

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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INSIDE:

Tom Shannon on the
Future of Diplomacy

Elections and the Foreign Service

Working a **Presidential Transition**

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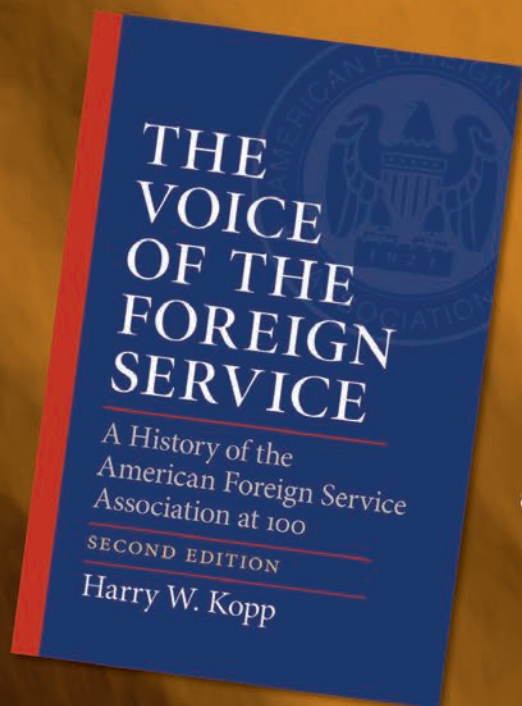
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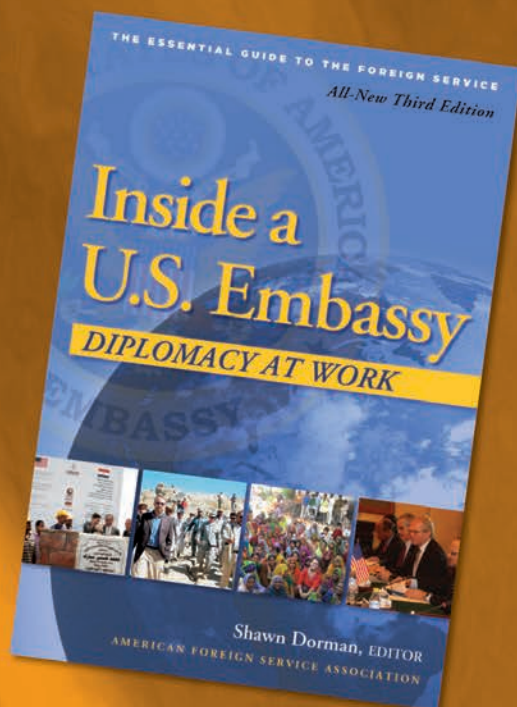
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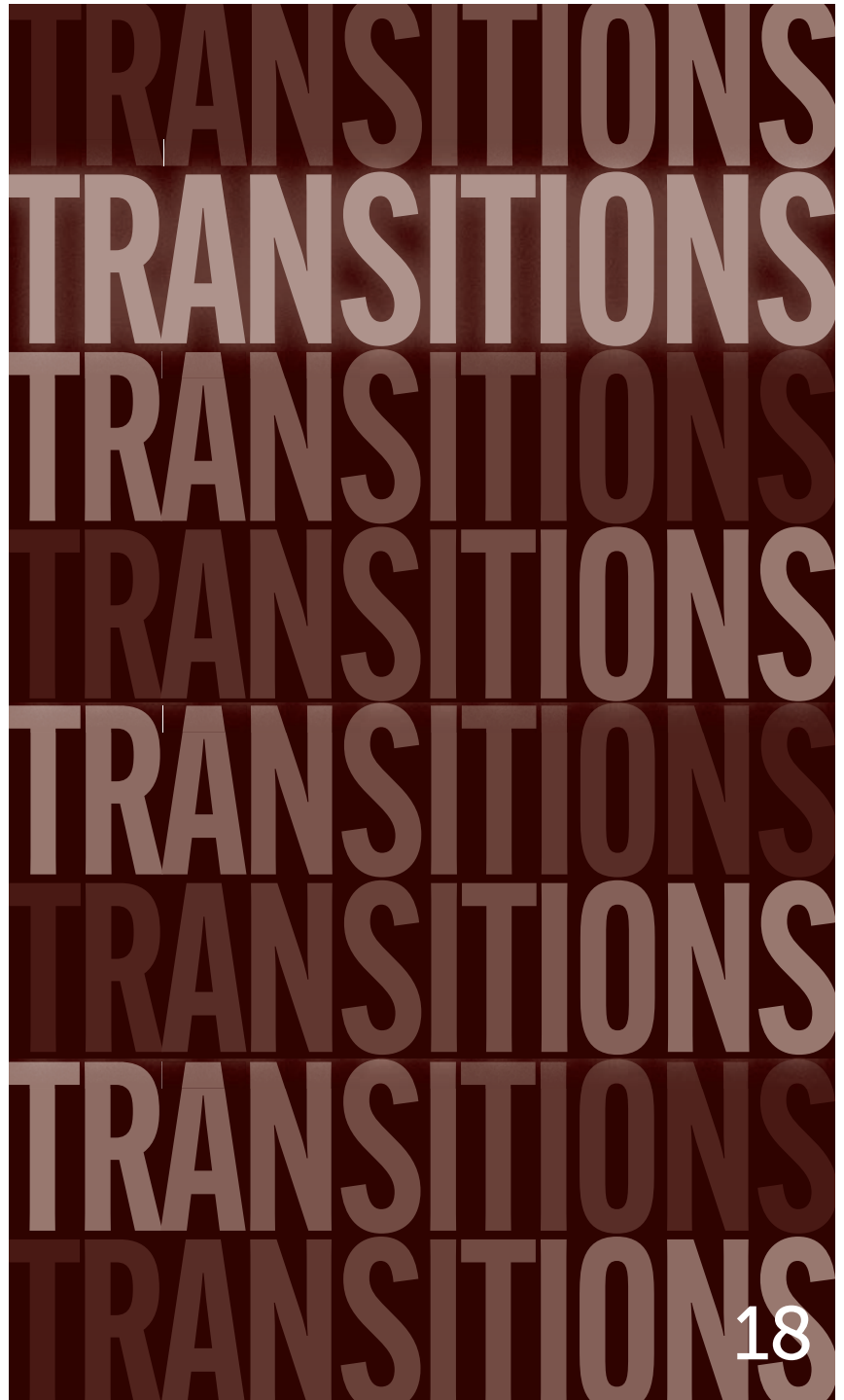
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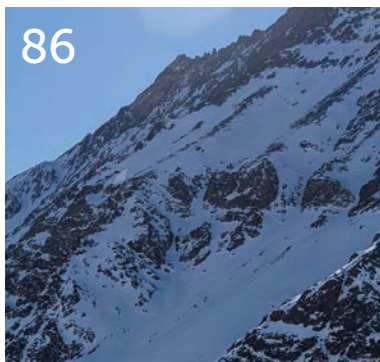
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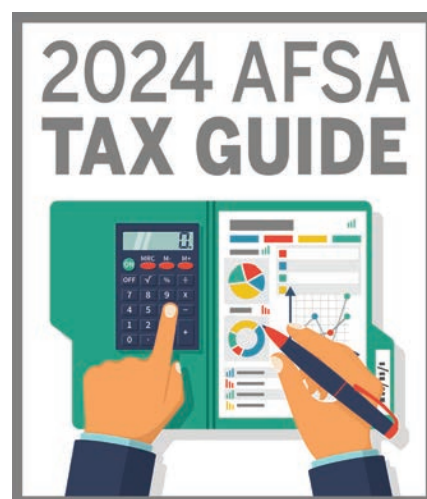
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Time of Transition

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

As of this writing in late November, the transition to a new administration is in full swing. I know this can be a time of anxiety for many of our members, especially with the continued political polarization in our country and the uncertainty that our Foreign Service will continue to be valued and adequately funded as America's first line of defense.

Presidential transitions, of course, are nothing new to the U.S. Foreign Service. Indeed, the Foreign Service has always provided the institutional memory and continuity in foreign policy, serving as a bridge to the next administration and on-the-ground link for policy implementation.

This edition of the *Journal* is focused on the future, starting with the Trump transition and the current environment in which America's diplomats work.

Ambassador Tom Shannon's thoughtful lead piece, "Liberate the Future," argues that the highly polarized political culture at home coupled with a rapidly changing world requires a refocus not unlike what our diplomatic forebears faced in the aftermath of World War II, and that this presents members of the Foreign Service with a great responsibility—and opportunity.



As Shannon also notes: "We are a disciplined Service. But obedience does not mean obsequiousness." In other words, our job is to

carry out the president's foreign policy initiatives, but we must continue to have the courage to provide the best analysis and advice that we can to our elected and appointed leaders.

If you believe, like Shannon, that we may be on the brink of a "Present at the Creation" moment, then we will need budgets for our foreign affairs agencies that can support such an awesome undertaking.

Even if you do not hold that view, we will still need to appropriately fund U.S. diplomatic activities so that we can confront rivals, particularly China, and protect our interests.

For perspective, this edition also includes selections from the FSJ Digital Archive as well as firsthand accounts from diplomats who have worked on presidential transitions during the past half a century. *Journal* editors plumbed the archive to document the Foreign Service approach to presidential elections throughout its first 100 years.

And Daniel Evensen, a Foreign Service officer currently with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), tapped into ADST's vast oral history collection to capture diplomatic voices from times of presidential transition.

Both collections show that the Foreign Service has always dealt with political transitions by offering nonpartisan, professional advice and support. Evensen notes that a transition can also be an opportunity to provide new initiatives that make the Service more efficient and, I would add, reinforce the link

between what we do and the security and prosperity of our country.

I remain hopeful because I have seen in my five years on the AFSA Governing Board a bipartisan core of support for the FS in Congress. Senators and representatives from both parties have told me their positive views about what we do and how we do it, especially when they see us in action during their visits to U.S. embassies and consulates overseas.

With that in mind, I continue to hope that our career ambassadors get nominated, vetted, and confirmed in a timely fashion. It is now the norm to wait nearly a year from recommendation to nomination to confirmation to attestation. That is a strong disincentive for our best and brightest to throw their hats in the ring for an ambassadorship or to put their lives on hold while the process plays out.

Even more importantly, when our government does not provide sufficient diplomatic resources to compete with China overseas and when ambassadorial positions remain vacant for so long, it has a direct impact on our national security. This is also true for the promotion lists that suffer in this long and fraught process.

In March, we will once again share your "Notes to the New Administration," a place for members of the Foreign Service to offer their best advice on key issues that will confront the new president and his national security team.

As always, please let me know your thoughts at yazdgerdi@afsa.org or member@afsa.org. Wishing you and yours a happy and healthy new year! ■

Tom Yazdgerdi is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

Editor in Chief, Director of Publications
Shawn Dorman: dorman@afsa.org

Deputy Editor
Donna Gorman: gorman@afsa.org

Senior Editor
Susan Brady Maitra: maitra@afsa.org

Managing Editor
Kathryn Owens: owens@afsa.org

Associate Editor
Mark Parkhomenko: parkhomenko@afsa.org

Publications Coordinator and Content Strategist
Hannah Harari: harari@afsa.org

Business Development Manager—
Advertising and Circulation
Molly Long: long@afsa.org

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Fax: (202) 338-8244
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Address Changes: member@afsa.org

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CONTACTS



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AFSA Headquarters:
(202) 338-4045; Fax (202) 338-6820
State Department AFSA Office:
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PROFESSIONAL POLICY ISSUES AND ADVOCACY

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Appreciation for the Appreciation

Ambassador Tom Boyatt's article in the September 2024 *Journal*, "A Soft-Spoken Institution Builder," expressing his appreciation of Lars Hydle does them both credit. Much of the character of the present-day Foreign Service dates from the far-sighted interaction they engaged in as colleagues with somewhat differing views.

I hope it is widely read by current—and maybe even future—generations in the Foreign Service so they will know there were giants in those days.

Edward Marks
Ambassador, retired
Washington, D.C.

The Case for Red Teaming

Prior to joining the State Department as a Foreign Service officer, I worked for four years at the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) helping set up its Lessons Learned Program. I was glad to see my former colleague David Young's piece, "Foreign Assistance Lessons from Afghanistan: How to Balance Accountability and Learning," in the October 2024 *FSJ* and wholeheartedly agree with the suggestions he put forward.

However, State needs to go a step further and not just rely on external oversight organizations to critically assess our strategies, plans, evidence, and data analysis. The department's March 2022 After Action Review on Afghanistan recommended that State establish a "red team" capability, i.e., the ability to organize teams that can critically assess strategies and plans to identify weaknesses, assumptions, and alternatives to

help strengthen these plans and prepare for unexpected contingencies.



The review, however, focused on creating this capability only within the Policy Planning Staff (S/P) rather than more generally encouraging red teaming as a concept to be adopted across the department, for strategies big and small.

Red teams can add value to State efforts. I know this because I worked with others to establish red teams at Embassy Jakarta in 2021 and in the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau in 2023.

Unfortunately, even though the concept of red teaming has been around for decades, and its effectiveness validated many times over, the practice is still not widely adopted at State.

I have seen colleagues selflessly volunteer to rush off to deal with the myriad crises State faces at any given moment, but I have not seen the same gusto for long-term strategic planning aimed at preventing those crises in the first place (regrettably, incentive systems at State seem to reinforce this dynamic).

I encourage all my colleagues at State to embrace the lessons from our long and costly involvement in Afghanistan and find ways to apply principles of red teaming into your work, no matter how small or large.

Greg Bauer
FSO, Bureau of Intelligence
and Research
Arlington, Virginia

Foreign Assistance Needs to Be Streamlined

The importance of foreign economic and financial assistance in U.S. foreign policy is well highlighted by Steven Hen-

drix in the October 2024 *Foreign Service Journal* ("USAID: A Critical National Security Tool"). In fact, it is the major diplomatic tool we wield in numerous countries of the world.

Hendrix stresses the central role of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), our preeminent and lead implementing organization, with field missions around the world and an annual budget of about \$40 billion.

However, there are several other organizations also implementing segments of our foreign assistance program. These include the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); the Development Finance Corporation (DFC); the Trade and Development Agency (TDA), which I once briefly headed; the Peace Corps; the African Development Foundation; and aid units within various departments of our government, including State, Treasury, Agriculture, and others.

Having so many foreign assistance spigots creates confusion, overlap, inefficiencies, and high administrative costs. To my mind, it would be more effective to combine them into fewer entities.

In fact, our friends on the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have urged this from time to time. But we all know how difficult it is to eliminate an agency of government once established.

Raymond Malley
Senior FSO, retired
Hanover, New Hampshire

Reconsidering the Political Appointee Ambassador

Like many Foreign Service members, I have long argued that we need to align with most other countries and reserve our ambassador positions for career diplomats.

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I have often told the anecdote about a career ambassador who was chatting one day with the U.S. commander of the Fifth Fleet. The commander stated that when he retires from the Navy, he'd really enjoy a gig as a U.S. ambassador.

The quick-witted ambassador responded: "That's funny. When I retire, I'd like to get a job as head of the Fifth Fleet!"

Needless to say, the admiral was horrified at the idea that someone thought he could walk into that naval job with no experience.

Thus, it was with some trepidation that I bid on a job as special assistant to an incoming political appointee ambassador to India. I secretly hoped his pending nomination would linger so I could continue to work for the sharp chargé d'affaires in New Delhi, Career Ambassador Beth Jones.

It turned out, however, that the political appointee ambassador, former Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti, was one of the finest leaders with whom I have had the pleasure of working.

He was eminently qualified on the issues, having studied India in college, and possessed the contacts to reach back to the highest levels of the U.S. government, as well as leaders on both sides of the aisle in Congress and the private sector.

Working tirelessly on the entire realm of U.S.-India relations, he recognized what he didn't know about the Foreign Service and depended on the highly respected Career Minister-ranked deputy chief of mission, Patricia Lacina, for counsel.

Together they made a dynamic team, along with a sterling country team. Amb.



Garcetti's charisma and vision inspired mission staff to want to raise their ambitions.

Perhaps most important, he was committed to "leading with kindness" and cared deeply about the well-being of career members of the Foreign Service and embassy staff.

He pushed for solutions to address local staff complaints that had simmered for years.

Even after his most draining 12-hour days of high-level visits, when any of us would have been burned out, he would somehow find the time, of his own volition, to stop and chat with a gardener, check up on an FS child, or deposit a handwritten note of appreciation to an embassy officer's desk.

I honestly do not believe there was anyone more qualified in the Foreign Service to be that ambassador at that time.

So, do we need to reform the dreadful role of money in our elections that can lead to donors buying ambassadorships? Absolutely.

But I, for one, will keep a more open mind about political appointees.

Stuart Denyer

FSO

U.S. Embassy Cairo ■

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

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Modernization Agenda Wrap-Up

In an address at the Foreign Service Institute on Oct. 30, 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reflected on his tenure and outlined the achievements of his modernization agenda, emphasizing its influence on equipping U.S. diplomacy with the tools to navigate a rapidly shifting global landscape.

The Secretary highlighted key reforms during the Biden administration, including the establishment of new bureaus focused on cybersecurity, global health security, and emerging technologies. These efforts aim to address pressing issues such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and economic security while strengthening U.S. leadership in setting global norms.

He also pointed to the department's expanded global presence, with five new U.S. embassies in the Indo-Pacific region.

Blinken emphasized investment in the department's workforce, citing record hiring levels, introduction of paid internships, and reforms to improve diversity and retention.

The Secretary also praised the department's embrace of innovation, citing the adoption of AI tools and online passport renewal services as examples of how technology is transforming diplomacy.

At the same time, he pointed to the importance of fostering open discourse, referencing the revitalized Dissent Channel as a means to strengthen policy through constructive debate.

Blinken called for bipartisan support from Congress to sustain and build on these modernization efforts: "When our diplomats have the resources they need, when they have the support they deserve, ... there's nothing—nothing—they can't do."

Contemporary Quote

Take away America's diplomats working all around the globe, deployed in the world's second-largest network of embassies and consulates, and you get a very different reality, one less bright, less peaceful, less prosperous. [But] make no mistake about it, all that deploying takes a toll. It often involves real sacrifice on the part of members of the Foreign Service and their families. Tonight, we celebrate their commitment, their sacrifice, their tireless efforts, and their profound impact on shaping our world.

—World Affairs Councils of America (WACA) board member Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, presenting the WACA International Service Award to "the Foreign Service" at the WACA annual conference opening dinner in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 20, 2024.

Transition at State

As the U.S. transitions from President Joe Biden's administration to President-elect Donald Trump's, two individuals will manage this critical period at the State Department.

Secretary Blinken announced that Ambassador (ret.) Stephen D. Mull, vice provost for global affairs at the University of Virginia, will coordinate the State Department's transition on behalf of the Biden administration.

For the Trump administration, Brian Hook, a former State director of policy planning and special envoy for Iran, has been selected to lead the transition team.

Mull, a seasoned diplomat and former ambassador to Lithuania and Poland, began his assignment on Oct. 28, focusing on ensuring a smooth transition while safeguarding vital U.S. interests. Blinken emphasized his commitment to using the remaining weeks of the Biden administration to address pressing foreign policy issues, including U.S.-China competition, support for Ukraine, and efforts to end the conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza.

On the Trump side, Hook's appointment highlights the early formation of the president-elect's national security team. Known for his tenure in Trump's first administration, Hook will play a central

role in shaping the incoming administration's foreign policy priorities.

While Mull focuses on continuity and stability during the handover, Hook is expected to prioritize aligning the department's leadership with Trump's vision.

These developments echo past challenges in diplomatic transitions. The 1980 State Department transition report, written by Robert G. Neumann for President Ronald Reagan's incoming administration, stressed the necessity for the Secretary of State to assert control over the department's bureaucracy and ensure alignment with the president's foreign policy objectives.

Both appointments are part of broader transition efforts across national security and foreign policy sectors, with figures like Robert Wilkie (Pentagon) and Joel Rayburn (National Security Council) also taking prominent roles.

COP29 Ends in Contentious Agreement

The 29th UN Climate Change Conference (COP29), held in Baku, Azerbaijan, concluded on Nov. 22, 2024, with a polarizing agreement to triple annual climate finance for developing nations to \$300 billion by 2035.

The deal, which fell far short of the \$1.3 trillion annually that experts say is

needed, has exposed deep fractures in global climate diplomacy and highlighted the challenges of addressing the climate crisis amid shifting geopolitical priorities.

The agreement, described by COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev as the “Baku Breakthrough,” was finalized after tense negotiations and accusations of mismanagement.

While the agreement avoided an impasse, it was immediately criticized by delegates from developing nations as insufficient.

India’s climate envoy, Chandni Raina, called the deal “a paltry sum,” and representatives from countries including the Marshall Islands and Panama accused wealthier nations of prioritizing political convenience over global needs.

The negotiations were overshadowed by geopolitical turmoil, including the election of Donald J. Trump, who is expected to once again withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement and scale back U.S. climate commitments.

Trump’s rhetoric and anticipated policy positions loomed over the conference, weakening the U.S. delegation’s leadership role and adding uncertainty about future global climate cooperation. U.S. officials sought to reassure partners that market forces and existing policies would sustain renewable energy progress domestically, but doubts remain.

Adding to the tension, the war in Ukraine and rising conflict in the Middle East have strained global finances, limiting the willingness of wealthy nations to increase climate funding. Critics pointed to this financial retrenchment as evidence of the declining prioritization of climate change amid growing isolationist politics and economic challenges.

The conference also highlighted the intersection of climate change and forced displacement, as detailed in a report by

100 Years Ago

An Intern’s Perspective

In reviewing specific impressions, I would like to begin on the positive side. The most remarkable attribute of the US embassy at which I worked was the high calibre of persons filling a number of prominent positions. By the internship’s end, I felt special admiration for the thoughtfulness, political aplomb, and integrity of the American ambassador. Although I often heard FSOs discuss other US chiefs-of-mission as counter-examples, I can only conclude that an organization which permits such a man to rise through its ranks to the top must be doing something right! Several other officers with whom I came in contact, all proceeding up their career ladders quickly, were also extraordinarily capable and personally attractive. Each, I know, has made strongly favorable impressions on citizens of the host country. A notable characteristic of some of these US officials (the observation applies especially to the deputy chief of mission) was an effervescent interest in other people. All in all, the efforts of this group of exemplary officers are a credit to their profession and country. As an outside observer and a possible Foreign Service candidate, I was impressed.”

—Andrew Spindler, excerpted from his article, “A Summer’s Intern,” in the January 1975 FSJ.



the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, released during COP29.

The report, “No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict and Forced Displacement,” revealed that three-quarters of the world’s 120 million forcibly displaced people live in countries heavily impacted by climate change.

Already vulnerable due to conflict and insecurity, these communities face escalating risks from climate hazards such as flooding, cyclones, and extreme heat. Despite their dire need, fragile states hosting displaced populations receive only \$2 per person annually in adaptation funding—compared to \$161 per person in non-fragile states.

UNHCR has called for increased climate financing to reach displaced populations and host communities, urging their inclusion in global climate policies and funding mechanisms.

Despite the contentious atmosphere, COP29 made progress on important tech-

nic issues, including finalizing mechanisms for carbon markets under the Paris Agreement. These mechanisms aim to support least-developed countries while incorporating safeguards for environmental and human rights protections.

Debates over the transition away from fossil fuels remained divisive, however, with Saudi Arabia resisting language affirming the need to phase out fossil fuels.

Negotiating blocs representing least-developed nations and small island states walked out of COP talks at one point, delaying the deal’s conclusion by hours. Many delegations left the summit frustrated, with Sierra Leone’s Environment Minister Jiwoh Abdulai criticizing the influence of a few wealthy nations over the process.

