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On the Cover—Photo by Lara Eventide. It is of baobab trees near Kirindy Village, Madagascar, in October 2022, around the time of year when farmers burn the land to clear it for planting. There was a lot of smoke and burnt ground when she visited then.

Accomplishments and Challenges

BY ERIC RUBIN

This is my penultimate President's Views column for the *FSJ*. I will finish my second term and four years in office on July 15. In my final column next month, I will share my views on what needs to happen to make the U.S. Foreign Service healthy, happy, and relevant after a very trying two decades.

I took office in July 2019 during the Trump administration in the wake of a series of damaging decisions and unprecedented challenges for our members and our Service.

The State Department hiring freeze imposed by the Trump administration in its first two years continues to distort our demographics and has led to a serious deficit of mid-level officers in key positions. The first impeachment proceedings against President Trump put the Foreign Service and many of our members in the crosshairs of American politics and challenged us to find a way to defend the career Service.

The impact of those difficult years was serious. The number of people signing up to take the Foreign Service Officer Test declined dramatically in the last 10 years, reaching a low point during the previous administration. There are many reasons for

this decline, and not all relate to politics. But the sense that career public service was not valued or respected definitely played a role.



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

AFSA's biggest challenge in the 2019-2021 Governing Board term was to defend the Foreign Service. When our members were subpoenaed to testify or give depositions in the impeachment proceedings, they were told that the U.S. government would not help with their legal costs and that they could neither accept pro bono legal representation nor privately raise funds to support their legal defense. Both were considered violations of ethics rules.

AFSA went to battle stations. We won U.S. government reimbursement for our members' legal bills, up to the statutory Justice Department limits. We won the right for AFSA to raise funds to support their legal costs, and we won the right for our members to accept pro bono representation via AFSA. That career employees should testify before Congress on live national television without expert legal counsel is absurd, but that was the Trump administration's initial position.

Our colleagues who testified made us proud, eschewing politics and telling the truth as their oath to the Constitution required.

We raised more than \$750,000 in three months for our legal defense fund and ensured that every penny of our members' legal bills was covered. We are very proud of that record.

Meanwhile, we have spent the past four years pushing for equity for members of the Foreign Service in relation to other federal services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we pushed for and won 20

hours of administrative leave for members who needed it to deal with child and elder care and other challenges.

We lobbied Congress to extend to members of the Foreign Service the protections that other federal employees enjoy. We secured their right to cancel apartment leases, cell phone contracts, and car leases without financial penalties when they receive official travel orders.

We won in-state college tuition for members of the Foreign Service and their dependents in their state of domicile. Most recently, we won the right for Foreign Service kids to apply for Virginia's Governor's Schools from overseas.

We also were part of a powerful coalition that won a significant increase in funding for all the foreign affairs agencies in last year's budget process. The prospects for the coming year are difficult, but we hope we will be able to build off last year's gains.

AFSA plays multiple roles. We fight for our members as individuals, and we fight for the Foreign Service and our profession as the most important alternative to war and destruction.

We are grateful to have the highest percentage membership of any federal union, and we take our obligations seriously. Our work is by no means done, but I believe we have made a real difference in many important areas.

As always, please let us know how we can do better in representing you: member@afsa.org. ■

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U.S.-Africa Partnerships

BY SHAWN DORMAN

In November 2021, Secretary of State Blinken said: “Africa will shape the future—and not just the future of the African people but of the world.”

In August 2022, the administration released “U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa” to reframe the relationships between the U.S. and Africa to emphasize “African agency” and partnership.

Our September 2022 *FSJ* focused on the U.S. increasing its engagement with Africa. This month we look at the promise of this renewal, starting with the December 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C., which brought together African leaders from 49 countries and the African Union.

To find out what was accomplished, we asked the senior director for Africa at the National Security Council and special adviser for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, FSO Dana Banks, who played a central role in advancing updated U.S. policies toward Africa and in planning the summit. In “Elevating the Partnership with Africa,” she fills us in on how that went and what’s ahead.

Next, Ambassador Hank Cohen reflects on the first U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, in 2014, and highlights prospects for U.S. involvement in “Deepening Working Relationships in Africa.”



In “A Key to Success: Engaging Civil Society,” Humanity United’s Kehinde Togun and Maria Kisumbi hail the summit’s depart-

ture from decades of “finger-wagging at African leaders” and “a Western savior mindset toward African people,” but also urging governments to boost civil society participation in the policy process.

The focus section closes with “The Business of Diplomacy: Prioritizing the U.S.-Africa Commercial Agenda” by Scott Eisner, president of the U.S.-Africa Business Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, who suggests doubling the presence of U.S. Foreign Commercial Service officers in Africa.

In the Feature, retired career diplomat Annie Pforzheimer and lawyer and human rights advocate Heather Barr discuss how those inside and those outside government can better understand each other and work together to support human rights globally.

The Education Supplement includes two significant articles. Frequent contributor Francesca Kelly takes us into the brave new world of generative artificial intelligence as it relates to applying to college. And Rebecca McPherson of State’s Global Community Liaison Office brings us “Special Needs Education Allowances: An Update.”

In President’s Views, Ambassador Eric Rubin reflects on “Accomplishments and Challenges” during four years at the AFSA helm. And in a timely Speaking Out, retired FSO Robert Wang makes the case for “Standing by Taiwan and Its Democracy: Why Statecraft Is Not Just About Avoiding Conflict.”

As always, we want to hear from you. Write us at journal@afsa.org. ■

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

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Gold-Standard Gaming

I found Robert Domaingue's November 2022 *FSJ* article, "Why the State Department Needs an Office of Diplomatic Gaming," and Fred Hill's March 2023 Letters-Plus response, "Gaming at State: Needed but Not New," both inspiring and a source of pride and fond memories.

I especially remembered how delighted we on the senior management team in the School of Language Studies were when Fred Hill agreed to conduct games in foreign languages as a subset, or sidebar, to his policy and strategic games on national security and global issues.

Working with Fred's team, we were able to provide our students who were studying French, Spanish, and more difficult languages like Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean with some of the most effective language experiences in their studies.

The students had authentic language experiences working on topics that would soon be part of their jobs at post. The students had those experiences working with native-speaking subject matter experts, making gaming in a foreign language the gold standard in language learning.

James E. Bernhardt
Director (ret.) for Innovation,
Curriculum, Student and Staff
Development
School of Language Studies, FSI
Arlington, Virginia

Bring Back Gaming

Let me second the March 2023 *FSJ* piece by Fred Hill, "Gaming at State: Needed but Not New," advocating for gaming at State.

I had the honor of serving as a Senior Army Fellow at the Foreign Service Institute and worked for Hill when he ran the Office of Special Programs. By that point in my career, I had been involved

in military exercises and "war games" for 23 years, culminating as director of the Strategic Crisis Exercise at the Army War College.

I cannot overstate the importance of looking "over the horizon" at the potential national security issues the United States may face. In that light, Special Programs reached out to the regional bureaus to solicit their concerns, developed scenarios vetted by those same bureaus, and then, given the unique location of FSI and influence of the Policy Planning Office, brought in senior interagency officials to consider options and solutions.

Our exercises often included combatant commanders and senior intelligence and Foreign Service officers as players, and so truly had a strategic focus. For example, after my fellowship and return to the Army War College, we collaborated on and supported the exercise that looked at possible outcomes of a U.S. invasion of Iraq six months before that happened, an exercise that Hill points to and led.

Diplomats serving in missions worldwide recognize that the churn of daily activities leaves little room for deep strategic thinking and planning. Special Programs helped fill that gap by providing insights and supporting Main State and the chiefs of mission in out-year planning, including the appropriate allocation of scarce resources.

The absence of strategic planning informed by gaming, on the other hand, risks unnecessary, reactive crisis responses, inefficient use of resources, and potential failure.

Special Programs had a proven track record at minimal cost to the benefit of the nation. I strongly urge State to bring it back in some form.

Dennis Murphy
Colonel (ret.), U.S. Army
Sneads Ferry, North Carolina

Data Analysis for Reform

I found the March 2023 issue of *The Foreign Service Journal* to be one of the best ever! Extremely well written, it includes a pleasant balance of viewpoints on key subjects pertinent to its readership.

One of my favorites, Dan Spokojny's "From Instinct to Evidence in Foreign Policy Decision-Making," was a bit reminiscent of a piece I used to circulate to fellow management officers, "The Department of State: Formal Organization and Informal Culture," a March 1969 Andrew M. Scott piece on why, historically, Foreign Service officers often fail to get the data analysis part correct. Some called it out of date; I chose to call it "historical."

The March edition's cover title, "Refining Reforms," is almost poetic in its scope, and we can always use more poetry.

Just another reason to keep *The Foreign Service Journal* on our bookshelves and in our hearts.

Raymond Maxwell
FSO, retired
Washington, D.C.

Recalling Successful Education and Training

I was heartened to read in the March 2023 *FSJ* about the modest progress in desperately needed Foreign Service reform. A recurring theme in the articles was the need to expand professional education and training.

As we design training programs for the 21st century, we need to recall successful 20th-century training programs that disappeared. Beatrice Camp's article on rotational job opportunities, "Learning the Ropes Through Rotations," particularly caught my attention.

The State Department, as well as the U.S. Information Agency, at one time assigned incoming junior officers as junior officer trainees (JOTs). Following

eight weeks of orientation (the A-100 course) and four months of Spanish-language training, my first assignment was as a JOT in Quito. There I did administrative, consular, political, and economic work.

In each section, I found a mentor willing to give me as much responsibility as I could handle. Friendships with several of these individuals lasted well beyond my time in Ecuador.

Memories of Ecuador include going to the port of Salinas to assist captains whose tuna boats had been seized for violating Ecuador's self-declared 200-mile territorial limit, keeping an American tourist out of jail who had gone on a drunken and naked romp in a Quito hotel, and being sent to our consulate in Guayaquil to take over the visa line when malfeasance was uncovered.

When I went to Quito, I had no career track (or "cone"). I left Quito knowing I wanted to be an economic officer. I asked for and received an assignment as an economic-commercial officer in Europe.

I never liked State's later decision to require applicants to select a career track before entering the Service. No doubt it was related to the decision to abolish JOT positions for budgetary reasons.

In my first decade, the Foreign Service provided me with 13 months of training in two languages, six months of in-house economics training, and an academic year of graduate economics. This was in addition to the A-100 orientation course and the 20-month apprenticeship in Quito. Later generations of junior officers were not so lucky.

I was also fortunate later in my career to be assigned to the Senior Seminar, a nine-month program designed to prepare its members (half coming from other U.S. government agencies) for leadership



responsibilities. The course featured monthly trips to different U.S. regions to give participants a better sense of the country we were representing.

I still have vivid memories of time on a family-run dairy farm in Minnesota, riding with the night shift in a police patrol car in Detroit, and riding around with the Border Patrol in El Paso.

We were all assigned an essay on leadership. This helped me craft a leadership style that stood me in good stead during my subsequent assignments to Riyadh as deputy chief of mission and Muscat as ambassador.

Sadly, the Senior Seminar disappeared during the first term of the George H.W. Bush administration, likely because of the need to fill "real" jobs.

David Dunford
FSO, retired
Tucson, Arizona

Learning the Ropes

The cover of the March 2023 *FSJ* was brilliant, capturing pictorially the history of "reform" in the Foreign Service. Every 20 or so years, a new generation rises to bring the system up to date. That seems quite extraordinary to me. I don't believe there's anything like it elsewhere in our government service.

I would also like to comment on one of the articles, "Learning the Ropes Through Rotations," by Beatrice Camp. Camp describes a wise practice that was unhappily abandoned by State decades ago.

In the early 1960s new officers assigned to embassies were usually, though not always, "over complement" and rotated through the various sections and, sometimes, other agencies, for six-month stints to learn those "ropes."

And learn we did. In my case, it was two or three months with USAID, which



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William B. Taylor

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proved invaluable in my later career. Camp had a similar experience.

Later, when this practice at State was abandoned and as I rose through the ranks, I watched first-tour officers often struggle to figure out what was going on and where they fit in. And sometimes they would lose heart, especially if assigned to consular positions at “visa mill” posts.

I could not help but wonder how management allowed this to happen. It was profoundly wasteful. I know that budgetary constraints and absence of a personnel “float” precluded continuation of the practice, but it seemed to me to be a serious loss.

*Jack Binns
Ambassador, retired
Tucson, Arizona*

Evaluations Need 360s

I read with interest Virginia Blaser’s Speaking Out piece in the April 2023 *FSJ*, “Why Our Evaluation System Is Broken and What to Do About It.”

Having served as a director of the Office of Performance Evaluation and as chair of the Foreign Service Grievance Board—and having written and read hundreds of EERs in those roles and as a deputy chief of mission (DCM) and management counselor—I concur that performance evaluation is a process, not a document, and that its real value is in helping employees improve their skills.

There is one important missing ingredient in her recipe for change, however. A key to successful performance evaluation is getting a full picture of the employee, not just from their supervisors but from colleagues and subordinates.

Especially in a Service with no shortage of brilliant writers and hard workers, interpersonal skills are essential to moving up



the organizational chain. Folks who are not able to manage down or sideways cannot be effective DCMs and chiefs of mission.

Yet we never evaluate for those skills or provide feedback—until employees in those roles are having problems. Adding the dimension of what peers and subordinates think about an employee’s performance can round out the picture in necessary ways.

Until we do that, we will never have an accurate understanding of an employee’s strengths and weaknesses. And employees will not really know what important skills they need to further develop, in their own self-interest and that of the State Department.

*Larry Mandel
FSO, retired
North Kingstown, Rhode Island*

Lessons Learned in CAR

I read the April 2023 feature, “Losing the Peace in the Central African Republic,” by Ambassador (ret.) Laurence Wohlers, with interest. The Central African Republic (CAR) may win the sweepstakes for the developing country in dire crisis that the American public knows and cares the least about. They’re not indifferent but truly ignorant about it—with scant political or economic incentive to learn.

This is largely because it is, for us, one of those places that epitomizes geographic remoteness. It is, moreover, surrounded by other “remote” countries with serious problems of their own.

So we must admire the many years of effort the author has devoted in various capacities to try to help guide CAR’s feuding communities within its French colonial-created boundaries to domestic peace and stability and to being capable of

self-defense. And we must thank him for sharing his lessons learned.

In the concluding section, “The ‘International Community’ as an Actor,” Wohlers explains why the complex efforts of the international community to help CAR overcome its difficulties failed. Thus, his analysis provides a road map to how and why such efforts can go wrong.

We can hope this may help planners in United Nations agencies, international nongovernmental organizations, and the foreign ministries of individual powers dealing with other developing countries in need of help that works. (Such planners should also see “Central African Republic” in the “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples.”)

*John W. Vincent
FSO, retired
East Windsor, New Jersey* ■

Corrections: May 2023 Edition

In “Getting to Know the Real USSR” by Rose Gottemoeller, Alma-Ata is now Almaty, not Astana. In “The Journey to Expo 2020 Dubai and Its Legacy” by Matthew Asada, U.S. Ambassador John Rakolta Jr. was dual-hatted as commissioner general of the expo, not Counselor T. Ulrich Brechbuhl. In the *AUSA News* article “FSO-Journalist on Countering Disinformation,” VOA was founded in 1942 to counter wartime disinformation, not Cold War disinformation. In Books, the Canadian team for the summit series included Paul Henderson, not Bobby Hull. We regret the errors.

**Share your thoughts
about this month’s issue.**

**Submit letters to the editor:
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RESPONSE TO MARCH 2023 FOCUS ARTICLE, “MERITOCRACY AT STATE: WHO DESERVES WHAT”

Meritocracy at State and the Foreign Service Exam Are Not Incompatible

BY JAMES JEFFREY

Foreign Service Officer Marshall Sherrell (“Meritocracy at State: Who Deserves What,” March 2023 *FSJ*) deserves credit for raising a controversial Foreign Service issue, the recent changes in valuation of the generalist exam (officially: Foreign Service Officer Test, or FSOT), and he reminds us that the way any FSO enters the Service is of no relevance once in.

Still, I cannot agree with his point that we do not need an FSOT pass requirement to help select new FSOs, and I come to different conclusions than he does on the exam as a “rigid fixture” versus arguably more effective subjective criteria, on its negative impact on diversity, and on the “who merits being chosen” question.

But first, as with any discussion of FSO personnel issues, we should pose the question: For what purpose does the United States have a Foreign Service officer corps? Mr. Sherrell, apart from describing the Service as “aspirational” and practicing “nontraditional” diplomacy, doesn’t address this. Neither the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) nor, beyond tight limits, FSOs

themselves define the ends of the Service. Rather, the American people, who pay for us through Congress, and administration leaders do that.

Two Unique Components

Congress has legislated a Service with two unique components. First, the Service is explicitly modeled on military officer personnel, not Civil Service, practice—with rank in the officer, not in the position—and a competitive promotion and assignment system with “up or out” characteristics that are at times brutal. (I know having crossed the senior threshold only on my last, sixth attempt.)

Second, it has a Senior Foreign Service (SFS) proportionally many times larger in comparison to the entire FSO corps than seen with the military or Civil Service. Generalist SFS officers make up about 10 percent of the total generalist officer corps of around 8,000; Army general officers make up less than 3 percent of the approximately 100,000 active-duty Army officers (according to 10 U.S.C. § 526 and 10 U.S.C. § 521). The Foreign Service has almost three times as many SFS officers



in numerical terms than the Army has general officers!

The intent is obvious. While doing the routine of diplomatic work from issuing visas to following host country developments to managing installations, the Foreign Service has as its main mission to develop and deploy senior diplomatic personnel to implement our country’s foreign policy, including a handful helping to formulate it.

Otherwise, we would save the taxpayer oodles of money with an almost entirely mid-level Service with a handful of seniors to supervise more or less routine work. The stress that GTM places on management responsibilities can’t justify such a rank structure; after all, 26-year-old FS-4-equivalent Army captains command 150-soldier companies. Rather, policy expertise and policy implementation justify it.

Policy Expertise at the Center

Presidents and secretaries expect just this. At any given time, roughly 100 FSOs are presidential appointees serving as ambassadors or assistant secretaries. In the last 40 years, FSOs have been



James Jeffrey retired from the Foreign Service in 2012 with the rank of Career Ambassador. He served, among other assignments, as deputy national security adviser and as U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Turkey (now Türkiye), and Albania. He was recalled in 2018 for 27 months as chief of mission in Syria and Special Representative to Defeat the ISIS Coalition.

elevated four times to Cabinet level, and some 15 to subcabinet positions as Deputy Secretary, under secretary for political affairs, or equivalent Defense Department or National Security Council staff positions.

An FSO laid out the entire strategy for our Cold War struggle of more than 40 years; an FSO ambassador, next to a four-star general, convinced a reluctant Congress to support President George W. Bush's Iraq surge; and an FSO in Kyiv's Maidan Square inspired a whole nation. FSOs understand this; thus, in this same edition of the *FSJ*, the "AFSA Survey on the Future of Foreign Service Work" documented that fully 39 percent of FSOs aspire to mission leadership positions.

For reasons I cannot fathom, our personnel system pervasively deemphasizes, distorts, even denies this reality, namely, the priority of policy work. I was present when two senior GTM officials emphasized to the then-Secretary and the entire senior staff that officer performance needed to be based on management, not on policy, allegedly consisting of writing reporting cables.

But look at the background of those FSOs now in Cabinet, subcabinet, assistant secretary, or major embassy chief of mission positions. All have a strong record of policy excellence.

This focus on policy should be kept in mind in assessing Mr. Sherrell's preference for subjective assessment tools such as the Qualification Evaluations Panel (QEP), the oral exam itself, and various alternative entry processes such as Pickering and Rangel Fellowships.

As he indicated, the FS testing and recruitment process has changed over the years; and as many of us are aware, the CIA recruits highly intelligent, capable people based not on a test but on

My answer is that the exam provides more or less objective information, otherwise difficult to ascertain, on the candidate's competitive position on not all, but a number of traits essential for an FSO career, particularly policy work.

subjective evaluations of performance in interviews and background reviews, albeit in an enormously intense fashion.

So could we do without the exam?

A Measure of Essential Traits

Leaving aside why we would want to do so, my answer is that the exam provides more or less objective information, otherwise difficult to ascertain, on the candidate's competitive position on not all, but a number of traits essential for an FSO career, particularly policy work.

Specifically, to quote the State Department: "The Foreign Service Officer Test measures your knowledge, skills, and abilities, including writing skills that are necessary to the work of a Foreign Service Officer. ... Questions will cover a broad range of topics including, but not limited to, the structure and workings of the U.S. Government, U.S. and world history, U.S. culture, psychology, technology, management theory, finance and economics, and world affairs; English expression; and a situational judgement section."

It's not an IQ test, as I've seen brilliant people flunk it. Rather, much of it tests recognizing and analyzing facts and patterns under huge time pressure from a mass of often ambiguous data—a good approximation of how diplomatic policy-making and negotiations actually occur.

These traits cannot be measured competitively by reviewing a candidate's

personal narratives for the QEP or thoroughly in the oral exam. Assessments of performance once in the Service shed more light on them, but those are also subjective; and, most importantly, the officer is already in the organization.

Mr. Sherrell points out that the State Department lists, along with the traits for candidate evaluation, 13 dimensions of performance, some of which, such as cultural adaptability, leadership, and working with others, cannot be measured by the FSOT.

