boarded the dogs at the Aramco kennel in Dhahran.

More than five months later, we were reunited with the dogs at the consul general's residence in Dhahran. Moose seemed fine, but age and lack of exercise had weakened Jack. Dog ownership in Oman, given British influence, was relatively common. Oman

did, however, require dogs to have photo IDs. After 30 minutes of bedlam in a photographer's studio, punctuated by snarls and yelps and curses, we walked out with acceptable photographs.

## A Glimpse of Dog Heaven

When we returned from a U.S. trip, Jack was struggling. I took him for his last car ride to a British vet who diagnosed the problem as mouth cancer. I reluctantly agreed to put him down. That same morning, I had a difficult meeting with Haitham bin Tariq, then deputy foreign minister and now sultan, on the cancellation of our economic assistance program. I had lost a good friend, and I struggled to manage this delicate meeting.

Our residence in Oman had overlooked an Indian Ocean beach. When we took the dogs there, Jack would plod along the surf, happy to get wet but careful to avoid swimming. Moose, on the other hand, would race in and out of the waves chasing tennis balls and scattering gulls. Now, sitting on our balcony, we imagined Jack with his tennis ball slowly walking behind Moose along the beach.

Then one day, a yellow Lab raced across the sand with the blinding speed of the youthful Jack. Another yellow Lab followed, splashing happily through the waves. Looking at the unspoiled beach and the sun setting over the Indian Ocean, we were looking at dog heaven. ■



COURTESY OF DAVE DUNFORD

**Jack playing frisbee in Cairo.**



If you don't take a selfie, were you actually there? The massive Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi is UAE's largest mosque, offering daily prayers, and an awesome sight for a steady stream of worshippers, tourists, and, of course, selfie-snappers. This photo was a happy accident as I tried to capture the stunning architecture of this vast structure. There are so many visitors, it's impossible to avoid the crowds. And the mosque complex is so big that it features its own parking garage, grocery store, and shopping mall complete with a McDonald's. ■

*Sarah Talalay is the cultural affairs officer at the U.S. embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She took this photo on an iPhone 12 mini during a vacation in Abu Dhabi with her husband, photographer James Talalay.*

Please submit your favorite, recent photograph to be considered for Local Lens. Images must be high resolution (at least 300 dpi at 8" x 10", or 1 MB or larger) and must not be in print elsewhere. Include a short description of the scene/event, as well as your name, brief biodata, and the type of camera used. Send to [locallens@afsa.org](mailto:locallens@afsa.org).

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