Fractures exposed at COP29, coupled with growing skepticism about multilateral climate action, foreshadow the difficult road ahead. As climate envoy Tina Stege of the Marshall Islands warned, “Playing games with the lives of the world’s most vulnerable people must end.”

Diplomatic Arrests in Yemen and Russia

Recent developments in Yemen and Russia highlight escalating threats to Foreign Service personnel and affiliated staff, emphasizing the need for vigilance and resilience in the face of authoritarian crackdowns.

In Yemen, the Iran-backed Houthi militia has detained dozens of individuals linked to the U.S. embassy and the United Nations, including former Yemeni local staff member Shaif al-Hamdani.

After years of detention, following his arrest in 2021, al-Hamdani resurfaced in June 2024 and was forced to appear in a Houthi propaganda video confessing to espionage, a claim dismissed as coerced by U.S. officials.

Al-Hamdani's arrest is part of a broader campaign of repression, with arrests targeting humanitarian workers to exert control over international aid operations. The State Department and humanitarian organizations have condemned these actions, warning of the dire implications for aid delivery in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Meanwhile, in Russia, Robert Shonov, a former Russian local staff member at the U.S. consulate in Vladivostok, was arrested in May 2023 and recently sentenced to nearly five years in prison for "secret collaboration with a foreign state."

Shonov worked at the consulate for more than 25 years. After Moscow placed restrictions on hiring local staff in 2021, Shonov became a contractor, compiling publicly available media reports.

The Russian government accused him of passing secret information about the war in Ukraine to the United States, allegations the State Department has strongly denied as baseless. Following his arrest, Russia expelled two U.S.

diplomats in September 2023, accusing them of acting as liaisons to Shonov.

In recent years, Russia has detained several U.S. nationals under politically motivated charges, often using them as leverage in potential prisoner exchanges. Despite the high-profile prisoner swap involving journalist Evan Gershkovich in August 2024, many U.S. and dual nationals remain imprisoned in Russia under precarious circumstances, including American school-teacher Marc Fogel.

These cases exemplify the challenges faced by Foreign Service personnel and locally employed staff operating in environments where authoritarian regimes use intimidation and false allegations to suppress dissent and control narratives.

U.S. Diplomat Wins C3E Award

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has recognized Gina Cady, a USAID Foreign Service officer, as a 2024 C3E International Award winner for her outstanding contributions to clean energy deployment and sustainability.

The C3E Awards, now in their 13th year, celebrate women leaders driving innovation and equity in clean energy.

Cady leads Power Africa's Health Electrification and Telecommunications Alliance (HETA), a \$150 million public-private partnership to electrify and connect 10,000 health facilities across sub-Saharan Africa. Her work integrates the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 3 (health) and 7 (energy) to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and reduce energy poverty.

In her acceptance speech, Cady highlighted the critical link between energy and health: "Health is a climate issue. Without reliable power, primarily women and children are unable to get the basic care and services they deserve. Doctors

are using cell phone lights, and patients are bringing candles for nighttime care. We can do better."

GEC Faces Uncertain Future

The State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC), a critical hub for countering foreign disinformation campaigns, risks losing its congressional authorization as this edition goes to press.

Established in 2016, the GEC has exposed major disinformation efforts by Russia and China, including a recent Kremlin-backed campaign in Africa targeting U.S.-funded health programs.

Senators Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and John Cornyn (R-Texas) have led bipartisan efforts to extend its mandate through 2031, but the center faces opposition from some Republican lawmakers.

Critics accuse the GEC of overreaching and funding entities perceived as politically biased, such as the Global Disinformation Index, which has labeled certain conservative media outlets as high risk.

Special Envoy James Rubin, the GEC's leader, has emphasized the center's successes, including detailed reports on Russian and Chinese propaganda and agreements with 21 countries to counter disinformation. Rubin acknowledged concerns over past funding decisions and assured lawmakers of stricter nonpartisan guidelines under the proposed reauthorization.

The GEC's closure could weaken U.S. efforts to combat global disinformation. Foreign allies have praised its work, highlighting its influence on security issues in regions like Africa and Eastern Europe.

As debates continue, the State Department remains committed to countering foreign disinformation regardless of the center's fate.

Site of the Month: Institute for the Study of War (ISW)



This edition, we spotlight the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a nonpartisan organization that provides in-depth analysis of military affairs and national security through its open-source research, conflict maps, and on-the-ground assessments, helping policymakers and the public understand complex global conflicts.

ISW offers timely and independent analysis on key security issues such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the evolving threat of ISIS, and Iran's nuclear policy. The center works to identify strategic risks and opportunities for the United States and its allies.

ISW publishes a range of reports, including its Russian Offensive Campaign Assessments and Iran Updates, which track battlefield developments and geopolitical shifts. Recent reports include analyses of Russian advances in Donetsk Oblast and Iranian responses to international censure.

ISW provides all research free to the public. Visit www.understandingwar.org to explore ISW's comprehensive reports and learn more about its mission.

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

Russia and China in Central Asia: Compete, Cooperate, or De-conflict?

The Center for a New American Security (CNAS) hosted a panel discussion on Nov. 12 exploring the complex relationship between Russia and China in Central Asia, "Russia and China in Central Asia: Compete, Cooperate, or De-conflict?"

Moderated by *New Statesman* Senior Editor Katie Stallard, the event marked the launch of a CNAS report on the subject. Panelists included Ambassador Donald Lu, assistant secretary of State for South and Central Asia; Andrea Kendall-Taylor, director of the Transatlantic Security Program at CNAS; and Lisa Curtis, director of the Indo-Pacific Security Program at CNAS.

The panelists painted a nuanced picture of the region, noting limited cooperation between Russia and China despite

overlapping interests. They emphasized the U.S. role in providing economic alternatives and fostering regional stability. Programs like the U.S.-led C5+1 initiative and greater educational exchange were identified as opportunities for deeper American engagement.

The discussion concluded with a call for sustained U.S. attention to Central Asia as a geopolitical crossroads, warning that neglecting the region could leave it further exposed to the competing influences of Moscow and Beijing. Listen to the full discussion at <http://bit.ly/RC-CNAS>.

Afghan Lessons Learned in SIGAR Report

The head of SIGAR, John Sopko, called for the organization to close its doors by Sept. 30, 2025. Shortly after, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has released its 13th, and what could be its

last, lessons learned report, "Staffing the Mission: Lessons from the U.S. Reconstruction of Afghanistan," shedding light on critical personnel shortcomings that plagued U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan over two decades.

The report highlights chronic issues in recruiting, training, retaining, and coordinating personnel from the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Defense (DOD), ultimately undermining the \$145 billion U.S. investment in rebuilding Afghanistan's institutions, security forces, and economy.

Frequent staff turnover drained institutional knowledge, while insufficient handovers perpetuated mistakes across civilian and military agencies.

The report emphasizes that politically driven timelines hindered long-term planning, preventing the establishment of robust state-building institutions to address Afghanistan's complex needs effectively.

SIGAR also identifies failures in training personnel for the specific challenges of Afghanistan, including inadequate preparation for advising Afghan security forces and understanding local dynamics.

SIGAR's recommendations point to the necessity of systemic reforms to prepare U.S. agencies for future reconstruction efforts. Proposed measures include establishing a Diplomatic Reserve Corps, improving pre-deployment training, enhancing interagency coordination, and instituting mandatory exit memos for personnel.

The report also stresses the importance of retaining capabilities like the Security Force Assistance Brigades to ensure readiness for future contingency operations. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.

Defending Values: The Case for Strategic Clarity

BY ROBERT S. WANG

During his term in office over the past four years, President Joe Biden highlighted the global struggle between democracies and autocracies and underscored the need for the United States to help defend and strengthen the post-World War II rules-based liberal international order.

For this effort, the administration inaugurated and co-hosted an annual Summit for Democracy with the participation of leaders from up to 100 countries who have made a range of specific commitments to advance human rights and democracy, counter authoritarianism, and fight corruption.

At the same time, the United States provided crucial military assistance to Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion and built and strengthened security alliances in Europe and Asia, while increasing worldwide development assistance and taking measures to respond to China's increasingly aggressive and coercive political, military, and trade policies.

In its February 2022 "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States" document, the Biden administration specifically called attention to the mounting challenges in the region, particularly citing

Beijing has continued to promote its narrative that the U.S.-China rivalry is primarily a competition of national interests as opposed to values.

Beijing's actions "from the economic coercion of Australia to the conflict along the Line of Actual Control with India to the growing pressure on Taiwan and bullying of neighbors in the East and South China Seas. ... In the process, the PRC is also undermining human rights and international law, including freedom of navigation, as well as other principles that have brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific."

Nonetheless, while calling for collective efforts to address these challenges, the strategy states: "Our objective is *not to change the PRC* [emphasis added] but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share."

This phrasing deliberately avoids stating clearly the ultimate goal of getting

China, itself, to accept and abide by the values and principles of the rules-based liberal international order, which the United States has worked to promote globally since the end of WWII and to advance with respect to China since establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979.

In so doing, the administration appears to be acknowledging the difficulty of achieving this goal (without being accused of seeking "regime change") while continuing "to manage our competition with the PRC responsibly."

Beijing's Narrative: Interests vs. Values

Meanwhile, Beijing has continued to promote its narrative that the U.S.-China rivalry is primarily a competition of national interests as opposed to values. That is, the United States as a status quo power is seeking to contain and suppress China as a rising power (popularized in the concept of the "Thucydides Trap").

In April 2013, shortly after Xi Jinping assumed power, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) issued an internal communiqué ("Document Nine") warning that "Western anti-China forces" were seeking to spread Western ideas and values (such



Robert S. Wang, a retired Foreign Service officer, is a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and was an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service from 2018 to 2023. 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.

as constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society, and freedom of the press) and cultivating so-called “anti-government forces” within China to subvert CCP rule and prevent China’s rise.

This was followed by a crackdown against human rights lawyers, media outlets, academics, and other such independent thinkers within China; against the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang; and, later, the people of Hong Kong. This Beijing narrative has served to mobilize populist and nationalist anti-U.S. sentiment within China to justify the CCP’s increasingly tight political controls.

Abroad, Beijing has also sought to promote the same narrative while utilizing trade and investment ties, e.g., through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as acts of economic coercion intended to expand China’s economic and political influence.

To the extent that this narrative prevails, it lends support to those who argue against having to choose between the United States and China, focusing instead on protecting and advancing their countries’ own interests in the context of this geopolitical rivalry.

In a series of essays published by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in 2023, for example, scholars from the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries were asked to address the issue of how each of their countries has viewed and responded to U.S.-China geopolitical competition in the region.

A summary of these essays concluded that “they all emphasized developmental security and strategic diversification as priorities” to protect and advance their own national interests without reference to issues of human rights and international law. Notably, “none of the papers featured especially prominently the importance of the

United States as an economic partner. In contrast, China’s economic initiatives and expanded economic relations with individual states loomed large.”

Highlighting the views of these countries, Indonesia’s then President-elect Prabowo Subianto said in an interview with Al Jazeera in May 2024 that his administration would maintain an open foreign policy approach and not be drawn into choosing sides between the United States and China as they compete for global influence.

“Our guiding philosophy is to be friends with all countries,” Subianto said. “We invite the U.S., the Japanese, the Koreans, the Europeans. The fact that we are friends with you doesn’t mean we can’t be friends with China, India, Russia.”

Defending Values and Interests

While cognizant of the difficulty of “changing China” and the need to engage diplomatically with Beijing, I would argue here that it is critical that the United States openly and directly challenge the Beijing narrative by making clear, first to the Chinese people, that our strategic goal has never been to suppress China’s rise but rather to encourage and convince the government in Beijing that it needs to change many of its current policies, which undermine the fundamental values and principles of the rules-based liberal international order from which China has greatly benefited.

We need to underscore that the United States and the West have helped China achieve its remarkable rise over the past 50 years with the hope and expectation that it will eventually assume the role of a “responsible stakeholder” in this international order.

I certainly believed this to be our goal while I served several tours in China during the past 30 years, working with my colleagues to expand trade and investment relations through China’s eventual accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), facilitating the travel of millions of Chinese students to the United States, and building broad government and people-to-people ties between our two countries.

At the same time, we should make explicit to those countries that have chosen not to take sides that they have, in fact, chosen to accept Beijing’s narrative, thus ignoring or even denigrating the values of the liberal international order, implicitly condoning China’s practices and fueling its threat to this order.

Although the United States cannot make other countries choose sides, we should at least warn them that unless Beijing changes and abides by the rules and principles of this order, it may eventually pose a threat to their own interests, if those conflict with China’s interests as Beijing further extends its sphere of influence.

We have already witnessed this during the past decade in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the East and South China Seas. As Beijing has significantly expanded its aggressive military and gray-zone activities, both Japan and the Philippines have now become increasingly aware of the dangers of neutrality and are beginning to work with the United States to respond to Beijing’s threats.

Similarly, Beijing’s continued support for the DPRK and its nuclear arms program should be a clear warning not only to Korea and others in the region but even beyond the region with the DPRK now sending its own troops to assist Russian forces in Ukraine.

While we should continue to counter Beijing’s coercive policies by reshaping

critical supply chains and offering alternative development incentives, i.e., shaping the strategic environment, I believe that we must also get more countries to recognize the serious risks of Beijing's continued challenge to the values of the rules-based international order and its eventual effect on peace and stability in the region.

Finally, we need to point out more broadly that if Beijing does not fundamentally change its policies, it poses an existential threat to the long-term interest of the entire global community as Beijing continues to assist other powerful and aggressive authoritarian states that transgress and violate the rights of other countries and erode the rules-based liberal international order.

This threat is becoming increasingly clear today, with China first declaring its "no limits" partnership with Russia at a Xi-Putin summit meeting in Beijing just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and subsequently refusing to impose sanctions on Russia while continuing to provide critical assistance that has allowed Russia to expand its war against Ukraine.

In a continued show of defiance, Xi and Putin held three summits in 2024, each time reaffirming their partnership against the United States and the West. In October, Xi traveled to Kazan in western Russia, where Putin hosted a meeting of BRICS, the intergovernmental organization of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates that has now expanded its membership to include Iran.

Separately, Xi traveled to France, Serbia, and Hungary last May in an apparent effort to sow division within Europe and weaken U.S.-European ties.

As China, Russia, and other autocracies join together to expand their

influence, we are facing the very real risk of a return to an even more dangerous "Cold War" that could potentially have devastating consequences for the entire world.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line of my argument is that the United States itself must adhere to and continue to promote the rules-based liberal international order. And we must underscore that if Beijing continues to violate the values and principles of this order, China's continued rise will eventually, directly and indirectly, pose an existential threat to the peace and prosperity of the global community.

Understanding this, the United States must be forthright in stating our strategic objective, which is to induce China to change, and we must try to get our like-minded partners and others to understand the seriousness of this challenge. "Not taking sides" is taking sides.

This will not be an easy task as Beijing continues to promote its narrative and wield its considerable economic power and influence, especially among those who do not share these values or those who continue to focus solely on their immediate economic interests.

Nonetheless, I believe that greater strategic clarity regarding our goal with respect to China is especially critical at this time, because Beijing's increasingly assertive and expansive policies have begun to raise concerns in the region and around the world.

Within China, we must continue to speak up for universal values and contest and dispel the notion that the United States wants to suppress China's rise or seeks regional hegemony, understanding that it will ultimately be up to the Chinese people themselves to choose their own path forward. ■



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LIBERATE the FUTURE



Few generations of American diplomats are given the privilege and opportunity to reshape the direction of our great republic's foreign policy. Fewer still are asked to undertake such a task during a period of domestic political ferment and change.

Today's diplomats, both U.S. Foreign and Civil Service, find themselves in the extraordinary position to play such a historic role—with, however, an added twist. This generation is also being asked to find a way to make government work, and protect America's fundamental national security interests, during a period of intense political strife, polarization, partisanship, and institutional decay. The professional career officers who make up our national security agencies face an additional and ironic challenge. Their work, which has been denigrated by political leaders and elected officials over time, is now viewed as part of the problem and something that needs profound reform.

The challenges facing our career services are compounded by political rhetoric that presents the United States as approaching an existential crossroads and portrays political adversaries as enemies. Fear now has political currency. And the nonpartisan nature of our career bureaucracy seems quaint. In such a heated environment, it is easy to point fingers at transgressing political figures, as if their disappearance or defeat would somehow allow everything to return to normal.

But the real task—our opportunity!—is far greater. We need to clearly understand the new world in which we now live. We need to recognize the forces of transformational change at work in our world, and step away from ideologies and rhetoric that limit our understanding of this new world. Henry Kissinger once wrote that great diplomats will be “judged in the end not by their

cleverness but by their grasp of reality.” He urged Americans to be “pitiless” in judging our current circumstances.

As we advance from such knowledge to action, it is worth reflecting on the words of Niccolo Machiavelli, the statesman and philosopher, who wrote: “It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

The Meaning of the Moment

Our current circumstance is not of recent vintage. It has been building over time, driven by rapid economic and social changes that have transformed the communities and country in which

we live. Our political leaders, parties, and institutions have not been able to grasp, understand, explain, or respond comprehensively to these changes. This has left the American people increasingly desperate, as they move from leader to leader, party to party, looking for someone to make sense of their world and guide the United States deeper into the 21st century.

The American people are not fools. They have been quietly conversing

among themselves about the purpose of American power in the world. This debate, which once revolved around American power and principle, now revolves around American grievance. Thirty-five years after the end of the Cold War, are the American people wrong to ask why our global security commitments have expanded and not contracted? Are they wrong to ask why our allies, including neighbors like Canada, avoid shouldering a heavier military and security role? Are they wrong to ask why the global economy we constructed has exacted such a painful cost in communities built on industry and unionized labor? Are they wrong to ask why successive governments and Congresses have allowed our migration policy to be defined by informality and illegality? Are they wrong to ask why our extraordinary wealth never seems to reach those who most need it?

There are answers to all these questions, but our political leadership is not responding to them. Worse, the national security elites of both parties talk only among themselves.

Today's diplomats have an opportunity to play a historic role in reshaping the direction of U.S. foreign policy.

BY THOMAS A. SHANNON JR.



Thomas A. Shannon Jr. served for 35 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, ending his career as under secretary for political affairs with the rank of Career Ambassador. Currently, he is senior international policy adviser at Arnold & Porter.

We require a professional mindset that allows us to operate within our current environment without being sucked into the partisan vortex.

This growing divide between the American people and U.S. foreign policy is evident in polling data and voting. No amount of ideological rhetoric will close this gap. The world needs to be explained anew.

To our adversaries, this foreign-policy disconnect is puzzling and opens an opportunity they will seek to exploit. To our allies and partners, it is distressing. Both see the United States as an enormously powerful country with a remarkably flexible and responsive political system. Both see our economy as endlessly inventive, something that seems to produce jobs and wealth at will. Both envy our innovation ecosystem and recognize our leadership in science and high technology. Both understand that we are an increasingly diverse and varied society that is not only cosmopolitan but global. In short, they both understand us as the premier global power that will not be easily shuffled off the world's stage.

In such a complicated and dangerous environment, with so many crosscurrents, how is today's generation of American diplomats and national security professionals to navigate the ship of state?

A Professional Mindset

Political polarization is like water. It knows no natural limits. Those limits have to be constructed. We have institutional and legal constraints to prevent partisan political activity within the career bureaucracy. But in a polarized society that peddles fear of the adversary, formal constraints are not enough. We require a professional mindset that allows us to operate within our current environment without being sucked into the partisan vortex. In other words, we cannot lose our nerve, and we must never lose our respect for the choice of the American voter.

We all swear (or affirm) an oath of allegiance to the Constitution of our republic. It is commonplace to remind all being sworn in that they are making an oath not to a leader, a people, or a bloodline, but to our Constitution and the values that it carries. Implicit in this oath is a recognition that the American

people are our ultimate sovereign. Through this oath, we recognize the authority of the elected leaders chosen by the American people as their representatives. It is our purpose to work with these elected leaders to enact their policies and programs.

We are a disciplined service. But obedience does not mean obsequiousness. It is our purpose to provide the best analysis and advice that we can to our elected and appointed leaders. But it is also our responsibility to let these leaders know when they are mistaken or have taken decisions that will harm our interests or contravene our values.

Constructive dissent is an honored practice within the State Department. There are formal processes and procedures to register such dissent. By its nature, such dissent is a negative process. It represents disagreement with policy decisions, and it is usually expressed at the end of a decision-making process. It is valuable as a reminder of when a decision went wrong or as an opportunity for dissenting officers to speak their mind. But that is not enough.

Positive Engagement

What our leaders and our institutions need most is the daily willingness to speak with clarity and integrity about the issues facing policymakers. This can be most powerful in moments when decisions are being made, but it is also needed in the analysis and reporting that constitutes much of our work. In a dynamic world defined by complexity, conflict, and contestation, the ability to describe events and issues, place them within a strategic context, and suggest courses of action that will lead to success is what makes our career services valuable to presidents and their governments.

Such positive engagement with elected and appointed leaders will help them have the kind of conversation about foreign policy with the American people that is so lacking. In so doing, our career services will have to step away from the shibboleths that have defined American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, and to think about the world in fresh ways.

The nature of American leadership, global purpose, and reliability as a partner are all being questioned. The so-called Global South does not accept our narrative of an international struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. Increasingly, our relevance to other countries depends not on ideology but on our ability to help them succeed. As we navigate in this changed world, it will fall to our career services to liberate the future from a past that has run its course.

The world's security challenges are not subject to American elections. These challenges do not change just because there is

a new occupant in the White House. Some of these challenges reflect contests deeply rooted in regional rivalries or expressions of ambition long desired. But much in our world is malleable and can be shaped by active diplomacy that understands the world correctly.

Understanding Today's World

In this regard, I would suggest the following propositions to refresh how we think about the world in which we live, work, judge, and act.

First, our enemy is the status quo. We have many adversaries. Some will remain fixed over time; others will come and go. However, our enemy is the tendency to try to preserve our global position by freezing our advantages and our opponents' weaknesses in time. This will not work. The United States has never been a status quo country. Our purpose was never to restore a past or preserve a present. It has always been about projecting ourselves into the future. When we have fought, it has always been about shaping the future. Abraham Lincoln said during the Civil War that we fight for a "vast posterity." That is still true.

Second, all politics are social. The biggest challenges facing government and the politics that underpin it will be inequality, contingency, and discontinuity. During a century of unprecedented wealth creation and technological advancement, there will be a relentless demand for access to the education, health care, security, and resources that people believe will allow them to define and determine their individual destinies. Today, migration is the most dramatic expression of this reality.

Third, values matter. Power is an empty concept. Absent the purpose that values give to it, power is unsustainable over time. What has defined American power is not our destructive capability but our constructive purpose. Democracy is not just a form of government or the expression of a constitutional or institutional arrangement; it is also a fundamental moral commitment to the individual and to their right to self-expression. In other words, it is a commitment to an open society that empowers the individual. This commitment to values has given our democracy a human face and allowed us to step beyond formulated doctrines and discuss greater problems of human nature and destiny.

Fourth, societies and cultures will drive relations between and among states. States will continue to be the fundamental building blocks of the global order. However, the expression of national interest will increasingly reflect the societies and cultures that reside within and across these states. This creates a larger panorama for communication and cooperation,

What has defined American power is not our destructive capability but our constructive purpose.

one that gives an advantage to our own society because of its diversity, variety, and vast communication platforms. But it will also require us to use insight, sensitivity, and empathy to better understand the world we live in.