That's fair, but the two abilities that in my experience distinguish truly effective senior officers doing policy from their near peers are their palpably impressive intellectual and communications traits, traits best measured against the universe of other applicants by objective test criteria.

To be sure, a senior State Department official recently argued that the test has never been a predictor of future job performance, but is there statistical documentation for what should be an easily tested assertion?

On diversity, Mr. Sherrell suggests that the exam is a problem but doesn't explain why. Aside from obligations to advance legal, judicial, and administration diversity, equity, and inclusion policies, the Service derives unique benefit from them by representing our diversity to a diverse world.

But how does the exam block hiring a diverse work force? Often up to 40 percent

or morve of exam-takers passed—thousands of people. The Service hires only a few hundred most years and certainly could select test-passers from disadvantaged groups. Nor is the exam necessarily an impediment to the other sort of diversity Mr. Sherrell correctly emphasizes, that of varied life experience such as his as a janitor. Or mine.

I may have been “pale and male” but was certainly not “Yale” back when that really mattered: the son of an auto mechanic, commuting to a work-study university, earning a master’s in night school not in foreign affairs but business administration, and spending seven years as an Army officer. That and barely passing my oral exam should have ruled me out. What got me in was a high test score, rebutting his argument that the exam produces only a “very specific type.”

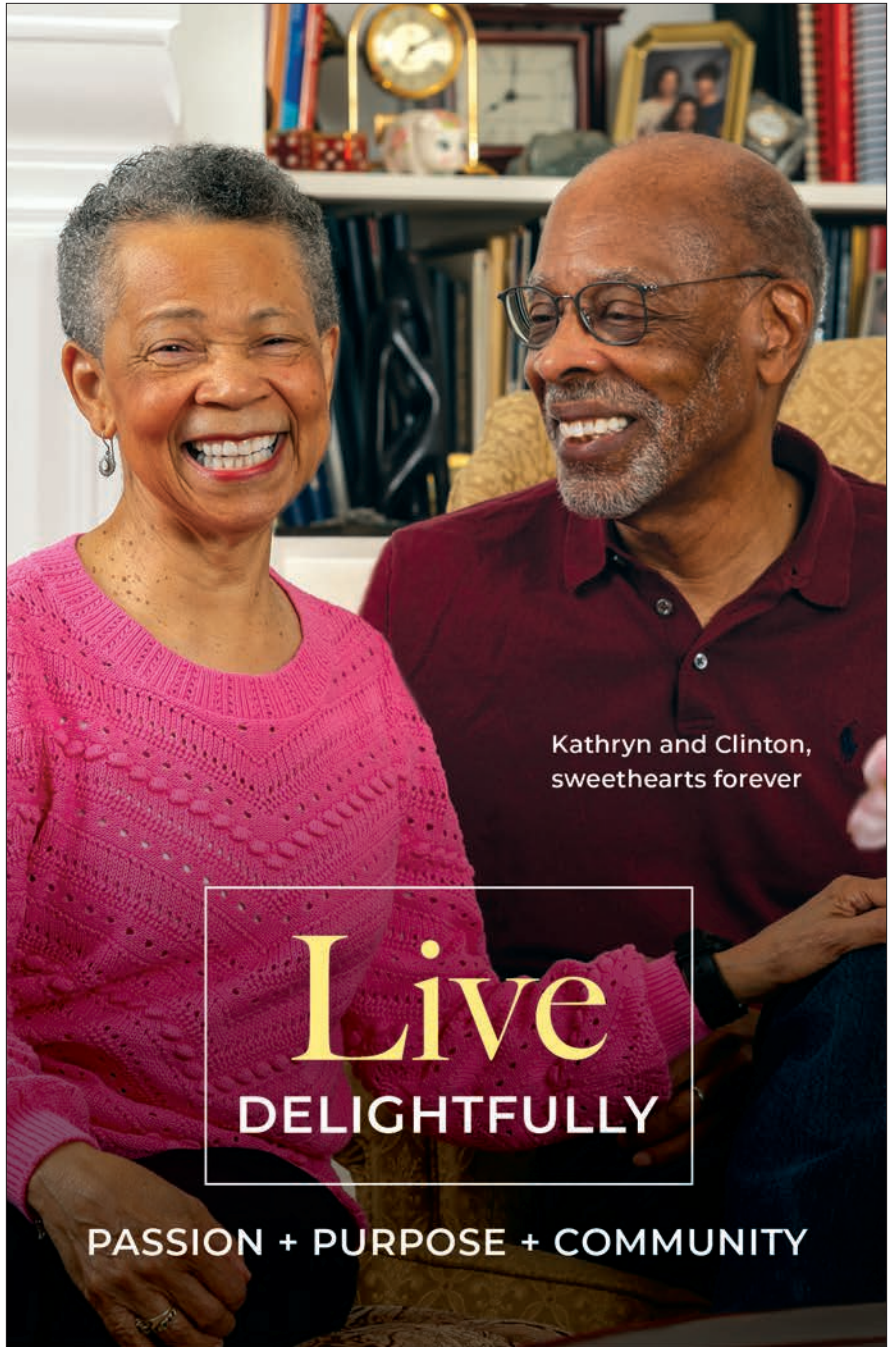
The Question of Merit

Finally, Mr. Sherrell’s headline question: Who merits being chosen? My answer: A Foreign Service career is not a reward for merit. The Service is a public institution serving the American people, who fund and rely on it for some pretty serious things.

The Service, in granting admission, assures most of those entering a more than 20-year career with salary, benefits, and retirement superior to what most people have.

Americans, and in particular those citizens striving to enter but whom their government does not select, thus must be sure that the Service has tried its best to select those competitively most qualified, however imperfect any selection system.

To this end, there is no substitute for a quantifiable test that objectively documents strength in communications and intellectual skills central to FSO success, particularly for duty at higher levels. ■



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Evacuation from Sudan

On April 23, an elite team of Navy SEALs carried out a precarious evacuation of American embassy personnel in Khartoum, airlifting them to Djibouti, 800 miles away, *The New York Times* reported. The airlift included about 70 U.S. embassy employees and a handful of diplomats from other countries.

The exodus continued as, hours later, a United Nations convoy carrying foreign nationals from around the world began a 35-hour journey to Port Sudan on the Red Sea, and French and British diplomats made use of an airfield outside the city to flee heavy fighting.

Germany became one of the first countries to launch an evacuation mission for *all* of its nationals in Sudan, flying 101 German citizens to Jordan.

In the week preceding the evacuation,

battle for control of the country between two rival generals—Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in charge of the nation’s armed forces, and Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who leads the Rapid Support Forces military group—led to a swift deterioration in security in and around the capital.

As fighting worsened, the State Department suspended operations at Embassy Khartoum on April 22. John Godfrey, the first U.S. ambassador to Sudan in a quarter century, arrived in the country just eight months prior to the evacuation.

Secretary Blinken said that the State Department was exploring ways to reestablish a diplomatic footprint in the country, possibly in Port Sudan. But he cautioned it would depend on the conditions in the country, which he described as “very, very challenging.”

The State Department is also collecting information from Americans in Sudan through a crisis-intake form that allows citizens to indicate they want to leave the country and need assistance.

However, as the majority of Americans still there are dual citizens, the department anticipates that many will opt not to leave. At least two U.S. citizens have been killed in the conflict, Reuters reported on April 26.

USAID Administrator Samantha Power said in an April 23 statement that the agency had deployed a team of disaster response experts to coordinate the humanitarian response as fighting continues.

Afghanistan Dissent Message Saga

The monthslong tug-of-war between top House Republicans and the State Department continues, and the Secretary of State’s Dissent Channel lies at the center of the debate.

In early March, the House Foreign Affairs Committee began conducting hearings to investigate the Biden administration’s handling of the 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal.

As part of this process, committee chair Michael McCaul (R-Texas) has demanded that the State Department provide relevant documents.

The committee demanded three documents in particular: a classified cable, transmitted by diplomats through the Dissent Channel, allegedly warning of the potential collapse of the Afghan government; an 87-page After Action Report prepared by Ambassador Daniel Smith (who was tapped to lead the State Department’s review of its role in the withdrawal); and U.S. Embassy Kabul’s Emergency Action Plan.

While the State Department shared two of the documents, it did not comply

Gratitude for USAID

I want to take a moment to thank the men and women of USAID, including the Foreign Service nationals and the staff of your implementing partners, for their efforts to make the world a better place. We don’t say it enough, but we appreciate their service, and yours, Administrator Power, so please convey those thanks on behalf of our subcommittee.

—Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, at the FY24 Budget Hearing for USAID on April 18.

Aid Work Despite Danger

The staff of humanitarian aid organizations have been assaulted and killed—a reminder of the dangers our diplomats, humanitarian, and development workers at USAID face as they carry out their mission every day. I’m sure I speak for all of us when I say how relieved I was to hear about the successful evacuation of our officials from Sudan, but ... we cannot and must not abandon the Sudanese people, nor will insecurity deter us from our work in other parts of the continent and other places in the world.

—Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at the FY24 Budget Hearing for USAID on April 26.



with requests for the dissent cable, citing the importance of preserving the integrity of a dissent mechanism. Instead, the department offered to hold a classified, bipartisan briefing for the Foreign Affairs Committee on the concerns raised by embassy staff ahead of the pullout.

House Republicans issued a subpoena on March 27 for Secretary of State Antony Blinken to produce the classified cable, *Foreign Policy* reported. If he does not, the House committee could choose to enforce the subpoena by holding a vote to cite the State Department for failure to comply.

If the committee were to approve, the full House could vote to ask a federal court to order enforcement of the subpoena, according to Axios. As of May 10, State had not complied.

Ambassador Thomas Boyatt, who authored a dissent cable in 1974 over U.S. policy in Cyprus and is a former AFSA president, told *Real Clear Politics* in an April 26 interview that “if a dissent cable for one reason or another reaches public purview, it’s good for a variety of national security reasons because it forces the bureaucracy to confront its mistakes and to concentrate on not repeating them.”

In a press briefing March 27, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel told journalists: “The tradition of having a Dissent Channel is one that is cherished here. It is a unique way for anyone in the department to speak truth to power without fear or favor. It’s vital to us that we preserve the integrity of that process and of that channel.”

On March 30, AFSA released a statement from President Eric Rubin in support of the Dissent Channel’s confidentiality: “Failure to protect the confidentiality of constructive dissent can lead to a fear of disclosure or retaliation that may dissuade career employees from



Richard Verma is sworn in as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources during a ceremony on April 5, 2023.

DepSec Confirmation

On March 30, the U.S. Senate confirmed Richard R. Verma as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources (D/MR) to replace Brian McKeon.

Verma, 54, left his role as chief legal officer and head of global public policy at Mastercard to rejoin the State Department, having served as U.S. ambassador to India from 2015 to 2017. During the Obama administration, he also served as Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs.

Earlier in his career, he was national security adviser to former Senator Harry Reid (D-Nev.). Verma had stints as vice chair of The Asia Group, partner and senior counselor at Steptoe and Johnson LLP, and senior counselor at the Albright Stonebridge Group.

He is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, where he also served as judge advocate. He is the recipient of numerous awards and decorations, including the State Department’s Distinguished Service Medal, the International Affairs Fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Air Force’s Meritorious Service Medal.

offering their best professional advice. AFSA believes that use of the Dissent Channel ... must be protected within the executive branch of government.”

Since the hearings with the 118th Congress began in early March, witnesses have included U.S. military members present at the Abbey Gate suicide bombing, some of whom were badly injured in the attack.

The House Oversight and Accountability Committee is also holding hearings to review the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, *The Hill* reported. Witnesses include inspectors general from the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Russian Government Shuts Down American School

On March 31, a Moscow court suspended the work of the Anglo-American School of Moscow (AAS) for 90 days for allegedly violating Russian educational requirements, forcing the school to close its doors to the more than 1,200 students who were enrolled there from pre-K through grade 12.

AAS Moscow released a statement on April 13 stating that their motions to lift the suspension had been unsuccessful and confirming that the school would not reopen for the remainder of the 2022-2023 school year.

In a second statement on April 21, the school announced that it would

remain closed through the end of the 2023-2024 school year and said it is “considering our next steps in terms of clarity on what would be required to return to operations in the future.”

AAS was founded in Moscow in 1949 by the U.S., U.K., and Canadian embassies, but it also teaches local Russian students and students from expatriate families. The purpose-built campus in the northwest part of Moscow has been in operation since 2000.

The smaller St. Petersburg branch of the school was forced to close in 2018 when Russian authorities declined to renew the school’s lease. That decision was made shortly after multiple Russian diplomats were expelled from the U.S. and U.K. in response to the poisoning of ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in London.

One former AAS teacher, Marc Fogel, has been in Russian prison since August 2021, when he was arrested for possessing medical marijuana; he is currently serving a sentence of 14 years in a Russian penal colony.

Too Many Vacancies

As an April 4 op-ed in *The Washington Post* noted, too many crucial positions remain unfilled by the current administration well into its third year. Despite laudable progress in nominations in the face of obstructive senators, many posts—such as Italy—still have no nominee on the horizon.

The solution, writes the paper’s editorial board, would be a structural overhaul of how confirmations are handled: decreasing the number of nominees who require votes and changing Senate rules to require that lawmakers guarantee confirmation hearings to presidential nominees within a short, fixed period after their nominations.

Contemporary Quote

“The people who work for the State Department are this different class. They’re for the country in all senses; they give up their entire life. They usually speak multiple languages, and they’re positioned all over the world. ... They’re the first ones in, before any soldiers, before any boots on the ground, and they’re the last to leave. It’s a really fascinating job that many people just don’t know about.”

—Keri Russell, lead actress in the Netflix series *“The Diplomat,”* in an April 11 interview on *“The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.”*

Since our last update in the March *FSJ*, the pace of confirmation has slowed to barely a trickle: Only three nominees have been confirmed since January. They are career FSO Michael Ratney to be ambassador to Saudi Arabia, political appointee Eric Garcetti to be ambassador to India, and political appointee Richard Verma to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

Nominations have come at a much healthier clip. Since the beginning of the year, 16 career members of the U.S. Foreign Service have been nominated for ambassadorships to Micronesia, Djibouti, Albania, Georgia, Lebanon, Laos, Gabon, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Palau, Lithuania, Egypt, Liberia, Somalia, Burundi, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Three political appointees have been nominated for the positions of Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy, special envoy for North Korean Human Rights, and Ambassador at Large for Arctic Affairs.

As of mid-April, AFSA is tracking 29 ambassador vacancies, 14 of which have a nominee. The Biden administration has nominated 106 career members of the Foreign Service versus 67 political appointees—a ratio of 61.3 percent to 38.7 percent.

A Tech Expert at Every Embassy

Just one year after its creation, the State Department’s Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy is working to put a trained cyber and digital officer in every embassy around the world by the end of 2024.

At an April 12 event hosted by The George Washington University’s School of Media and Public Affairs, the bureau’s ambassador at large, Nathaniel Fick, said the Foreign Service created a new skill code for personnel who work on cyber, digital, and emerging tech issues to elevate the skill set across the workforce.

“If a Foreign Service officer spends a couple of years in a designated technology tour, he or she gets credit for that in their record. That’s the first step towards incentivizing people to seek out these jobs,” Fick said.

He said the new skill code demonstrates the cross-cutting role cybersecurity and emerging tech have in other policy areas, and could potentially serve as a core competency for senior leadership roles in the future.

“I can imagine a future where every credible candidate to be a chief of mission, every future U.S. ambassador anywhere in the world, has to have some demonstrated understanding of technology issues, and a willingness to engage on that,” he added.

State in (Foggy) Bottom Five

In their recently released annual report on the best places to work in the federal government in 2022, the Partnership for Public Service and the Boston Consulting Group ranked the State Department in the bottom five among the largest agencies.

State placed 13th out of 17 (tied with the Department of the Navy), which is the same ranking it achieved in 2021. An evaluation of its subcomponents found that the Bureau of Intelligence and Research had the highest engagement score.

Based on employee satisfaction rankings governmentwide and at individual departments and agencies, the 2022 data found that NASA holds the number one position, as it did last year, while the intelligence community ranks third.

Of the 27 midsize agencies, USAID ranks 23rd. The U.S. Agency for Global Media, home of Voice of America, ranks 25th.

Meanwhile, after a banner year in 2021, the engagement score for the Foreign Service Institute saw a significant drop, falling from 79.7 to 72.2.

Newest to NATO

On April 4, Finland became the 31st and newest member of the trans-Atlantic security alliance.

At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto deposited Finland's instrument of accession with the U.S. government, represented by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Ahead of the flag-raising ceremony, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in remarks: "I am deeply proud to welcome Finland as a full-fledged member of our alliance, and I look forward to also welcoming Sweden as soon as possible."

25 Years Ago

The FSO Who Did It All

FSJ: In 20 years will a Foreign Service still be needed?

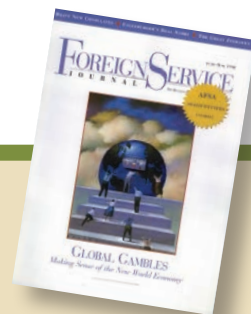
Eagleburger: I don't know. I can tell you if all the Foreign Service is asked to do is be somebody's postman, then the future is not bright.

But if we still want people who are immersed enough in somebody else's country and culture that they can give some insights you can't get from a website, then I think there's still a major role for the Foreign Service and for diplomacy.

It's a question of nuance. You get into a tight negotiation, you'd like to have somebody who understands the subtleties—that can make a difference. How do you interpret what somebody just said to you? What are their motivations? You can't get that out of a computer.

One question I have: Will the speed at which we now communicate drive out thought? I worry about that a lot. Instant answers to instant problems can get you in a hell of a lot of trouble.

—Interview with former Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger, winner of AFSA's 1998 Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award, excerpted from a profile titled, "The FSO Who Did It All: How AFSA Award Winner Larry Eagleburger Went from Career FSO to Secretary of State," in the June 1998 FSJ.



He noted that Finland's accession shows the world that Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to "slam NATO's door shut," adding: "Instead of less NATO, he has achieved the opposite; more NATO and our door remains firmly open."

Finland's accession protocol was signed by NATO allies on July 5, 2022, after which all 30 national parliaments voted to ratify the country's membership.

Sweden, which has sought to join the alliance since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, continues to have its accession blocked by Hungary and Türkiye.

Both Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary-General Stoltenberg have said they aim to secure Swedish membership before July's NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The U.S. Needs a Better Publicist

In an April 16 opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates argues that the U.S. must improve a crucial nonmilitary instrument of power: telling America's story.

Strategic communications and engagement with foreign publics and leaders are essential to advancing American national interests, he writes, but "the country that invented public relations is being out-communicated around the world by an authoritarian Russia and increasingly totalitarian China."

Gates laments the loss of communication know-how when the U.S. Information Agency, then present in 150 countries, was eliminated in 1999. Further, the under secretary position created that year in the

State Department to oversee American strategic communications and engagement has not had a Senate-confirmed occupant 40 percent of the time. The position has been vacant for the past five years, with its functions overseen by a series of acting under secretaries.

Efforts are instead fragmented among 14 agencies and 48 commissions, and the State Department lacks the necessary resources and authority to coordinate.

The solution, says Gates, is not to recreate USIA; rather, the White House and State Department should develop a global engagement plan for strategic communications to advance U.S. national security interests, including a road map for engaging with foreign publics and leaders focused especially on sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Underpinning this plan, he writes, “should be a significant expansion of people-to-people exchange programs that send American musicians, sports figures, and artists abroad and bring foreign college students to the U.S., with government support for private efforts in these areas.”

Fighting disinformation is another area the U.S. should focus on. Gates writes: “We should allocate additional resources to the State Department’s Global Engagement Center, the organization responsible for unmasking and discrediting foreign disinformation. These measures, among others, would give focus to our strategic communications efforts.”

FSI Launches New Curriculum

As part of Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s Modernization Agenda, on April 10 the Foreign Service Institute and the Bureau of Global Talent Management rolled out the new Core Curriculum, a series of highly recommended courses and mandatory leadership and management training.

The curriculum is designed to bolster core diplomatic tradecraft skills among mid-career Civil Service and Foreign Service professionals.

The courses cover a variety of essential skills, including critical thinking and



supervisory leadership, congressional relations, negotiation, presentation skills, and working in the interagency.

Implementation of the Core Curriculum is the first step in the State Department’s broader efforts to foster a culture of career-long learning and enhance training and professional development for its workforce.

While the Core Curriculum was specifically created to address identified gaps at the mid-career level, all employees are encouraged to take appropriate training and avail themselves of professional development opportunities.

New Island Mission

The U.S. plans to open an embassy in the Republic of Vanuatu, the State Department announced in a March 31 press release, as part of an effort to boost its presence in the Pacific and counter China’s growing influence.

“Establishing U.S. Embassy Port Vila would facilitate areas of potential bilateral cooperation and development assistance, including efforts to tackle the climate crisis,” the statement read.

While the U.S. already has diplomatic relations with the country, which is made up of roughly 80 islands in the South Pacific Ocean, currently the chargé d’affaires ad interim in Port Moresby is accredited to Vanuatu.