Fifth, legitimacy will be determined by outcome. Process, such as free and fair elections and the peaceful transition of power, will remain an important cornerstone of political legitimacy. However, these processes must produce governments that can deliver results. In a world transforming itself, pleas to process will be viewed as efforts to entrench the status quo. For the purpose of American diplomacy, we must be able to show that democracy is capable of fundamentally transforming societies, but doing so peacefully and within constitutional and lawful structures.

Beyond Outdated Ways

Reflecting on these propositions will help us step beyond older and increasingly outdated ways of understanding the world. It will refresh our conversation with the American people and allow elected leaders to engage voters on issues and themes that are already part of the reality of the American public. It will also allow our career Foreign Service members to approach our elected and appointed leaders in a way in which the integrity and clarity of our voice can be heard.

In his 1987 memoir, *Present at the Creation*, Secretary of State Dean Acheson described the generation of American diplomats who shaped the world after World War II as filled with "daring and buoyant determination," but also defined by "ignorance of the true situation." He wrote that the postwar period was "one of great obscurity to those who lived through it." And, he said, "the significance of events was shrouded in ambiguity."

I believe that today's American diplomats and national security professionals have the same daring and buoyant determination as Acheson and his colleagues, but we can make no claim to ignorance. Nor can we assert that the world is obscure or that the significance of events is unknown. We know what needs to be done, and we know why; and for that reason, we will be judged. ■

A LOOK BACK

The Foreign Service and Presidential Elections

From the FSJ Archive

Exploring the “time capsule” that is the FSJ Digital Archive yields insights into the importance of presidential elections for the U.S. Foreign Service and the Service’s evolving approach to those elections and the administrative transitions that routinely follow.

In the early years, comprehensive notes on the election results were a standard feature in the *Journal*. By the 1950s, the *Journal* began focusing on the FS role in facilitating effective foreign affairs transitions. This included educating candidates and engaging the new administration on the purpose and work of the Foreign Service, as well as its particular concerns of the hour—from “Schedule C” in 1960 and political-appointee ambassadors in 1976 to implementation of a new Foreign Service Act in 1980 and staffing shortages in the 2000s.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, since the late 1960s the strictly nonpartisan nature of the Foreign Service has been emphasized. Starting in 2000, the *Journal* has occasionally presented the views of foreign journalists, for a look at a U.S. election “through their eyes.” More recently, we have sought the views and recommendations of AFSA members for a feature compilation of “Notes to the New Administration.”

—The Editors

“The Presidential Election”

by Gerhard Gade

December 1924, Lead Story

On Nov. 4 the people of the United States elected Calvin Coolidge President by a popular vote estimated at about 18,000,000—2,000,000 more votes than President Harding received in 1920. ...

The increase in the vote of 1920 over 1916 was due to the passage of the Woman Suffrage Amendment.

The Republican Party obtained working majorities in both branches of the Sixty-ninth Congress. ...

The electorate cast the largest vote in American history—between 30,000,000 and 32,000,000 as compared with 26,675,000 votes in 1920. This record-breaking ballot may be attributed to a

number of causes. The organized appeal, made by both Coolidge and Davis as well as by the American Legion to go to the polls as a patriotic duty regardless of partisanship, must have considerably increased the vote. A large number of women who did not avail themselves of the franchise in 1920 doubtless discharged their duty on Nov. 4 after four more years of political education.

The radio for the first time in history had a tremendous effect on the size of the votes by broadcasting political speeches to millions of homes and thus creating a more personal interest in the speakers and the issues of the campaign than was formerly possible through the newspapers alone.

1933: HERBERT HOOVER TO FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

“The Election”

December 1932, Lead Story

At half-past twelve of the morning of November 9, Governor Roosevelt received the following telegram from President Hoover:

“Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,
“Biltmore Hotel, New York City.

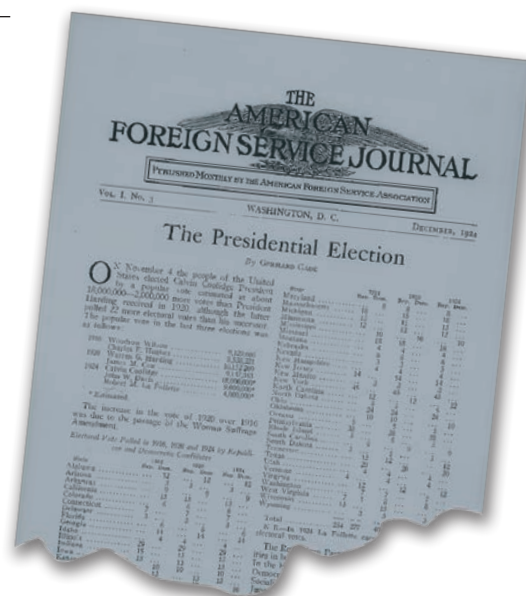
“I congratulate you on the opportunity that has come to you to be of service to the country, and I wish for you a most successful administration. In the common purpose of all of us, I shall dedicate myself to every possible helpful effort.” ...

The situation in Congress after March 4 will be the most advantageous any President has found in recent years. ...

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was 50 years old last January 14. ... Since he entered public life 21 years ago, Governor Roosevelt advanced steadily. ... Despite the physical handicap, confined to his leg muscles, Mr. Roosevelt has been regarded as one of the hardest working Governors in New York’s history.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, like the late President Theodore Roosevelt [his distant cousin], reached the road to the White House by way of the governorship of New York and the position of Assistant Secretary of the Navy. ...

Speculation has been rife as to who will be chosen by Mr. Roosevelt for his Cabinet, but the following recent letter from the President-elect somewhat puts that matter aside for the time being: “In the weeks and months immediately ahead, further



unauthorized and unfounded suggestions may appear in print and otherwise. To avoid any misunderstanding, I desire to make it clear that no decision has been reached, and no decision will be reached in regard to any appointments for at least two months.” ...

Franklin D. Roosevelt has spent much time traveling in Europe, and speaks French and German fairly fluently. It is therefore said that he possesses an unusually extensive first-hand foreign background.

“The Election”

December 1948, Editorial

As their individual preferences or predictions ran, members of the Foreign Service all over the world reacted like everyone else to President Truman’s upset victory in the election. They gasped or grinned at the discomfiture of the pollsters; their eyes were dewy for Mr. Dewey or triumphant for Mr. Truman. The Hatch Act properly proscribes some kinds of political activity for us Federal bureaucrats; but let us hope no American rule or writ ever keeps us from voting for our choice.

The mighty and processional spectacle of an American presidential election is a thing to marvel at in the world of today. Few people can appreciate this better than those who represent this government abroad, particularly in countries where the secret ballot is a lie or a myth. ...

The election meant many things to many people. Whatever else it signified, to most everyone abroad it meant reaffirmation of President Truman’s foreign policy. It is more, not less, to the

President’s credit—as well as to the Republicans’—that this is a nonpartisan policy.

Europeans familiar with the vagaries of American diplomacy and Americans who recall our retreat into the shell after World War I could hardly have expected that this country would take the lead in creating an international organization, or that we would launch such an imaginative and audacious project as the European Recovery Plan.

There are many, even among our friends, who might not have credited American policy makers with the ability to recognize the dissembled challenge to the free world in time to do something about it. ...

The election returns are in: the returns on this foreign policy are beginning to come in. We think it not premature to congratulate President Truman and Governor Dewey, the Republicans and the Democrats, and our fellow Americans on the election and on the bi-partisan foreign policy.

“The Election and the Foreign Service”

August 1952, Editorial

As these words are being written, all eyes are turned upon Chicago, where the second of the two great nominating conventions has commenced. This year the prospect of a new administration—whether Democratic or Republican—lends special significance for the Foreign Service to its work.

Removal of the government employee from politics does not at the same time blind him to the phenomenon of a Presidential election, immunize him against personal convictions, or destroy the awareness of his rights and duties as an American citizen. Consequently, the *Journal* can hardly ignore the activity to which the attention of Americans, wherever they may be, is irresistibly drawn now and until November.

An immediate job of the Foreign Service will be to explain to the people in whose countries we are accredited the amazing machinery of the American presidential election campaign. That should bring out our greatest powers of description, analysis, and interpretation.

But this is only the immediate job. Out of these conventions come new leaders, new chiefs, and new policies. Whether the victors put the helm to port or starboard, the ship of state in some degree alters course and, perhaps, alters speed as well. The adjustment places added burdens upon those of the crew who remain, including those who have made our foreign affairs their life’s profession.

Upon us in large measure devolves the task of providing background, of outlining present problems, and of applying our knowledge and experience—in short, of providing continuity. As in the past so in the future our new chiefs will, we hope, find us dedicated to the national welfare and ready to serve them as we serve our present chiefs today.

After the election, what should we hope for in any new administration? Surely, understanding of the peculiar nature of the [State] Department’s responsibilities and support of its loyal members at home and abroad. Our ability to perform our

duties effectively depends upon the confidence not only of our chiefs but also of the American people. *The Journal* appreciates the efforts which the present administration has made to sift the truth and combat unfair attacks upon the Service; it hopes for renewed efforts upon the part of a successor administration.

We need to develop further between the American people and the Foreign Service a relationship of mutual knowledge, understanding, confidence and respect. Given the role which our country plays today in world affairs, such a relationship must exist. Without it, the Foreign Service cannot do its job.

1961: DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER TO JOHN F. KENNEDY

“Election Day, 1960”

by Gwen Barrows

December 1960, Washington Letter

To those who sat up all that Tuesday night watching the election returns come in, and there were many, this year’s election will not soon be forgotten. It had all begun easily, with as sunny and mild an Election Day as one could imagine. The voting turnout accordingly was what even seasoned political reporters called fantastically high. ... Not until 1 p.m. Wednesday was it announced officially that Senator John F. Kennedy had been elected America’s 35th president. ...

Of immediate interest, of course, once the election was determined, was in what direction the “New Frontiers” would be pushed? To what extent would the theology of the new prophets be followed? (*The Journal* has carried some of their views in recent months, including W. W. Rostow and Galbraith.) How many replacements would be taking place, and when? Would “Schedule C” appointments in the Department be filled by political appointees? The so-called “Schedule C” appointments cover some 1,200 jobs in Government, and were set up in 1952 so that a political appointee could have people working under him who would be sympathetic and would carry forward his work.

Not long after the election results were firm the President-elect in press conference allayed some apprehensions by stating that ambassadorial posts would not necessarily be filled by political appointees, and that provision might be made so that Foreign Service career officers without private means could afford to accept ambassadorial appointments to the large posts.

Mort Sahl, satirist of the American political scene, [observed], ... “What we really need is a man who can stand up to Khrushchev and sit down to Susskind.” And it appears that is what we will have in the very active days ahead.

1969: LYNDON B. JOHNSON TO RICHARD M. NIXON

“Republican Platform Committee”

September 1968, Association News Lead

John Reinhardt, AFSA Vice President, represented the Association in testimony before the Republican Platform Committee in Miami Beach on July 29.

He noted that, “no apparent attention is being given to some of the difficult but important problems of organization and personnel—solutions to which we believe will have an important positive impact upon the success of the next Administration’s policies,” adding that the Association believes, “that the professionals in foreign affairs may know better than anyone else what requires improvement.”

The Association urged that the Platform Committee include the following language in the platform:

“In the face of the increasingly competitive demands upon our resources, it is imperative that the nation insure that the portion of its public revenues devoted to foreign affairs is effectively programed and soundly managed.

“The Secretary of State has been delegated great authority to ‘coordinate and direct’ the activities of the many agencies now involved in foreign affairs. To make this authority effective, however, will require significant changes in the organization of the Department of State and the Foreign Service of the United States.

“These will include the establishment of a position, perhaps to be called the Permanent Under Secretary, which will combine the functions of planning, resource allocation and evaluation. We recall that a recommendation to this effect was contained in the Herter Committee report some six years ago, but never put into effect. If the Secretary’s leadership role is to be effective, if the often-anarchic operations of independent and semi-independent agencies are to be subordinated to the national interest, they must be directed in the national interest.

“In addition, we must return to the concept expressed in the Foreign Service Act of 1946 that the nation speak with but one voice abroad through a single Foreign Service of the United States, safeguarded from abuse by a reconstituted Board of the Foreign Service representing the interests of all the agencies in foreign affairs.

“The personnel of the Foreign Service of the United States must be responsive to the technical requirements of specialized agencies, able to observe and report broad political trends faithfully, represent American interests vigorously and provide

strong leadership to the American presence abroad. The people in foreign affairs must be imaginative in the use of new ideas and new techniques. They must be supported, in turn, with the most modern of the country's technology."

What emerged in the platform as published on Aug. 5 was the following felicitous language: "In the development and execution of the nation's foreign policy our career Foreign Service officers play a critical role. We strongly support the Foreign Service and will strengthen it by improving its efficiency and administration and providing adequate allowances for its personnel."

"AFSA and the Election" October 1968, *Journal Editorial*

Now that we are in the midst of another Presidential election campaign, it is timely and perhaps desirable to remind ourselves that professional members of the foreign services will serve the next President, whoever he may be. AFSA is therefore taking no position on the merits of the candidates or parties. Nor is it taking a position on the substance of any of the foreign policy issues being debated in the election campaign.

At the same time, AFSA has strong views about the nature and organization of the foreign affairs part of the executive branch and about the foreign services which it represents. We have stated these views to the platform committees of both major parties, as reported in the September Association News section and will continue to attempt to impress both parties and their candidates with our seriousness of purpose in working for an

improved professional foreign service. We will enlist their cooperation and support for our efforts. We believe these efforts are in the nation's interest and transcend partisan activity.

"Change" December 1968, *Journal Editorial*

Next month a new administration will be installed in Washington. We join all other Americans in extending our best wishes to Mr. Nixon. Surely the quantity, complexity and magnitude of the problems he will face, and their implications for our nation and the world, require the best efforts of everyone to seek and implement the wisest solutions.

We commend the extensive efforts which have been made to ensure the orderly transfer of responsibility from the outgoing to the incoming Administration. Such a positive approach to transition is a professional response to practical needs which can go far to mitigate the difficulties of adjusting to change.

The President-elect should have no doubt that he will have the complete loyalty of the career professionals of the Foreign Service. He can also be certain that the professionals stand ready to assist him in improving the conduct of our foreign relations. The report to the Association's Board, "Toward a Modern Diplomacy," provides an indication of our interest and of the direction of our thinking. In an atmosphere of change, the report offers some constructive suggestions. It shows that we don't mind the heat in the kitchen. And we are encouraged by the support given us in the Republican Party Platform of last August.

1977: GERALD FORD TO JIMMY CARTER

"Open Letter to the President-elect" December 1976, *AFSA Editorial*

On behalf of the American Foreign Service Association, and at the direction of its Governing Board, I am writing to congratulate you on your election.

For more than 50 years our Association has been the principal professional representative of Foreign Service people. And under Executive Order 11636 (Employee-Management Relations in the Foreign Service of the United States of America) we are the elected representative of the Foreign Service in the Department of State and the Agency for International Development.

In that capacity we participate in consultations with management on personnel policies and working conditions.

Historians tell us that successive Presidents have taken office with a distrust for the career Foreign Service, believing it to be stuffed with holdovers from the previous Administration who want to make him look bad, and mandarins who regard him as an interloper in foreign policy matters. In fact, the Foreign Service which we represent is a non-partisan professional cadre that works for only one President at a time, fully

recognizes his or her primacy in foreign policy, and has served successive Presidents and Secretaries of State as a motivated and disciplined force for implementing national policy.

The Association enthusiastically welcomes your repeated declarations that Presidential diplomatic appointments must be based on merit. While we fully appreciate the contributions of certain distinguished non-career diplomats, we have long opposed politically motivated appointments of non-career incompetents, and we have enough self-confidence to believe that in a competition based on merit, the Foreign Service can produce winners most of the time. We look forward to developing, with your transition team and other interested persons and organizations, criteria for such appointments and procedures for evaluating potential Presidential nominees.

The Association is also impressed with your systematic approach to the organization of the federal government, and we believe we may be able to make a useful contribution to a review of our foreign policy bureaucratic structures. We have noted your practice of seeking information and advice from all responsible sources before making up your mind, and have for many years strongly supported the maintenance of institutions whereby the President can receive the best possible information and advice from the Foreign Service, including alternative views.

As exclusive employee representative for the State and AID Foreign Service, we have many matters to raise with you. For example, we hope that you will authorize a review of our policy toward terrorists who kidnap American diplomats, and the governments who support or provide sanctuary to these terrorists. We hope that AID Foreign Service will be given a permanent career status commensurate with that of their State and USIA colleagues, and with the long-term nature of the international development challenge facing the United States.

We earnestly hope that we can avoid the traditional phase of suspicion between new Presidents and the career Foreign Service, and make a smooth transition to a productive relationship which serves the national interest. For this purpose, the Association has established a Transition Task Force which will be available to work with your transition officials in any manner you may desire.

“Ambassadorial Appointments”

December 1976, AFSA Editorial

[In his *Why Not the Best?*, Jimmy Carter wrote:] “For many years in the State Department we have chosen from among almost 16,000 applicants about 110 of our nation’s finest young leaders to

represent us in the international world. But we top this off with the disgraceful and counterproductive policy of appointing unqualified persons to major diplomatic posts as political payoffs. This must be stopped immediately.”

AFSA warmly seconds the views of the President-elect and proposes the following reforms to effect the needed overhaul of the ambassadorial selection process:

- A non-partisan advisory panel, patterned on the American Bar Association’s Committee on the Federal Judiciary, should examine the credentials of ambassadorial nominees—career as well as non-career.
- The President, as part of the standard nomination process, should inform the Senate Foreign Relations Committee what special foreign affairs qualifications and skills a proposed political appointee would bring to the assignment.
- Congress and the Executive Branch should agree on guidelines to limit appointment of non-career ambassadors to ten per cent globally and fifteen per cent in any geographic region.

The report of the AFSA Committee on Presidential Appointments can be found elsewhere in this issue of the *Foreign Service Journal*.

1981: JIMMY CARTER TO RONALD REAGAN

“Congratulations, Governor Reagan”

December 1980, Association News

The letter reprinted below, to Governor Reagan from the president of the Association, represents the approach the Governing Board is taking with the foreign affairs advisers and transition team of the new administration.

Dear Governor Reagan:

The members of the American Foreign Service extend to you our warmest congratulations on your election as our next president. We welcome the opportunity to work for you in advancing the themes you outlined during your campaign to strengthen our national security and to support our global interests.

As professionals, experienced in the close relationship between the level of our national strength and our skill in knowing how and when to use it, we appreciate the challenges you and your secretary of state will face over the next four years. You will encounter interrelated economic, political and military issues compounded by international population and social pressures more complex than those addressed by any of our previous presidents.

As president you will have at your disposal both a highly skilled team of American professionals and a strengthened and enhanced structure for using them. We hope that in filling key foreign affairs positions both overseas and in Washington you will turn first to this powerful resource.

Your leadership and your mandate are firmly established. In support, the American Foreign Service offers you a resource of people selected in a highly competitive process on the basis of merit, representative of all segments of our population, trained in foreign languages, customs and history and their impact on our national interests. Foreign Service numbers are small—they have not risen at all during the last 20 years as the American global role and the rest of the government burgeoned. We are ready to give your foreign affairs team honest advice and service which is both disciplined and efficient.

A new Foreign Service Act, the first in 33 years, will take effect within a month after you take office. As you move to strengthen our national security apparatus you and the secretary will have this new charter for the Foreign Service, shaped in a bi-partisan effort which began under President Ford. It provides an extraordinary opportunity to perfect the institutional base for fielding the very best people our country has to offer in pursuit of our national objectives.

In sum, as president you will have at your disposal both a highly skilled team of American professionals and a strengthened and enhanced structure for using them. We hope that in filling key foreign affairs positions both overseas and in Washington you will turn first to this powerful resource.

The American Foreign Service Association stands ready to assist you in all possible ways during the transition and throughout your presidency. We will be glad to facilitate any communication you or your advisors may wish to establish with the 11,000 members of the Service whom we represent. As you said on election night, “Together, we will do what has to be done.”

Sincerely, Kenneth W. Bleakley

1989: RONALD REAGAN TO GEORGE H.W. BUSH

“Transition Time: The 1989 Changeover”

by Robert G. Neumann, former ambassador and director
of the Reagan administration's State Department
Transition Team (1980-1981)

October 1988, Feature

Last, but far from least, I want to discuss the Foreign Service. The president should realize that the professional Foreign Service is not an enemy and is not disloyal. On the contrary, it will be more than anxious to prove its loyalty to the president. However, it does have its own agenda, as do all departments. That agenda is not necessarily the president's and could be highly parochial. Hence, it is important that the president appoint key officials who are sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced to hold their own and listen carefully to expert advice, but who can then chart the government's course as the president's views dictate and as he may have committed himself to the electorate.

Occasionally the bureaucracy—in the State Department and elsewhere—may try to wait the president out. That must not be permitted. The president, his cabinet officers and their immediate subordinates must not only see to it that policy decisions are made promptly, but also follow up on them to make sure that they are speedily and effectively carried out. A hands-off administration does not work, least of all in foreign affairs where crises develop every week.

“A Message to the Next President”

November 1988, AFSA Editorial

The next President of the United States will need a strong Foreign Service to implement his foreign policies and meet his strategic goals in the world at large. At no time since the end of World War II has there been a greater need for a properly staffed and funded Foreign Service. Yet the Foreign Service is in trouble. Budget cuts and forced early retirements of some of our most valued officers have taken their toll. Strengthening the Foreign Service and using it as an important element of national security will help the President maintain our country's leadership and assure its prosperity in a multipolar

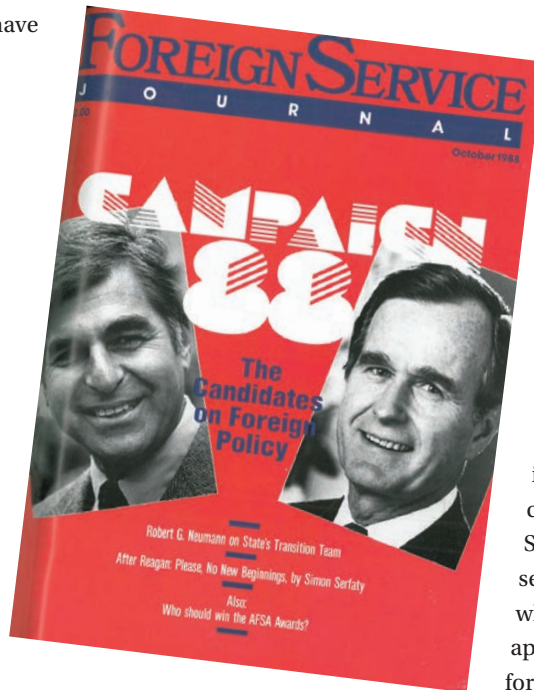
world where our friends and allies have achieved economic parity.

Foreign Affairs Challenges. The next President will have to do more with less. As we enter an era of shifting alliance relationships and competition for global resources the President must have a Foreign Service ready to capitalize through adroit diplomacy on America's political, economic and military strength. American leadership is needed to engage European and Japanese economic cooperation toward a healthier global economy. Whereas in the past the United States has been able to impose its will or allocate vast resources, in the future we will have to rely more on the tools of diplomacy—international negotiations, persuasion and coalition building.

What the Foreign Service offers. The Foreign Service offers the next President its expertise in negotiations and analysis of international affairs. It has the linguistic, interpersonal and intercultural skills needed to defend American interests against foreign competition. It provides a high degree of professional competence in such important areas as arms control, East-West relations, Middle East conflicts, Japanese economic growth, security and economic relationships with Europe, democracy and economic development in Third World countries, counterterrorism, narcotics, and environmental and scientific concerns.

Problems of the Foreign Service. In the eight years since the passage of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, the Department of State has embarked on a misguided program to shrink the Foreign Service at its mid-career and senior levels, forcing the involuntary retirement of hundreds of competent, experienced Foreign Service officers. These skilled professionals have not been replaced, their expertise has been lost to national service, and key positions in our embassies abroad and in Washington are left vacant for extended periods.

The process must stop, and the Foreign Service must be rebuilt. The problem is made worse by budget cuts. Regardless of how the next administration deals with the budget crisis, it should not continue the current starvation diet on which



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American diplomacy now barely lives. There must be a better way. No matter how severe the budget situation becomes, the next administration must ensure that the Department of State and the Foreign Service are adequately funded to do their job.

Political Appointees. The American Foreign Service Association endorses the tradition of partnership between political leadership and the career service. AFSA only asks that political appointees also understand this tradition. AFSA's concern is that the numbers of political appointees continue to increase while the size of the Service decreases. The damage to the career service is apparent. The issue goes beyond who gets which ambassadorial post. Political appointees are placed at all grade levels, either for reasons of patronage or ideology.

A Loyal Service. The Foreign Service is not partisan. It is loyal to the political leadership and committed to providing non-partisan, unbiased support. The Foreign Service offers the next President the skill and experience in foreign affairs he needs to succeed. Above all, the Foreign Service is composed of professionals who take pride in their service to the country.

What is Needed.

- AFSA recommends that the President consider a strong Foreign Service an important element of national security—the first line of defense in peacetime.
- AFSA urges the President to take the lead in persuading Congress to provide adequate funding for the Foreign Service.
- AFSA recommends a quality control process for ambassadorial appointments and the top positions in the Department, for both political and career appointees, and a stop to the placement of political appointees at lower levels.
- AFSA proposes that the President adopt these steps to make the Foreign Service an example in restoring faith in public service as an attractive and prestigious vocation for the best our country has to offer.

—This message was prepared by the AFSA Governing Board and delivered to each of the Presidential candidates in September.

1993: GEORGE H.W. BUSH TO BILL CLINTON

“A Message to the President-elect”

January 1993, AFSA Views

The following letter was sent to Governor [William Jefferson] Clinton immediately after his election.

The Foreign Service is well-positioned to serve the country in the post-Cold War era. As a nation we are moving internationally from military confrontation to economic competition and to the need to deal with a variety of global problems with serious domestic implications. Indeed, domestic and foreign policy are increasingly interconnected. In that context, the career professionals of the Foreign Service can provide policy recommendations based solely on the national interest and professional implementation of the policies you choose to pursue.

Challenges and Opportunities. As the first president elected since the end of the Cold War, you face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The challenges arise from the need to redefine our nation’s role in a changing world and to lead our people to understand that the domestic problems which they understandably are anxious to confront are inextricably linked to our success in retaining American leadership abroad. If this can be done, opportunities exist to use that American leadership to encourage democratic change, foster free market forces and confront the many global ills that threaten to overwhelm us all.

The Role of the Foreign Service. In confronting these challenges and seizing these opportunities, you will find a unique resource in the Foreign Service. Negotiating expertise, language skills and familiarity with diverse societies around the globe will be increasingly important in this new era, as will proven experience in public diplomacy and economic cooperation. The Foreign Service offers all this, as well as the skills required to maintain over 250 posts abroad and keep them in constant contact with Washington. In addition, a new Foreign Affairs Reserve Corps, comprised of experienced foreign service retirees available for prompt deployment, provides a cost-efficient means of meeting emergencies.

Strengthening the Foreign Service. In order for the Foreign Service to serve the nation most effectively, it must be strengthened. In recent years, its numbers have not risen to keep pace with its increased responsibilities. We must recruit more of the best our nation has to offer and ensure that they accurately

The career professionals of the Foreign Service can provide policy recommendations based solely on the national interest and professional implementation of the policies you choose to pursue.

reflect the diversity of our population. We must provide them with the best possible training to prepare them for our new challenges, particularly in the economic and commercial areas. And we must ensure that service abroad remains attractive for employees and their families.

To do so requires resources. All government agencies face budgetary constraints at this time, especially in light of pressing domestic needs. But the strength of our nation is too closely tied to our diplomatic efforts to allow for reductions in the budgets of the foreign affairs agencies or failure to maintain adequate levels of foreign assistance. As military spending declines, the foreign affairs agencies should receive sufficient spending to enable them to maintain U.S. leadership abroad.

Political Appointees. The qualities required to be a successful ambassador abroad or to serve at senior levels in the foreign affairs agencies in Washington are to be found in career diplomats. These qualities are particularly important.

2001: BILL CLINTON TO GEORGE W. BUSH

“State and Congress: An Up-Hill Battle?”

by Marshall P. Adair

January 2001, President's Views

We are beginning a new year and a new administration with a closely divided government. Scholars of American democracy have long argued that bipartisan cooperation is important to effective government. The most recent election has made it an absolute necessity. Nowhere is the need so pressing or the opportunity so great as in the conduct of America’s foreign relations. Perhaps there is an opportunity for the next secretary of State to promote cooperation by overhauling State’s congressional relations.

2009: GEORGE W. BUSH TO BARACK OBAMA

“SOS for DOS”

by John K. Naland

December 2008, President's Views

AFSA congratulates President-elect Barack Obama and Vice President-elect Joe Biden on their electoral victory. At press time, the Secretary of State-designate had not been named. But AFSA hopes for the traditional pre-inauguration meeting with the Secretary-designate to discuss the resource and management needs of diplomacy and development assistance. AFSA also looks forward to meeting with the USAID Administrator-designate and other incoming officials. Below are the highlights of our message.

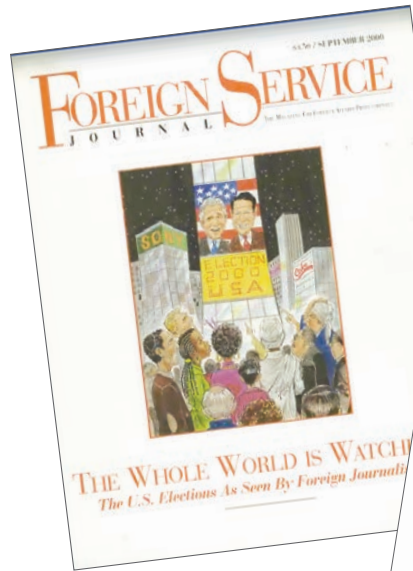
U.S. diplomacy is in crisis. While the inauguration of a new president will likely produce an initial rebound in America's standing in world opinion, that honeymoon will be short-lived unless the next administration takes concrete steps to strengthen diplomacy and development assistance. Issues requiring immediate attention include:

- **Staffing:** Our foreign affairs agencies are hobbled by a human capital crisis. An October report by the American Academy of Diplomacy—whose membership includes all living former secretaries of State—called for expanding State Department diplomatic staffing by 43 percent and USAID staffing by 62 percent within five years. Funding to begin that expansion must be sought immediately.

- **Training:** Foreign Service training lags because of personnel shortages. ...

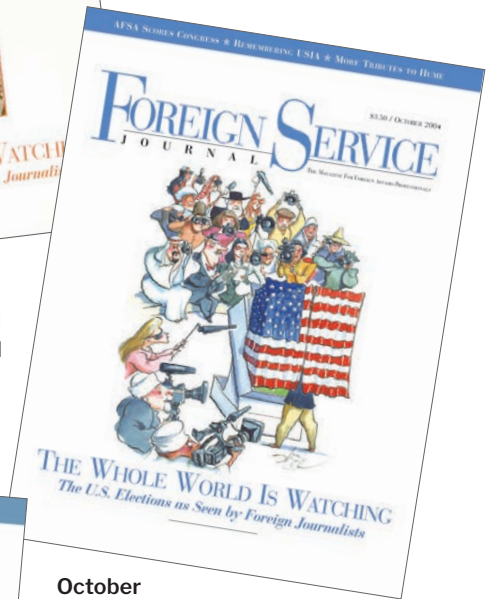
- **Benefits:** If legislation to close the Foreign Service overseas pay gap does not pass this year, ending this longstanding financial disincentive must be at the top of the next Secretary's legislative agenda. Junior and mid-level Foreign Service members simply cannot continue to lose the equivalent of one year's salary for every five years served abroad.

- **Hardship:** As the number of unaccompanied and other hardship posts has jumped in recent years, insufficient efforts



September 2000 FSJ.

During the 2000s, the *Journal* covered several presidential elections through the eyes of foreign journalists.



October 2004 FSJ.

have been made to reduce some of the burdens of such service. ...

- **Management:** The next Secretary must not focus solely on policy issues while ignoring the platform upon which diplomacy and development assistance are conducted. He or she should make time to lobby the White House, Congress, and the American public for resources. The Secretary should pick a deputy secretary and under secretary for management with real ability in this area.

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- **Morale:** The Secretary should work to restore the morale of the career Service, which has been sapped by a growing imbalance between the burdens and rewards of service. The Secretary should speak up when critics unfairly malign the Foreign Service and diplomacy.

- **Professionalism:** The next administration should look to the Foreign Service for expert advice by scaling back the proliferation of noncareer appointees, including ambassadors. On the

other hand, the next Secretary should shun any career officers who meekly recommend what they think the Secretary wants to hear or who mechanically implement directives without first speaking up about likely negative consequences. Instead, the Secretary should encourage frank, constructive criticism to probe for potential pitfalls and unintended consequences in policy initiatives.

Unless these urgent steps are taken to strengthen the diplomatic element of national security, no amount of jetting around the globe by the president or Secretary will restore our nation's role as the world's leader in international affairs. Without sufficient numbers of properly resourced and well-trained diplomats and development professionals, America's engagement with the world will suffer.

“Renewing American Diplomacy”

by John K. Naland

January 2009, President's Views

Barack Obama won the presidency pledging to renew American diplomacy. In so doing, he not only called for changes in substantive foreign policy positions, but also looked beneath the policy superstructure and identified the need to strengthen the platform upon which diplomacy is conducted. For example, he called for increasing Foreign Service staffing at State and USAID.

AFSA, of course, completely agrees on the need to fix the staffing deficits that have hobbled our foreign affairs agencies. Toward that end, we look forward to working with President-elect Obama, Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton, and other incoming officials to obtain the needed resources from Congress.

But as candidate Obama and his campaign policy papers made clear, the mere application of more resources will not be sufficient to strengthen America's international engagement. Instead, our diplomats and development professionals also need increased capabilities. ...

I am confident that Foreign Service members would welcome a “grand bargain” that coupled a significant expansion of staffing with a reengineering of our personnel system

to set new, career-long training requirements. But whether or not such a reform would be universally welcomed, I am convinced that it is necessary. Unless the Foreign Service raises the level of its game by sharpening knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet the challenges of 21st-century diplomacy and development assistance, the president and Congress may increasingly look elsewhere—including to our already overstretched military—to conduct our nation's engagement with the world.

2017: BARACK OBAMA TO DONALD J. TRUMP

“Dear S: You Can Count on Us”

by Barbara Stephenson

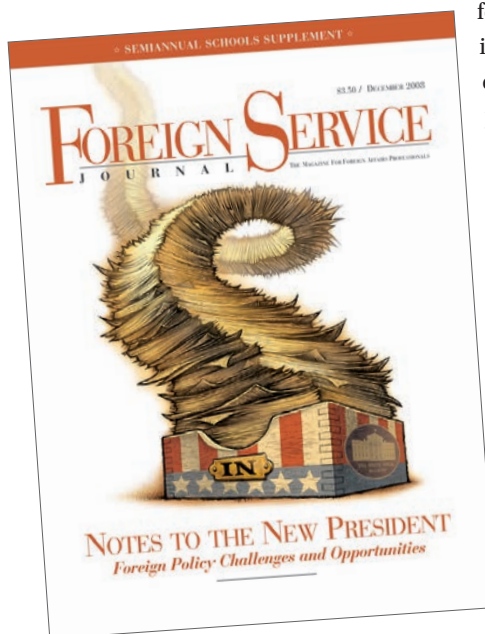
January-February 2017, President's Views

Congratulations on your appointment to lead the State Department. ...

In the Foreign Service, you will have a corps of career professionals who are second to none in their grasp of how to get things done in the near and far-flung places where we are deployed. And you can count on us to call it like we see it, to give you our best advice. Sometimes you will love our reports and our advice, as we chart the course for achieving an American goal that you might not have thought possible, might not have seen if you didn't have members of the Foreign Service on the ground, working in the local language, searching out these opportunities. Sometimes you may not like our reports and advice so much, when we must advise you that something just won't fly, when even asking would carry a heavy cost.

We are hard-wired to give you an unvarnished reality check. It starts with the oath of office we take on entering the Service—to protect and defend the Constitution. ...

Count on us and use us fully as we support you in delivering the global leadership Americans want and the world needs.



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“The Diplomacy Brief”

by Shawn Dorman

January-February 2017,
Letter from the Editor

By all indications, many in the incoming administration will be new to public service. ... To help orient the newcomers, we have reached out to the Foreign Service community for this month’s special focus on “Notes to the New Administration.”

AFSA President Ambassador Barbara Stephenson opens by introducing herself, the association and the Foreign Service to the new Secretary of State.

In “Mr. President, You Have Partners at State to Help Navigate the World’s Shoals,” Foreign Service Officer Keith Mines calls on the new president to have a conversation with the American people about America’s place in the world, reaffirm the leadership role that the United States plays globally and reassure allies of that commitment.

Ambassador (ret.) Prudence Bushnell shares valuable leadership lessons learned through handling tragic crises overseas. She advises that leadership is “not about you”; that the best strategies result from asking the best questions; and that you must take care of your people and yourself, and persevere.

In “Time to Sharpen a Vital Diplomatic Tool,” development expert Thomas Adams takes a serious look at how to improve the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance. He argues for rebuilding USAID’s capacity and consolidating development functions there, while more closely integrating foreign assistance and foreign policy.

We went out to the members of the Foreign Service to ask for brief notes on what they want the Trump administration to know about the role of the Foreign Service. We received 38 thoughtful responses and share them all in this issue.

Several themes come through loud and clear: Know that we are the professional Foreign Service, your Foreign Service, serving the United States all over the world. We are the face of America abroad, a bridge to the world. We understand the local

Know that we are the professional Foreign Service, your Foreign Service, serving the United States all over the world.

situations at our posts and offer honest reporting that you need in order to formulate policy.

Last, but not least, you have an opportunity to turn away from the practice, unique to the United States, of rewarding campaign donors and bundlers with ambassadorships, and turn to the career Foreign Service for the expertise needed for these positions. In this month’s Speaking Out, Ambassador Edward Peck expands on that particular message, laying out the case against “pay to play” ambassadors and in favor of career diplomats for those critical posts.

2021: DONALD J. TRUMP TO JOE BIDEN

“Taking Stock and Looking Ahead”

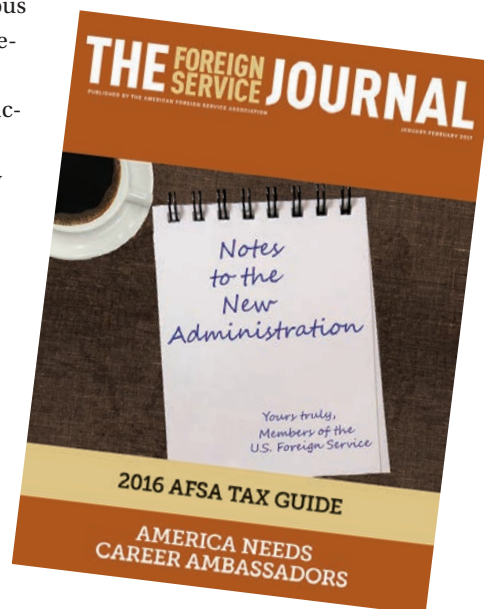
by Eric Rubin

October 2020, President’s Views

As I write this column, we are two months away from November’s elections. By the time you read it, only a month will remain before we and our fellow citizens make choices that have the potential to affect our lives, and those of our children and grandchildren, for many years to come.

I don’t claim to know how the elections will turn out, and I would not even want to try to prognosticate. What I will say is that every one of us, as proud citizens of the United States, must vote. And we must also comply with the Hatch Act that governs political activity of federal employees.

This year has been a year unlike any in recent memory. Historians will debate and assess how we as a country and we as a planet coped with the challenges that came our way, challenges that are ongoing.



January-
February
2017 FSJ.

There is no substitute for experience, and our members collectively bring thousands of years of experience to their jobs every day.

For now, though, it is worth taking stock of what we have accomplished as a Service and as an association under trying circumstances. Beginning last fall and continuing into this year, we stood up—as a union and association, as a Service and as patriotic Americans—to support and defend our colleagues who were compelled to participate in the legal process of impeachment.

Just when we thought we had put that crisis behind us, COVID-19 hit and changed everything. ...

As this difficult year draws to a close, the unfinished business of bringing the Foreign Service back to the central role in American foreign policy formulation mandated in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 remains. ...

Our elected leaders need the advice and contributions of senior career experts before they make critical foreign policy decisions. There is no substitute for experience, and our members collectively bring thousands of years of experience to their jobs every day. ...

It is hard to imagine what 2021 will bring, after the disorienting changes and challenges of 2020. But we will be there for our members and for the essential national institution that is the U.S. Foreign Service.

“A Moment of Hope and Possibility”

by Eric Rubin

January-February 2021, President's Views

Let me start by offering my warmest congratulations to President-elect Joe Biden, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, and the nominees for senior positions announced to date. There is much to celebrate about our November elections: the largest numerical turnout in U.S. history, the first woman and first woman of color elected vice president, and both domestic and foreign observers confirming a free and fair election.

AFSA is fundamentally nonpartisan and nonpolitical. We do not endorse candidates or political parties. We are committed to representing all our 16,700-plus members, as well as those in the FS community who are not AFSA members. We represent everyone in the entire Foreign Service, regardless of political views.

As both the professional association and labor union for the Foreign Service, AFSA is committed to working constructively with the president Americans have chosen, as well as with his political appointees. I personally have worked for six presidents in the past 35 years and have given all of them my utmost dedication and loyalty. I know that my colleagues in the Foreign Service have done the same. This is who we are, and that is what we do.

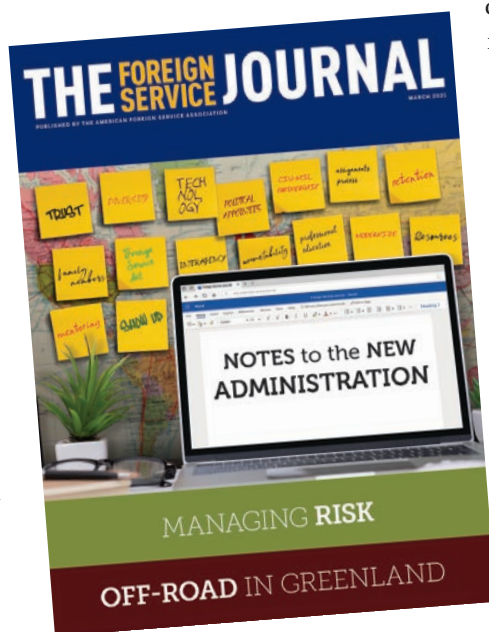
This is a moment of hope and possibility for our Service and for our country's conduct of diplomacy and development. ...

As we welcome the new president and administration later this month, we want them to know that the Foreign Service is determined to help our country succeed and to carry out the policies of the administration to the best of our abilities.

We hope that our most senior colleagues will be entrusted with the positions they have prepared for decades to assume. A healthy mix of political and career appointees is a critical element in making our system work.

Finally, we hope the new administration will accept AFSA's offer to partner with them, and with Congress, to review needed changes to the Foreign Service, with a view toward modernization and reform wherever it is required.

There is much work to be done, and AFSA is ready to do its part. ■



March 2021
FSJ.

Working a Presidential Transition

FIRST-PERSON

ACCOUNTS

**Stories from past presidential transitions,
as told by Foreign Service officers
who worked through them.**

COMPILED BY DANIEL EVENSEN



Daniel Evensen is a Foreign Service officer currently on detail with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. His prior Foreign Service assignments include Shenyang, Ottawa, Beijing, and the Office for Monitoring and Combatting Trafficking in Persons in Washington, D.C.

Throughout the storied history of the U.S. Foreign Service, career diplomats have dealt with periods of political transition with professionalism and flexibility.

The oral history collection managed by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) contains numerous personal accounts of successful transitions told by diplomats who used the transition of power from one administration to another as an opportunity to recommend new initiatives and policy changes that would increase efficiency and fix problems.

From the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to the inauguration of President George W. Bush in 2001, the stories that follow, taken from ADST's archives, demonstrate how skilled Foreign Service officers have used past presidential transitions to advance the work of American diplomacy.

The following excerpts from ADST's oral histories have been lightly edited for clarity. For more fascinating firsthand accounts from practitioners in the field, go to <https://adst.org/oral-history/>.

1961

From Eisenhower to Kennedy: Ambassador Nicholas Veliotes

"Don't Take Anything for Granted"



ABBIE ROWE/WHITE HOUSE

President Dwight D. Eisenhower meets with President-elect John F. Kennedy in the Oval Office, Dec. 6, 1960.

There were two things about the transition that struck me very much.

Kennedy's personal curiosity and his desire to know became clear very early. I remember ... Kennedy sent a query back on why we had recommended he not respond to the congratulatory letter of the East German president. And we were shocked. I was handling Europe at the time in the Secretariat. I mean, how could this guy not know that we don't recognize them, and the consequence of recognizing them, our relationship with West Germany and all of this?

We had a brilliant director of German affairs at the time, Martin Hillenbrand. ... We decided, maybe what the president really needs is just a two-page background on why. ... Kennedy read it and said fine, I understand that. That got everyone knowing that you don't take anything for granted.

The other thing was the nature of the changes that Kennedy brought into the State Department. There was nothing hostile

about them. Whereas the previous executive secretaries had been [mid-level FSOs, Secretary of State Dean] Rusk's executive secretary was [Ambassador] Luke Battle. And clearly the signal was that he, Dean Rusk, was going to put his stamp on the place, and he was going to use the Secretariat as his mechanism. That changed the nature of the job, and you had a much more activist Seventh Floor. ...

There was no hostility involved. ... Certainly the career officers were not hurt. There even was a major effort made to demonstrate nonpartisanship. Bill Macomber, whom everyone confuses with a career officer, was a political appointee of John Foster Dulles, and when the administration ended, Macomber, I believe, was assistant secretary for congressional affairs. The decision was made,

deliberately, to offer Macomber (a clearly identified Republican appointee who had worked very closely with the Eisenhower administration and the previous Secretaries of State) an embassy.

That carried a message that was very positive. Totally different from what [had] happened to [Special Assistant to the Secretary] Luke Battle when the Republicans came in in 1952. He was literally hounded out of the Foreign Service because of his close relationship with Dean Acheson and others. So [in 1961] you had just the opposite of hostility, you had a feeling that these people appreciated us and that they were not going to play a game of witch-hunting against the career officers.

Ambassador Nicholas Veliotes joined the Foreign Service in 1955 and served in the Executive Secretariat during the transition from President Dwight D. Eisenhower to President John F. Kennedy. This oral history interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

1969

From Johnson to Nixon: Donald F. McHenry "Still a Period of Bipartisanship"

In November, right after Nixon was elected, I was sitting in my little office and the phone rang, and it was William Rogers, whom [President Lyndon] Johnson had appointed in 1967 or so as the U.S. representative on the Special Commission on Southwest Africa, and I had been sent off to be his adviser. In any event, in November of 1968, the phone rang, and it was Rogers, saying that Nixon was going to appoint him Secretary of State. Rogers didn't know that many people in the State Department, but he knew me and wanted me to work with him and Dick Pedersen, who later became the ambassador to Hungary, on the transition from Johnson to Nixon. And so I worked on the transition team. I was detailed to the Nixon transition team, ... November, December, and January, 1968-1969. ...