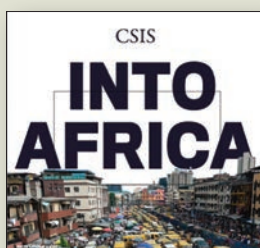
Other U.S. embassies are planned in the Pacific island nations of Kiribati and Tonga, according to Reuters. February 2023 saw the opening of an embassy in the Solomon Islands, less than one year after the plan was announced. ■

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

Podcast of the Month: *Into Africa* (<https://www.csis.org/podcasts/africa>)

In this podcast from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, host and CSIS Africa Program Director Mvemba Phezo Dizolele talks with policymakers, journalists, and academics in African affairs. Using current events on the continent as a springboard, the 30-minute episodes dive into the cultural, political, and economic forces driving change across Africa.

One recent interview on the podcast traces the long-term sources of tension that led to the current crisis in Sudan, while a March episode analyzes the Nigerian presidential election. In February, the podcast covered ways African investors can support the region’s creative future.



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

Standing by Taiwan and Its Democracy

Why Statecraft Is Not Just About Avoiding Conflict

BY ROBERT S. WANG

According to the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense, China's warplane incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ)

nearly doubled in 2022, with a surge in fighter jet and bomber sorties, and China launching the largest war games in decades after a visit by United States House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August.

China sent 1,727 planes into Taiwan's ADIZ in 2022, compared with around 960 incursions in 2021 and 380 in 2020. Last year also witnessed China's first use of drones, with all 71 reported by Taiwan's military coming after Pelosi's visit.

Going into 2023, Taiwan reported that 57 Chinese aircraft and four warships were detected near Taiwan on January 9 as part of joint combat training exercises. It said 28 of the aircraft either crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait or breached the southwestern perimeter of Taiwan's ADIZ.

This was the second round of military exercises conducted by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) around Taiwan over two weeks since President Joe Biden had signed the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act into law on

Beijing's ultimate goal is to create uncertainty about U.S. commitments in order to erode the confidence of the Taiwan people.

Dec. 23, authorizing \$10 billion in loans to Taiwan to buy weapons from the United States over the next five years.

Since then, Taiwan has reported that the PLA now conducts military aircraft incursions across the median line on an almost daily basis and continues to send squadrons of fighter jets into Taiwan's ADIZ.

Heightened Concerns

China's rapid escalation of military threats against Taiwan has prompted a sharp increase in concerns about an imminent outbreak of a cross-Strait conflict, and many analysts are now urging the United States to take steps to ease tensions and avoid conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

For instance, in an October 2022 *Foreign Affairs* article, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas J. Christensen and a task force of U.S.-China experts argued

that while the United States needs to adapt and strengthen defense preparations to deter the PRC, it must also provide assurances to Beijing that the United States will not take actions to support Taiwan independence. They recommended the United States maintain "strategic ambiguity" and "avoid symbolic political gestures that needlessly aggravate Beijing."

In another, more recent *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2023) article, U.S. analysts Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass went further, recommending the United States not focus narrowly on military solutions that escalate tensions with China and stoke fear in Taiwan. The United States must not back Chinese leader Xi Jinping into a corner.

"The sole metric on which U.S. policy should be judged is whether it helps preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait—not whether it solves the question of Taiwan once and for all or keeps Taiwan permanently in the United States' camp," they stated. The United States, they said, needs to understand China's anxieties and convince Beijing that unification belongs to a distant future.

Finally, Blanchette and Hass argued, the United States should resist casting the Taiwan problem as a contest between authoritarianism and democracy,



Robert S. Wang, a retired Foreign Service officer, is a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service. During a 32-year career with the Department of State, Mr. Wang served overseas in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Taiwan, and Beijing, where he was deputy chief of mission from 2011 to 2013. He served as the U.S. senior official for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (2013-2015) and retired in 2016.

because “framing tensions as an ideological struggle risks backing China into a corner, too,” leading Beijing to conclude that its only choice is military action.

In their view, the United States has shifted to a policy of countering the threat the PRC poses to Taiwan (as reflected in President Biden’s repeated statements about U.S. commitment to intervene militarily on behalf of Taiwan) and “abandoned any pretense of acting as a principled arbiter committed to preserving the status quo and allowing the two sides to come to their own peaceful settlement.”

To evaluate the Biden administration’s responses and to determine the best U.S. policy in dealing with Beijing’s cross-Strait moves and the increased tension, we need first to understand the PRC’s strategy.

What Game Is Beijing Playing?

As I argued in my June 2021 article in these pages (“Countering China’s Intimidation of Taiwan”), given the anticipated cost of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan, Beijing’s current cross-Strait strategy appears to be following the script of the classic Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu. He posited that the best way to win a war is without fighting it, that is, by employing tools of coercion and intimidation to obtain concessions and, eventually, the enemy’s surrender.

We have seen this strategy play out successfully in the case of Hong Kong, and it is now being applied against Taiwan. Accordingly, I suspect that Beijing sees the recent calls in the U.S. to shift from open and determined resistance to its aggressive actions to a policy of understanding Beijing’s “anxieties” and providing various assurances to the PRC as evidence that its strategy is working.

Biden’s recent statements about U.S. commitments to Taiwan and some

In fact, the Biden administration has not changed long-standing U.S. policy and is responding to Beijing’s increasingly aggressive actions.

analysts’ demands for greater “strategic clarity” in direct response to Beijing’s increasingly aggressive threats are now being criticized as dangerous and provocative on the grounds that they may provide a “blank check” to advocates of Taiwan’s de jure independence, thereby provoking rather than deterring a PRC attack on Taiwan.

Significantly, however, in my discussions with Taiwanese political figures and analysts from both sides of the aisle during recent visits to Taipei, I never encountered any question as to where the Biden administration stood regarding the issue of Taiwan independence, especially as the October 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy clearly reiterated the decades-long U.S. position: “We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side, and do not support Taiwan independence.”

(Rather, in view of the abrupt U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the current conflict in Ukraine, the question most often raised was whether the United States would in fact come to the assistance of Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion absent any declaration of Taiwan independence.)

Similarly, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in August 2022 to underscore the United States’ “unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan’s vibrant democracy” has been variously criticized as “political,” “gratuitous,” and “reckless”—despite the fact that the visit had clear precedence, was

endorsed by both the ruling and opposition parties in Taiwan, was broadly welcomed by the people of Taiwan, and had bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress.

Finally, calls for expanding U.S. military capacity in light of China’s rising military power are now also being characterized as provocative, despite the clear mandate under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”

In fact, the Biden administration has not changed long-standing U.S. policy and is responding to Beijing’s increasingly aggressive actions.

Nonetheless, Beijing will continue to reject any call to renounce its use of force against Taiwan and will continue to apply even greater military and political pressure with the aim of further raising tensions.

We saw Beijing’s determination in its strong military response to the recent authorization of \$10 billion in loans for U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, as well as its success in getting Honduras to switch diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing.

Beijing’s ultimate goal is to create uncertainty about U.S. commitments in order to erode the confidence of the Taiwan people and, eventually, pressure a future Taiwan government into making concessions on the issue of reunification in an effort to ease tensions and avoid conflict.

Dangers of Appeasement

If the “sole metric” of U.S. statecraft is indeed to preserve peace and stability, then some might consider Beijing’s strategy as offering an acceptable solution. Technically, it could be argued, this would allow “the two sides to come to their own peaceful settlement,” albeit as a result of Beijing’s intimidation.

It may, after all, take many more years before Beijing can actually impose a solution in which it is able to exercise full control over Taiwan and achieve “Chinese reunification.” Meanwhile, this “peaceful settlement” would arguably reduce the risk of a major power conflict between China and the United States, at least over Taiwan and for the time being.

In my opinion, however, such an outcome would be recognized by the people in Taiwan and other democracies as the United States having wavered not only in its commitment to Taiwan but also more broadly in its support for democratic values and the rules-based liberal international order.

Successive U.S. presidents have praised Taiwan as “a beacon of democracy” in its remarkable transition from autocracy to democracy over the past two decades. Despite Beijing’s protestations, President Biden invited Taiwan representatives to attend the Summit for Democracy in Washington in 2021.

For the United States to accept a cross-Strait settlement that was clearly arrived at under duress will be seen as our abandoning not only the people of Taiwan, yet again, but also betraying the U.S. commitment to democracy. This would have a major impact on Japan and Korea and other democratic allies, who will have good cause to doubt U.S. commitments in the face of a rising China’s increasingly aggressive policies.

Moreover, having succeeded in its strategy against Hong Kong and at least for now Taiwan, Beijing will be emboldened to use the same strategy to pursue its interests around the region, starting with its territorial disputes with Japan and other countries in the South China Sea. I believe this will eventually lead to increased tensions—and perhaps even conflict in the region.

It is also not clear to me whether this “peaceful settlement” will continue to be accepted by the people of Taiwan, even without the support of the United States. While a future Taiwan government may accept an initial settlement, an increasingly alienated and desperate Taiwan population may emerge to resist Chinese efforts to consolidate its hold over Taiwan, as we saw in the later years of the Ma Ying-jeou administration.

So the question is: How long will peace and stability endure if Beijing continues to be able to pursue its strategy of intimidation in the region?

Wise Statecraft

My own understanding of modern history and diplomatic experience leads me to believe that wise statecraft is not just about easing tensions and avoiding conflict but also about adhering to fundamental values and thinking beyond current challenges.

Hence, I believe the United States should first build the capacity, as per the TRA, “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.” This requires maintaining a credible military deterrent in response to Beijing’s increasing military threats.

Beyond this, it is equally critical that the United States demonstrate its political will to defend Taiwan and its democracy.

While continuing to make clear its opposition to “any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side,” the United States should respond firmly to Beijing’s threats in both statements and actions (e.g., pledging and strengthening military cooperation and further congressional engagement to bolster the trust and confidence of the Taiwan people in the U.S. commitment). It should also seek more broadly to enlist the cooperation of Japan and other democratic allies in this effort.

At the same time, the United States should strengthen its “extensive, close, and friendly commercial, cultural, and other relations” with Taiwan (as stated in the TRA), for example, by completing a substantive bilateral trade agreement as soon as possible.

Last but not least, Washington should continue to underscore that the United States values Taiwan not just as a military or economic asset but also as “a beacon of democracy.” It should encourage further civil society ties between Taiwan and the United States, as well as with other democracies around the world.

The ultimate goal is to convince Beijing that its only path to Chinese reunification is not through coercion but through the free and willing consent of the people of Taiwan. While such statecraft may not reduce current tensions, we need to make it clear to Chinese leaders that the United States and our allies will not succumb to its strategy of intimidation now or in the future. ■

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U.S.-AFRICA LEADERS SUMMIT ELEVATING THE PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICA

In a robust gathering of U.S. and African leaders from the government, private sector, and civil society, the emphasis was on advancing priorities through effective partnerships.

BY DANA BANKS

At the second-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C. (Dec. 13-15, 2022), President Joseph R. Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and more than 20 Cabinet members, heads of U.S. government agencies, and members of Congress engaged with delegations from 49 African countries plus the African Union, alongside members of civil society, the private sector, and the African diaspora.



A diplomat with more than 23 years of service to the United States, Dana Banks has most recently served as special assistant to the president, special adviser for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, and senior director for Africa at the National Security Council, where she

was responsible for coordinating and leading U.S.-Africa policy for the Biden-Harris administration from 2021 to 2023. Prior to that, she was deputy director of the Foreign Service Institute's Leadership and Management School's Division of Executive Development. She has also served in Thailand, Haiti, South Africa, Tanzania, and in Togo as deputy chief of mission. In Washington, she has served as a senior watch officer in the Operations Center, as special assistant to the assistant secretary of State for Africa, and as a desk officer in the Office of West African Affairs.

Africa has one of the world's fastest-growing populations, largest free trade areas, most diverse ecosystems, and one of the largest regional voting blocs in the United Nations. By 2050 Africa will be home to one quarter of the world's population. The continent hosts vast natural resources, including the world's second-largest rainforest and 30 percent of the critical minerals needed globally.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), once fully implemented, will be the fifth-largest economy in the world, with a potential combined GDP of more than \$3.4 trillion. Moreover, the dynamism, innovation, and economic growth being spurred by youth across the African continent is noteworthy; it translated into African startups attracting \$5 billion in investment in 2021, even in the midst of a global pandemic.

Thus, as the "U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa" states: "It is impossible to meet this era's defining challenges without African contributions and leadership." This is the framework I worked with in etching out the vision for the strategy at the National Security Council and, subsequently, as I led the organization and coordination of the summit. The U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit cell coordinated with robust interagency teams of talented, dedicated colleagues in crafting an event with the overarching goal to deepen our partnership with African countries, institutions, and peoples.

One of the most vital aspects of our Foreign Service trajectory is building relationships, which ultimately result in

U.S. AFRICA LEADERS SUMMIT

WASHINGTON, D.C. | 2022

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PAUL KIM/U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

U.S. President Joe Biden (center) and African leaders at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 15, 2022.

partnerships that advance mutually beneficial goals, such as improving lives and livelihoods, promoting economic growth, or advancing democratic values. It is a humbling yet critical task for U.S. national security interests with our African partners. And with stakes as high as they are, one may wonder how the summit would advance U.S. policy priorities in Africa.

Let's start at the beginning.

The Road to the Summit

During his first trip to Africa as Secretary of State, in November 2021, Secretary Blinken affirmed that “Africa will shape the future—and not just the future of the African people, but of the world.” He also conveyed President Biden’s intention to host the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in 2022; eight months later, in virtual remarks to the Corporate Council on Africa’s U.S.-Africa Business Summit in Morocco in July 2022, Vice President Harris announced the dates.

“This Summit will demonstrate our enduring commitment to our African partners ... will be based on mutual respect, shared interests and values ... and a critical element will be to bolster our economic relationship,” stated Vice President Harris. Her remarks were accompanied by a concrete demonstration of the administration’s intentions, the presence of senior leadership from 10 U.S. government agencies, including Millennium Challenge Corporation CEO Alice Albright, U.S. Trade and Development

Agency Director Enoch Ebong, U.S. African Development Foundation CEO Travis Adkins, and a delegation of U.S. institutional investors who manage more than a trillion dollars in assets seeking investment on the continent.

The vice president’s public announcement of the dates also set the stage for interagency collaboration and stakeholder consultations to commence in earnest as we prepared for the summit. As special adviser for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, I led my team in conducting extensive consultative sessions with members of Congress, the African diplomatic corps, members of the American and African private sectors, members of civil society, and the African diaspora to feed into the interagency policy process. The aim was to craft a set of discussion topics that would speak to the president’s vision with clearly defined objectives, concrete deliverables, and innovative elements—with an emphasis on partnership.

That collaborative process netted agreement on thematic sessions that focused on shared priorities, including new themes and topics that had emerged since the first summit, in 2014: for instance, the role of civil society; the strength of our African diaspora; health security and improved health systems; climate change, adaptation, and a just energy transition; peace, security, and governance; global food security and food systems resilience; digital transformation; and even cooperation on space exploration.

President Joe Biden delivers closing remarks at the U.S.-Africa Business Forum on Dec. 14, 2022, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.



ADAM SCHULTZ / THE WHITE HOUSE

The first day focused on the role of civil society and the African diaspora, with seven fora on topics ranging from a ministerial on the African Growth and Opportunity Act to cooperation on space, health security, peace and security, and climate adaptation and a just energy transition. The second day was devoted wholly to the U.S.-Africa Business Forum, focused on advancing two-way trade and investment. The third day was reserved for heads of state discussions, focused on the African Union’s Agenda 2063 document (“The Africa We Want,” the organization’s development goals for the 100th anniversary of its founding); greater cooperation with African partners in multilateral fora; and food security on the continent.

Even more crucial than the discussion topics was who would speak and when. Ensuring all invited heads of state were able to engage meaningfully during one of the sessions over the

The engagements extended beyond the confines of the summit sessions into a series of “partner events,” many of them substantive.

three days, while also securing U.S. Cabinet officials and senior-level participation, became a true test of diplomatic negotiation skills. While there was no guarantee everyone would be pleased with the speaking schedule, we reached agreement on a roster that fostered robust discussions on shared priorities. In fact, the engagements extended beyond the confines of the summit sessions into a series of “partner events,” many of them substantive. The summit created an environment in which stakeholders congregated to take advantage of the presence of 50 delegations from Africa to participate in a full schedule of events and social engagements throughout the week, further advancing summit goals.

Five heads of state were not invited: Either the African Union had suspended them because of recent military takeovers in their countries (Guinea, Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso) or the U.S. does not have full diplomatic relations (Eritrea).

Delivering on Deliverables

The clear message from our partners in planning the summit was that its success would be measured largely by the achievement of tangible and significant deliverables. Along those lines, President Biden committed to work with Congress to invest \$55 billion



BEN SOLOMON / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

From left: White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, actor Idris Elba, Nigerian American actress Yvonne Orji, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield pose for a photo during the summit’s fireside chat at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 13, 2022.

over the next three years toward developing renewable energy projects and health care systems, increasing trade and investment, expanding internet access and literacy, increasing food supply, strengthening democratic institutions, and improving security.

We crafted and negotiated a vision statement with African Union leadership that outlined the contours of the strengthened partnership, reaffirming our commitment to work collaboratively with African governments, businesses, and publics to realize the vision. Among the extensive new and existing deliverables were a core set of announcements.

- President Biden announced support for a permanent African Union seat on the G20, furthering the commitment to more inclusive and responsive international institutions.
- Vice President Harris announced more than \$100 million toward the expansion of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) to support youth and innovation across the continent, while also drawing on support from the private sector, the diaspora, and educational institutions.



COURTESY OF DANA BANKS

Senegalese Foreign Minister Aïssata Tall Sall (left) with the author at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in December 2022.



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Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulates Innovation First Place Winner Health-botics Limited of Nigeria at a reception for African innovators as part of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 12, 2022.

- Vice President Harris announced the historic creation of the President’s Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement in the United States, a vehicle to realize the commitment to strengthening cultural, social, political, and economic ties between U.S. government officials, African communities, and the diaspora in the United States.

- U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine Tai signed a memorandum of understanding with Secretary-General Wamkele Mene of the AfCFTA Secretariat to promote equitable, sustainable, and inclusive trade and attract further U.S. investment on the continent.

- The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) announced its first-ever regional compact to the tune of \$504 million with the governments of Benin and Niger, supporting regional economic integration, trade, and cross-border collaboration. At the summit, MCC also announced compact eligibility for The Gambia and Togo and threshold eligibility for Mauritania.

- Not least, in an innovative and promising move, President Biden named retired Career Ambassador Johnnie Carson to be Special Presidential Representative for Summit Implementation, to coordinate follow-up, including a dialogue on future summits, and ensure delivery of the deliverables.

Investment and Innovation Emphasized

Because the strongest demand signal we received during our consultation process concerned mobilizing the power of the American private sector to expand broad-based economic opportunity in Africa, the entire second day was dedicated to the U.S.-

Africa Business Forum. President Biden invited CEOs and private sector leadership from more than 300 U.S. and African companies to catalyze investment in the critical sectors: health, infrastructure, energy, agribusiness, and digital infrastructure and access.

The Department of Commerce partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Corporate Council on Africa to bring both American and African CEOs together with heads of state to make connections, finalize current deals, and spawn future business deals. President Biden announced more than \$15 billion in new trade and investment deals from American companies with partners on the continent.

As part of the business forum and elsewhere, the focus on innovation, the expansion of digital access and development, and the dynamic role of the African diaspora clearly spoke to important elements of an updated 21st-century partnership. Secretary Blinken hosted an “Innovators Gathering” with more than 250 young entrepreneurs, investors, diaspora celebrities, and local government officials such as actors Idris Elba, Yvonne Orji, African entrepreneur Tony Elumelu, and New York City Mayor Eric Adams, as well as virtual remarks from former President Barack Obama, who established YALI under his tenure.

The structure of the event amplified the U.S. commitment to investing in Africa’s next generation to further the innovation currently transforming the continent while harnessing the power of public-private partnerships in bolstering trade and investment opportunities. Further, with new technologies changing the way Africans live and work, President Biden announced the launch of the Digital Transformation with Africa initiative focused on building an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet led by African communities.

As the “U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa” acknowledges: “Our African diaspora is a source of strength. It includes African Americans, and nearly two million African immigrants who maintain close familial, social, and economic connections to the continent ... the African immigrant population is among the most educated and prosperous communities in the United States.” The African and Diaspora Young Leaders Forum, held on the first day of the summit with more than 300 diaspora members involved, reflected the commitment to strengthening the dialogue between U.S. officials and the diaspora in the United States.

The View Ahead

In the few short months since the summit, there have been five U.S. government high-level trips to the continent, including Vice President Harris, First Lady Jill Biden, Secretaries Blinken and Yellen, and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, and

Secretary Blinken hosted an “Innovators Gathering” with more than 250 young entrepreneurs, investors, diaspora celebrities, and local government officials.

President Biden committed to traveling to the continent this year. During her March visit to Lusaka, Zambia, Vice President Harris announced another \$7 billion in new private sector and U.S. government commitments to climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation in Africa.

The reality is that U.S. engagement with the continent is enduring and has persisted for decades, from the early days of Peace Corps through extensive people-to-people study and exchange programs, health programs such as the U.S. President’s Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) and the President’s Malaria Initiative, MCC, YALI, Power Africa, and Prosper Africa, to name just a few. The summit served to put a finer point on that engagement, particularly at a moment when our global interconnectedness, in both challenges and opportunities, is abundantly clear. From global health to economic growth, to food security, to global peace and security, the import of the African continent not only to U.S. foreign policy but also to our national security is undeniable.

The 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit has prompted a shift in fostering inclusive partnerships with our African counterparts that will generate beneficial outcomes for future generations of African and U.S. citizens. ■

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DEEPENING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS IN AFRICA

The energy sector, broadly defined, offers enormous scope for investment and economic development as U.S. constructive engagement in Africa deepens. As always, however, the proof will be in the pudding.

BY HERMAN J. COHEN



Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, a retired FSO, directed the State Department's Office of Central African Affairs from 1967 to 1974. After three years as political counselor in Paris (1974-1977), he was named ambassador to Senegal and The Gambia, based in Dakar,

where he served from 1977 to 1980. He then returned to Washington to serve as principal deputy assistant secretary of State (PDAS) for intelligence and research (1980-1984) and PDAS for personnel (1984-1987). In 1987 he was appointed as special assistant to the president and senior director for Africa at the National Security Council, a position he held for two years.

*Amb. Cohen is the author of three books: *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent* (Macmillan, 2000), *The Mind of the African Strong Man: Conversations with Dictators, Statesmen, and Father Figures* (New Academia, 2015), and *U.S. Policy Toward Africa: Eight Decades of Realpolitik* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020). He is the 2019 recipient of AFSA's award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy.*

The second U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit took place in Washington, D.C., in December 2022 after nearly a decade. The Biden administration's policy statement emphasized human rights, good governance, food security, peace, and a favorable environment for private sector investments. The summit's focus was on extending

and deepening the partnership between the U.S. and Africa.

The first summit, hosted by President Barack Obama in 2014 and themed "Investing in the Next Generation," had focused on trade and investment in Africa and highlighted America's commitment to Africa's security, its democratic development, and its people. Representing the U.S. Corporate Council on Africa there, I attended the session in which African leaders met with representatives of the American business community and have a vivid memory of President Obama scolding the Africans with statements like, "You must get rid of corruption."

Yet despite the tough rhetoric, in the following years U.S.-Africa relations continued much as before, with annual foreign aid budgets around \$7 billion. Although the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which had been enacted in the year 2000, continued to give African countries duty-free entry for their manufactured products, only the Republics of South Africa and Senegal and the Kingdom of Lesotho have been able to take advantage of it. At the same time, however, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) established in 2004 and USAID's



The KivuWatt power project in Rwanda is unusual and important ecologically.

Power Africa initiative established in 2013 have made steady progress in constructively engaging with Africa.

This second summit—in mobilizing officials, businesspeople, and civil society to address a wide range of old and new topics, in emphasizing “partnership” at every level, in increasing development assistance, and in cementing deals—appears to have qualitatively advanced the working relationship. As always, the proof will be in the pudding.

Energy and the Environment Prospects

The second day’s U.S.-Africa Business Forum, hosted by the Commerce Department, emphasized matchmaking. A “Deal Room” was set up to foster agreements between U.S. and African business representatives. Significantly, President Biden announced more than \$15 billion in new two-way trade and investment commitments, deals, and partnerships at the forum. There were sessions on climate adaptation, health cooperation, a just energy transition, and cooperation in civil and commercial space research. And new agreements were reached that give momentum to energy and agricultural projects.

President Biden and President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have agreed, for example, on preserving the rain forest of the Congo Basin. In addition to the DRC, the Congo Basin includes Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Angola. This forest is the second-largest CO₂-absorbing “lung” in the world, after the Amazon. Until mid-2022, Chinese loggers in the Congo forest were shipping wood to China, and Congolese

farmers were cutting trees to make room for agriculture required by population increase. Now tree cutting has stopped while U.S. and Congolese experts work to develop a system of conservation within limited commercial operations.

The energy sector, broadly defined, offers enormous scope for investment and economic development. Most African households continue to prepare meals with charcoal, which contributes to the cutting of rainforests. A major effort is underway to expand the use of gas, which produces far less CO₂ than coal, for the preparation of meals. Gas canisters for meal preparation are currently the rule in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia.

Since the year 2010, significant gas deposits have been discovered near offshore in both West and East Africa. The deposits are measured upward of 40 trillion cubic feet in each region. They are currently being developed to produce liquid natural gas (LNG) that will replace dirty coal for the generation of electricity. In northern Mozambique, in the province of Cabo Delgado, offshore gas is processed into LNG, which will be used by private companies to generate electricity. A U.S. company, Anglo Eurasia of Houston, Texas, has received a permit from the Mozambican government to invest in a power plant in the province to produce electricity from LNG derived from offshore gas. This power will be sold to southern Malawi, Zambia, and South Africa, all of whom had serious power deficits as of the end of 2022.

Power Africa, a USAID program promoting private investments in power generation in sub-Saharan Africa that will amount to 30,000 megawatts (MW) by 2030, has become another major facilitator for economic development partnerships. I have



Improvements in operations and infrastructure at Benin's Port of Cotonou supported by the Millennium Challenge Corporation are opening up the economic potential of the region. Inset: Map showing the beneficially affected countries.

personally worked on negotiations to create five new power plants in Africa for the company Contour Global. Three of these plants are in Nigeria; one is in Togo and one in Rwanda.

The power plant in Rwanda is particularly interesting. It utilizes gas that is in suspension in Lake Kivu as fuel. The gas seeps up from the lake bottom. The company pipes the gas from a floating barge to the power plant on shore. Besides supplying power, the plant is of critical importance ecologically. If the gas is not extracted from the lake, the gas buildup will cause a major explosion at some point during the next hundred years. Such an explosion happened in 1986 in Lake Nyos in northwest Cameroon, killing 1,746 people and 3,500 livestock.

Renewables and Food Security

There is also significant potential for renewable energy in Africa. Of particular significance is the Grand Inga hydroelectric complex on the Congo River, approximately 50 miles from the Atlantic Ocean port of Boma. The complex now consists of two power plants—Inga 1 and Inga 2, completed in 1972 and 1982, respectively—and is currently producing 1,100 MW, with 500 MW flowing to the Southern African Power Pool switch in Zambia. The DC transmission line was financed in 1992 with a loan from Bankers Trust guaranteed by the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation.

The complete Grand Inga project envisions adding six more power plants to the complex, bringing total capacity to more than 40,000 MW and making it the world's largest hydroelectric project. The second phase involves construction of a third plant, Inga 3, which is slated to increase power output by about 4,000 MW. All the inhabitants of the district where the Inga 3 plant is sited were relocated in the year 2000. As of 2022, the planning for construction of the third plant was being done by Spanish private contractors.

Though the overall Grand Inga project was discussed at the summit, there appears to be no prospect for financing the third and last phase in the foreseeable future. The second phase, construction of Inga 3, however, was of particular interest because it would make electricity available to the entire central African subregion. The USAID office Power Africa is available to

facilitate potential American power company investments.

Other sources of renewable energy are wind and solar, both abundant in different Africa subregions. Because wind does not blow all the time, and because the sun does not shine at night, batteries are required for energy storage. Storage batteries require the minerals cobalt and lithium, both of which are abundant in Africa. As of 2022, lithium mines were under development in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Ghana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali. The DRC has the second-largest known deposit of cobalt after Russia. In general, Africa is potentially very strong in renewables—provided the necessary financing becomes available.

The last day of the summit, devoted to leaders sessions, closed with a discussion on partnering to promote food security and food systems resilience. Food security in Africa is precarious because so much of the food Africans consume originates abroad, where unexpected events occasionally cause supply interruptions. A good example is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. In normal times, Ukraine supplies 40 percent of the wheat that Africa uses to make bread. During the first three months of 2022, Russia was able to prevent Ukrainian ships from transiting the Crimea straits, thereby cutting Africa off from its major source of wheat. After the international media cast blame on Russia, grain shipments were resumed

under an agreement brokered by the United Nations and Türkiye for safe Black Sea export of Ukrainian grain.

After international food shipments arrive in African ports, however, there are often problems with storage and road transportation. The Republic of Madagascar, an island, is noteworthy for its food storage and transportation issues. Many other African nations suffer from the same logistical problems.

Moving Toward Partnerships

In several public statements, President Biden has stressed that respect for human rights and democracy are at the core of his foreign policy. These issues play a role in Africa mainly in implementation of the programs of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, established with strong bipartisan backing during the administration of President George W. Bush. The MCC judges the eligibility of countries against a list of established criteria decided by independent nongovernmental organizations, including respect for human rights and democracy.

The issues of democracy and good governance are possibly the most difficult to evaluate. The American government democracy institutes, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, have determined that two consecutive transparent, free, and fair elections, as witnessed by impartial observers, qualify a government as democratic. The African governments that have achieved the designation “democracy” are the same as those that have qualified for Millennium Challenge Corporation compacts.

In the first year of the program, eight African countries were declared eligible. Compacts were negotiated that determined how the recipient countries would use large sums of money. The West African Republic of Benin was one of the first countries to sign a compact with the MCC, in 2006. The five-year, \$307 million compact with the Government of Benin aimed to increase investments and private sector activity through the implementation of four projects: (1) increase access to land through more secure and useful land tenure; (2) expand access to financial services through grants given to micro, small, and medium enterprises; (3) provide access to justice by bringing courts closer to rural populations; and (4) improve access to markets by eliminating physical and procedural constraints currently hindering the flow of goods through the Port of Cotonou.

Successful elimination of constraints hindering the flow of goods through the Port of Cotonou has been, in my view, the most effective part of the Benin compact. Because of the port’s increased efficiency, especially the elimination of long waiting time in the port, the West African private sector has shifted



SCOTT JAEITSCH / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Millennium Challenge Corporation CEO Alice Albright, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (top center), President of Benin Patrice Talon (top left), and President of Niger Mohamed Bazoum (top right) sign documents during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 14, 2022.

much of its cargos to Benin. At the December summit, the MCC announced Benin’s first regional compact, with Niger, a \$504 million grant to improve the trade corridor between Cotonou and Niger’s capital city, Niamey.

Other African countries that have signed compacts with the MCC include Cabo Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Morocco, and Mozambique. MCC investments in Mozambique fisheries have made that country a major exporter of fish products, including a weekly lobster/shrimp flight to nourish the restaurants of New York.

U.S.-Africa relations are also active in the military sector. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, situated in the National Defense University, had a special meeting of African military leaders during the summit designed to enhance professionalism within the African militaries.

Finally, the Development Finance Corporation, formerly the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, is giving guarantees to American companies investing in Africa. Including guarantees against expropriation and natural disasters, this initiative is a substantial incentive for private sector investment.

Did the 2022 U.S.-Africa summit make a difference in U.S.-Africa relations? On the American side, the word “partnership” served as the key to the American vision. The signal sent to the Africans by that word was that the U.S. will no longer view Africa as a charity case. U.S. funding must be matched by African political and economic reforms, honestly implemented, that justify the American taxpayers’ efforts.

Now for the hard part. ■

A KEY TO SUCCESS ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations, viewed with skepticism in some African countries and slighted at the summit, can play a vital role in development efforts.

BY KEHINDE TOGUN AND MARIA KISUMBI



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In December 2022, the Biden-Harris administration hosted the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit—the first such convening of African heads of state in the United States since 2014. The summit occurred against the backdrop of the administration's new Africa strategy, released in August 2022, which seeks to reframe U.S.-Africa relations as a partnership. It also seeks to move away from the perception of Africa as a pawn in the United States' strategic competition with China. With the strategy and the summit, the administration has been intentional about leaving behind decades of finger-wagging at African leaders and a Western "savior" mindset toward African people.

Instead, the summit sought to create opportunities for African leaders to engage on equal footing with U.S. government officials. The administration also made several meaningful commitments

to the continent, as well as “smaller” initiatives likely to pay positive dividends: to strengthen African democratic transitions, to improve civilian oversight of the security sector, and to increase labor rights for women in the workplace. There were also significant deals brokered between African governments and the U.S. private sector.

The vast majority of participants and observers agree that the summit was more substantive and more successful than many of us anticipated. Of course, the true measure of success isn't the number of promises made. It's how well the administration honors its commitments, as well as how many benefits African citizens are able to reap as a result of the summit and the agreements coming out of it.

In that regard, the summit's biggest failing is of great concern because it could imperil the very success the administration is after. Despite all the pomp and circumstance surrounding the event, African civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the U.S. working on Africa were largely sidelined.

A Critical Failing

No doubt there was an effort to include civil society. The first day of the summit included a civil society forum hosted at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) with lots of interesting conversations. That forum was held in parallel with other events at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center (the main summit location), including African youth and diaspora forums. Because each event was by invitation only, the vast majority of Africa-focused civil society representatives were invited exclusively to the civil society forum at USIP. Instead, many civil society organizations ended up hosting their own side events to elevate their specific issues. Ultimately, it seemed the African civil society leaders—the ones who will hold their governments accountable for ensuring citizens benefit from the summit commitments—were cordoned off in one building (at USIP) while most of the action happened at the convention center.

Further, several of the important events, including a Peace, Security, and Governance Forum—also on the first day—featured African heads of state talking *at* the audience instead of having a real dialogue. The Business Forum on the second day was a company-to-government affair, with little effort to allow civil society in the room or to know what deals were being made, much less offer input or introduce concerns of the constituents they represent.

In an era of shrinking civic space on the African continent, the inadequate platforming of civil society was a missed opportunity.

In an era of shrinking civic space on the African continent, the inadequate platforming of civil society was a missed opportunity.

In a number of African nations, laws and regulations are being enacted to restrict CSOs' operations and fundamental human rights; civic engagement and freedom of speech are also undermined, and CSO leaders and activists face frequent arrests and attacks. In addition, some African governments view civil society with general suspicion and skepticism.

The summit could have been an opportunity for the U.S. to emphasize to African heads of state the importance with which we view civil society engagement and the need to promote a conducive environment for CSOs to meaningfully participate in domestic and regional policy processes. Finding ways to include civil society on the same stage as African heads of state during these high-stakes events can help send a message that the U.S. believes they're an essential part of the governance architecture.

Admittedly, planning a summit is hard, and the administration was never going to please everyone. Many Africa experts hope that the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit becomes a regular occurrence and that it doesn't take another decade for the next one. Ideally, in the future the U.S. administration will treat civil society as an equal leg of the stool, along with the private sector and government. This can be done by strengthening CSO engagement prior to future summits. For example, in advance of this summit, our organization, Humanity United, partnered with Amnesty International USA and the National Democratic Institute to co-chair a working group of Africa-based and Africa-focused CSOs in the U.S., representing the different regions within the continent.

This diverse group of organizations remains willing to find ways to continue collaborating more closely with various U.S. government entities. The group also released a series of recommendations on areas in which the administration should focus its engagement with the continent, including democratic governance, rule of law, human rights, African futures, and shared prosperity.

The message that trade and investment trumps human rights violations will only make it harder for the U.S. to achieve its goal of having Africa succeed.

Form a Brain Trust, Prioritize Human Rights

Beyond the summit, U.S. embassies in Africa and the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council can play their own parts in identifying community- and national-level African CSOs that can form a brain trust as advisory partners. Such a brain trust can contribute toward shaping the agenda for future engagements, help identify which elements of the current commitments would yield the greatest success, or what aspects of current commitments are most lacking and need bolstering to garner support from their respective constituents. Establishing these kinds of brain trusts will contribute toward fostering and consolidating partnerships between the U.S. government, African leaders, and CSOs—and thereby create opportunities for dialogue as the summit moves to implementation.

The lack of emphasis on human rights was another failing of the December summit. Prioritizing human rights, a principle the Biden-Harris administration has rhetorically championed, seemed a tertiary concern. In particular, when President Biden has photo ops with African dictators and the U.S. Secretary of State is seen shaking hands with the Ethiopian prime minister, whose government was until recently carrying out war crimes at home, the U.S. is sending an unfortunate, albeit perhaps unintentional, message.

The message that trade and investment trumps human rights violations will only make it harder for the U.S. to achieve its goal of having Africa succeed and creating a true partnership. The Biden-Harris administration's 2022 National Security Strategy places a global political order built on respect for universal human rights, and a global economy that provides opportunity for all, as fundamental to its national security interests. This means that beyond the fanfare of summitry, Foreign Service officers (FSOs) who represent the United States abroad must continue to have these conversations at post and emphasize to

their counterparts that trade and investment in Africa will thrive only when there is good governance that includes solid human rights protections.

We all acknowledge that senior U.S. officials will visit countries—and meet with their leaders—where human rights records are questionable. However, arranging for these senior officials to also meet with civil society leaders and human rights defenders in the country makes a statement that the U.S. government takes them seriously. It also bolsters activists' efforts in the long term if they're in environments where they can safely seek meetings with their own government officials.

There's no doubt that the State Department does a lot to support activists behind the scenes. Many of them tell us they would also like to see the U.S. more vociferous in public support. During the summit, for example, along with some other civil society organizations (e.g., Amnesty International USA, Human Rights Watch, and Project on Middle East Democracy), we held a daylong "Africa Human Rights Leaders Summit." The bravery with which these activists carry out their work is inspiring. Each of them said the U.S. government is an effective listener but doesn't act often enough on their requests. In this area, FSOs and colleagues in Washington, D.C., can better triangulate what actions would be most effective. They can also use the civil society in Washington to better understand nuances and what levers our partners on the ground are seeking to have the U.S. government pull.

Toward a Full Partnership

As the dust settles on the summit, it would also be useful for FSOs to become intentional about supporting multisectoral dialogue outside embassy walls. This kind of dialogue can catalyze partnerships that are intended in the spirit of the National Security Strategy and the U.S.-Africa Strategy. They can also help bring greater clarity on private sector commitments to the respective African governments. Taking these actions now and before the next summit might strengthen CSO engagement with businesses that could pay dividends in the business forum of future summits. So, too, would the United States being explicit about ensuring that human rights protections are built into trade and investment discussions.

We hope the Biden-Harris administration continues efforts to prioritize Africa in a way that includes African people and not only their elected leaders. A full partnership would fully embody the "Africa Matters" mantra, and a multisectoral approach can help ensure success of the various commitments the U.S. has and will make to the continent. ■

THE BUSINESS OF DIPLOMACY

PRIORITIZING THE U.S.-AFRICA COMMERCIAL AGENDA

U.S. business ties to Africa are poised for takeoff, but success will depend on commercial diplomacy getting a boost.

BY SCOTT EISNER



Scott Eisner is president of the U.S.-Africa Business Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. A former member of the U.S. Trade Representative's Trade Advisory Committee on Africa, he currently serves on the advisory board for City Year South Africa, the Africa Leadership Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson Center Africa Program Advisory Council.

The 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit and Business Forum, bringing U.S. and African business executives, policy-makers, and heads of state together after almost a decade, showed the world that the United States sees Africa as an equal partner with a shared vision. This second summit not only revived and deepened the great expectations inspired by its predecessor; the astounding convening power from the public and private sectors on display at the summit marks it as a turning point.

Regaining Momentum

Following that first summit, a new level of interest in African markets emerged from corporate America. Iconic brands like GE, IBM, John Deere, and Caterpillar, to name a few, began to see their bottom lines grow upon expanding into Africa's competitive business landscape. At last, the U.S. had decided to engage African markets on the terms they wanted to discuss (i.e., investment, job creation, and economic growth) and was at the top of its game regarding African relations. As a result, the business community began to understand the continent in new terms, and competitors from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe saw us in a new light.

But just as we were beginning to hit our stride with the announcement of negotiations over a free trade agreement with



Africa, July 2020.

Kenya in 2020, the pandemic hit. In terms of the human toll of COVID-19, much of the continent fared better than the rest of the world, but economically it suffered like the rest. Across the continent, we saw a significant economic slowdown, businesses shuttering, and mass job losses. Tourism declined, supply chains were scrambled, and many countries had to assume heavy debt. Amid the pandemic, leadership changes in the U.S. blew us further off course.

After the pandemic, African economies reawakened, buoyed by the promises of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The U.S. business community has taken note of its vast potential: a colossal single market for goods and services covering 54 countries with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion.

On the margins of the 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Forum, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce signed a memorandum of understanding with the AfCFTA—the only business organization in the world to do so—to ensure that the voice of American business is reflected in the final negotiated objectives. Signs of progress remain on the U.S.-Africa bilateral trade agenda as

exemplified by the Biden administration’s agreement in July 2022 to continue talks with the government of Kenya via a new U.S.-Kenya Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership.

It would appear we have now come full circle, and U.S.-Africa business ties are poised for takeoff.

Next Steps

Where do we go from here? To start, we need to show up. African governments anticipate that the U.S. government will be accompanied on official visits by scores of business leaders, just as China, France, Türkiye, Japan, and the United Kingdom have done. In the first quarter of 2023, there has been a surge in high-level U.S. government officials traveling to the continent. However, not a single trip has delivered on the prospect of commercial engagement with delegations in tow. Yes, business has been discussed; but as we all know, the U.S. government is outside the business of business.

At the Chamber of Commerce, we have long believed that for our country to retain its global leadership position, we must priori-

tize the creation of businesses at home while opening new markets and leveling the playing field for American companies abroad. Globally, we rely on our American Chambers of Commerce (AmCham) network to help achieve these objectives, with more than 127 AmChams worldwide, more than 15 in Africa. The U.S. government also relies on this network to push for market access.

But AmChams can't do it alone. One of the recommendations the U.S. Chamber made in 2021 to President Biden was to increase the number of Foreign Commercial Service officers. By increasing the number of commercially trained officials in the field, we can further help U.S. small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) de-risk and demystify African markets.