It was still a period of ... bipartisanship in foreign policy. Some of the people were brought back in, like [U. Alexis] Johnson—a career officer who was simply brought back in a higher position in the new administration. Dick Pedersen, who had been up at the United Nations, was brought in. Elliot Richardson, who was an eastern Republican stylistic figure, came down as under secretary of State, the number-two position. I don't think

that there was as much ideology in that transition as we saw, for example, from Carter to Reagan. I say that despite the fact that Nixon made any number of speeches in which he talked about the State Department and that he knew who the good guys were and the bad ones, and that he was going to clean up the place, and so forth. There wasn't that much of that at the time. And, of course, Rogers was really a gentle and decent person, and Richardson was.

What we saw, however, early on, was not the sharks taking over so much as the complete takeover of foreign policy by the White House, specifically by [Henry] Kissinger and the National Security Council staff. And we know that's what Nixon wanted to do. ...

In the transition period, I saw it occurring. I saw those drafts of Nixon's first [National Security Council]. ... And it was very clear to me that they were setting up a structure in which the Secretary of State was going to be frozen out. In fact, I told Secretary Rogers, and he expressed the view that it didn't matter what the bureaucratic structure was, he was going to be Secretary of State, and when he wanted to get to the president, he would.

Foreign Service Officer Donald F. McHenry worked with Secretary William P. Rogers on Southwest Africa, before Rogers was nominated as Secretary of State under incoming President Richard Nixon in 1969. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

1969

From Johnson to Nixon: Benjamin H. Read "Full Disclosure All Around"

I was appointed ... for the transition, so I saw quite a bit of [cooperation with the incoming Nixon administration]. I think it was done quite well. ... It was one of the most civil transitions between parties that had occurred, unlike 1980.

There was very full disclosure, offerings of briefings. [Incoming Secretary of State] Bill Rogers and [outgoing Secretary] Dean Rusk met repeatedly. Unlike Secretary [James] Baker and Secretary [George] Shultz. We gave them an office right on the seventh floor, yards away from the Secretary's office where Bill Leonhart and the under secretary of the Eisenhower period, the famous diplomat Bob Murphy, were putting together the personnel for State. Henry Kissinger had run a Vietnam peace initiative for LBJ, and I knew Henry quite well. I went up to the Hotel Pierre to see him a few times, and I don't think it could

have been handled much more gracefully than it was, although I'm sure there were glitches at different levels.

I didn't see Nixon during this period. I saw some of his staff who became notorious during that time. The State Department's whole transition team was very effective and had entrée anywhere they wanted. They got just as full briefings as they desired. There had been briefings during the campaign of Nixon or his designees. The transition was pretty well done, I think.

Benjamin H. Read was under secretary for management in the late 1970s and worked in the Executive Secretariat during the transition from President Lyndon Johnson to President Richard Nixon. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.



GERALD R. FORD PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

President Gerald Ford and First Lady Betty Ford (at center) with President-elect Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter following the Carters' tour of the White House, Nov. 22, 1976.

1993

From George H.W. Bush to Clinton: Hans Binnendijk

"An Opportune Time to Make Change"

I mentioned that in late 1992 and early 1993, I worked on the transition team. I had some work for the Clinton campaign team, mostly for Madeleine Albright, who was at the time a professor at Georgetown and director of a small think tank that was politically active. During the campaign, one of her functions was to organize a speakers program. I was one of her "stable" and, for example, debated on behalf of Clinton at a forum organized by the Chicago Council for Foreign Relations. When Brian Atwood, whom I had known for several years, was designated to head the transition team for the State Department, he asked me to join him to work on organizational issues, which I did. So I worked for a couple of months on that, together with Dan Spiegel—another old friend from my Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff days.

I found working on the transition team very stimulating because we had the sense that ... the time was opportune to effect some change. It is hard to change organizations after an administration has been established—short of cataclysms such as the recent forced amalgamations of foreign affairs agencies. But in transition, we could begin with a relatively fresh page and suggest some changes. I found it stimulating to think about the department's organization and consider various ways to increase its efficiency. Spiegel and I wrote a series of reports, which were incorporated into briefing books for Warren Christopher, the new Secretary. We briefed Christopher several times, and a number of decisions were made based on our recommendations.

We reinvigorated the under secretarial system by assigning to each under secretary responsibility for certain bureaus. ... We suggested that in response to practices that had grown up under Baker—he would bring in five or six people every morning, without regard to official roles that these people played, and make policy right then and there in this informal group. Our view was that such practice would probably continue under any Secretary; any Secretary would convene a small group of personal advisers, but we strongly hoped that such a group would include several under secretaries, who were the operating linchpins in the department.

We tried to take a natural behavioral pattern—a small group of advisers—and institutionalize it by including in it a number of

1977

From Ford to Carter: Morris Draper

"Not a Bureaucratic Exercise"

There was some change. The transition of administrations was managed by Phil Habib, who stayed on as under secretary for political affairs. That made for a very smooth transition. It was also exciting because, as is customary, we prepared transition papers on every country and every issue. On the Middle East, around Christmas time—that is after the election, but before inauguration—we had reason to believe that the Secretary of State-designate and probably Carter himself had looked over our papers and were considering a major initiative. If historians ever examine these transition papers, they will find that the quality was very high.

Moreover, we were encouraged by Habib to be imaginative and not to prepare the papers just as a bureaucratic exercise. I remember the period quite vividly because I submitted a paper early on the Lebanon problem, which Habib circulated to the bureaus as a model of what he wanted in terms of the thrusts and options. So there was a lot of excitement in the Near East Bureau at the time, which may not have been shared by others.

Of course, Carter was also introducing other concepts into our foreign policy, like the emphasis on human rights.

Ambassador Morris Draper spent 35 years in the Foreign Service, including as deputy assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

officials responsible for the day-to-day activities of the department. We recommended the creation of an additional under secretary—for global affairs—and in general tried to strengthen the role of the under secretaries by having them frequently in touch with the Secretary, which would allow them to serve as conduits for his or her wishes to the department’s bureaucracy. That didn’t work out quite as well as we had hoped, but it was probably better than the Baker system. The problem was that some of the under secretaries did not connect well enough with the bureaus and the assistant secretaries often felt cut out.

We recommended some other changes. The one which probably had the greatest impact on the bureaucracy was to radically cut the number of deputy assistant secretary (DAS) positions—about 40 percent. The idea was to try to reduce a top-heavy bureaucratic structure and increase the responsibilities of office directors. We found that a number of deputy assistant secretaries were essentially glorified office directors. By reducing the number of DAS positions, we hoped to strengthen the role of the office directors. I think that worked; the number of DASEs were cut substantially, although I have recently noticed that the number is creeping up again.

I found my work on the transition team to be interesting and fruitful, with an immediate and visible payoff for our recommendations.

Hans Binnendijk served on the transition team for incoming President Bill Clinton as a political appointee. He is currently a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council and an adjunct political scientist at the RAND Corporation. This interview was conducted by Thomas Stern in 1996.

2001

From Clinton to George W. Bush: Marc Grossman “What Is Your Plan?”

In the fall of 2000, [Langhorne] Tony Motley—who had been ambassador to Brazil, an assistant secretary for Secretary [George] Shultz, and was a mentor of mine (he was always asking me if I was thinking about things in the right way)—called me up and said, “Marc, are you thinking about the next Secretary of State?”

... He said: “You need to think about numbers. The next Secretary of State is going to sit down with you and he or she is going to say, ‘Where are all of my senior officers?’ You need to know,

‘Who are my senior officers? Where are all my junior officers?’” In other words, that person is going to want all this data sliced and diced in dozens of different ways.

Also, he asked me: “What is your plan? What do you want? What do you need?”

I got the “skunk works” folks in, and this effort was led by Bill Eaton. I said: “We have six weeks to figure this out, so go away and think about all the questions you would ask if you were the new Secretary of State and then let us get them answered, statistically and with lists; let us just really do this up. And then let us think up something to ask the new Secretary for.”

So Bill and Maureen [E.] Quinn came back after a while, and they did a fantastic job on the numbers. I had been reading that military units have a 15 percent personnel float for training and transit, so that every military unit is only really staffed up if there is 15 percent on top of whatever they have in the unit. I said, “Why not us, why can’t we do that?”

I asked everybody in personnel, and I said: “Think about this. What would 15 percent be? Could we recruit that many new people if we had the money? Over what period of time? Does FSI have room to train them?” We worked on this, and we came up with the numbers, and then President Bush 43 was elected, and Colin Powell was named Secretary of State. And I said: “Lucky us, here is the person who will understand this.”

We put together a really good presentation about why we needed a 15 percent float, and 15 percent for us, total State Department, was just under 1,200 people. We made a budget, imagined a timeline. And so, thanks to Tony Motley’s call and some very creative work by the bureau, we were set.

Just before Christmas of 2000, I was in the car with a bunch of kids in the back seat, and we were going through the Christmas light show at Bull Run Park. So all these kids are in the back seat and we are driving through the park, and the phone rings. It’s the Ops Center; it’s Colin Powell. I tell the kids to be quiet.

He gets on the line, and he says: “I am coming to State tomorrow. Give me a few hours to get settled in my office, and then I will come call on you, because I would like the first person I call on to be the director of personnel. Are you ready?”

I said: “Yes sir, I am ready. But I have something to say.” “What?” he asked.

I said: “I will come call on you. ... Because if you come to call on me there will be a riot on the Sixth Floor, and it would be disrespectful to Secretary Albright.” And he said, “Okay, come see me.”

The next afternoon I went down to see then Secretary-Designate Powell in the transition suite. I introduced myself and he started to ask me questions. He asked me all the questions



WHITE HOUSE PHOTO OFFICE

President Bill Clinton and President-elect George W. Bush shake hands during their meeting in the Oval Office, Dec. 19, 2000. Inset: President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell at a National Security Council meeting on Sept. 12, 2001.



WHITE HOUSE PHOTO OFFICE

Tony Motley said he was going to ask me, and, thanks to Tony and the HR team, I had the answers. At the end, he said: “So, what could I do for you? What would really show the people here something really great, something fantastic?”

... I pulled out my slides on the float, which I called the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative. I pitched him, and he said, “First of all, I have to tell you I hate the name ‘diplomatic readiness.’” I said, “I do not care what you call it, actually, if you give me 1,200 people.” And he said, “We will have to think about the name.”

I said: “You are going to testify to the need for readiness. Who better to testify about the need for readiness than the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs?”

He said: “I hate the name, but the substance is great. I commit to you, right this afternoon, that we will get these 1,200 people over three years.”

I said: “Really?”

He said: “You have my word.”

And that is what started the DRI (because in the end he could not think of a better name, and I could not think of a

better name), which has been pursued so successfully by my successors, Bob Pearson and Ruth Davis, with strong support from Under Secretary for Management Grant Green. We hired just under 1,200 people in three years. Of course, as we sit here today, we still do not have a 15 percent float for training and transit because most of those people were taken up in Afghanistan and Iraq. But we had the people. ■

Ambassador Marc Grossman served as Director General and Director of Human Resources when George W. Bush was elected president. He is currently vice chairman of The Cohen Group and was the 2024 winner of AFSA's Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

MANAGEMENT MATTERS

New Tools for Middle Managers at State

The Bureau of Global Talent Management has new tools to improve management practices.

BY SARAH WARDWELL AND JEAN AKERS

Being a good manager isn't something that's necessarily innate. It requires a set of skills that you develop over time—and these skills apply to any FS member in a supervisory position. You must be willing to take risks, make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, ask for feedback, be vulnerable, and keep trying. A study by Torch Leadership Labs shows that good managers can increase employee performance by 25 percent or more and retention by 40 percent.



Sarah Wardwell is a consular-coned Foreign Service officer currently serving in the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) Innovation Unit. She has previously served in Jakarta, Santo Domingo, and Consular Affairs' ICA.



Jean Akers is division chief of GTM's Manager Support Unit. She has previously served overseas in Montreal, Kabul, Phnom Penh, and Curacao, and in Washington, D.C., in the Bureau of Consular Affairs Executive Office, at the Foreign Service Institute, in Consular Affairs' ICA, and in the Bureau of Global Talent Management Office of Career Development and Assignments.

The State Department has a low attrition rate historically—just 4.3 percent for career Foreign Service employees in Fiscal Year 2023, including retirements. But according to the 2022 Department Stay Survey and data from both exit surveys and exit interviews, poor supervisory practices are a top driver of regrettable attrition. In 2023 the department fell to 14 out of 17 in the Partnership for Public Service Best Places to Work rankings (which are calculated based on Federal Employment Viewpoint Surveys). These statistics highlight the tremendous opportunity the department has to increase engagement and satisfaction in our agency by improving the support offered to managers across the Service.

The up-or-out system of the Foreign Service encourages employees to move quickly from individual contributor to manager, perhaps before they fully understand what is expected of them as managers. In the absence of clear, consistent, and specific guidance, new managers wing it, often unsuccessfully, reverting to what worked well for them as an individual contributor and ultimately cementing bad habits over time. Recently, however, several new tools have been added to the Bureau of Global Talent Management's resources available to all employees who want to improve their skills as managers.

Journey to Unleash Manager Potential

The Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) launched JUMP, the Journey to Unleash Manager Potential, in September 2024. This first-of-its-kind effort to support first-time and middle managers is based on extensive literature reviews, focus groups, survey data analysis, and ideas submitted to GTM's Innovation Portal. JUMP offers a compendium of on-demand learning resources to enhance managerial skills—including a self-service, 360-degree feedback tool—and provides tips and tools to help managers more effectively use their time. Each component of JUMP was designed to meet a need directly articulated by the workforce.

JUMP support starts with a letter from the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources (D-MR) outlining the department's expectations of managers and providing links to all JUMP components. The letter sets both new and seasoned managers up for success by explaining their job requirements

and outlining skills they should build throughout their career, taking into account both the leadership and management principles and the department's core precepts for promotion. All managers—both new and experienced—are given a copy of that letter. It is not only a good reminder to more experienced managers but also a tool they can use with their own new managers as they coach them and help them craft their individual development plans (IDP).

The letter lists seven aspirational and functional expectations that are linked to a comprehensive compendium of curated training and learning opportunities that meet learners where they are, including Foreign Service Institute (FSI) classes, on-demand Percipio courses, AI simulators, articles from top business journals, videos, and podcasts. (See box below for a comprehensive list of resources.) JUMP resources are categorized both topically and thematically under these seven areas of focus to help make manager development straightforward and

JUMP into Manager Development is linked on the GTM intranet homepage. The following tools can be found at the JUMP link:

- **Department Expectations of Managers: Letter to Managers.** This letter outlines seven aspirational benchmarks and functional expectations for managers, and links directly to JUMP tools.
- **Manager Learning Resources: Compendium of Learning Content.** The compendium contains nearly 500 thematically organized resources for managerial growth and development.
- **LIFTool.** This automated, self-service tool helps managers seek feedback on a skill area they want to further develop and to obtain “nudges” of relevant learning materials in the months following their use of the tool.
- **Meeting Cost Estimator.** This interactive tool helps employees rethink who needs to be in a meeting and how often they need to hold it (or whether they need to hold it at all).
- **Workload Analyzer.** This interactive tool allows managers to evaluate how they are spending their time, highlighting whether they have enough capacity for essential managerial tasks like strategic planning, employee development, and self-improvement.
- **Time Saving Tips.** This suite of online resources helps managers reclaim their time.
- **AI for Managers.** Sample generative AI prompts to help managers become more effective and efficient.

[The JUMP letter] is not only a good reminder to more experienced managers but also a tool they can use with their own new managers as they coach them and help them craft their individual development plans.

accessible. These resources can be used as part of the 40 hours of annual learning time endorsed by the department’s 2023 Learning Policy. GTM plans to expand this compendium of learning based on employee feedback.

360-Degree Feedback Tool

To design the LIFTool (Leveraging Individual Feedback Tool), team members from the Innovation Unit met with the developers of existing feedback tools and discovered a self-service, 360-degree feedback tool had been developed by Deputy Director to the American Institute of Taiwan Jeremy Cornforth and had already been tested with more than 100 colleagues. The GTM team used his tool as a base for theirs.

The LIFTool takes five minutes to use and can be deployed on demand. The manager selects just one area they want to work on from the list of areas outlined in the expectations letter. The manager can send a feedback request to any of their colleagues. Besides sending feedback to the manager, the tool will send the manager a series of nudge emails that include a few tailored learning resources to help develop their skills and knowledge in the selected area.

Feedback is anonymous and won’t be incorporated into any performance management or bidding considerations. It is up to managers themselves to act on the feedback they receive. FSI’s coaching program can also help managers integrate and act on this feedback.



The advertisement features the AFSPA logo (American Foreign Service Protective Association) and the word "Explore" in a script font. Below this is a photograph of a family of four (a woman, a man, and two children) sitting on the floor and holding up a large cardboard box. A blue button at the bottom left contains the URL afspa.org/aip. On the right side, there are six benefit categories, each with an icon and a brief description:

- Dental**: AFSPA offers four dental plans to meet the needs of our worldwide membership - Cigna International, Cigna HMO, Cigna PPO, and Dominion National.
- Tax Consulting**: AFSPA offers members a complimentary 20-minute consultation for all your tax questions and a 10% discount on standard hourly rates.
- Members of Household**: Health coverage designed for family members – this includes domestic partners, parents, and dependent children who accompany the employee overseas, but who do not qualify for coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB).
- Group Term Life Insurance**: AFSPA's policy offers a term life insurance that provides you and your family protection up to \$600,000. It allows early access to a portion of your benefits to use towards chronic and terminal illness.
- Financial/Retirement/Long Term Care Planning**: AFSPA members receive retirement analysis and long term care guidance.
- Discount Care Programs**: AFSPA offers a three-in-one package discount plan for purchase. It includes savings on dental, vision, and LASIK. (For U.S. members only)

Some restrictions apply.

According to the 2022 Department Stay Survey and data from both exit surveys and exit interviews, poor supervisory practices are a top driver of regrettable attrition.

Beyond JUMP

Managers across industries complain that administrative tasks—particularly meetings and emails—eat up time that could be spent engaging their teams. As therapist and writer Nedra Glover Tawwab says: “Efficiency and time management are excellent skills to learn, but when you have too much to do, they won’t help. Sometimes you need to unload your plate instead of making everything fit.”

To help managers take back their time, the Innovation Unit compiled resources from across the State Department, including a toolkit and game developed by Foreign Service Officer Amy Storrow, who completed an Una Chapman Cox sabbatical fellowship studying how to improve team meetings in the department. The Innovation Unit also created interactive tools that help managers shift the way they think about their time, including a meeting cost estimator to help managers reframe the value of their (and their colleagues’) time and a workload analyzer to visualize where their time goes.

JUMP is just one component of broader GTM efforts to develop and support managers, which include GTM’s popular “Managing Partner” newsletter, its quarterly webinar series “Aspiring Managers,” and the Manager Support Unit (MSU).

The Manager Support Unit

The MSU was launched in March 2020 with the mandate to offer supervisors real-time, practical advice on effectively managing and mitigating detrimental performance and conduct issues. Nearly five years later, the unit has provided advice to roughly 5,000 Foreign and Civil Service managers about more than 2,500 employee situations; conducted training and outreach to more than 12,000 managers and human resources professionals; and created an internal landing page with tools,

Straight from the Source is the *FSJ* space for the foreign affairs agencies to inform the FS community about new policies or innovations in operations. Please send your feedback as letters to journal@afsa.org or comment on *FSJ* LinkedIn.

resources, and templates that is accessed by dozens of department professionals each week.

MSU has evolved from a temporary office to a fully established division within GTM’s Office of Employee Relations that advises overseas and domestic managers on every type of conduct and performance issue. While the nature of cases fluctuates from month to month, one theme remains constant: Managers around the globe are eager for guidance. Most managers recognize the corrosive effect that poor performance and misconduct have when left unaddressed, and they’re looking for advice on how to tackle the issues and, ideally, correct the behavior.

Middle managers represent the bulk of supervisors who approach the MSU, but senior officials also seek support. Even the most seasoned managers encounter situations they’re not sure how to handle, and as they undertake challenging discussions with team members, they need support and affirmation—and they need to be sure they are acting in accordance with department guidance.

After one call for advice in 2024, a manager wrote: “Since we spoke, I have had a series of difficult but productive conversations with the employee. ... They want to improve, and I am now following up conversations in writing, which has been helpful. In addition to your suggestions, it was immensely helpful to learn that my situation is not uncommon and to receive your support in helping this employee succeed.”

In years past, many managers didn’t know where to turn for guidance, but feedback to the MSU indicates that’s no longer the case. At a recent workshop for deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers, nearly every participant raised their hand when asked if they’d heard of the MSU, and most confirmed they had consulted with the MSU on a personnel issue.

A Judgment-Free Zone

A phrase many participants in MSU training hear is: “The MSU is a judgment-free zone.” Holding employees accountable is one of the toughest things managers need to learn. MSU staff does not judge struggling managers. Instead, they see themselves as a pillar of support during difficult conversations.

The MSU’s unofficial tagline is: “Have you spoken with the employee?” This simple question conveys the fundamental

Nearly five years later, the unit has provided advice to roughly 5,000 Foreign and Civil Service managers about more than 2,500 employee situations.

responsibility of managers to their team members: to communicate expectations clearly, provide regular feedback on how an employee is doing, and let the employee know their manager supports their ongoing development. The good news is that MSU advisers are asking this question less frequently. Many managers seeking MSU support have already done initial counseling, and now they are looking for advice on next steps.

The Work Continues

JUMP was officially launched alongside the Retention Plan in September 2024. There's still much to be done to help middle managers reach their full potential and shift the culture inside

the department. GTM's Innovation Unit is currently partnering with FSI to create a game that can help managers further develop their skills; FSI is piloting a new course to help first-time managers make the jump; and the department continues to increase the number of coaches available to provide individualized support.

The Innovation Unit is always looking for new ideas to support managers and our workforce, and it welcomes input through the Innovation Portal. Department employees have already submitted more than 3,800 ideas through the Innovation Portal, and a small team of Civil Service and Foreign Service staff within the unit reads and reviews every submission. ■

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COURTESY OF DACOR

DACOR Bacon House Turns 200

Special 2025 programs mark the bicentennial of this historic gathering place for discussions of international affairs.

BY J. THOMAS BRANNAN



J. Thomas Brannan serves on the Board of Governors at DACOR and is a member and former chair of DACOR's Public Outreach Committee, which oversees undergraduate and graduate mentoring programs at the University of the District of Columbia and the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Prior to his teaching career, he worked in city management, regional planning, and journalism.

Prior to his teaching career, he worked in city management, regional planning, and journalism.

In 1861, the DACOR Bacon House, the red-brick mansion perched at the corner of 18th and F Street, NW, in Washington, D.C., played host to a wedding attended by President Abraham Lincoln. In 2025, as the foreign affairs organization DACOR and its sister nonprofit, the DACOR Bacon House Foundation, commemorate the 200th anniversary of the historic DACOR Bacon House, this is just one of the moments they will explore in a series of events, open to the public, showcasing the Federal mansion's place in U.S. history, including American diplomatic history.

Standing just blocks from the State Department, the house represents an ongoing commitment to advancing public under-

The DACOR Bacon House (page opposite), home of the foreign affairs organization DACOR, at 1801 F Street NW, Washington, D.C.