We must acknowledge the urgency and importance of helping American SMEs enter the African market—among the key themes that emerged from the U.S.-Africa Business Forum in December, and one for which the chamber has long been an advocate.

In August 2022, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce launched “Advance with Africa,” a nationwide roadshow and campaign increasing U.S. businesses’ understanding of commercial opportunities in Africa, transforming the narrative around Africa’s business climate, and dispelling myths—creating new opportunities for American companies, big and small. Crucially, “Advance with Africa” focuses on empowering minority- and Black-owned small businesses, fueling a transformation that ensures equitable growth for Americans and Africans alike. Within four months of the campaign’s launch, we reached more than 1,000 diverse companies.

Each of them is eager to understand African markets but unaware of the resources the U.S. government provides to help them. Building off the success of Prosper Africa, a 2019 USAID initiative that brings the services and resources of 17 U.S. government agencies to help African and American businesses and investors identify partners and close deals, we saw a unique opportunity to partner with state and local chambers of commerce across America to answer the call of so many African governments: Bring us more of your small businesses.

A Team Sport

As much as the private sector leans on the U.S. government to help manage risk, establish regulatory standards, and open markets through trade, the U.S. government relies on the private sector to make all of the policy work meaningful and lasting. Without a pro-business agenda in partnership with the U.S. government, we will continue to lose commercial ground to China, Russia, and the European Union. Currently, Africans have an affinity for U.S. goods and services, but that won't be the case forever.

For the summit to be successful, we must collectively ensure that team USA shows up, led by a starting lineup of businesses.

We will also need to catch up when it comes to our national security. For example, Russia has been a historic partner for many African nations as they emerged from colonial rule. In recent times, Russia’s military influence and increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) spending have flourished across the continent. We saw this on full display during recent votes at the United Nations on the war in Ukraine. Many African nations sided with Russia or, at best, abstained from voting. This should have been a resounding wake-up call for the United States that there are other teams vigorously courting Africa.

The African continent is now a major player, and our trite old act of aid dollars is no longer unique. China has proven that FDI is a sought-after commodity. For us to overtake China’s quick start on the continent, we must do the following:

- Pledge to host the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit and Business Forum every three years.
- Seek new trade agreements with African partners and ensure they complement the African Continental Free Trade Area.
- Urge U.S. Cabinet members to visit Africa at least every other year and include a business delegation whenever possible.
- Double the presence of the Department of Commerce’s Foreign Commercial Service officers in Africa.

A Turning Point

The 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit was a turning point; make no mistake about that. However, for the summit to be successful, we must collectively ensure that team USA shows up, led by a starting lineup of businesses.

The U.S. Chamber is a natural ally in this game. We have the national network of chambers of commerce, the international network of AmChams, and the trust of African governments, as well as our own.

For more than 100 years, diplomats have relied on the voice of business to help them be successful in the field, delivering on the American dream at home and abroad. We must ensure that the next 100 years of diplomats do the same. ■

Human RIGHTS and U.S. Foreign POLICY

WILDPIXEL



A Frank Discussion

A diplomat and an activist talk candidly about how to work together.

BY ANNIE PFORZHEIMER
AND HEATHER BARR

The role of the U.S. government in supporting human rights is a topic of nearly constant controversy and debate. Annie Pforzheimer and Heather Barr have worked together to advocate for women’s rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. This collaboration prompted discussions about U.S. policy vis-à-vis human rights, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and the sometimes-contentious role of human rights advocates in seeking to influence that policy. We invited them to compare notes.



Annie Pforzheimer is a former U.S. diplomat who retired from the State Department after 30 years of service in Washington, D.C., and seven overseas postings, including Colombia, Afghanistan, Türkiye, and South Africa. In her Foreign Service career, she focused on issues of security, human rights, and peacebuilding. She is currently affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.



Heather Barr is an American lawyer who has worked outside the U.S. for 18 years, the last 11 for Human Rights Watch, first as the Afghanistan researcher and then with the organization’s women’s rights division, where she is currently an associate director.

Annie Pforzheimer: Here is something I have always wanted to know: When activists make requests of the U.S. government, are those the actual things they want or are they positioning something extreme in order to get to a worthwhile compromise?

Heather Barr: Those are things Human Rights Watch, at least, actually wants. Our compass is always international human rights law, and it's clear and usually fairly strong. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that parties must take all steps to guarantee women "the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men." There isn't a single country on the planet that has achieved this, but that's what the convention says, and that's what we want. The United States has signed but not ratified CEDAW, which is shameful. But women in the U.S. want full equality, too; and we want it for them.

A frequent internal discussion is how to react when there is an opportunity for partial reform. We always want to think carefully through how we can be as helpful as possible to activists in-country who are working for smaller goals, while still being consistent about always calling for full respect for the rights people have under international law.

So no, when we walk into a meeting with a diplomat, we aren't thinking, "Let me ask for something super extreme, and then maybe we'll get to some midpoint, which is what we really want." I remember when I interviewed for my job, and they asked me how I manage frustration when nothing seems to work. I said it's about managing your own expectations of what success looks like—sometimes success can even be things getting worse a tiny bit more slowly because of your efforts. On Afghanistan today, I dream of that kind of "success."

So here's one for you. How much space is there for diplomats to argue internally for principled approaches to human rights, and what pushback do diplomats face when they do so? And will human rights always be deprioritized under other interests such as national security?

AP: "It depends." Classic State Department answer.

Human rights are a worthwhile policy consideration and are usually treated as such, both as a standalone "right thing to do" and also because they are key to big-picture goals of regional stability, national prosperity, and representational governments. Many specific U.S. laws and policies enshrine human rights. And we're required to write an annual report evaluating their status. That "Human Rights Report" represents an opportunity within

How much space is there for diplomats to argue internally for principled approaches to human rights?

—HB

embassies and the department to talk to local dissenting voices and criticize even friendly governments, and to create an objective and agreed-on U.S. government record of what is actually happening, which is the best basis for policymaking.

I respect what you say about the importance of international law, but in practice the space to argue this can depend on a wide variety of factors. As they say in government-speak, those factors include but are not limited to: the mood of the White House or Congress toward having an activist foreign policy; the relative importance of a country and what else the U.S. looks for in the relationship; the latest headlines; where we are in an electoral cycle; a crisis somewhere else that requires our tools of international influence; the history of what we've tried previously; trends in policymaking; the existence of international media on the scene; classified information that makes the situation more complicated than it looks to the public; whether or not there is a principled and nonviolent movement for human rights in that country.

Finally, with respect to priorities within foreign policy, national security—per the Constitution's phrase "provide for the common defense"—is the U.S. government's highest task, but I'd argue that human rights *is* national security. Governments that respect their own citizens are better allies, bring stability to their regions, and work with us to protect other American interests.

So what do you think: Should human rights be seen as one issue set among many, or are they foundational to all the others?

HB: We see them as very much foundational.

A good example of this is the discussion about transitional justice. We saw this clearly in Afghanistan, where survivors and activists were calling for accountability for human rights violations perpetrated by many different governments and international actors, stretching back decades. The Karzai and Ghani administrations in Afghanistan shut down those efforts, with strong support from a lot of foreign diplomats who often told us privately that there were more pressing issues—that there

Almost nothing about policymaking is truly calculable in absolute terms without considering it relative to other policy goals.

—AP

needed to be an end to the conflict in Afghanistan and stability in the country. Our response was that failing to deal with past atrocities was a major barrier to exactly the kind of peace and stability diplomats from the U.S. and elsewhere and Afghan government officials were saying was a prerequisite. I don't claim that this dynamic explains the whole human rights disaster that Afghanistan is today, but it certainly didn't help.

Similarly, women's full participation in all peace processes—for which everyone should be on board since U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, requires it—is forgotten all the time. It didn't surprise anyone working on women's rights, though, when research by the U.N. and others started to show that women's participation made it more likely that a deal to bring peace would be reached and that it would be implemented.

Afghanistan today can, unfortunately, be seen as an example of what happens when rights are not seen as foundational. What has happened there involved a deal—between the U.S. and the Taliban—made without the participation of the Afghan government and with zero Afghan women at the table. As we know, that deal brought nothing resembling peace to Afghan women.

So, Annie: What kind of training do U.S. diplomats get—and what kind of guidance do they receive—from the State Department and, in particular, the Foreign Service Institute, about the importance of and the role of diplomats regarding human rights?

AP: For me, human rights training was incorporated into a three-week “Political Tradecraft” course, with elements on reporting on human rights, drafting the annual reports, and adjudicating the Leahy Law for security training. Human rights training is also available in units regarding gender, atrocity prevention, fundamentals of international human rights law, and religious freedom. But the State Department has a culture of on-the-job training, largely out of necessity: time spent at the Foreign Service Institute equates to a vacant chair somewhere, in tightly staffed offices or embassies.

One quibble with the question, though: No one could necessarily train you in the “importance” of human rights. As I mentioned, almost nothing about policymaking is truly calculable in absolute terms without considering it relative to other policy goals.

HB: Sigh. That doesn't seem like much training. Maybe not on the importance, but Human Rights Watch thinks all Foreign Service officers should receive training in international human rights treaty law and customary law, as well as topics like refugee law and basic international humanitarian law. One can't expect new Foreign Service officers to teach themselves the fundamentals of human rights laws and practices.

AP: OK, a different topic—have government officials ever changed their mind after talking to you? If so, why?

HB: That's a hard question. How would I know? I guess I have been in meetings where the official we were speaking with seemed surprised and concerned by information we were providing. When someone seems like they're hearing something new, you think maybe you are going to have an impact and shift their thinking.

We really want to work with diplomats who are, in their own role, advocates for human rights. We bring to the table information, findings, data, detailed ideas for practical solutions, and deep connections with experts and activists. When we are doing our work well, we're partnering with activists on the ground and helping them be heard in new ways, including by U.S. diplomats. Policymakers should care about what civil society has to say. We see that they often do. They're overworked and are on the hook to make big decisions about complex matters, and they often look to Human Rights Watch and other organizations for help.

Since we're on the subject, what mistakes do human rights advocates make in their engagement with diplomats?

AP: So glad you asked, because it's vital to make the most of the opportunities to have the impact you just described.

A few procedural mistakes come to mind. For example, advocates may waste time in meetings by starting at a too-basic level, such as introducing who is in the room beyond a sentence or two, or going over the history of a problem rather than getting to the heart of the conversation. If you have a meeting with a diplomat, especially a formal one, that person already has your bio and a briefing memo on the issue under discussion. Also, treat the diplomat as a respected colleague with whom you want to

connect versus a student receiving a lecture. Please bear in mind that they are people underneath those suits and badges. Pointed criticisms or rhetoric may sting because that person actually has been trying their hardest. And that can turn into dislike of the messenger or message, or even a sense that “what’s the use, it’s never enough.”

Listen hard. The diplomat may be able—and may want—to tell you a lot about where the policy discussion really stands. Some diplomats are allies within the system, as you said, the kind who want to brainstorm options.

For your part, do you assume all government officials are lying to you?

HB: Definitely case by case. People do lie to us sometimes. That includes perpetrators of atrocities, but it may also include government officials whom we are approaching as potential allies. We know that most people we would hope to engage, which includes U.S. diplomats, would be very careful not to lie, or be caught in a lie, and that partially accounts for discussions that can feel vague and noncommittal. But there are definitely shades of truth.

When we ask for the U.S. and other governments to speak out publicly on a human rights issue, sometimes we are told by the person we are in communication with that in their view raising the issue privately is more effective, and we should rest assured that they are indeed raising it privately, emphatically and frequently. How would we ever really know for sure, especially if things don’t improve?

Have your actions as a diplomat been influenced by human rights advocacy groups, and if so, how?

AP: I think that I have been influenced most as a diplomat by groups that emphasize big principles and overall policy direction. They are right, in other words, about the imperatives. That emphasis may have emboldened me to keep pushing something that was difficult within the system and afforded me more space with my superiors to do so.

I often was less influenced by advocates’ arguments at a granular policy or program level since these often lacked particular, relevant bits of information or context. That said, diplomats shouldn’t let their knowledge of existing impediments to getting something done blind them to the importance of changing course or reprioritizing U.S. interests, no matter how difficult.

How about you? Have you ever changed your mind about an issue after talking to a U.S. government official? If so, why?

HB: That’s an interesting question. I have definitely changed my mind about the right strategy on a particular issue, and I have definitely acquired new information in discussions with diplomats from the U.S. and elsewhere that has changed my thinking.

In my 11 years of doing advocacy for Human Rights Watch I have experienced a whole range of folks, from some U.S. diplomats who came across as racist and rude to many others who were truly interested in working together on a human rights issue. The best meetings are ones where you feel like you are co-conspirators—like you are on the same page and are brainstorming together on how to use your respective roles to reach a goal you share.

So, tell me the truth: What do U.S. diplomats think about activists and advocates? Do we seem ridiculously naive?

AP: Well ... sometimes.

I would call out some advocates who think that a national leader’s criticism of the U.S. is proof of their independence of mind or principles: Nope, it’s possible to hate the U.S. and still be a tyrant. Also, there is a holdover view that “name and shame” is the best tool in the international tool kit, despite evidence to the contrary. And, I have a criticism that’s not about naivete: It seems messianic if international human rights advocates take the floor when a local advocate would be more appropriate.

As we discussed, I think we disagree on the extent of a focus on human rights within a complex policy relationship. We also may see advocates as being uninformed or manipulated by people with domestic agendas—and just like anyone, they can become wedded to a position and defensive about it, even when faced with evidence of error.

On a personal level, and especially when I dealt with individual researchers and advocates over time, I felt they were brilliant and idealistic. I wished I could carry out their vision of an absolute prioritization of human rights, but my job was to hold the line for the many other core interests of the U.S. government.

That said, advocates are invaluable to the wider policy debate; more extreme and one-sided approaches can help lead to a better, more nuanced overall policy. It’s often useful to state in an interagency policy meeting that you had a “tough” meeting with well-briefed human rights advocates, and introduce their new information, arguments, and recommendations.

Speaking of which, does a human rights activist have the same “truth” as a U.S. government official—in other words, are your verification and fact-checking methodologies similar to the State Department’s? What are the gaps in information you often have?

HB: Obviously, there are all kinds of human rights activists with all kinds of approaches.

Regarding information gaps, well, unlike you, we don't have access to an intelligence agency! We are very thin on the ground. Human Rights Watch usually has one researcher per country and maybe one or two research assistants. Some of our researchers cover several countries, and many work on thematic issues across a whole region or even globally. So those are real constraints, no matter how connected, knowledgeable, and hard-working someone might be.

But my organization and many other organizations and activists pride ourselves on being incredibly careful to have our facts right. Our reputation is our greatest asset, and if we wreck it by being wrong, we can't fix that. Behind the need to get things right is a whole structure at Human Rights Watch of fact-checking and a pretty heavy review process—I have had documents I've written reviewed by more than 20 people, including specialists on any country or thematic area that is mentioned, external experts, and always the legal and policy department. That process will

not allow us to publish information that is not supported by multiple credible sources, and we get asked a lot of questions along the way to ensure that that is the case.

We have discussions over the meanings of everyday words like “pervasive,” “routine,” or even “massacre,” and tough, careful, and sometimes very long internal discussions about legal terminology like “systematic,” “apartheid,” and “genocide.” We try to stick to using technical terms with their technical meaning—not the more common use of the term—and err on the side of caution with respect to the facts.

We hope that the benefit of being so careful and measured is that people we see as advocacy targets, such as U.S. diplomats, will see the information we collect as credible and feel that it is appropriate to incorporate it into their analysis. Our work can be most effective when we are able to build relationships with insiders within governments or institutions who see value in working with us to promote common goals.

I hope our conversation today helps those relationships take shape, the way ours has! ■



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AFSA President on the Road

NEWS OF DAVIDSON



Ambassadors Eric Rubin and Marie Yovanovitch share the stage at Davidson College in North Carolina.

AFSA President Eric Rubin traveled to Charlotte, N.C., on April 4 for a series of events.

Ambassador Rubin was invited by recently retired FSO and former AFSA Governing Board member Daniel Crocker, now director of the Dean Rusk International Studies Program, to speak at Davidson College. He moderated a speaking event with Ambassador (ret.) Marie “Masha” Yovanovitch before an audience of 200 students and community members.

The two were introduced on stage by a first-year Davidson student from Ukraine whose goal is to join her country’s diplomatic corps after graduation.

After speaking, Amb. Rubin was able to visit a U.S. politics class on campus, while Amb. Yovanovitch visited a class on international relations.

Later, more than 50 people turned up at the World Affairs Council of Charlotte, where Amb. Rubin spoke on the topic

of diplomacy in the 21st century. A recording of that event can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/WACC-Diplomacy>.

On April 17, Amb. Rubin virtually joined an international politics class at Valencia College, based in Orlando, Fla., to speak to students about a Foreign Service

career and AFSA’s role in promoting the importance of diplomacy.

Nearly half of Valencia College’s student body claims Hispanic heritage, and many speak several languages. Amb. Rubin pointed out that these skills present opportunities for young people interested in becoming diplomats.

“One of the great strengths of our country is that we have so many people who are immigrants or children of immigrants or grandchildren of immigrants, who speak other languages and can bring that to the Foreign Service. That’s something that we actually recruit for,” he said.

A recording of the event can be found at <https://bit.ly/VC-Rubin>. ■



Ljubomir “LJ” Stambuk, president and CEO of the World Affairs Council of Charlotte, N.C., presents a certificate of appreciation to Amb. Rubin.

CALENDAR

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

June 12
Time TBD
Welcome Lunch for State LNA Class

June 14
12-1 p.m.
Lunch for Outgoing FAS Officers

June 19
Juneteenth
AFSA Offices Closed

June 21
12-2 p.m.
Final Meeting of the 2021-2023 AFSA Governing Board

July 3-4
Independence Day
AFSA Offices Closed

July 10
FAS Global Attaché Conference at USDA

July 15
2023-2025 AFSA Governing Board Takes Office

July 18
10 a.m.-12 p.m.
Youth Awards Ceremony and Reception

July 19
12-2 p.m.
First Meeting of the 2023-2025 AFSA Governing Board

July 20
Time TBD
Welcome Lunch for State Class

September 4
Labor Day
AFSA Offices Closed

September 22
7:05 p.m.
Foreign Service Night at Nationals Park



Your Pension Should Be Your Pension, Period

You would think the title of this column would always hold true. No matter what job you may have after you retire, you should always receive your full government pension because you earned it, full stop.

But if you are a retiree participating in the reemployed annuitant (REA) program, run by the State Department, that is not the case. That is because REAs are subject to caps on hours they may work and the salary they may receive if the department decides to reemploy them.

One of AFSA's priorities with the current Congress is to change the REA program so that our retirees who choose to work for the department are not bound by these caps. Our military colleagues have no such limits on their pensions, and we firmly believe that Foreign Service pensions should not be limited either.

Background. The caps on hours and salary date back to a 1986 amendment to the Foreign Service Act of 1980. In Section 824, the act sets the rules that govern hiring reemployed annuitants.

Translated into department regulation, an FS annuitant reemployed on a temporary basis can work only 1,040 hours per year (equal to six months) and will continue to receive their full annuity and full REA salary so long as the annual

earning and annuity do not exceed the higher of: (a) the FS annuitant's salary at retirement (unadjusted for inflation), or (b) the fulltime salary of the position in which the FS annuitant is reemployed. If you go above those caps, you must pay back to the department the amount by which the caps were exceeded.

For most REAs, the work hours cap kicks in well before the salary cap. Looking at the legislative history of the act, the idea apparently was to ensure that the annuity REAs receive, when combined with the salary they are entitled to in any calendar year, may not exceed their salary at retirement. But why should that matter?

Double Dipping? The narrative has been that Foreign Service officers would be guilty of "double dipping"—that is, allegedly getting the same benefit twice—if they were to receive both their full pension and their REA salary without limitation. But how can it be called double dipping if your pension has been earned and the department now wants to reemploy you?

Again, the military has no such problem. A friend recently told me that a friend of his just retired from the military and returned to work for the Department of Defense shortly thereafter. He receives both his full pension and new salary without

The department should support this effort to make REA service as equitable and frictionless as possible.

limitation. (The only time that happens in the department is in the relatively rare case of being hired as a personal services contractor, or PSC, after retirement.)

By the way, it is your responsibility as the REA to keep track of the number of hours you work and make certain you do not go over the caps.

Creating a Diplomatic Reserve Corps. Many of you have heard of this reform effort, led by Ambassadors Marc Grossman and Marcie Ries. The September 2022 "Blueprints" report proposes the creation of a 1,000-person Diplomatic Reserve Corps. This corps, designed to function when a surge capability is needed, would be drawn from both active-duty and retired department members and appropriate members of the public.

AFSA strongly supports the creation of this reserve. Included in the report is legislative language that would ensure that the pensions of our retirees who participate as reserve corps members *would not be touched*.

Changing the Narrative. AFSA hopes to change the unfair, decades-long practice

of treating our pensions as fair game to limit and has found some support on the Hill for this reform. Your State Department pension should be off-limits, regardless of whether you now work in the private sector or are reemployed by the department. And if it's considered wrongful "double dipping" at State, then why isn't it considered wrong in other agencies as well?

AFSA is not arguing that REAs should receive all the benefits of a full-time, active-duty employee. We understand and agree that the department should save money with REAs by not allowing the accrual of annual and sick leave and by not making matching Thrift Savings Plan payments, for example.