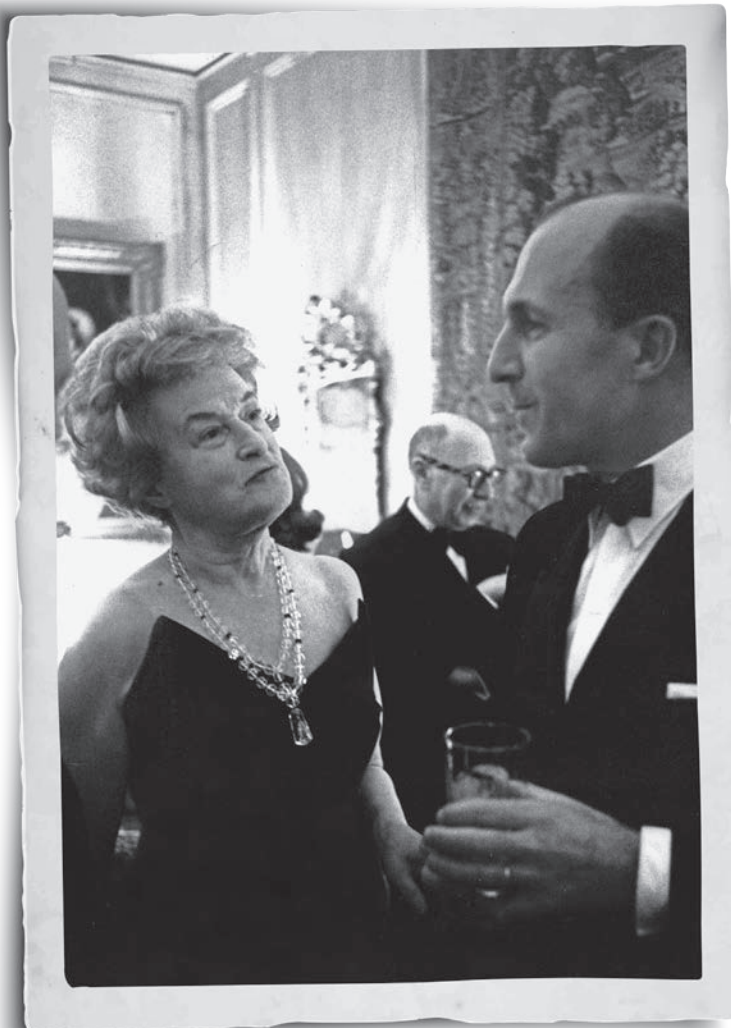
standing of diplomacy and support for current and future generations of the U.S. Foreign Service. It is known for the international scope of its programs and the hospitality it offers to members and guests. Indeed, the mandate of the DACOR Bacon House is to serve as an intellectual gathering place for the discussion of international affairs among DACOR's 1,700 members and by the many organizations that support and use the house.

"We are proud to share the DACOR Bacon House with the larger foreign affairs community," says Angela Dickey, president of DACOR and the DACOR Bacon House Foundation, and a retired State Department Foreign Service officer. "Many of us in the Foreign Service received our first exposure to diplomatic courtesies and hospitality in this house. We are extremely fortunate to have inherited this incomparable setting, where we can bring together in community individuals who are devoting their lives and careers to international understanding and impact."

Who Was Virginia Murray Bacon?

The redbrick mansion takes its present name from the last private owner of the house, Virginia Murray Bacon, one of the few female members of DACOR in its early days, who upon her death in 1980 donated the property to a foundation honoring the memory of her late husband, Congressman Robert Low Bacon. In 1985 the Bacon and DACOR foundations merged to create the DACOR Bacon House Foundation, bringing to fruition Mrs. Bacon's dream of creating a venue for promoting diplomacy and international understanding. In the 40 years since the house was acquired by the foundation, DACOR members have underwritten the cost of its preservation, made it accessible to mobility impaired members and guests, and invited other diplomacy-focused organizations to make use of it in accord with Mrs. Bacon's wishes.

"Mrs. Bacon came from a long line of socially and politically powerful women who owned DACOR Bacon House from its earliest days," says DACOR historian Dr. Terry Walz. "Her predecessors were the wives of the U.S. marshal for the District of Columbia, the clerk of the Supreme Court, and the chief justice of the United States. What makes Virginia unusual among them was her interest in the wider world and her unstinting support for the arts."



COURTESY OF DACOR. FRAME: ISTOCK.COM/VIKTAR KUZNETSOV

Virginia Bacon at her home with Claude Lebel, of the French embassy in Washington, D.C., in March 1962. Mrs. Bacon used her social graces to foster the international understanding to which she was so committed.

She arrived in Washington after her husband, Robert Low Bacon, was elected to Congress in 1922, representing New York's solidly Republican 1st District. They easily fit into the Washington political scene. "She was also a political activist, world traveler, power hostess, and policy whisperer," says DACOR archivist Elizabeth Warner. "And she was renowned for her ability to bring together the most interesting people in the world to the many salons, dinners, and other events she held for nearly 60 years at 1801 F Street. She treasured the storied history of the house and was adamant that it continue to be a place where people could come together to discuss important issues of the day."



COURTESY OF DACOR

Richard Osborn, a noted cartoonist who was published in *Harper's*, *Fortune*, *Life*, and *The New Republic*, was a good friend of Mrs. Bacon. He frequented many events at her home and often gave her drawings depicting her social life and friendships.

The Original Owners

The original owner of the four-story house, garden, and outer buildings, U.S. Marshal Tench Ringgold, bought the site and used slave labor to build the original house in 1824-1825. Ringgold hosted Supreme Court members during two of the court's terms, in the winters of 1832 and 1833. Among the justices residing at the house was Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall, who had earlier (1800-1801) served as Secretary of State under President John Adams. Ringgold was appointed the U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia by President James Monroe and reappointed by President John Quincy Adams.

The house was purchased in 1835 by Governor Samuel Sprigg of Maryland for his daughter Sally Sprigg, who married William Thomas Carroll, then the Clerk of the Supreme Court. During her stewardship, Mrs. Carroll rented her home to the Russian Imperial Minister to Washington Nikolai Shishkin (1875-1878); it served as a background for glittering social and diplomatic receptions. Following Mrs. Carroll's death, the house was purchased in 1896 by Mary Ellen Fuller, wife of Chief Justice Melville Fuller, who resided in the house for 14 years, entertaining the justices on Saturdays as they discussed future cases.

After Justice Fuller's death in 1910, the house was sold to Alice Copley Thaw, the divorced Countess of Yarmouth, who rented the house to Illinois Senator Medill McCormick and

his wife, Ruth Hanna McCormick. This was the period when Republican Senator McCormick fought against the acceptance of the Treaty of Paris and U.S. participation in the League of Nations. After the death of Sen. McCormick in 1925, the house was sold again, this time to Congressman Bacon and his wife, Virginia. In contrast with the isolationist McCormick, Virginia Bacon was a fierce advocate for U.S. leadership and official acceptance of the principle of multilateralism as embodied in the United Nations.

Today, the exterior of the home is protected by an easement from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, ensuring its architectural integrity. As DACOR is a historic site and museum, its operation is supported by committed DACOR volunteers, docents, donors to the foundation, and the many foreign affairs groups who meet at the house, including the American Foreign Service Association, the American Academy of Diplomacy, the Women's Foreign Policy Group, the USAID Alumni Association, the Association of Black American Ambassadors, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and others.

2025 Bicentennial Program of Events at the House

The theme of the 2025 bicentennial programs at DACOR Bacon House is the formative role that its residents played in promoting public understanding of the importance of diplomacy and development to the nation's security and prosperity,



COURTESY OF DACOR

Over the years, the house has regularly hosted foreign affairs luminaries. Secretary of State George Shultz, a DACOR member, was the principal speaker at the dedication ceremony for the organization's move to the DACOR Bacon House on May 23, 1986 (above). His Excellency Laurent Bili, French ambassador to the U.S., keynoted an August 2024 celebration marking the anniversary of the Marquis de Lafayette's 1824-1825 return visit to America. Bili recounted the history of U.S.-French relations since the two nations' alliance during the American Revolution.



COURTESY OF DACOR

the advancement of U.S. foreign policy goals, and the spread of democratic values. During its 200 years, the mansion has served as a meeting place for government officials, politicians, legislators, judges, and leading cultural and society elites. It has been a setting for discussions and policymaking on the country's legal system, U.S. foreign policy, and, since the Rogers Act of 1924, the modernization of America's diplomatic corps.

The bicentennial series was preceded by a public forum in June 2024, which celebrated the anniversary of the Rogers Act and the creation of the modern U.S. Foreign Service. In August, the house hosted the French ambassador at a gala celebrating the 200th anniversary of the 1824-1825 return visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to the United States and the important role played in that visit by U.S. Marshal Ringgold. The series continued during the fall with a November dinner charting two centuries of change in the "President's Neighborhood," including a discussion of how private residences were replaced by hotels and government office buildings.

The series will continue with a luncheon program on March 19 devoted to the social history of other historic Washington houses, including the Ringgold residence.

An April 10 dinner program will focus on the house as the Carroll family experienced it during the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln and Mrs.

Lincoln came to the house for the 1861 wedding of a Carroll daughter, Sally.

Two Carroll sons served in the Federal Army during the war. The family's oldest son, Samuel Sprigg Carroll, rose to the rank of brigadier general.

A luncheon program on May 14 will explore the role of Mrs. Bacon as a hostess at gatherings of the city's power brokers. Even after her husband's death in 1938, Mrs. Bacon was renowned as one of the "Three B's"—a trio of Washington salonnières, including hostesses Marie Beale of Decatur House and Mildred Barnes Bliss

of Dumbarton Oaks. During the mid-20th century, the three women presided over the city's social scene, hosting events that brought together political and cultural leaders.

On June 10, DACOR will host an evening event, a 200th birthday party in the house's half-acre garden. And in December, the yearlong celebration of the house will conclude with a Christmas musicale embracing the Victorian and modern music-making eras at the house. Virginia Bacon was an important patron of the arts in Washington, D.C., and played a prominent role in enlisting government support for the creation of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Information about the 2025 DACOR Bacon House bicentennial programs can be found on the DACOR calendar of events, <https://tinyurl.com/4fax8dy6>. ■

Call for Nominations: 2025-2027 AFSA Governing Board



Volunteering to serve on the AFSA Governing Board means that you can represent your colleagues and help ensure that the voice of the Foreign Service is heard on the Hill and around the country. You will participate in the management and modernization of a multimillion-dollar organization with a large staff and real impact in Washington, D.C., including helping to secure congressional funding for the U.S. Foreign Service, working to tell the story of diplomacy to our fellow Americans, and ensuring that all members of the Foreign Service are treated with fairness.

If this sounds like something you would be proud to do, please consider joining the next AFSA leadership team by running for a position on the 2025-2027 AFSA Governing Board. The Committee on Elections encourages members of all backgrounds to consider running; diversity is a core strength of any governing body.

Note: AFSA does not directly recruit candidates for elected office and relies on members to volunteer for this important duty. We encourage all those interested in running to read our bylaws, AFSA's foundational documents, at <https://afsa.org/bylaws>.

Election Call
Election of AFSA Officers and Constituency Representatives

This election call, issued in accordance with Article VII(2)(a) of the AFSA bylaws, constitutes a formal notice to all AFSA members of the opportunity to participate in the nomination and election of a new Governing Board.

Call for Nominations Available Positions

The following positions will be filled in this election:

- Officers**
- President
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Vice President for State
 - Vice President for USAID
 - Vice President for FCS
 - Vice President for FAS
 - Vice President for Retirees

- Constituency Representatives**
- Full-time State Representative (1)
 - State Department Representatives (5)
 - USAID Representative (1)
 - Alternate FCS Representative (1) *
 - Alternate FAS Representative (1) *
 - USAGM Representative (1) *
 - APHIS Representative (1) *
 - Retired Member Representatives (2)

These positions have two-year terms beginning July 15, 2025. AFSA bylaws require that Governing Board members participate via attendance at regularly scheduled meetings of the board within 60 days of taking office on July 15 or appointment to office thereafter. While in-person attendance is required for all (except the four positions marked with an asterisk above), Governing Board members may participate virtually two (2) times in any 12-month period.

The four positions marked with an asterisk (*) can be fully virtual (i.e., the Board mem-

CALENDAR

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

January 15
 12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

February 19
 12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

March 19
 12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

bers encumbering those positions may serve from anywhere in the world, provided they attend Board meetings virtually as required).

The president and State, USAID, FCS, and FAS vice presidents are full-time positions detailed to AFSA. These employees are assigned over complement and are eligible for time-in-class extensions. The active-duty representative positions are not full time, but their incumbents are given a reasonable amount of official time to attend meetings regarding labor-management issues. Governing Board members are required to attend monthly lunchtime board meetings and may volunteer to serve on additional committees. To see position descriptions for all officer

Continued on page 55



Flourishing in Our Career Paths for 2025 and Beyond

**The desire to reach for the stars is ambitious.
The desire to reach hearts is wise.**

—Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou's powerful words ring true in 2025, propelling me into quiet reflection about the Foreign Service career path.

When I joined the Foreign Service, I was not focused on attaining a specific high rank or role. I simply believed I could represent the United States abroad and help sway foreign interlocutors' support for America's values and international norms.

For me, it was always about reaching hearts and minds abroad and a deep commitment to a public service career that would constantly stretch me, build my skills, and strengthen these same skills in my team.

Moment of realization. Something changed, however, when I landed back in Washington, D.C., as a mid-level officer. Having already excelled at senior action officer work, I found intense pressure in the mid-ranks to compete for managerial experiences that would prove we had all the skills to reach the highest levels of the State Department.

Given the needs of my young children, a dual-career household, and elderly parents, I suddenly became the very epitome of the "sandwich" generation.

It became vital for me to unpack this traditional career progression expected of members of the Foreign Service and the job choices we make that cause intended or unintended adjustments to that career path.

The career path on paper. There are many resource guides and tools outlining the generic Foreign Service career progression. A search on StateChat's AI Bot found a description of the "structured" path as entry-level/junior officer with directed first- and second-tour assignments.

Then follows a longer period of mid-level assignments both in the field and Washington, D.C., enabling officers to specialize in particular regions and functions (such as China, arms control, emerging technologies, and more) and in a variety of first-time manager roles (such as deputy counselor or senior desk officer).

The next rung of this ladder is the senior level, where employees take on more significant roles such as deputy chief of mission (DCM) or consul general in a small mission, with significant leadership, institution-building, and mentoring responsibilities.

Finally, for the top 1 percent, there is the executive level (or Senior Foreign Service) including DCMs/chargés d'affaires of very large missions and ambassadors.

Off the beaten career path. Whether you are at the entry-, mid-, or senior level, you should give yourself grace and breathing space. It might be wise not to hit the accelerator all the time but find time to pause or slow down.

If 2025 is not the last year (or even last few years) when the promotion boards look at you for promotion to the next level, give yourself ample time to do some strategic, out-of-the-box thinking about your career.

The adoption of cross-functional competency as a sixth area of our promotion criteria is an institutional signal to encourage us to step outside our cone or specialty, or even outside the State Department.

AFSA advocated for our members to shore up a congressionally supported and Department of State resourced 250-person training float. This new personnel policy has translated into an exciting lineup of detail and training opportunities open every summer before the regular bidding cycle.

These include sabbaticals and research fellowships, training in war colleges, interagency assignments, packaged assignments

with one year of study in an academic institution followed up by a two-year D.C.-based assignment, congressional fellowships, and details to multilateral organizations.

A senior mentor once told me they tried at least one of these opportunities at every level to broaden their skill sets and expand their networks.

Taking other career risks. Take control of your career in 2025. If none of these outside opportunities appeal to you right now, do not get discouraged.

Explore a job share in the State Department while taking care of family or other self-care needs.

Read more about leave without pay (LWOP) options that will allow you to work in the private or nongovernmental sector. As part of the LWOP approval process, check in with the Office of Ethics and Financial Disclosure to ensure there are no conflicts of interest with the State Department.

Set a "timer" for when you might want to come back to State and under what conditions. I know several employees who took LWOP, returned, got promoted, and are thriving. You can do this.

Write to me at wong@afsa.org if you have any questions or want to talk about this career journey. ■



Why USAID?

You'd think after 21 years my relatives would get it, but every year over pumpkin pie, the same questions are asked: Who do you work for? What do you do? Why should my tax dollars pay for this?

Today, answering these questions is even more important. Not just for family, but because with a new administration, we all need to be able to explain the important work we do at USAID.

Who do you work for?

The Foreign Service officers (FSOs) of the U.S. Agency for International Development represent the U.S. government and its citizens overseas to foreign governments and their people. At USAID, more than 1,900 career FSOs and 500 noncareer officers are working alongside nearly 8,000 other employees in more than 150 countries, implementing the president's foreign and development policy, regardless of party or individual political affiliation.

Why should I pay? We get results. With an annual budget of less than 1 percent of the total federal budget, USAID supports expanding economic opportunities led by the private sector, countering the growing threat of Chinese expansion, and increasing opportunities for local community groups and faith-based organizations to design and participate in activities that support their growth, to name a few. Our work makes the U.S. safer,

expands economic opportunities for U.S. businesses, and promotes U.S. values abroad.

Supporting private sector-led opportunities.

In Fiscal Year 2023, USAID mobilized \$2.1 billion in private sector investment. The recently concluded INVEST project, for instance, was begun in 2017 and, with \$101 million in USAID seed funding, mobilized more than \$1.6 billion from private sector investors. According to the 2024 INVEST Final Report, this was a more than 15:1 return.

Additionally, in FY23, other USAID investments increased annual agriculture sales by \$5.7 billion, improving access to food and raising food security for some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Our private sector-driven investments create and expand markets for U.S. companies, increase jobs that can lower illegal migration to the U.S., and raise food security in countries experiencing damaging natural disasters, lowering the need for costly humanitarian assistance.

Limiting Chinese influence. With our partners in the State Department and other U.S. agencies, USAID is engaged in supporting countries staving off the growing economic influence and power of China in the Indo-Pacific region, a vital U.S. economic and security

USAID investments increased annual agriculture sales by \$5.7 billion.

interest. Our program aims to enhance economic ties between the United States and region governments, support efforts to improve government capacity, and bolster regional security and stability.

Expanding partnerships with local and faith-based partners. While our private sector partnerships are helping significantly scale up our efforts, we also work closely with local community and faith-based organizations, which are well placed to reach rural communities and underserved populations.

Currently, about 10 percent of USAID funding is through local organizations. In Africa, more than 20 percent of USAID funding goes to local and faith-based organizations. Plans are for 50 percent of USAID funding to be implemented by local groups by 2030, an ambitious but achievable target that will help us reach more people, do more, lower costs, and improve the image of the U.S. overseas, according to the USAID Localization Report for FY23.

But the cost ... The USAID FY 25 budget request is \$28.3 billion, or \$7/month per capita, according to the FY25 Congressional Budget Justification. With this funding, in

addition to the above, USAID investments will reduce food insecurity, promote global health security, improve literacy and access to primary education for children, strengthen communities' ability to respond to and recover from natural disasters, and increase the adoption of digital technologies.

Finally, what makes USAID great is our inherent ability to adapt and respond to an ever-changing world. The agency I joined in 2004 is not the agency of 2025. We have changed the way we do business, incorporating lessons learned from engaging with the private sector and adopting innovative financing models.

We've expanded opportunities to develop, promote, and utilize pioneering technologies and information and communication technology (ICT) tools, shifted focus toward empowering local communities, and strengthened measures to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse while maintaining oversight of U.S. taxpayer funds.

We are a vital tool supporting any president's foreign policy agenda, and, at all times, we act with the highest professional standards to ensure its implementation and success. ■



Toward a Culture of Dissent

Ever since I realized that as the new AFSA VP for the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) I'd have the opportunity to opine publicly on a topic of my choice, I kept circling back to "dissent," which I believe is essential for healthy societies and institutions of all types.

I also believe AFSA's awards for constructive dissent by members of the Foreign Service, State's Open Forum, and the Dissent Channel all send a powerful signal that an open exchange of views is a net positive for U.S. foreign affairs.

It will come as no surprise to my FAS colleagues or to my new AFSA colleagues that I'm a fan of dissent. I can hold my peace, but I'm not shy about speaking up, let alone disagreeing, more often than most.

Maybe it's my New Jersey upbringing, my need to process ideas aloud (sorry, introverts), or my impatience with perceived inefficiency and inconsistency—I may also just be an arrogant crank.

Without elevating arrogance to a virtue, I think a justifiable sliver of arrogance is in all dissent. It is brassy to suggest: I've got a better read on this situation; I'm seeing something I think you're missing; or I've got a better path forward.

If accumulated knowledge and experience leads to that kind of thought, however, then I hope all of us would

voice that dissent with an openness to opposing views.

I'd like to see more regular exchanges of opposing views at post. But I'm concerned that the reason we don't see more dissent is because the culture we have built—and in which we operate as foreign affairs professionals—is not as supportive of dissent as it should be.

Some people don't feel comfortable disagreeing at all, and that's a personal trait our professional culture is unlikely to overcome. But some of us fear we wouldn't be supported by our agencies or by our supervisory chain if we offer a dissenting view.

Others don't believe their dissent would meaningfully move a conversation or a policy in a different direction. These latter explanations reflect a corrosive lack of trust and apathy among my colleagues that I can't accept.

For me, dissent is like my yogic practice, and I try to cultivate dissent among those with whom I serve—direct reports, peers, and supervisors alike. True, it makes me feel like less of a crank when others speak up alongside me. But I also advocate for dissent because I believe it makes my agency a better organization and a better place to work.

The more we engage in constructive dissent, the more likely we will carry a dissenting skill set into leadership roles where we

have a greater impact on and responsibility in shaping our agency culture.

Even if AFSA members don't avail themselves of formal dissent mechanisms, the established dissent infrastructure contributes to an enabling environment for daily forms of dissent—the kind of dissent that leads not just to better foreign policies but also to better operational policies, and to a healthier discourse among and within our teams.

I'll confess—absolution not guaranteed—that I had been practicing dissent in the Foreign Agricultural Service for nearly two decades before I knew about AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards. And as a lifelong dissenter, I was comforted to learn that an organization I belong to values dissent sufficiently to have established awards for it.

Serving as an AFSA VP, I know that AFSA not only supports dissent but also has my back when I choose to stand up in defense of my views, principles, and informed perspectives.

How, and how often, we choose to dissent is ultimately up to us, but I deeply appreciate the role AFSA plays in promoting a culture of dissent.

Amelia Shaw's September 2015 *FSJ* article, "Deconstructing Dissent," and Sara Berndt and Holly Holzer's December 2023 *FSJ* cover story, "The State Department Dissent Channel: History and Impact," are excellent primers on dissent. Holzer's ABCDs of dissenting well should be required reading for all FSOs and could provide a shortcut around learning humility the hard way. ■

NEWS BRIEF

FSLRB Appointments

Congratulations to the two new members of the Foreign Service Labor Relations Board (FSLRB) appointed on Nov. 4 by FSLRB Chair Susan Tsui Grundmann under procedures prescribed by the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

The three-member board decides labor-management disputes between AFSA and the Foreign Service agencies, including deciding negotiability appeals and appeals of implementation disputes decided by the Foreign Service Grievance Board (FSGB).

The new members are Garber A. Davidson Jr., a retired Foreign Service officer and former chair of the FSGB, for a three-year term, and Cheryl M. Long, a retired judge and former member of the FSGB, for a two-year term.

Davidson and Long replaced outgoing members Amb. (ret.) Dennis K. Hays and Amb. (ret.) Thomas J. Miller. AFSA thanks them all for their service. ■



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and State Vice President Tina Wong met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken on November 21 and thanked him for his support of the Foreign Service and his leadership of the State Department. The meeting was the last of a regular series of meetings between AFSA and the Secretary to discuss issues of concern to Foreign Service members. AFSA looks forward to meeting with the incoming Secretary for the next administration in 2025. ■

(From left) AFSA State Vice President Tina Wong, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi.