To take advantage of the extensive experience and skill that our retirees bring to the table, the department should support this effort to make REA service as equitable and frictionless as possible. AFSA believes the best way to do that is to remove the hour and salary caps.

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



A Complicated Question with No Clear Answer

In late March, USAID issued a solicitation for a Foreign Service Limited (FSL-2) procurement analyst position requiring a bachelor's degree and four years of relevant experience, including one year of specialized experience at the FS-3 level.

AFSA career and career-candidate members, many of whom have served in multiple missions, hold warrants, have advanced degrees, and are still serving at the FS-3 (or below) class, saw the message and contacted us.

They all recognize the urgent need for acquisition and assistance support and welcome new colleagues. But they expressed dismay at the disparity between the qualifications, class, and compensation for this FSL appointment and the treatment of career/career-candidate FSOs.

I want to be clear: There was no resentment toward any colleagues, nor questions as to whether USAID needs more employees (spoiler: we do).

Rather, this example is emblematic of an increasing number of inquiries that AFSA receives on the disparities between the required qualifications of career/career-candidate FSOs and those of FSL appointees and the differences in respective compensation.

It is a complex, important, and, yes, sometimes sensitive question with no

clear answer. But it is worth attention as USAID continues to look at better strategic workforce planning.

Similarities and Differences. While USAID has many hiring mechanisms, the U.S. government has only one Foreign Service Act of 1980, which outlines the rationale and the functions of the Foreign Service. It also outlines appointment parameters and policies for career, temporary, and limited terms; affirms merit principles; and covers qualifications and compensation.

Career/career-candidate FSOs and FSL appointees fall under the act, but in practice have different authorities, roles, compensation and benefit packages, requirements, and time frames.

FSL appointees are limited in their employment terms (though many seek career Civil Service jobs!). FSOs must maintain a Top Secret security clearance. FSL appointees are hired for a specific position and role and do not receive the FS pension. FSOs must be worldwide available; not so with FSLs.

Different requirements and overall compensation packages are not surprising. But as all fall under the Foreign Service Act, there are pertinent questions related to strategic workforce planning efforts and equity goals.

Class. Determining what class (and correspond-

ing compensation range) someone should be assigned on entering USAID's Foreign Service is complicated.

The act's "General Provisions Relating to Appointments" state: "The Secretary shall prescribe, as appropriate, written, oral, physical, foreign language, and other examinations for appointment to the Service."

The act devotes an entire chapter to compensation, noting: "The Secretary shall assign all Foreign Service Officers and Foreign Service personnel to appropriate salary classes in the Foreign Service Schedule." "All" personnel suggests no differentiation among career, temporary, or limited appointments.

The act does specify that career-candidates may not enter at higher than the FS-4 level, with limited exceptions, but provides no such specificity for FSL appointees.

So, taken together, the act suggests that all appointees should be held to some form of qualification benchmarks and should have an "appropriate" salary class.

What USAID Says.

Guided by the act, USAID's own policies (notably, ADS 414 on Appointments and ADS 470 on Pay under the FS) add granularity. Per ADS 470: "Foreign Service pay rates are fixed in accord with sections of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended." This applies to

Foreign Service (FS) career, career-candidate, and non-career employees in classes FS-1 and below.

On FSL appointments, USAID maintains qualification standards for each class and occupational specialty and uses these to screen applicants to determine which class level is appropriate for each. Applicants can be eligible to receive a higher rate of pay depending on their current or prior federal service and their nonfederal salary.

So, What's the Question? Well, there are several. A basic question is, Should FSO and FSL positions at the same rank have identical or differing education, overseas time, experience, and other qualifications? If differing, does this create, at a minimum, an appearance of pay equity concerns?

How does the agency account for factors like a pension, security clearance, worldwide availability, USAID mission experience, etc.?

How does this practice affect morale and strategic workforce planning? How can USAID address the qualifications, ranks, and commensurate salaries of career/career-candidate FSOs and FSL appointees on a more equitable basis?

AFSA is encouraging the agency to look at these questions, and we welcome your thoughts and ideas. ■

Inside Diplomacy

Climate Change and the Role of Diplomacy

On March 10, AFSA invited Monica Medina, the assistant secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) and the president's special envoy for biodiversity and water resources, to talk to members about the role that diplomats play in halting the catastrophic effects of global climate change.



Assistant Secretary
Monica Medina

Assistant Secretary Medina

called climate change “one of the defining challenges of our time” and said the Biden administration sees it as a priority.

“We are back at the table and absolutely engaged,” she said of the administration’s push to return the U.S. to its former status as a leader in the movement to protect the planet.

“The president issued an executive order within a few days of taking office that put the climate crisis at the center—at the center—of U.S. foreign policy and national security,” said Medina.

So what does OES have to do with solving the climate crisis? “Climate is related to almost everything we do in the OES bureau,” said Medina. Work disrupting international criminal networks and preventing illegal

fishing, mining, logging, and wildlife trade ties directly back to the health of the natural world.

Even the bureau’s mandate to forge cooperation on space exploration is linked

to the climate crisis, Medina explained. “Working with partners, bringing other countries with us as we go to the moon and go to Mars, is a great way for us to not only expand our diplomatic efforts, but also to expand their ability to help us solve the climate crisis by all the observations that we’re going to get from space.”

She is most proud of OES’ work to finalize a United Nations treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of the high seas, which was agreed to in March 2023 after more than a decade of negotiations.

Once ratified, the treaty will protect the parts of the ocean that are beyond any country’s 200-mile national jurisdiction—half the planet, she said, will be covered under the new agreement. She added: “It took a Herculean effort by a team of people led by OES, including our lawyers and an interagency team that was phenomenal.”

It was diplomacy that

Climate is related to almost everything we do in the OES bureau.

—Assistant Secretary Monica Medina

made this happen, said Medina. “It is because we’ve developed strong relationships with countries from all over the world. ... We really have worked very, very closely to try to understand each other’s perspectives.”

“We couldn’t solve these global problems without strong partnerships in government, in private sector, in philanthropic organizations, and businesses,” she said.

Her team is now taking part in negotiations on a global treaty on plastics. “It’s time for us to address the plastic pollution crisis that we see worldwide,” said Medina. There are 8 billion people on the planet, she noted, and there are 21,000 pieces of plastic in the ocean per person.

Medina hopes this new agreement will be like the Paris Agreement, allowing for flexibility in how each country chooses to solve the problem within its borders.

Medina said she is making a case for increased resources in OES. In the past year, she said, the department increased the number of Environment, Science, Technology and Health (ESTH) climate directed offi-

cers by “a couple dozen,” and they are working to get more.

She also pointed to training being done at the Foreign Service Institute so that officers “who don’t necessarily spend all their time on climate and environment issues can learn them and know them and see how they impact their day-to-day jobs.”

She said new Foreign Service officers she meets have a great interest in climate issues. “I think many people are joining the Foreign Service in order to help solve these very problems, because they are global in nature, and it is a pivotal time, and they are really interested in making sure that they have a healthy planet for generations to come.”

Diplomats will continue to play an important role in solving the climate crisis. Medina wants to see an increasing number of ESTH officers and regional hub officers focused on the subject in order to set global standards that have regional cooperation.

A recording of the event is available at <https://bit.ly/ID-AS-OES>. ■

AFSA Co-Sponsors “Diplomacy, Dissent and the Holocaust” Film Screening

On March 23, the State Department held the special event, “Diplomacy, Dissent and the Holocaust: Speaking Out, Then and Now,” in the William J. Burns Auditorium.

Online viewers joined in-person attendees for a screening of curated clips from the 2022 PBS documentary, “The U.S. and the Holocaust,” directed by Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein, followed by a panel discussion moder-

ated by U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Ellen Germain.

The event was co-sponsored by AFSA, the department’s Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and the newly revived Secretary’s Open Forum.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman delivered opening remarks. The film, she said, “calls us to be the voices of conscience when the times demand it. That

implores us to see dissent as not merely our right as Americans but our duty as public servants—as advocates of policies that give life to our principles. For if ‘never again’ is to mean something, then silence is inadequate and neutrality unacceptable when events worldwide cry out for more.”

Panelists included AFSA State Vice President and former Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Tom Yazd-



erdi; FSO Elisabeth Zentos; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum historian Rebecca Erbelding (featured in the film); and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations Colleen Crenwelge.

Topics covered ranged from the role of the State Department and foreign policy makers in atrocity prevention to the functions of today’s Dissent Channel. ■

DACOR Needs Our Support



DACOR President James Dandridge II is appealing to the foreign affairs community for donations toward the preservation of DACOR Bacon House, the 200-year-old mansion where the organization is based.

In a letter to AFSA, Dandridge wrote that the house is in need of urgent repairs: to buttress a garden wall in imminent danger of collapsing and to address other critical concerns uncovered by the mansion’s Historic Structure Report.

With these needs in mind, DACOR requests contributions to the \$250,000 fund it is raising from various diplomatic organizations and DACOR members so that the house and garden can continue to be enjoyed by all in the foreign affairs community.

For those interested in providing support, tax-deductible contributions may be made by check (with the designation “Garden Wall”) mailed to DACOR, 1801 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20006; online at www.dacorbacon.org/donate (with the notation “Garden Wall”); or by phone to Director of Development Jared Hughes at (202 682-0500, ext. 23. ■

AFSA Meets with FirstGens@State

On March 30, AFSA leadership met virtually with members of the State Department’s newest employee organization, FirstGens@State.



Founded in November 2022 to support State Department employees who are the first in their families to obtain a college degree in the United States, FirstGens@State already has more than 150 members.

Their goal is to heighten public and workforce awareness of the challenges FirstGens and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds face; to develop resources, support, and a workplace culture to help FirstGens thrive; and to focus on developing an environment that maximizes retention.

They also seek to provide a network of social and professional support for people who participated in any of the Department of Education’s TRIO programs (eight programs to assist eligible but disadvantaged students).

FirstGens@State membership is open to all State Department employees, as well as employees from interagency partners working at the department or operating in any U.S. embassy or consulate. For questions, email FirstGensState@state.gov or join their Teams channel, FirstGens@State. ■

Changes to Assignment Restrictions: FAQs

On March 22, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced an end to the issuance of new assignment restrictions as a condition placed on security clearances. He noted in his announcement that other assignments-related processes, including the assignment review process (also known as the pass-through process), will be maintained.

According to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, there are currently 666 people—less than 2 percent of the State Department workforce—subject to assignments restrictions. The lifting of these restrictions opens up new possible assignments for those affected, and also allows the department's native speakers to better utilize their language skills and cultural knowledge.

AFSA looks forward to continued discussions with department leadership to seek assurances that the assignment review process and other processes used to address foreign influence or preference concerns will be conducted under accountable and transparent processes.

1. Assignment restrictions, assignment reviews (pass-throughs), assignment preclusions ... What's the difference?

The department has three different assignment-related mechanisms that may impact an employee's ability to be posted abroad, which

are outlined in two recent ALDACS: 23 STATE 31212 and 23 STATE 31486.

Assignment restrictions, for which Secretary Blinken ended new issuances, are a personnel security function governed by 12 FAM 233.5 and handled by DS/SI/PSS.

Assignment preclusions are a human resources function and not a security function. They are imposed when a host government does not afford an employee diplomatic immunity due to dual citizenship considerations. GTM handles these.

Assignment reviews, informally known as pass-throughs, are secondary counterintelligence reviews of proposed assignments to certain posts prior to the assignment being paneled. They are governed by 12 FAM 263.3-2. DS/ICI/CI conducts the assignment review and makes a recommendation about the proposed assignment to the Director General, who concurs or non-concurs with the recommendation.

2. Does this mean that all assignment restrictions have been lifted?

No. The Secretary only announced an end to *new* assignment restrictions. Existing assignment restrictions will still be in place. However, new employees joining the department will no longer be given assignment restrictions. Current employees who take action that might have resulted in the issuance of

an assignment restriction in the past, such as marrying a foreign national, will also no longer be given a new assignment restriction.

3. Previously, Diplomatic Security would review assignment restrictions when renewing security clearances. Will they cease renewing assignment restrictions in the future based on the Secretary's new policy?

We don't know. AFSA and the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association (AAFAA) are working to address this question with Diplomatic Security. We will report as soon as more information is available.

4. If I have a current assignment restriction, what do I do?

After negotiations with the department, AFSA was successful in establishing an appeals process in which the final decision will be made by the Security Appeals Panel. Those who wish to appeal their assignment restrictions must do so prior to seeking an assignment in

the country of the restriction.

Appeals of an assignment restriction are governed by 12 FAM 230, 12 FAM 233.5(h), 12 FAM 234.1(c), and 12 FAM 234.3(a). Diplomatic Security sent out an ALDAC, 23 STATE 31212, on March 22 that provided instructions for a one-time deviation from policy that allows employees to request an appeal before June 19 for existing assignment restrictions due to recent changes in policy. For more information, contact DSDirectorPSS@state.gov.

5. Does that mean I can be assigned to Country X now?

If you have an existing assignment restriction, that restriction is still in effect. If your assignment restriction has been lifted, you should have been notified in writing via email. However, even if it has been lifted, assignments to certain posts are subject to an assignment review. Your experiences may vary.

Please contact member@afsa.org if you have any further questions or would like to share more information. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meeting, April 19, 2023

The Governing Board met in person at AFSA headquarters.

Associate Members: The board approved the applications of two new associate members.

Awards: The board adopted the Awards and Plaques Committee recommendations for AFSA's 2023 Foreign Service Champions Award and Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award. ■

AFSA Meets with Post Reps

On April 20, AFSA hosted a virtual, informal discussion with post representatives around the world.

AFSA President Eric Rubin, joined by AFSA vice presidents and section heads, provided an update on the association's advocacy priorities, upcoming AFSA events, and took questions and feedback from participants.

Christine Miele, AFSA's director of programs and member engagement, gave an overview of annual Foreign Service Day programming and noted that 2024 marks the centennial of the FS. She discussed how posts might be involved and reminded post reps that

these events are a great opportunity to showcase the work of the Foreign Service to visiting congressional delegations.

In an effort to keep up with the ever-changing mailing addresses of FS members, Miele also asked post reps for their assistance in updating AFSA's list of who is at post after transfer season. This ensures that members can continue to receive physical copies of the FSJ.

AFSA post representatives are integral to the work we do in support of members globally, and we look forward to meeting with them again! ■

AFSA Congratulates New Retirees

AFSA joined soon-to- retire colleagues at the Job Search/ Transition Program (JSTP) at the Foreign Service Institute in March. JSTP helps Foreign Service (and sometimes Civil Service) members with the transition from government service to new careers and other opportunities that await them in retirement.

At a brown bag lunch attended by 25 participants on March 14, AFSA Retiree Vice President John Naland talked about what AFSA can do for our retired members

and explained how retirees can rejoin AFSA.

On March 31, AFSA hosted a graduation reception for more than 60 JSTP participants. AFSA President Ambassador Eric Rubin and other AFSA employees toasted the participants and celebrated their impending retirement.

Congratulations to all JSTP participants—we wish you much luck in your future endeavors, and we thank you for your years of service to our country. ■

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FIRST CONSULTATION FREE

Help for Mission Sudan Local Staff

Donate to the FSN Emergency Relief Fund

Following the escalation of violence in Sudan as rival military leaders battle for control, the Locally Employed (LE) staff (still known as FSNs) at the U.S. mission in Khartoum and beyond face immense risk. Some have already experienced property damage as a result of the fighting, and many have been stranded at home with limited access to food, water, and electricity.

For anyone looking for a way to provide direct, meaningful assistance, consider donating to the Foreign Service National Emergency Relief Fund. Please note that LE staff in other countries and private sector employees can contribute, as well.

All contributions are tax-deductible, and 100 percent of contributions are allocated for disbursement directly to staff in need, as the fund is administered internally by the department.

Outlined below are several ways to contribute to the relief fund. For additional information, please visit www.bit.ly/FSN-Relief-Fund.

Online. Secure online electronic donations can be made directly from your bank account or by credit/debit card via <https://bit.ly/Pay-Gov-FSNRF>.

Checks. Please send checks to the State Department's Gift Fund Coordinator, Crystal Jobe, Room 1821, 2201 C Street NW, Washington DC 20520. Make checks payable to the U.S. Department of State, designation for the FSN Emergency Relief Fund. Include a return address or email to receive a letter of acknowledgment for tax deduction purposes.

Payroll Deductions. All employees on State's payroll can make contributions by payroll deduction. U.S. direct hires may request a one-time or recurring deduction from net pay by submitting a request in the CGFS Payroll Customer Support Portal, found at <https://bit.ly/CGFS-CustomerSupport>.

For LE staff wishing to donate through payroll deductions, post should send a cable on behalf of the employee indicating the desire to make an "FSN Emergency Relief Fund" donation. Please include the employee's name and ID as well as the start and ending dates of the withholding.

Cash. Cash contributions in dollars or local currency can be made through the embassy/consulate cashier or at the State Department Federal Credit Union.

In the Washington area, donors can drop foreign currency in collection boxes in the Employee Service Center or the SDFCU branch at Main State or other branches. The SDFCU has partnered with the department and covers the cost of converting the donated currency to U.S. dollars. ■

AFSA Meets with Americans by Choice Group

On Feb. 21, 2023, AFSA leadership met with the board of Americans by Choice (ABC), a new employee organization at the State Department.

Founded in June 2022, Americans by Choice already had almost 200 members by April 2023. Their priority is to advocate on behalf of the department's growing community of foreign-born employees, whom the group describes as an often "invisible demographic" within the department.

ABC board members discussed the group's challenges with AFSA. While they offer unique perspectives and skill sets to foreign policy work, they also face challenges such as accent-based bias, unequal benefits, and policies that fail to take into account the needs of employees who earned their citizenship by virtue of naturalization rather than birth.

The board discussed the need to address accent bias in the bidding interview process. They worry that a move to audio-only interviews to remove bias has not achieved its intended goal; rather, it may have led to increasing bias against those with U.S. regional and foreign accents.

ABC's mission is threefold:

- Raising awareness of the contributions of foreign-born professionals to foreign affairs;
- Offering a support network to our members and fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging across the department; and
- Advocating for equitable access and opportunities for our community while working to remove the obstacles stemming from discrimination and unjust biases.

ABC membership is open to all Civil Service and Foreign Service employees in the department. To learn more, email ABC@state.gov. ■



Transportation Safety Act in Honor of FSO

AFSA encourages its members to consider supporting the bipartisan Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Active Transportation Safety Act (H.R. 1668). The bill, named for a Foreign Service officer tragically killed in a bicycle accident in August last year, will encourage state and local governments to fully leverage federal funding for complete biking and walking plans.

Those looking to assist can visit <https://bit.ly/SDL-bill-support> to voice your support to your representative. ■

Generative AI and the College Admissions Process



New technologies based on artificial intelligence are raising lots of questions for students and educators alike.

BY FRANCESCA KELLY

stood outside the window, staring at my reflection in the glass. My brother's face was just inches away on the other side, but it was like he was a million miles away. He was sitting in a hospital room, surrounded by white walls and beeping machines. It was hard to believe that just a few months ago, we were playing video games and teasing each other like we always did. Now, he was trapped in his own mind, unable to communicate with the outside world.

Does that paragraph draw you in and make you want to read more? That's what I've traditionally coached my college application essay students to do with their writing: open with a "hook."

But the above paragraph wasn't written by one of my students, or even by a human being.

It was the first paragraph of an essay created by the generative artificial intelligence (AI) entity, ChatGPT, after I fed in the following prompt: "Write a 550-word college application essay



*Francesca Huemer Kelly, the spouse of a retired Foreign Service officer and ambassador, counsels students on their college application essays through www.essayadvantage.net. A freelance writer, co-founder of *Tales from a Small Planet*, and former editor of *AFSA News*, she has also served as a college counselor at two international schools.*

in narrative form that tells a story about the writer's experience visiting his schizophrenic brother in a mental hospital. The essay should open with a scene that is compelling, then go back and tell a little family history and the sibling relationship, and finish with insights about what the writer has experienced and what he has learned."

As soon as I submitted this prompt, ChatGPT started writing in front of my eyes. The entire essay was done in less than a minute.

Not only that, but the essay was better than serviceable—it probably would have fooled many admissions officers.

Unless you've been living off the grid, you're probably aware of the recent buzz about ChatGPT and other forms of generative AI. Artificial intelligence has been around for a while, but since OpenAI made ChatGPT more accessible to the general public last fall, both usage and discussion about it have increased exponentially, especially among college counselors, admissions officers, high school teachers and university professors—and students.

And that's just in the world of higher education. The conversations have gone far beyond that into AI-generated art, music, literature, inventions, and other applications. The questions range from big ("Is humankind opening Pandora's Box?") to small ("Can I use AI to help me write my college application essays?").

In this article, we'll confine our discussion to the latter topic. *Phew.*

What Exactly Is Generative AI?

Generative AI uses deep machine learning through neural networks to both create and evaluate original content such as text, images, and audio. In a recent interview on the “PBS News Hour,” Seth Dobrin, president of the nonprofit Responsible Artificial Intelligence Institute, said: “Think of it as auto-complete on steroids.”

He explained that generative AI comprises “large language or foundational models that are essentially trained on the whole of the internet.”

Because the internet offers factual information, disinformation, bias, and opinion, generative AI content can contain all of those things. It’s important to note that generative AI, depending on its purpose, also mines datasets of thou-

sands of books and millions of images, as well as scientific and medical data.

Still, Dobrin pointed out, ChatGPT uses Reddit, a huge chat site with 50 million users, to learn how humans converse. And Reddit is nothing if not human. Also, GPT-4 was trained on data only through 2021, so it can produce outdated information.

Although there are several generative AI programs available, ChatGPT (GPT stands for Generative Pre-Trained Transformer) has captured the lion’s share of media attention. Other companies such as Google (whose AI tool is called Bard) and Microsoft (Bing) offer their own generative AI platforms.

If you give these new apps a spin, bear in mind that there are data privacy concerns about ChatGPT and other AI tools.

It’s Already Being Used to Write Essays ...

Some college applicants have already used AI to generate college admissions essays, even at the risk of consequences. Can college admissions officers determine if an application essay is AI-generated? Without AI detection and other tools, that’s unlikely at this point. ChatGPT-generated essays have recently fooled expert readers.

The essays generated by those of us first testing out ChatGPT’s “skills” were good, but not necessarily great. In the essay I created above, there were not enough of the specific small details that show us something about the writer. There was more “telling” than “showing,” and a certain monotonous rhythm to the writing.

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So, just a few months ago, the consensus was that a talented student could still write a more personal essay than what ChatGPT produced and that AI-generated essays, while very good, still lacked specific and unique details that would have made them ... well, more *human*.

Then GPT-4 was released. And with that more sophisticated tool, the landscape is changing once again. I gave it a prompt for an essay about the writer's love of fossils, and it generated a good—but again, not great—essay. I tweaked the prompt, asking it to mimic sample essays from different sources. Here, it did better.

How the prompt is written and tweaked makes a difference, and I've seen some essays generated by GPT-4 that use specific colorful details and show

insight, vulnerability, and humor. Just as “deep fake” audio, video, and imagery are rapidly improving, so is generative AI's essay fakery.

That said, generative AI can also produce a result that's too polished, too sophisticated. That might raise red flags among college admissions officers.

And, really, they just want to get to know you better: who you are, what your values are, what you'll bring to campus. Can an AI-generated essay show these things? That's up for debate, but it'd be pretty ironic if you asked ChatGPT to generate an essay that showcases your honesty.

Admissions officers also want to know that you have good writing skills, because you'll need those at college—where AI-

savvy professors might require essays to be written in class by hand.

And generative AI can still get things wrong. I tried my earlier prompt, about the mentally ill brother, with the updated GPT-4. Surprisingly, this supposedly more sophisticated generative AI had some glitches: Even though I asked for 550 words, it generated a repetitive and trite 787-word essay. So, it's not perfect. Yet.

So Why Should You Write Your Own Original Essays?

Ethics. Whether or not colleges or students consider it plagiarism to use generative AI to write for you, it's still considered morally wrong to claim to have written something that you didn't write.



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Can college admissions officers determine if an application essay is AI-generated?

Growth and self-knowledge.

College Essay Guy Ethan Sawyer points out that using generative AI to write essays “doesn’t provide students the same opportunity for personal growth” they might otherwise have working with a coach or even on their own. “This process can serve as a sort of rite of passage, teaching students valuable insights about themselves along the way. I worry that AI may skip over that.”

Indeed, as an essay coach, I’ve helped students dig deep into their motivations and their values. You’ll embark on a jour-

ney of self-discovery if you keep asking yourself, almost like a 3-year-old, “Why?”

Why, in a room full of swim-team trophies, is the “most improved in calculus” certificate more important to you? *Because I had to work so much harder at calculus.* Why did you choose to work so hard? *Because I needed to prove that I could master something difficult.* Why did you need to prove this? *Because I come from privilege and actually wanted to experience firsthand the rewards of sweating through an uncertain outcome.*

When you approach your essays in

this way, writing them becomes a deep and rich process that you’ll miss if you use generative AI. (Full disclosure: I have worked as an essay coach for College Essay Guy, as well as for several other companies.)

Pride of accomplishment. Making the writing process easier is a tempting but temporary fix. Confidently knowing your capabilities is permanent. Brainstorming, structuring, writing a rough draft, and fine-tuning to write exactly what you want to write with depth and thoughtfulness—this process sends an important message to your psyche about your own resources and skills.

Using AI to write for you sends a very different message: that you’re not up for the job. That’s not the subliminal



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self-talk to carry through life. (However, this doesn't mean that you can't use AI to help you become a better writer. More about that later.)

Consequences. If the above reasons don't resonate, there's always this one: If you get caught lying about who (or what) wrote your essays, you may face some pretty bad consequences: a rescinded admissions offer; suspension or even expulsion from your high school; even loss of respect from those you care about.

How Well Can AI-Generated Essays Be Detected?

Scott Aaronson, a computer science professor at the University of Texas–Austin, and now a guest researcher at OpenAI, has been working on a digital

“watermark” that signals AI-generated text. Several entities have also created AI detectors, although they vary in quality.

I sent the first two paragraphs of a ChatGPT-generated essay to three different AI detector sites: Crossplag.com, AIwritingcheck.org, and GPTZero.me. Only GPTZero, a program developed by Princeton computer science student Edward Tian, detected AI writing.

But with rapidly developing programs such as Turnitin, college admissions officers may soon be checking application essays with AI detection software.

As of this writing, administrators are still wary about using AI detectors in the college classroom. Says Betsy Barre, executive director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Wake Forest

University: “If [AI detection tools] are not accurate, then we shouldn't use them.”

Anna Mills, a writing instructor and Open Textbook author at the College of Marin, agrees: “Some detection tools have given false positives that could lead to false accusations of cheating.” But she does think there might be a role for them, “if they are not used punitively but as part of student-teacher dialogue.”

Barre adds, “We need to protect our students who *don't* cheat.” She points out that a professor “can ask a student to walk through how they came up with their ideas for a paper.”

A growing list of universities are crafting new honor code guidelines redefining plagiarism and clarifying that students may not claim AI-generated



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work as their own. Meanwhile, some professors are teaching students how to ethically use generative AI to help in their studies and writing.

The Positives: How Can Generative AI Help?

Despite the concerns cited above, let's not be too hasty to hold a cross up against the "evil AI monster." Generative AI can be extremely helpful—in coming up with course syllabi for professors, for example, or narrowing lists of prospective colleges for students. Here are just a few of the ways generative AI can streamline the college admissions process:

Generating an initial college list.

This has traditionally been a somewhat tedious process, but generative AI can make it much faster. I asked GPT-4 to find me colleges that offered a major in journalism with a minor in musicology, a four-season environment, and an urban or suburban location.

In less than a minute, I had a list of five well-known universities (including my alma mater, Northwestern), with short descriptions of each—a much more efficient process than using search engines.

Planning a college tour. GPT-4 instantaneously produced a three-day itinerary, including approximate drive times, when I fed it the following prompt: "I live in Pittsburgh, and I want to visit the following colleges: Haverford, Gettysburg, Rutgers, Drew, SUNY Binghamton, and Ithaca College. Can you plan an itinerary for me where I visit no more than two colleges per day?"

Preparing for a college interview.

Most college websites tend to be clunky, so using generative AI to learn more about a prospective college is a time-saver. It's to your advantage to have researched specific departments and professors in which

you can demonstrate interest (not only during an interview but also in a "Why Us?" essay). Ask generative AI to pinpoint the specific classes, clubs, facilities, activities, and professors that are fine-tuned to your interests.

Brainstorming essay topics. AI can find connections between your values, interests, and goals. For example, I asked GPT-4, "What are some connections that can be made between these interests: human anatomy, soccer, and mock trial?"

Using both the first response and a second regenerated response, I received connections that included athletic functioning of the body, strategic/quick thinking, teamwork, preparation and discipline, as well as medical malpractice and sports malpractice issues.

I added character traits and values and got an even more thorough response. These could serve as a springboard for brainstorming essay content.

Outlining. If you're unsure of how to structure your essay, give generative AI pertinent details and ask it to suggest an outline. Some essay coaches and teachers have already encouraged their students to do this.

Correcting/editing original writing. Although applications such as Grammarly do a good job finding errors in writing, ChatGPT can do even more. I fed it a paragraph filled with spelling, spacing, and grammatical errors, and it fixed them all, and made suggestions for new material to include, as well. (Google's Bard did not do as well; it missed errors and just suggested general ways to improve writing.) My prompt was simply: "Make suggestions on how to improve the following paragraph."

Though I did not use generative AI to write this article, I did ask ChatGPT if parts of the paragraph in which I define generative AI offered an accurate

description. The answer was largely yes, with some clarifications, which I then fact-checked and used to revise those sentences.

How College Admissions May Change in the Face of Generative AI

This is being discussed on practically every high school and college campus right now. Ideas being circulated include reinstating essays as part of an in-person SAT or ACT; using AI detectors; and asking students to create a baseline, hand-written sample in class to a surprise prompt (no electronics allowed) that is then uploaded to the Common App or another application for colleges to use as a basis for comparison.

Administrators are scrambling right now to keep abreast of the rapid changes in generative AI and to come up with policies that are effective and ethical.

Will writing coaches turn into "prompt engineers"? For many of us, this crosses an ethical line, but it also makes us a little sad: We want our students to be not only good writers but also good thinkers. How will generative AI affect our critical thinking skills? Are we equipped to fact-check generative AI, just as we should fact-check social media?

As of this writing, generative AI is evolving so rapidly that it's hard to know where it will take us. Consider this: It took Facebook six years to reach one billion monthly users; it took ChatGPT two months.

The large, even existential questions about generative AI are daily growing more urgent. But for the smaller questions—such as how to make use of AI ethically and efficiently to help you in the college admissions process—we've got some preliminary, exciting, and perhaps scary answers, with more to come. ■

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■ ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR													
Concord Hill School	59	106	57/43	NA	22	PK-3	N	N	Limited	8	N	N	18,250-32,750
■ ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH													
Fairfax Christian School	58	330	50/50	15	20	PK-12	AP	N	Limited	3	Y	Y	60,100-68,150 ^{abdeg}
Garrison Forest School	63	530	All Girls	30	14	PK-12	AP	N	Limited	20	Y	NA	63,875-69,475 ^b
Jakarta Intercultural School	57	2074	48/52	NA	76	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	19.6	Y	NA	17,000-46,000 ^c
Rochambeau The French International School	60	1180	45/55	NA	30	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	15	Y	N	24,750-29,865 ^{ab}
■ JUNIOR HIGH/SENIOR HIGH													
New England Innovation Academy	71	95	50/50	30	NA	6-12	NA	Y	Y	35	Y	Y	44,625 ^{bdef}
■ SENIOR HIGH													
Christchurch School	69	210	60/40	70	25	9-12	AP	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	55,900-56,900 ^d
EF Academy New York	59	275	55/45	98	90	9-12	IB	N	Y	40.5	Y	N	42,000-66,500 ^a
EF Academy Pasadena	59	275	50/50	85	75	9-12	AP	N	Y	32	Y	N	42,000-69,500
Fountain Valley School	63	245	50/50	70	32	9-12	AP	Y	Limited	60	Y	Limited	37,500-73,000 ^b
George School	61	544	46/54	46	28	9-12	AP/IB	Y	Limited	36	Y	Limited	73,100 ^b
Marvelwood School	69	120	50/50	80	15	9-12, PG	AP	N	Y	55	Y	Limited	64,700 ^{abce}
Peddie School, The	56	530	50/50	61	20	9-PG	AP	Y	N	35	Y	Limited	67,900 ^{bef}
St. Mark's School	73	375	51/49	75	27	9-12	NA	N	N	29	N	Limited	72,930 ^{bf}
Westover School	72	180	All Girls	60	30	9-12	AP	N	Limited	50	Y	Limited	71,800 ^b
■ OVERSEAS													
Berlin Brandenburg International School	57	800	50/50	10	70	K-12	IB	N	Y	22	Y	N	48,000 ^c
Carlucci American International School of Lisbon	54	689	48/52	NA	78	PK-12	IB	N	Limited	18	Y	N	10,490-22,232 ^{abc}
EF Academy Oxford	59	150	50/50	100	100	11-12	IB	N	Limited	43	Y	N	62,000
Frankfurt International School	60	1800	50/50	NA	80	K-12	IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	11,744-29,608 ^{bc}
Leysin American School in Switzerland	68	300	50/50	100	85	7-12, PG	AP/IB	N	Limited	75	Y	N	109,000 ^{abd}
St. Stephen's School - Rome	63	300	47/53	20	64	9-12, PG	IB	N	N	12	Y	N	46,180 ^b
TASIS The American School in Switzerland	72	750	46/54	37	93	PK-PG	AP/IB	N	Y	45	Y	Limited	95,000 ^{bode}

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New USAJobs Portal Aims to Bring Students into Government

BY DONNA SCARAMASTRA GORMAN

Love it or hate it, chances are if you're looking for a job with the U.S. government, you're going to have to get familiar with the USAJobs portal. Thanks to a push for increased equity in federal government hiring by the Biden administration, college students and recent graduates are now able to use a new section of the portal to find internships—many of them paid—in their hoped-for fields.

The USAJobs portal has been the government's official job search website since 1996. Operated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the portal is designed to connect job seekers with federal employment opportunities throughout the United States. Many Foreign Service family members have experience—some positive, some not—in applying for jobs through the virtual job board, which was expanded in February 2023 to include a separate portal specifically targeting potential student interns.

Shortly after coming into office in 2021, as part of his Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, President Biden instructed OPM to issue guidance on increasing the availability of paid internships, fellowships, and apprenticeships and to improve outreach to individuals from underserved communities. E.O. 14035 also requires each agency to report annually on their progress. Although the Executive Order makes it clear that agencies should seek to increase paid work opportunities for students and recent graduates, it does not provide a funding mechanism for these jobs, instead encouraging individual agencies to fund the positions.

On Jan. 19, 2023, OPM issued the required guidance, which calls on federal agencies to increase the number of interns, with an emphasis on increasing paid opportunities; to better coordinate and fund strategic internship and early career opportunities; and to hold senior leaders accountable to using the new internship programs to “build an inclusive and diverse Federal workforce talent pipeline.”

The following month, on Feb. 16, OPM launched the USAJobs Federal Internship Portal.

Like the original USAJobs search engine, the portal allows applicants to search for internships by agency, job type, or geographic location. Students can save searches and set up job alerts, allowing them to receive notifications when new internships that match their search criteria are posted. They can also save multiple résumés and other pertinent documents within the portal, which should streamline the application process.

Federal agencies offer internships in areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as in fields such as public policy, law, and international relations, giving students of all backgrounds a place to start within the federal system.

“Federal internships offer a critical pathway into government and public service,” OPM Director Kiran Ahuja said in a Feb. 16 statement. “The Federal government offers opportunities in nearly every sector and every industry, from conservation, to housing policy, cybersecurity, and health care. Hundreds of internships are already posted with more opportunities going live every week.”

The intern portal should make it easier for interested students to find suitable opportunities while also streamlining the hiring process for human resources departments, which can use the portal to search for, screen, and communicate with applicants.

OPM hosted a February webinar to share tips for using the portal. More than 1,800 people signed up to listen in to the webinar, which can be found online. They also offer an FAQ on the job portal for students interested in learning more about the process. OPM advises student applicants to “make sure you list all courses, skills, projects, volunteer experiences, and prior internships or opportunities that may qualify you for the job.”

An OPM spokesperson told the *Journal* that students who are interested in tech careers within the government should also take a look at another new portal opened this year by OPM: The USAJobs Federal Tech Portal was started to centralize the search and application process for all federal tech jobs, from internships through mid- and senior-level careers. The tech portal was released in conjunction with a Tech to Gov Forum and Fair on Jan. 18, 2023, which attracted almost 1,900 attendees and hosted more than 50 organizations at the federal, state, and local level.

Of course, the portal will only be useful if agencies use it to recruit student talent. An OPM spokesperson confirmed that federal agencies have committed to hiring 35,000 interns across the country in Fiscal Year 2023, but a search of the internship portal on May 5 yielded just 70 job listings. None of the job postings on the site were for the State Department or USAID. ■


Donna Scaramastra Gorman is an FSJ contributing writer.

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LAB School of Washington, The	55	375	59/41	NA	1	1-12	NA	N	Y	26	Y	N	54,000 ^b
■ DISTANCE LEARNING													
Dwight Global Online School	2	430	56/44	NA	17	6-12	AP/IB	N	Y	NA	Y	NA	39,900 ^{abde}
Hemispheres Academy	72	24	50/50	NA	100	2-12	AP	N	Y	NA	Y	NA	10,297-12,797 ^{de}
■ OTHER													
GCLO	66	Global Community Liaison Office: Information and resources for Foreign Service families. Contact GCLOAskEducation@state.gov .											
FSYF	66	Foreign Service Youth Foundation: A support network for U.S. Foreign Service youth worldwide. Go to www.fsyf.org .											

*Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate **Attention Deficit Disorder/Learning Disabilities ***Dec. 25-Jan. 1 NA, Not applicable
^aSibling discount ^bFinancial aid available ^cDollar value subject to exchange rate
^dAid for federal employees ^eGap year ^fNeed-blind admissions; will meet full financial need ^gHost families



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Read GCLO's article on "What's Changed with Special Needs Education Allowances" in this FSJ issue.

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GLOBAL COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE



Special Needs Education Allowances

An Update

What's changed with SNEA? The Global Community Liaison Office finds out.

BY REBECCA MCPHERSON

Navigating the process of qualifying for the Special Needs Education Allowance (SNEA) can be overwhelming for Foreign Service families. Understanding the SNEA eligibility process is imperative during the bidding process and while transitioning from school to school overseas; so is knowing the partners who can help ensure your child's needs are met.

If your child has suspected or identified educational needs, work together with overseas medical staff and the Office of Child and Family Programs (CFP) to determine the appropriate educational plan and apply for SNEA, which can help you effectively implement that plan.

In June 2020, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an extensive audit of SNEA and made a total of 15 recommendations. Changes include updates to both the Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR) that governs allowances and benefits for U.S. civilians assigned abroad and to the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM).

The November 2022 revisions to DSSR 276.8 and 3 FAM 3280 include clarifying the Bureau of Medical Services (MED)/CFP authorization and appeals process and eligibility requirements,

expanding the list of required documentation, spelling out the steps in the SNEA appeal process, listing the expenses that are and are not covered, and changing the methodology for SNEA rate calculations.

The Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO) is here to guide parents to the information and resources that will help you understand the available options for meeting your child's educational needs.

Recently, GCLO's Rebecca McPherson sat down with Dr. Jason Coe, director of Overseas Mental Health Services; Nancy Kelly, CFP Education Program specialist; and Michele Schurtz, CFP program manager/nurse consultant in MED's Office of Child and Family Programs (MED/CFP) as well as with a team from the Office of Allowances (A/OPR/ALS) to clarify some of these changes.

The Expansion of 3 FAM 3283

GCLO: *The requirements in 3 FAM 3283 for SNEA eligibility were expanded in November 2022. Why were they expanded, and what are the new eligibility requirements?*

MED/CFP Team: The OIG identified that our SNEA process was causing confusion. The program needed to be more transparent on how and when to apply for SNEA funding. Some families were not aware that they need to reapply annually for SNEA or that the SNEA authorization is post-, school-, and provider-specific.

Of course, this confusion is not what we want. We want access to this program to be as clear as possible, and so we expanded 3 FAM 3283 and clarified eligibility requirements.



Rebecca McPherson is the Education and Youth Program specialist at the Global Community Liaison Office.

We want access to this program to be as clear as possible.
—MED/CFP

In CFP, we now follow a clearly defined SNEA application review time frame. For example, families are to apply for SNEA funding for the current 2022-2023 school year by Dec. 31, 2023.

GCLO: *There are now significantly more requirements for SNEA to accept an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Who should families reach out to in CFP to*

make sure their child's IEP will meet the new requirements?

MED/CFP Team: If a family is not actively corresponding with a member of the CFP team, I would encourage them to email MEDCFP@state.gov. We are happy to provide guidance.

The revised 3 FAM 3284 details the required elements of the IEP/504 Plan or the IEP/ILP equivalent. The goal of this revision is to detail the specific, required information parents should include in the learning plan/equivalent.

GCLO: *What does the Special Needs Education Allowance Committee do?*

MED/CFP Team: The deputy under secretary for management created the Special Needs Education Allowance

Committee, or the SNEA Committee, in November 2018 in response to the OIG audit.

This committee works at a policy level, reviewing existing SNEA procedures and reporting to the under secretary for management, as needed. The SNEA Committee is not directly involved in the CFP team review or in processing SNEA requests.

GCLO: *What changes were made to the SNEA Appeal Process and why?*

MED/CFP Team: A formalized SNEA appeal process was developed and implemented in 2020 as a result of the OIG SNEA audit and recommendations. Families now can initiate a SNEA appeal when educational services required are not approved as part of the SNEA review.



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The SNEA appeal process, outlined in 3 FAM 3289, provides detail and transparency regarding eligibility, steps to initiate an appeal, the composition of the SNEA Medical Review Panel, and procedures in reviewing cases and determining eligibility.

SNEA Allowances

GCLC: *I understand that the changes to DSSR 274.12 on Special Needs Education Allowances (SNEA) were a result of an OIG audit. What was the impetus for the OIG audit, and what did it reveal?*

Office of Allowances (ALS) Team:

A number of issues had been reported to the OIG about the SNEA process. During their audit, OIG found that regional bureaus would allocate the full published SNEA amount per child and that posts were utilizing the end-of-year SNEA excess amounts for other post obligations.