AFSA Governing Board Meeting, October 15, 2024

The board accepted the resignation of USAGM representative Steve Herman, effective Oct. 31, 2024.

The board agreed to appoint Gunter “Eric” Schwabe to serve as USAGM representative on the Governing Board, effective Nov. 1, 2024.

The board agreed to appoint Steve Herman to serve on the Committee on Elections, effective Nov. 1, 2024.

The board approved the list of 10 individuals to receive the 2024 Matilda W. Sinclair Awards (see page 72).

The board agreed to adopt a revised investment policy statement.

The board agreed to include an increase in dues of 2.4 percent, effective Jan. 1, 2025, in the FY25 budget that was voted on (see page 72).

The board agreed to a provisional 2.5 percent COLA-linked staff salary adjustment in the AFSA FY25 budget. ■

2025 High School Essay Contest

NEWS BRIEF

AFSA has launched its 2025 National High School Essay Contest, focusing on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. This annual competition challenges students to examine American diplomacy’s role in shaping international relations. The winner receives a full scholarship to a Semester at Sea and a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with U.S. officials at the State Department.

“This contest is a unique opportunity for young Americans to become familiar with the vital work of the U.S. Foreign Service as they reflect on a pivotal moment in our diplomatic history,” said AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi.

Open to all eligible U.S. high school students (excluding children of Foreign Service or AFSA employees), the contest represents AFSA’s commitment to fostering understanding of diplomatic service among the next generation.

Full contest details can be found on AFSA’s website at <https://afsa.org/essay-contest>. ■

Call for Nominations
Continued from page 50

positions, go to <https://afsa.org/board>.

Nomination Procedures

Nominating Candidates

Any AFSA regular member in good standing (i.e., a member whose dues are automatically deducted or who has paid dues as of Feb. 14, 2025) may nominate any person (including self-nomination) for any of the available positions for which the nominee is eligible. The following requirements apply to nominations:

1. No member may nominate more than one person for each officer position, or more than the number of representatives established for each constituency. No member's name may appear on the ballot for more than one position.

2. All nominations must be submitted in writing by letter or email. To be valid, they must, without exception, be received no later than 5 p.m. EST on Feb. 14, 2025. All written nominations must be addressed to the AFSA Committee on Elections, 2101 E Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. Email nominations shall be sent to election@afsa.org.

3. Nominations may be submitted individually or in slates. To qualify as a slate, a proposed slate must have a minimum of four candidates from at least two constituencies. Slate designations will be noted on the ballot.

Qualifications for Governing Board Membership

Individuals meeting the following qualifications are eligible for nomination to one of the available positions:

1. The individual must be an AFSA regular member in good standing as of Feb. 14, 2025, and remain in good standing through the election process and, if elected, for their term of office.

2. The individual must not have a conflict of interest as defined in Section 1017(e) of the Foreign Service Act. Please see the "Conflicts of Interest" section below for more information.

3. Active-duty members presenting themselves as candidate for president or constituency vice president must hold an active security clearance.

4. Retired members presenting themselves as candidate for president, secretary, treasurer, retiree vice president, or retiree representative must have been granted tenure before leaving the Foreign Service. See Article III, Section 2 of the AFSA bylaws.

Conflicts of Interest

Section 1017(e) of the Foreign Service Act restricts employees serving in certain positions within their agencies from participating in labor-management issues while serving on the Governing Board. Management officials and confidential employees, as well as those in positions that may raise or appear to raise a conflict of interest

(as defined below) when the new Governing Board takes office on July 15, may not participate in Governing Board discussion, deliberations, or decisions relating to labor-management issues. They may participate in AFSA Board activities that do not relate to labor-management issues. The Foreign Service Act also imposes a two-year pre- and post-AFSA "cooling off" period on employees who occupied or will occupy positions within their agency that involve labor-management relations or the formulation of personnel policies and programs of a foreign affairs agency.

a. Section 1017(e) of the Act, 22 USC 4117(e) states: "Participation in labor organizations restricted. (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this subchapter (A) participation in the management of a labor organization for purposes of collective bargaining or acting as a representative of a labor organization for such purposes is prohibited under this subchapter (i) on the part of any management official or confidential employee; (ii) on the part of any individual who has served as a management official or confidential employee during the preceding two years; or (iii) on the part of any other employee if the participation or activity would result in a conflict of interest or apparent conflict of interest or would otherwise be incompatible with law or with the official functions of such employee; and (B) ser-

vice as a management official or confidential employee is prohibited on the part of any individual having participated in the management of a labor organization for purposes of collective bargaining or having acted as a representative of a labor organization during the preceding two years. (2) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(A)(ii) and paragraph (1)(B), the term 'management official' does not include (A) any chief of mission; (B) any principal officer or deputy principal officer; (C) any administrative or personnel officer abroad; or (D) any individual described in section 4102(12)(B), (C), or (D) of this title who is not involved in the administration of this subchapter or in the formulation of the personnel policies and programs of the Department."

b. Section 1002 (12), 22 USC 4102(12) of the Act defines a management official as "an individual who: is a chief of mission or principal officer; occupies a position of comparable importance to chief of mission or principal officer; is serving as a deputy to the foregoing positions; is assigned to the Office of the Inspector General; or is engaged in labor-management relations or the formulation of personnel policies and programs of a foreign affairs agency."

c. Section 1002 (6), 22 USC 4102(6) of the Act defines a confidential employee as "an employee who acts in a confidential capacity with respect to an individual who formulates or effectuates

management policies in labor-management relations.” Employees who may have a conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest include those who are “engaged in personnel work in other than a purely clerical capacity” (for example, employees assigned to non-clerical positions within the Global Talent Management Bureau) and “employees engaged in criminal or national security investigations of other employees or who audit the work of individuals to ensure that their functions are discharged honestly and with integrity” (such as employees assigned to DS investigative units or those assigned to the OIG). See Section 1012(1) and (2), 22 USC 4112(1) and (2) of the Foreign Service Act.

As discussed above, the Foreign Service Act precludes these categories of individuals from participating in labor-management issues while serving on the Governing Board.

The Foreign Service Act also imposes a two-year pre- and post- “cooling-off period,” which restricts the movement of Foreign Service employees between certain positions on the AFSA Governing Board and certain Washington-based positions.

Pre-AFSA restrictions:

Any individual who has served: (1) in a management position in Washington in which they have engaged in labor-management relations or the formulation of personnel policies and programs; or

(2) as a confidential employee to one of these management officials within two years prior to taking office in AFSA, is precluded from participating in labor-management issues while serving on the Governing Board.

Post-AFSA restrictions:

Employees who have participated in collective bargaining while serving on the AFSA Governing Board may not serve: (1) in a management position in Washington that involves labor-management relations or the formulation of personnel policies and programs; or (2) as a confidential employee to such management positions, for two years after leaving AFSA. Members should consider these restrictions before deciding whether to run for AFSA Governing Board positions covered by these restrictions.

Please direct questions regarding this issue to Raeka Safai, Deputy General Counsel, by email: safai@afsa.org. All other election-related queries should be addressed to the Committee on Elections by email at election@afsa.org.

In addition to the above, due to AFSA efforts to educate Congress on issues related to Foreign Service conditions of employment, legislative proposals, and other issues directly impacting the Foreign Service, employees serving in congressional fellowships may not serve on the AFSA Governing Board. A conflict of interest exists between their posi-

tion in AFSA and their official duties. AFSA members serving as congressional fellows may run for the AFSA Governing Board provided their fellowship ends before the incoming board takes office on July 15, 2025.

Accepting a Nomination

1. A nominee can indicate their acceptance of a nomination by written response to the Committee on Elections (using the same addresses indicated above under “Nominating Candidates”). Following receipt of nominations, an authorized representative of the Committee on Elections will promptly communicate with each nominee (excluding members who nominate themselves) to confirm their willingness to be a candidate.

Nominees must confirm their acceptance in writing (using the same addresses indicated above under “Nominating Candidates”) to the Committee on Elections no later than 5 p.m. EST on Feb. 21, 2025. Any nominee whose written acceptance of nomination is not received by the Committee on Elections by this time will be considered to have declined candidacy. *Note that self-nominations will be interpreted as an acceptance of candidacy unless the individual specifically declines the nomination.*

2. All candidates accepting a nomination must identify the position or positions they have filled for the past two years prior to accepting the nomination. All candi-

dates not seeking a full-time AFSA position (president, State VP, USAID VP, FCS VP, FAS VP) must also identify the agency position they will be serving in beginning on July 15, 2025, when the Board takes office. This information is necessary to ensure compliance with section 1017(e) of the Foreign Service Act.

Campaigning

1. Campaign Statements.

All candidates will be given the opportunity to submit campaign statements for dissemination to AFSA members with the election ballots. Further information regarding such statements and editorial deadlines will be contained in the “Instructions to Candidates,” which will be posted by the Committee on Elections at www.afsa.org/elections no later than Jan. 15, 2025.

2. Supplementary Statements.

Should candidates wish to mail supplementary statements to the membership, AFSA will make its membership mailing list or address labels available to the candidate upon request and at their expense. Further information on this and other campaign procedures will be included in the “Instructions to Candidates” mentioned above.

3. Other Methods of Communication.

Department of Labor requirements prohibit individuals from using government or employer resources (including email accounts) to campaign for AFSA positions.

Voting

Ballots will be distributed on or about March 31, 2025, to each regular AFSA member as of March 7, 2025. Candidates or their representatives may observe the ballot distribution process if they so desire. Each member may cast one vote for president, secretary, treasurer, and, in addition, one vote for a constituency vice president and each representative position in the member's constituency.

Regular members may cast their votes for candidates listed on the official ballot, or by writing in the name(s) of member(s) eligible as of Feb. 14, 2025, or by

doing both. To be valid, a ballot must be received by 8 a.m. EDT on April 15, 2025, either (i) at the address indicated on the envelope accompanying the ballot or (ii) by online vote. More detailed balloting instructions will accompany the ballots.

Note that the election cycle is 30 days shorter than in previous years, following a bylaw amendment that was approved by AFSA members in 2023. To reflect modern methods of communication and voter participation, the cycle has been altered to the shortest possible allowed by AFSA's bylaws. The voting period is now 15 days.

Vote Counting and Announcement of Results

On or about April 15, 2025, the Committee on Elections will oversee ballot tabulation and declare elected the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes for each position. Candidates or their representatives may be present during the tally and may challenge the validity of any vote or the eligibility of any voter.

The committee will inform candidates individually of the election results by the swiftest possible means and will publish the names of all elected candidates in the next issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

Elected candidates will take office on July 15, 2025, as provided in the bylaws.

The Committee on Elections members and supporting staff members may be reached at election@afsa.org.

Members of the Committee on Elections

Paul Oliva (FCS, chair), Dustin Bradshaw (State), Mort Dworken (retiree), Steve Herman (USAGM), Christine Mumma (FAS).

Staff Members

Ásgeir Sigfússon, Executive Director; Raeka Safai, Deputy General Counsel. ■

APPLY FOR AN AFSA SCHOLARSHIP



Recipients of AFSA's 2024 Merit Award Scholarships with FS Director General Marcia Bernicat and AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi

Nearly \$400,000 in Merit and Financial Aid scholarships will be awarded, in total.

Applications will be accepted starting **December 13, 2024**.

Deadline to apply for Merit Award Scholarships is **March 10, 2025**.

Deadline to apply for Financial Aid Scholarships is **April 18, 2025**.

For more information, visit www.afsa.org/scholar.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | ART MERIT | COMMUNITY SERVICE | FINANCIAL AID

2024 Federal Tax Provisions for the Foreign Service

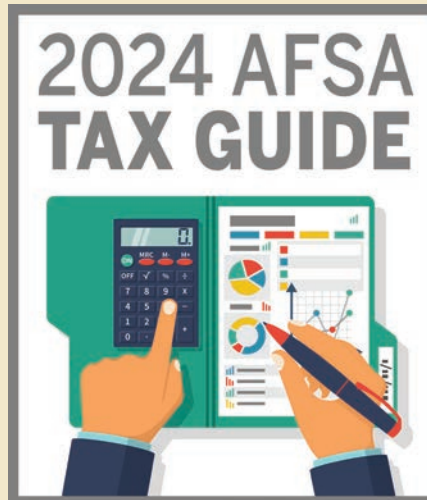
The American Foreign Service Association is pleased to present the 2024 Tax Guide, your first step to self-help for filing 2024 tax returns. This annual guide summarizes many of the tax laws members of the Foreign Service community will find relevant and provides information on tax issues affecting investments in real estate, capital gains, alimony, digital assets, the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion (FEIE), filings related to foreign assets and income, as well as other important topics for 2024 tax returns.

Although we try to be accurate, this article reviews complex tax issues affecting many individuals differently.

Readers should always follow up with IRS product pages for each form and publication mentioned, which are designed as extensions of the PDF versions and instructions. Always check the applicability and “last reviewed” dates of these resources.

Even then, statutes and case law are the only completely authoritative sources. Many credits, deductions, or other calculations (e.g., depreciation, foreign asset reporting, 1031 exchanges) are best done by a competent professional. Consultation with a tax professional for complete answers to specific questions is recommended; readers cannot rely on this article or the IRS website as a justification for their position on a tax return.

The federal section of this tax guide includes few changes from the prior year, because Congress has not passed any significant tax legislation affecting individuals during 2024. The 2024 federal tax section changes include



updates to various tax thresholds for contributions, credits, and deductions and several tax law clarifications, among other updates. AFSA Senior Labor Management Adviser James Yorke (YorkeJ@state.gov), who assists with compiling the tax guide, would like to thank Christine Elsea Mandojana, CPA, CFP® of CEM Global Tax Planning, LLC, and her team for preparing the section on federal tax provisions. Thanks also to Hallie Aronson, Esq., and Shannon Smith, Esq., of Withers Bergman, LLP, for their contributions, particularly regarding foreign accounts and asset reporting.

Filing Deadlines and Extensions

The deadline for filing 2024 individual income tax returns is April 15, 2025. U.S. citizens and resident aliens living outside the United States are allowed an automatic two-month extension for filing and paying federal taxes to June 16, 2025. To qualify for the June 16 automatic extension, a taxpayer must meet the following requirements: (1) on the regular tax return due date, the taxpayer is living outside of, and their main place of business or post is outside of, the United States and Puerto Rico (or the taxpayer is in the military or Naval Service on duty outside the United States or Puerto Rico); and (2) the taxpayer attaches a statement to the tax return specifying their qualifications for this automatic extension. Taxpayers claiming the extension should also write “taxpayer abroad” at the top of Form 1040.

An additional extension to Oct. 15, 2025, may be obtained by filing Form 4868. Certain taxpayers claiming the Foreign

2024 Digital State Tax Guide

AFSA is pleased to announce that the 2024 State Tax Guide is available to our members exclusively online. This comprehensive resource includes a detailed state-by-state tax guide along with the state pension and annuity tax guide, ensuring you have access to the latest tax information for all 50 states.

We hope this shift to a digital format will be more

convenient for our readers, most of whom only need access to information from a single state. The entire Federal Tax Guide will remain available both online and in print.

Access the guide today at <https://afsa.org/state-tax-provisions> and stay informed about important state tax details for 2024. ■

Earned Income Exclusion (FEIE) on their federal tax return may qualify to extend their return beyond the Oct. 15 deadline using Form 2350 (instead of Form 4868). An extension to Dec. 15, 2025, may be available to certain overseas taxpayers who filed a Form 4868 but are unable to meet the Oct. 15 deadline due to certain qualifying circumstances.

Taxpayers impacted by federally declared natural disasters may qualify for further extensions. Readers can review IRS filing extensions due to natural disasters at <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-in-disaster-situations>. States also offer tax filing extensions for natural disasters, so readers should review state-specific extension information as well.

We recommend that you consult with a qualified tax professional before availing yourself of these additional extensions. Taxpayers who take advantage of a federal extension must also check their state filing deadlines to avoid inadvertently missing them, because many states do not conform to the same federal extensions or extension deadlines.

Although the IRS should not charge interest or late payment penalties for returns filed under the June 16 automatic deadline, they often do. The taxpayer generally must call the IRS to have the interest or late penalties removed. For returns extended beyond June 16, however, the extension granted to the taxpayer is an extension to file but not an extension to pay. As such, the IRS will charge late payment penalties and interest for payments made after the April 15 deadline. Most states will likewise charge late payment penalties and interest for tax payments made after the state's initial tax filing deadline.

Minor Revisions to the 2024 Draft Form 1040

As has been the case for decades, U.S. taxpayers must report "all income from whatever source derived" on IRS Form 1040, which has been revised again this year. This article discusses the most recent draft of IRS Form 1040 (posted in July 2024), along with the multiple accompanying schedules with varying draft revision dates. Please note that the form may change before the final 2024 Form 1040 and its schedules are approved. Adjustments, deductions, and credits remain matters of "legislative grace," so it is important to understand those statutes, regulations, forms, and instructions when you claim a credit or deduction.

Form 1040: There are no significant changes to the 2024 draft Form 1040.

Schedule 1: Report additional income and adjustments,

such as tax refunds or credits; alimony received for certain divorces (discussed on page 66); unincorporated or single-member LLC business income or loss (see Schedule C); rental real estate, royalties, or other pass-through business income (see Schedule E); unemployment compensation; FEIE income; student loan interest deduction; one-half deduction for self-employment taxes; and educator expenses. The draft Schedule 1 includes a new line to report digital assets received as ordinary income not reported elsewhere.

Schedule 2: Report additional taxes such as the alternative minimum tax, self-employment tax, and household employment taxes. The draft Schedule 2 includes new lines to report the repayment of clean vehicle credits, if required.

Schedule 3: Claim credits such as the foreign tax credit, credit for child and dependent care, and education credits.

The lettered schedules, commonly A through E, remain as follows:

(A) Itemized deductions (e.g., medical and dental expenses, deductible taxes and interest paid, gifts to charity, casualty losses from a federally declared disaster). Taxpayers should generally file Schedule A only if their itemized deductions are higher than the standard deduction for the tax year. However, readers should evaluate the total federal and state taxes due when deciding between item-

ized deductions or the standard deduction.

(B) Interest, dividends, and foreign accounts and trusts.

(C) Profit or loss from business (sole proprietors and single-member LLCs).

(D) Capital gains and losses (e.g., investment sales and certain capital gains from the sale of certain realty and virtual currency investments).

(E) Supplemental income and loss from rental real estate, royalties, partnerships, S corporations, estates, and trusts.

Many other lettered schedules and incentive-specific forms (e.g., Form 8283 Noncash Charitable Contributions, Form 8889 Health Savings Accounts, Form 8938 Specified Foreign Financial Assets) and corresponding worksheets may be necessary. All are available from the IRS, most with corresponding product pages and instructions.

AFSA recommends that members review the IRS Form 1040 information webpage, "About Form 1040, U.S. Individual Income Tax Return"; the Form 1040 Instructions; Publication 17, "Your Federal Income Tax"; and this year's IRS Nationwide Income Tax Forums Online.



2024 Individual Income Tax Rates and Brackets

2024 Individual Income Tax Rates & Brackets				
Single				
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Max Tax Per Individual Bracket	Max Possible Incremental Tax for Income Within Bracket Range
10%	\$0	\$11,600	\$1,160	\$1,160
12%	\$11,601	\$47,150	\$4,266	\$5,426
22%	\$47,151	\$100,525	\$11,743	\$17,169
24%	\$100,526	\$191,950	\$21,942	\$39,111
32%	\$191,951	\$243,725	\$16,568	\$55,679
35%	\$243,726	\$609,350	\$127,969	\$183,647
37%	\$609,351	-	-	-
Married Filing Jointly or Qualified Surviving Spouse				
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Max Tax Per Individual Bracket	Max Possible Incremental Tax for Income Within Bracket Range
10%	\$0	\$23,200	\$2,320	\$2,320
12%	\$23,201	\$94,300	\$8,532	\$10,852
22%	\$94,301	\$201,050	\$23,485	\$34,337
24%	\$201,051	\$383,900	\$43,884	\$78,221
32%	\$383,901	\$487,450	\$33,136	\$111,357
35%	\$487,451	\$731,200	\$85,313	\$196,670
37%	\$731,201	-	-	-
Head of Household				
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Max Tax Per Individual Bracket	Max Possible Incremental Tax for Income Within Bracket Range
10%	\$0	\$16,550	\$1,655	\$1,655
12%	\$16,551	\$63,100	\$5,586	\$7,241
22%	\$63,101	\$100,500	\$8,228	\$15,469
24%	\$100,501	\$191,950	\$21,948	\$37,417
32%	\$191,951	\$243,700	\$16,560	\$53,977
35%	\$243,701	\$609,350	\$127,978	\$181,955
37%	\$609,351	-	-	-
Married Filing Separately				
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Max Tax Per Individual Bracket	Max Possible Incremental Tax for Income Within Bracket Range
10%	\$0	\$11,600	\$1,160	\$1,160
12%	\$11,601	\$47,150	\$4,266	\$5,426
22%	\$47,151	\$100,525	\$11,743	\$17,169
24%	\$100,526	\$191,950	\$21,942	\$39,111
32%	\$191,951	\$243,725	\$16,568	\$55,679
35%	\$243,726	\$365,600	\$42,656	\$98,335
37%	\$365,601	-	-	-

Figure 1

2024 Form W-4 Withholding Certificate

Taxpayers usually do not think to revise their Form W-4 withholdings until April or until they have paid their final 2024 taxes. Delaying a Form W-4 update may result in taxpayers withholding taxes on their wages based on an old calculation for several months of 2025. Don't wait. AFSA recommends readers revise their Form W-4 via their human resources office or through their employer's online portal (e.g., Employee Express for State Department employees) as soon as possible. Promptly doing so will help you avoid over-withholding or playing catch-up due to under-withholding for several months.

For help in calculating withholding, the IRS built a withholding estimator, found at <http://www.irs.gov/W4App>. Please note that this estimator may not work well for taxpayers with rental properties, those claiming the FEIE, or those who potentially have other complicated tax issues in their returns. Taxpayers with these complications should complete the worksheets provided with Form W-4 and/or consult a tax professional.

Please take particular note that the withholding necessary for a married couple filing jointly with two incomes should account for both spouses' incomes. The Form W-4 includes optional methods to account for two or more incomes on the withholding under Step 2. Form W-4 no longer allows exemptions for dependents but does account for the child and other dependent tax credits available under current law.

Standard Deduction

The standard deduction has increased this year to:

- \$29,200 for married filing jointly (MFJ) or qualifying surviving spouses,
- \$21,900 for heads of household (HOH), specifically defined by Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 2(b), and
- \$14,600 for single taxpayers or married individuals filing separately (MFS).

The personal exemption remains \$0 for 2024.

Capital Gains for Sale of Capital Assets Such as Stocks and Similar Securities

Determining the correct tax rate for capital gains requires taxpayers to first categorize their capital gains into short-term (gain from investments held for less than one year) and long-term (gain from investments held for one year or more). Next, taxpayers net their short-term capital gains (STCG) against their short-term capital losses (STCL), and their long-term capital gains (LTCG) against their long-term capital losses (LTCL). Figure 2 illustrates how the results are taxed.