This is not how the program is supposed to operate. The OIG determined that a more rigorous process was necessary to make sure the money went where it was intended and that the process would better meet the financial needs of parents applying for the allowances for their children.

GCLC: *Can you explain what changed in the methodology for calculating SNEA rates?*

ALS Team: Previously, the “At Post” SNEA rate was an average of U.S. and foreign schools able to address special needs plus a local transportation component. With the recent changes, the “At Post” SNEA is now equivalent to the DSSR Section 920 “At Post” Education Allowance for the employee’s foreign post of assignment and the child’s grade level.

MED/CFP reviews the child’s ILP or equivalent and approves services required in the ILP that may not be





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FROM THE DECEMBER 2022
FSJ EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

Returning to U.S. Public Schools with Special Education Needs: What You Need to Know

BY CHARLOTTE LARSEN AND REBECCA MCPHERSON

Returning to the U.S. after being overseas with a child who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan can be a challenge. Finding the right services and schools to meet the needs of your child will take time to research and understand.

As every child is different, many factors will go into this decision process. It is important to research the school districts and programs you are considering and evaluate whether the education they have received overseas will align with the different types of public school systems in the U.S. Starting early, asking questions, and connecting with the right resources will be crucial to making the transition easier.

As a Foreign Service parent, you may face the reality that the IEP or 504 Plan from your children's international school is no longer valid once they come home, nor is any educational assessment completed by an outside provider. If a child receives an IEP-504 from an international school overseas, including a State Department–assisted school, it will not be accepted by a U.S. public school.

The Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO) wants to help you understand how to navigate and advocate for the best outcome for your child in these situations.

Knowing who to contact can save time and can contribute to a successful transition back to the U.S. You can visit GCLO's Special Needs and the Foreign Service Child web page for parent resource centers in the D.C./Maryland/Virginia (DMV) school districts and to connect with the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Centers in the state where you choose to live.

You can start communicating with the school in the U.S. as soon as you know you are returning. Starting early allows you to understand the process for the school where you are hoping to enroll your child. Under the U.S. education law and IDEA 2004, an educational evaluation must be performed every three years.

The Bureau of Medical Services Child and Family Program (CFP) encourages families to contact MEDCFP@state.gov *before* scheduling an assessment and choosing an evaluator. CFP specialists can answer questions, discuss concerns, and provide recommendations for services that the schools can consider, as well as confirm whether an evaluator and the assessment meet the qualifications for Special Needs Education Allowance (SNEA) eligibility.

Charlotte Larsen has been a Foreign Service family member at six overseas posts over the last 26 years. She joined the Global Community Liaison Office as education and youth program officer in 2020.

Rebecca McPherson has been a Foreign Service family member for eight years, serving both overseas and domestically. She joined the Global Community Liaison Office in January 2020 and is an education and youth program specialist.

The complete article appears in the December 2022 FSJ.

Whatever is necessary for the child's education is allowed.

—ALS

available through the school. Posts may approve up to 50 percent above the "At Post" SNEA rate for allowable expenses. When necessary, Supplementary Instruction can be funded up to \$4,100, in addition to the "At Post" SNEA rate.

The "Home Study/Private Instruction/Virtual Schooling" (HS/PI/VS) SNEA rates are now equivalent to the HS/PI/VS rates under DSSR 274.12b (K–6 \$10,500 and 7–12 \$21,500, as of March 23, 2023).

MED/CFP reviews the child's ILP or equivalent and approves funds for additional services required in the ILP. Posts may reimburse for allowable expenses up to 50 percent above the HS/PI/VS SNEA rate. Previously, the HS/PI/VS SNEA rate was the same as the "At Post" SNEA rate.

The methodology for the "Away from Post" SNEA rate remains the same: an average of U.S. and foreign boarding schools attended by children with special needs plus an international transportation component to get the child between their school and the employee's foreign post of assignment.

The current amount, as of March 23, 2023, is \$95,400 annually. As above, MED/CFP reviews each child's ILP or equivalent and approves additional services required in the ILP. Posts may reimburse for allowable expenses up to 50 percent above the "Away from Post" SNEA rate.

GCLO: *Is there a new cap for SNEA reimbursements? It appears that the services are capped at 150 percent of the standard "At Post" education allowance.*



A more rigorous process was necessary to make sure the money went where it was intended.

—ALS

What if the services for a child cost more than that?

ALS Team: No, services are not capped at 150 percent of the standard “At Post” education allowance. The DSSR provides guidelines for parents to request an allowance above the published rate; however, whatever is necessary for the child’s education is allowed.

The first 50 percent above the chosen education allowance (At Post, Away from Post, or HS/PI/VS) may be reimbursed at the post level for required services listed in the child’s ILP or equivalent, as well as additional allowable expenses (listed in DSSR 276, 277, and 960).

If additional funding is necessary, post sends a request to us in the Office of Allowances. If MED/CFP is not copied on the request, then we will communicate with them to confirm the dollar amount and make sure we are able to financially meet a child’s educational needs.

The Role of the Office of Overseas Schools

GCLO’s Education and Youth Team also spoke with the Office of Overseas Schools (OS) to learn about the role regional education officers (REOs) play in helping meet the needs of families with children who have special education needs. The State Department’s six REOs

are all former educators, principals, or heads of international schools, and they are full of knowledge about the assisted schools overseas that they support.

The term “assisted” means that the school receives an annual grant from the State Department to assist with operations and programs and to help them offer educational practices similar to those in U.S. schools. Parents can contact the REO to discuss options, ask questions about specific schools, receive guidance, and help ensure that their child’s needs can be met at a particular school at post.

GCLO: *Most of the Department of State’s assisted schools are limited in their ability to meet the special education needs of a growing number of Foreign Service children. What steps is your office taking to improve the availability of accommodations for moderate to severe learning needs?*

Overseas Schools Team: Improving the availability of special needs programming is at the top of our office’s strategic plan. *Families are encouraged to work with the REOs as early as possible in their bidding and assignments process.*

While we support American-style education through our annual grants program, State does not own or operate any of these schools. We provide guidance

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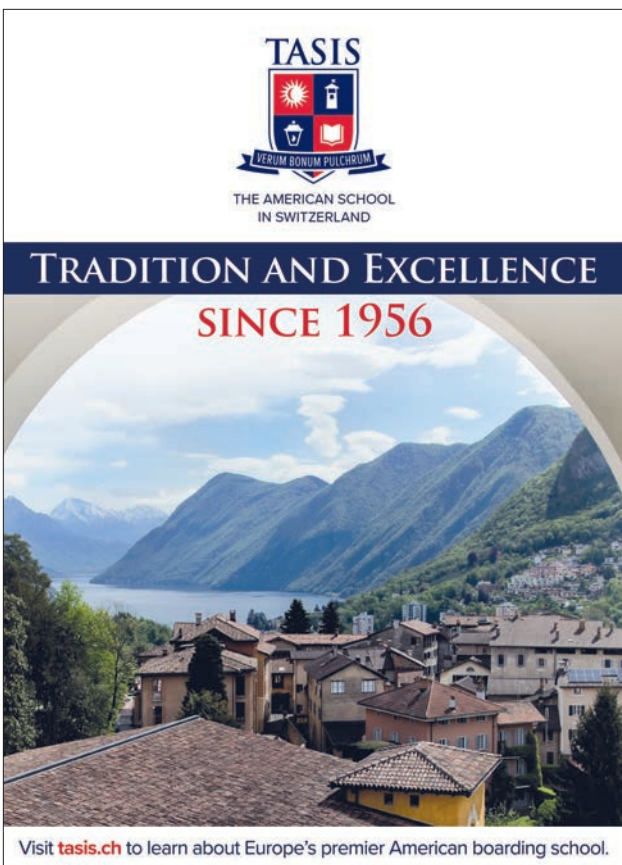
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To understand these schools and programs, and where each school is in their journey to build special needs capacity, we encourage families to reach out to the REOs.

—OS

and best practices, but we are not involved in the day-to-day policies or decisions at these independent institutions.

Our team's advocacy has increased the number of assisted schools willing to consider the applications of mild learning needs from approximately 20 percent to 98 percent. This work is just the start.

Next, we hope to increase the level and diversity of needs served. To understand these schools and programs, and where each school is in their journey to build special needs capacity, we encourage families to reach out to the REOs.



Understanding the SNEA process and ensuring children are receiving the services they need is an important part of

the process as families make decisions on their moves from post to post. GCLO aims to inform and connect families to resources that will help with those transitions. We encourage you to reach out directly to the Office of Allowances (AllowancesO@state.gov), MED's CFP Team (MEDCFP@state.gov), and the Office of Overseas Schools (Overseas Schools@state.gov) with questions or to ask for more information.

We also encourage families to contact our Education and Youth Team at GCLOAskEducation@state.gov, by phone at (202) 647-1076, and visit them online at www.state.gov/glco/education.

Families may also want to read 3 FAM 3280 SNEA and the DSSR 270 Education Allowance. ■



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Putin's Life—Illustrated

Accidental Czar: The Life and Lies of Vladimir Putin

Andrew S. Weiss (author), Brian "Box" Brown (illustrator), *First Second*, 2022, \$28.99/hardcover, e-book available, 272 pages.

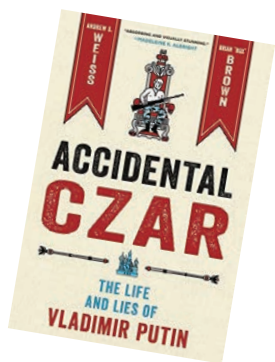
REVIEWED BY JOE RICE JOHNSON III

To be succinct, this graphic biography is a brilliant piece of work with many keen revelations and observations—not the least of which are human frailty and the resounding geopolitical issues of a very complex country.

Author Andrew Weiss draws on his deep knowledge of Russian and Soviet history, culture, and politics to present a compelling narrative, pleasantly accented via the engaging visuals by Brian "Box" Brown. In a surreal fashion, the graphic format makes reading the book akin to viewing a captivating slide presentation.

The final two piercing sentences of the book are a wakeup call for all globalist stakeholders.

Each of the seven chapters gifts the reader with all the information one needs to know about Vladimir Putin and his quiet yet stunning rise to power—from his challenging youth to the present day. Clearly, the reader will gain a perspective of his determination to leave



behind his early struggles, which ironically have made him who he is today.

Additionally, the book reveals the challenges he faced early in his career as an intelligence operative, through his years as a deputy to Anatoly Sobchak (a former pro-democracy mayor of St. Petersburg), and even including a time when he wondered if he would have to drive a taxi to meet expenses for his family.

Sparkling flashes of Russian history are sprinkled usefully throughout. We are reminded that Russia is the largest country in the world, covering 6.6 million square miles with 11 time zones. A diverse and multiethnic country, Russia has had to transform itself over the ages to survive.

Likewise, throughout his life, Putin has transformed himself to meet the current realities facing Russia. Readers learn how he has carefully crafted an image that dovetails with the sovereign attitudes of Russians: "We are a victorious people! It is in our genes and in our genetic code!" and "There are no bad Czars in Russia, just bad advisers." To the overwhelming majority, Putin is Russia and Russia is Putin. Thus, his stratospheric approval ratings from Russians should not be surprising.

The final two piercing sentences of the book are a wakeup call for all globalist stakeholders. Those 33 words (and history will prove the authors correct) encouraged me to keep the book at the top of my stacks as I knew I would want to read it again.

Curiously, I found the second read more enthralling and entertaining, though at times more dispiriting, than the first. I see the book's overall theme as remarkably tied to the ongoing narrative of Russia itself.

Weiss also makes clear that U.S.-Russia relations are complicated and complex. He notes the lack of discussion of grievances from both sides and the horrific risks associated with this stalemate. He writes that we must do better with this situation, and he is 100 percent right.

We should not forget that Putin was the first world leader to call the White House after 9/11 and offer support in our response to al-Qaida and the Taliban. True enough, there has been a dramatic and dangerous departure from those times, but we must not let go of any opportunities wherein the two countries can defuse tensions.

Russia is governed much differently than we are, however, Weiss goes on to write. Putin proceeds from the base realization that the role of a strong state is an end unto itself. Thus, the interests of the state will always take precedence over the individual and even the rule of law.

Clearly, Putin's belief system is deeply rooted in Russian history and political culture, in which the idea that the country requires and has always required a strong, centralized state to rule society is a truism. This is diametrically opposed to the ideals of participatory democracy.

This book should be required reading for students of Russian history or geopolitics, anyone with an interest in U.S.-Russia relations or even a passing interest in Russia, and those living and working in Russia.

In my opinion, the excellent work by the author leaves us with the sharpening and glaring reality of today's tinderbox between the two countries. Either we find a way out of this man-made conundrum, or we stumble into the abyss of what surely could be an end of humanity as we know it.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to do better in our transformational and evolving relationship with Russia.

Joe Rice Johnson III is a seasoned Russia expert, one of the first political consultants to work there during the Gorbachev years. He led democracy promotion programs as the country director for the International Republican Institute. He has met Vladimir Putin twice (being the only American invited to a United Russia Congress twice). He also worked in the private sector for a U.S.-based oil trading company in Russia.

Churchill's Principal Weakness

Churchill and India: Manipulation or Betrayal?

Kishan S. Rana, Routledge, 2022, \$52.95/paperback, e-book available, 214 pages.

REVIEWED BY EDWARD MARKS

History is a complicated story, full of major as well as subordinate themes. The major theme of the 20th century, arguably, was the great global conflicts that endured for much of the century.

The two world wars were the most dramatic events, but there were other major developments, one of the most notable being the end of the European-dominated colonial system. We can all recall those global maps that dramatically showed in color that, indeed, the sun never set on the British Empire.

The world was proved to be a solvent that, among other things, dissolved the colonial system. The “winds of change” were spurred by the conflicts, and within 30 years of the end of World War II, hundreds of years of European colonialism had ended.

If the British Empire was number one among empires, British India was its “jewel in the crown.” Its independence in 1947 was the death knell for European colonialism, and how it came about has been the subject of numerous studies, articles, memoirs, books, and movies.

Ambassador Kishan Rana's book is an intriguing contribution to this literature, as it is not focused on the overall drama and scope of the Indian independence movement but rather on the role of one man: Winston Churchill.

As Rana puts it: “The India story of Churchill's extreme positions on all things that touched on constitutional changes in India, and his hatred for Gandhi, the Indian national movement and towards all things that he labeled ‘Hindu,’ became one of the principal weaknesses in Churchill's public persona.”

Rana shows how Churchill's limited empathy toward India, initially based on his inherited imperial vision as a member of England's ruling class, was reinforced by his early experience as a young soldier in India where he adopted as an article of faith the distinction between the “martial Moslem races” and the “degraded” Hindus.

Although Churchill never returned to India after his military experience, his long career in British politics often touched on the questions of imperial governance in general and India in particular. This distant involvement was summed up in his statement in 1942: “I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.”

Rana's analysis of Churchill's role falls into three broad categories. First, whenever the subject of India came up throughout his six-decade political career, Churchill resisted any effort to reconsider the colonial relationship.

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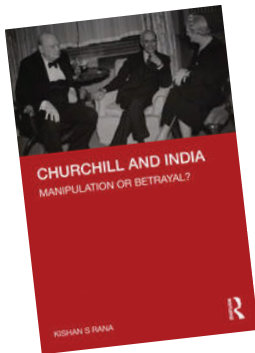
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Second, during the 1942-1943 famine in India, Churchill as prime minister essentially ignored the problem and refused to divert resources away from other areas more directly involved with the war. This failure of the colonial administrative system resulted in 3 million dead and permanent damage to the Indian body politic.

And last, Churchill's effective resistance to the independence movement as prime minister during the war years prevented any serious planning and preparation so that when independence came in 1947, it was accompanied by the



horrors of partition, the political struggles in the subcontinent, and resulting decades of conflict and insecurity.

Rana's story is not a simple debunking of Churchill nor a personal attack. As he states: "Churchill has extraordinary achievements to his credit, not just limited to his World War II leadership; one cannot study his life without developing admiration for the depth and breadth of his genius. But he remains responsible for all the damage he did in mishandling the endgame of British India, and his India-related misdeeds."

Ambassador Rana, a distinguished Indian diplomat (retired) and prolific writer on diplomatic history and practice, presents a convincing interpretation of historic events in this book.

In addition to a new insight into the life and role of Winston Churchill, there is a revealing discussion of the politics and administration of colonial policy that took place in the imperial capital, far away from the colony itself.

Both old India hands and Churchill aficionados should find this study thought-provoking. ■

Edward Marks is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer and ambassador, and a longtime AFSA member and former chair of the FSJ Editorial Board. His career memoir, A Professional Foreigner, was published in the spring of this year by the University of Nebraska Press in cooperation with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

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Finding Pavarotti in Western Zambia

BY CARL WILLIAM HENN

Imagine my surprise when, on a routine visit to the Angolan refugee camp on the giant floodplains of the Zambezi River in western Zambia in early 2006, I ran into ... Pavarotti.

The startling experience throws some light on the often highly complex arrangements involved in getting food aid to refugees, as well as the type of global conflict and postconflict resettlement efforts in which America is involved.

In addition to my other work at USAID Zambia, I had been designated the Mission Food-for-Peace officer supporting Angolan refugee feeding programs. There were more than 450,000 Angolan refugees at the height of the civil war in Angola that began in 1975. Many of the refugees had fled into Zambia over a period of years as the long, brutal civil war dragged on.

Although the war ended in 2002, convincing all the refugees to return home was a complex process that ended up taking years. Refugees had legitimate reasons to fear for their lives. Angola had been heavily mined.

It was dangerous for farmers, children, vehicles, essentially everyone and everything. Farmers might lose a leg while planting or harvesting crops. Children could be killed just trying to



The pontoon boat *Pavarotti*.

COURTESY OF CARL HENN

play soccer. On the road, a vehicle might hit a hidden mine at any time.

In 2006, 75,000 refugees were still in the camps. USAID was one of three major international relief agencies involved in supporting refugees and the major donor to the World Food Program (WFP) that has the mandate to supply food aid.

I visited the refugee camps with representatives from the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which established and managed the camps; the WFP, which imported American food aid; and the Zambian Ministry of the Interior, which ensured security.

My job was to make sure American

food aid reached the refugees, was distributed properly, and was not being resold or diverted. We also sought to maintain the peace between the refugees and the local population, which resented “foreigners” receiving free food and lodging.

Two Angolan refugee camps were located on the huge Barotse floodplain. UNHCR was trying to close the more remote Nangweshi Camp and move the remaining refugees to Mayukwayukwa Camp, which was more accessible for delivery of food aid and other supplies and services.

Getting the food to the camps was a challenge. There was no bridge across the Zambezi River to the refugee camps. The Zambezi overflowed its banks from January to March at the peak of the annual flood following the end of the rainy season. During those several months, the river flooded the plains, submerging the only road and making it impassible.

UNHCR had to find a way to float the



Carl William Henn worked for USAID Zambia from 2004 to 2010, serving as a Food-for-Peace officer to support Angolan refugee feeding in remote western Zambia across the Zambezi River. His primary assignment with USAID was HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, but the job was expanded to include drought relief and refugee feeding. Prior to USAID Zambia, he worked for USAID Zimbabwe as a health officer. He later served with USAID Burundi, 2018-2019. He has recently taken early retirement to focus on writing a book about his experiences.

COURTESY OF CARL HENN



The *Pavarotti* could take large quantities of food and small vehicles. Inset: When not carrying food, the boat could accommodate about 100 people at a time.

food commodities across on boats. Food aid is bulky and heavy (50-pound bags of cornmeal, large tins of oil, and 25-pound sacks of beans). The small local boats, mostly dugout canoes, could only transport a relatively tiny amount of food.

That's where Luciano Pavarotti comes in; the renowned opera singer was also

a goodwill ambassador for the UNHCR. A charity named "Luciano and Friends" did a refugee benefit concert in May 2002 and raised enough money to donate a cargo boat. Pavarotti asked UNHCR if he could name it after his father, Fernando Pavarotti, who had just died.

To get the metal cargo boat to where it was needed, it had to be cut into sections and transported thousands of miles from the coast, then reassembled on-site. A pontoon boat, it was a cheap, efficient way to float up to 63 metric tons at a time across the river. The boat could also transport small vehicles; and when

not transporting food, it had enough deck space to take about a hundred refugees at a time.

I had certainly not expected to see a boat named *Pavarotti* on the Zambezi River. But there it was.

We can be proud of the ingenuity of the various agencies and the generosity of the American people in supporting the refugees, who had no land to farm in Zambia and no other way to get food. Thankfully, all of them eventually moved back to Angola.

International aid sometimes works in strange ways and makes for strange bedfellows. ■



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Guangzhou, nicknamed the City of Flowers, celebrates Spring Festival after the ending of pandemic-era restrictions. In the foreground, Huacheng Square, the largest city square in Guangzhou, is decorated with flowers and the auspicious color red wishing passersby prosperity in the new year. In the background is Canton Tower, the fifth-tallest freestanding structure in the world at 604 meters (1,982 feet). The photograph is captured at the southern end of Huacheng Square facing south. The Canton Tower is approximately half a mile away, with the Pearl River being the primary barrier between the two landmarks. ■

Alex Litichevsky joined the Foreign Service in 2012. His prior assignments include Kinshasa, Shanghai, and Port Louis. He took this photo using an iPhone XR on Feb. 2, 2023.

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