Any net LTCG that results from this process is taxed at the capital gains rates in the table below:

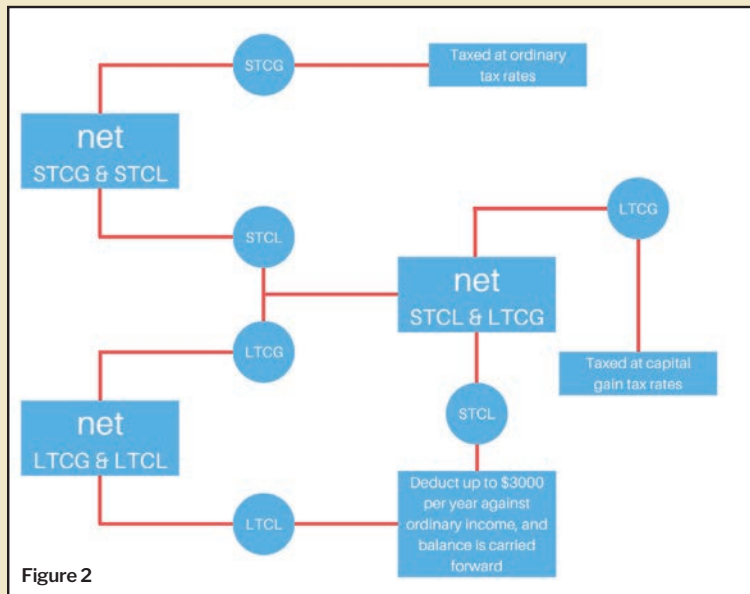


Figure 2

1099-K: Payment Card and Third-Party Network Transactions

The reporting requirements for business transactions processed through third-party payment settlement organizations (TPSOs) such as Venmo and PayPal were changed for 2024 transactions. Although the IRS initially planned to implement a \$600 reporting threshold starting in 2023, this threshold has been delayed. For 2024, the IRS is planning to implement a \$5,000 reporting threshold for Form 1099-K, meaning TPSOs must issue a 1099-K if a taxpayer receives more than \$5,000 in payments for goods or services. The \$5,000 threshold replaces the previous \$20,000 and 200 transactions threshold used in prior years.

The 1099-K will need to be accounted for on the taxpayer's 2024 tax return. If the 1099-K was issued due to the sale of personal items, the taxpayer must calculate the gain or loss from the sale of personal items on a per transaction basis. Each sale of a personal item that resulted in a gain must be reported on both Form 8949 and Schedule D, even if

the taxpayer did not receive a 1099-K reporting the transaction. The sale of personal items that results in a loss must only be reported if the taxpayer received a 1099-K reporting the transaction. In this case, the taxpayer must report the proceeds from the sale and the cost basis as equal amounts so no loss is reported, because personal losses are not tax deductible. If the sale of personal items that results in a loss is not reported on a 1099-K, then the sale does not need to be reported to the IRS.

Readers should keep adequate records to substantiate the original purchase price of sold items. Readers should also ensure they code transactions through TPSOs correctly so only business-related transactions are reported on Form 1099-K. Finally, readers should confirm if the payment service they are using is a TPSO. Certain money transfer services, such as Zelle, are not TPSOs and are not required to issue a Form 1099-K. Readers can follow IRS updates to 1099-K reporting on their FAQ page: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/form-1099-k-faqs>.

Virtual Currency/Digital Assets

In recent years, the IRS has placed increased scrutiny on virtual currency transactions (now referred to as a digital asset, along with many other types of digital assets such as nonfungible tokens [NFTs]). The draft 2024 Form 1040 and Schedule 1 reflects this continued scrutiny. Taxpayers must confirm in a check box on page 1 of Form 1040 whether the taxpayer received a reward, award, or payment for property

2024 Capital Gain Tax Rates & Brackets		
Single		
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
0%	\$0	\$47,025
15%	\$47,026	\$518,900
20%	\$518,901+	
Married Filing Jointly or Qualified Surviving Spouse		
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
0%	\$0	\$94,050
15%	\$94,051	\$583,750
20%	\$583,751+	
Head of Household		
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
0%	\$0	\$63,000
15%	\$63,001	\$551,350
20%	\$551,351+	
Married Filing Separately		
Bracket	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
0%	\$0	\$47,025
15%	\$47,026	\$291,850
20%	\$291,851+	

Figure 3

There are exceptions to these rates for certain types of capital gains, such as Section 1202 qualified small business stock, net capital gains from selling collectibles, and Section 1250 unrecaptured gains (explained in "Investments in Real Estate," on page 62).

Finally, and closely related, an additional 3.8 percent net investment income tax may apply to some forms of investment income, including some capital gains for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income (AGI) above:

- \$250,000 for those MFJ or qualifying surviving spouse with a dependent child,
- \$200,000 for HOH or single, and \$125,000 for those MFS.

or services or sold, exchanged, or otherwise disposed of any digital asset or a financial interest in any digital asset during 2024. The draft 2024 Schedule 1 introduces a specific line for reporting digital assets received as ordinary income not reported elsewhere.

In addition to confirming if a reportable transaction occurred during 2024, readers must be sure to complete the forms necessary to report the transaction when required, along with any resulting income or deductions. Further, digital assets held in accounts outside the United States should be reported as a foreign asset on the FinCen114 (FBAR) and Form 8938 if reporting thresholds are met. Although foreign accounts that only hold digital assets are not currently required to be reported on the FBAR, FinCen Notice 2020-2 states that FinCen intends to amend the FBAR regulations to include digital assets as FBAR reportable accounts. The IRS has provided FAQs related to digital assets, which can be found at <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/frequently-asked-questions-on-virtual-currency-transactions>.

Readers should particularly note that taxpayers who use digital assets to pay for goods or services or who sell digital assets must report the transaction(s) on their income tax return. Taxpayers who receive digital assets as payment for services must report the digital assets received as income on their tax return. Digital assets that a taxpayer holds as an investment is generally taxed as a capital gain or loss, as described in the preceding section. Many other types of digital asset transactions must also be reported on the taxpayer's tax return. During 2024, the IRS released final regulations covering digital assets, which include the elimination of the universal wallet for basis tracking beginning Jan. 1, 2025. The IRS subsequently issued Rev. Proc. 2024-28 detailing safe harbor procedures to ease the transition from universal wallet basis tracking.

AFSA recommends consulting IRS Notice 2014-21 as modified by IRS Notice 2023-34, Revenue Ruling 2019-24, Revenue Ruling 2023-14, Rev. Proc. 2024-28, specific to NFTs IRS Notice 2023-27, and the FAQs to determine the tax treatment, if any, of a transaction.

Investments in Real Estate

Taxpayers generally invest in real estate in five scenarios:

Scenario 1: To live in as their personal residence.

Scenario 2: For use as a vacation home.

Scenario 3: To live in as their personal residence but rent out at times when not living in it.

Scenario 4: To rent to a third party strictly for investment income purposes with no personal use.

Scenario 5: To rent as a short-term rental (e.g., Airbnb).

Adjusted Basis

In all five real estate investment scenarios, it is important to properly calculate the adjusted basis of the property. Please refer to Tax Topic 703; Publication 551; Form 1040 Schedule D with instructions; IRC Sections 1011, 1012, and 1014 through 1017; and associated tax regulations beginning at 26 CFR Sec. 1.1012-1.

Scenario 1: Personal Residence Never Rented. While living in the property as a personal residence, a taxpayer may deduct mortgage interest and property taxes as an itemized deduction on Schedule A, subject to limitations. Current tax law allows a taxpayer to deduct mortgage interest on qualifying debt up to current mortgage limits (\$375,000 MFS / \$750,000 MFJ unless the mortgage meets the requirements for grandfathered mortgage limit of \$500,000 MFS / \$1 million MFJ) for up to two properties: a personal residence and a second home personally used by the taxpayer. Interest paid on home equity loans (including popular HELOCs) is no longer deductible unless the proceeds from the loan are used to buy, build, or substantially improve the property on which the HELOC is taken, and the total mortgage loan balance (including home equity loans) stays within the permitted mortgage limits. Readers should note that proceeds from a cash-out refinance or personal debt rolled into a refinanced mortgage loan when the proceeds or personal debt was not used to buy, build, or substantially improve the home is not qualifying debt for the mortgage interest deduction.

Scenario 2: Vacation Home. A vacation home is a home that may be used by you and is rented out at times during the year. If you use the vacation home without renting it out, you may deduct the mortgage interest and property taxes on Schedule A, subject to limits as described in Scenario 1. If you rent out your vacation home for less than 15 days during the year, you are not required to report the rental income on your tax return and you may still deduct the mortgage interest and real estate taxes on Schedule A. If you rent the vacation home out more than 14 days, but use it personally for the greater of 14 days or 10 percent of the number of days rented, it is considered a personal residence, and you may not deduct rental expenses greater than rental income. Mortgage interest and real estate taxes allocated to personal use are reported on Schedule A, subject to limitations. Mortgage interest, real estate taxes, and other deductible expenses (including depreciation) allocated to rental use are reported on Schedule E using the vacation home rules. Note that in cases when there is fractional ownership of a vacation home, a taxpayer must include the personal use of all co-owners of the vacation home in determining whether it is considered a personal residence.

Scenarios 3 and 4: Rental Property. Real estate that you purchase as a personal use home and then convert to rental status (or vice versa) or real estate that you purchase for immediate rental to a third party both have similar requirements for calculating depreciation during the rental period and for capital gain or loss calculations upon sale. During periods when the property is rented, the taxpayer must report the gross rental income received and deductible expenses paid on Schedule E. The rules requiring expensing or capitalization/depreciation of expenditures made for a rental property are complex. Readers should refer to the FAQs for the Tangible Property Regulations (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/tangible-property-final-regulations>) for information on expensing and capitalization requirements. Consultation with a tax professional is also recommended.

Scenario 5: Short-Term Rental. Real estate that you rent on a short-term basis may be treated differently on your tax return from long-term rentals. Income and expenses could be reported on Schedule C or Schedule E, depending on whether substantial services are provided to renters. AFSA recommends Publication 527 for examples of substantial services. In addition, readers need to consider the average period of customer (renter) use, which can change the treatment of the rental activity from a passive activity (requiring Form 8582) to a nonpassive activity if the rental activity meets material participation requirements (though most readers won't meet the threshold for material participation). Consult Treasury Regulation 1.469-1T for exceptions to the passive activity rules related to short-term rentals. Finally, the depreciable life of a short-term rental property may be 39 years rather than the usual 27.5 years for residential rental property if the property is being rented on a transient basis (and thus considered nonresidential real property for these purposes). Readers are referred to IRC Section 168.

Depreciating Real Property Used to Produce Income

During periods when real estate is rented, the IRS requires the taxpayer to depreciate the property over the IRS-defined recovery period. To calculate annual depreciation, a taxpayer must know: (1) the property's adjusted cost basis and fair market value at time of rental conversion (the taxpayer must use the lower of the fair market value or adjusted basis as the depreciable basis); (2) adjustments to basis (tracked throughout the life of the property); (3) the date the property was placed in service as income-producing; and (4) the IRS-mandated depreciation method and convention. The IRS requires a taxpayer to depreciate buildings, certain land improvements, and other types of capital assets—all annually.

The IRS, however, prohibits a taxpayer from depreciating land, including the land on which a depreciable asset sits. So, land values must be accounted for separately. Property used for personal purposes may not be depreciated and claimed for tax purposes.

Taxpayers who believe they have sufficiently documented their property to begin using it for income-producing purposes should contact a tax professional to properly set up the property for tax reporting purposes, calculate deductible expenses (including depreciation), account for income derived from the property, and file correct tax forms on time each year. Readers should note that the depreciable basis of the property must be adjusted for prior mandatory depreciation deductions when a previously rented property converts back to rental use after a period of personal use. Failure to include the proper amount of depreciation on Schedule E can result in an incorrect accounting method, which may require a change in accounting method (Form 3115) or an amended return, depending on the mistake made and/or the number of years depreciation was improperly reported on Schedule E.

AFSA recommends also reading Tax Topics 703 (basis), 704 (depreciation), and 414 (rental property); the Schedule E and Form 1040 instructions; IRC Sections 167 (depreciation), 1012 (cost basis), 1011 (adjusted basis), and 1016 (adjustments to basis); associated basis and depreciation regulations; and Publications 527 and 946.

Selling a Principal Residence—IRC Section 121

Taxpayers who sell real estate used as a principal residence at some time during the taxpayer's ownership may qualify to exclude all or a portion of their net taxable capital gain under the provisions of IRC Section 121. A taxpayer who used the property as a principal residence and also rented out the property at any time during ownership can only exclude the qualifying IRC Section 121 capital gain, which is the capital gain other than the gain created under IRC Section 1250 (see below for a discussion of IRC Section 1250). IRC Section 121 allows an exclusion of qualifying capital gain up to \$500,000 MFJ or \$250,000 for all other filing statuses. To qualify for the full IRC Section 121 exclusion, the taxpayer(s): (1) must have owned the home and lived there as their principal residence at any time for at least two of the last five years before the date of the sale (but see Military Families Relief Act, below); (2) cannot have acquired the home in a 1031 exchange within the five years before the date of the sale; and (3) cannot have claimed this exclusion during the two years before the date of the sale.

An exclusion of gain for a fraction of these upper limits may be possible if one or more of the above requirements are not met. Taxpayers who sell their principal residence

for a profit of more than \$250,000 (\$500,000 for MFJ) will owe capital gains tax on the excess. Additionally, capital gain attributed to periods of nonqualified use cannot be excluded under IRC Section 121. AFSA recommends Topic 701, Publication 523, IRC Sec. 121, and related regulations.

Military Families Tax Relief Act of 2003

According to the Military Families Tax Relief Act of 2003 (which AFSA was instrumental in enacting), the five-year period to qualify for the exclusion under IRC Section 121 may be suspended for members of the Foreign Service for up to 10 years during which the taxpayer has been on a qualifying Foreign Service assignment. This act also excludes periods of “qualified official extended duty” from nonqualified use treatment. In addition to the recommended reading from the previous section, AFSA recommends IRC Sec. 121(d)(9) and 26 CFR Sec. 1.121-5.

Selling a Property That Was Previously Rented—IRC Section 1250

Taxpayers who sell a property that was used as a rental property at any time during the taxpayer’s ownership must reduce the property’s adjusted basis by the mandatory depreciation required during the rental period of the property (even if the taxpayer did not properly claim depreciation deductions) before calculating the final net taxable capital gain from the property sale. The portion of the net capital gain created from the mandatory depreciation (whether or not claimed during the rental period[s]) is taxed as IRC Section 1250 unrecaptured gain and is not eligible for capital gain exclusion under IRC Section 121. The portion of the remaining net capital gain is eligible for exclusion under IRC Section 121 if all requirements are met. Due to the impact of IRC Section 1250 unrecaptured gain rules, taxpayers who sell a property that was previously rented often still have a tax bill due even if they qualify to exclude a portion of their net capital gain under IRC Section 121. AFSA recommends Topic 701, Publication 523, IRC Sec. 1250, and related regulations.

Non-Rental Business Use of Home

Although most Foreign Service families find themselves in government-funded housing overseas much of the time, some may own property in the United States that they both occupy for personal purposes and use to operate a private business on the side. To qualify for a deduction for business-related expenses for a portion of a residence used for a business, a taxpayer must use a portion of their home exclusively and regularly as a principal place of business (and file a Schedule C to report the business activity). A taxpayer who meets that threshold must then either calculate the actual expenses of the home office—

e.g., cost of a business phone/internet line and the business use portion of state and local property taxes, utilities, mortgage interest, and depreciation—or use the IRS’ simplified method based on a flat rate for the square footage used for business (up to a maximum of 300 square feet). For more information, contact a professional and follow up with IRS Topic 509, Publication 587, the instructions for Form 8829, 1040 Schedule C, and IRC Sections 162, 212, and associated regulations.

Three Related Child and Dependent Credits

For all three credits related to children and dependents, qualifying child rules can quickly become complex, especially in the case of divorce or separation.

Child Tax Credit. A qualifying child for purposes of 2024 tax returns is one who has not attained age 17 by Dec. 31, 2024. The child tax credit is up to \$2,000 for each qualifying child. The qualifying income thresholds to claim the maximum child tax credit are as follows: modified adjusted gross income up to \$400,000 if MFJ, or up to \$200,000 for all other filing statuses for the maximum \$2,000 per qualifying child. The child tax credit is fully refundable up to \$1,700 per child.

Other Dependent Credit. A separate but related Other Dependent Credit of up to \$500 is available, often for those who do not meet the qualifying child requirements or for other dependent relatives. Calculate both the child tax credit and the other dependent credit on the Child Tax Credit and Credit for Other Dependents Worksheet. The worksheet and a flow chart for determining “Who Qualifies as Your Dependent?” are in the Form 1040 instructions. AFSA also recommends Publication 972, the instructions for 2024 Schedule 8812, and IRC Sec. 24 for the Child Tax Credit and Other Dependent Credit.

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Qualifying taxpayers with a qualifying dependent may be separately eligible for a credit to help pay for their child and dependent care expenses. A qualifying taxpayer is a taxpayer who earned income (not excluded under FEIE), looked for work and received earned income by the end of the tax year, or was a qualifying full-time student during the tax year. Most MFS taxpayers will not qualify. In the case of married taxpayers, both taxpayers must meet at least one of these requirements. The dollar limits for child and dependent care qualifying expenses for 2024 are \$3,000 for one qualifying individual and \$6,000 for two or more qualifying individuals. Taxpayers who utilize a Dependent Care FSA/FEDS (DCFSA) account to pay for qualifying dependent care expenses must still file Form 2441 to report that they used the funds for qualifying dependent care.

To claim this credit for foreign care providers who do not have a U.S. taxpayer identification number (either a Social



Security number or employer identification number), enter “LAFCP” (Living Abroad Foreign Care Provider) on Form 2441 in the space for the care provider’s taxpayer identification number. AFSA recommends IRS Tax Topic 602, Form 2441 and instructions, as well as Form 1040 Schedule 3 and corresponding Form 1040 instructions.

Health Care Savings Account (HSA) and Flexible Savings Account (FSA)

In 2024, taxpayers covered by a self-only high-deductible insurance plan may contribute up to \$4,150 to an HSA. Individuals with family high-deductible insurance coverage may contribute up to \$8,300 for 2024. HSA 2024 contributions are due by the 2024 individual tax filing deadline (currently April 15, 2025).

Distinct from an HSA, an FSA is a tax-advantaged account allowing an employee to contribute pre-tax wages to pay for qualifying medical expenses (as in the case of the Health Care FSAFEDS account) or to pay for qualifying dependent care (as in the case of the DCFSA account). The Consolidation Appropriation Act (CAA) signed by Congress on Dec. 27, 2020, permits FSA administrators to allow certain carryover and grace periods for FSA accounts. FSAFEDS has adopted many of these provisions. Health Care FSAFEDS (HCFSA) allows re-enrolled participants for the 2024 plan year to carry over \$640 of unspent HCFSA funds to the next year.

The Dependent Care FSA contribution limit for 2024 tax returns is \$5,000 per household or \$2,500 if married, filing separately.

Readers should take note that masks, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes used to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are now qualifying expenses for HCFSA funds (per IRS announcement 2021-7). Additionally, the CARES Act permanently expanded the definition of qualifying medical expenses to include feminine hygiene products and over-the-counter medications purchased after Dec. 31, 2019. This expanded definition allows taxpayers to withdraw funds from HSAs or FSAs (such as the HCFSA) to pay for these expenses. The IRS also announced that the cost of COVID-19 home testing is an eligible medical expense and may be paid or reimbursed from HSAs or FSAs. AFSA recommends Publication 969, the Form 8889 instructions, and the FSAFEDS website.

Deductions for Moving for a New Job and Retiring from Overseas Are No Longer Available

The personal costs incurred to move to a new job (IRC Sec. 217(j)) and for moving back to the United States after retiring from overseas are not deductible following amendments included in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA). Only active-duty members of the armed forces should use Form

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3903 to calculate and deduct moving expenses from their military moves. Visit the IRS webpage “Moving Expenses to and from the United States.”

Official Relocation Under the Foreign Service Act Is Not Taxed (PCS, R&R, Medevac)

All travel authorized under Section 901 of the Foreign Service Act—which includes permanent change of station (PCS), representational travel, R&R, emergency visitation travel, and medevac—is exempt from taxation per IRC Sec. 912. Charleston General Financial Services secured advice from the IRS to this effect, which is consistent with IRS guidance issued in April 2018. None of these reimbursements appear on a W-2 for State Department employees. Non-State Department employees and anyone who doubts they are traveling under the Foreign Service Act should contact a professional to determine what relocation expenses may be taxable.

Personally Incurred Expenses for Home Leave and R&R

Personal expenses paid by a direct-hire employee while on R&R are not tax deductible. Prior to the 2017 TCJA, lodging, food, and transportation expenses paid by the employee on official home leave were deductible on Schedule A as unreimbursed employee business expenses. The TCJA eliminated the tax deduction for most unreimbursed employee business expenses, so these expenses cannot be deducted until/if the TCJA sunsets on Dec. 31, 2025. The Schedule A line 16 “other itemized deductions” section is not appropriate for deducting these expenses.

Representational and Official Residence Expenses

Certain Foreign Service employees receive a nontaxable allowance for representational expenses. If the actual expenses exceed the allowance, the excess expenses are not deductible under current tax law. Further, other Foreign Service employees incurring expenses related to their job may not deduct such expenses.

Alimony for Divorces, Settlements, and Modifications

Alimony paid pursuant to agreements and orders entered into before Jan. 1, 2019, is deductible by the payer and taxed as income to the payee. Alimony payments paid pursuant to divorce or separation instruments entered into or modified after Dec. 31, 2018, are not deductible by the payer or taxed as income to the payee. Any modifications after Dec. 31, 2018, to agreements finalized before Jan. 1, 2019, must explicitly state that the repeal of the alimony and maintenance rules will apply to the modification, otherwise the pre-

2019 rules apply. Taxpayers should read Form 1040 Schedule 1, the Form 1040 Instructions, and Tax Topic 452. Note, TCJA generally repealed IRC Section 71 and 26 CFR 1.71-1 for agreements entered into after Dec. 31, 2018.

Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) from Inherited IRAs and Retirement Accounts

For inherited traditional IRAs and retirement plan accounts (Account) where the Account owner dies after Dec. 31, 2019, the 2019 SECURE Act changed some rules for RMDs and distinguished between an eligible designated beneficiary (EDB) and other beneficiaries (non-EDBs). EDBs include the surviving spouse, a disabled individual, a chronically ill individual, a minor child until age 21, or an individual not more than 10 years younger than the Account owner. Generally, an EDB may take distributions over the EDB's life expectancy. However, non-EDBs must withdraw the entire Account by the 10th calendar year following the year of the Account owner's post-2019 death unless the Account owner had already started RMDs prior to their death.

Under regulations finalized on July 19, 2024, the Department of the Treasury clarified that non-EDBs who inherit the Account before the deceased owner's required beginning date (RBD) of distributions must withdraw the entire Account before the end of the 10th calendar year following the owner's death. If the Account owner died on or after their RBD, the regulations state that non-EDBs must take annual RMDs (based on the non-EDB's lifespan) for years one to nine and receive the remaining balance in the 10th calendar year. Prior to these regulations, non-EDBs who inherited Accounts in 2020 reasonably expected they could wait until the end of the 10-year period to withdraw the entire Account. Due to the confusion regarding RMDs for non-EDBs, the IRS issued Notices 2022-53, 2023-54, and 2024-35, which provide transition relief to taxpayers so they are not required to take an RMD from an inherited IRA through 2024.

Retirement Savings in TSP, 401(k)s, and IRAs

Individuals may contribute up to \$23,000 to 401(k) plans, the Thrift Savings Plan, and 403(b) plans in 2024. Taxpayers age 50 and older (note the additional amount permitted for ages 60-63 beginning in 2025 as explained below) may make additional catch-up contributions of \$7,500 to their qualified employer workplace retirement plan. The 2024 Traditional IRA and Roth contribution limits (in total) are \$7,000 for those under age 50 and \$8,000 for those age 50 and older. The 2024 tax year deadline for contributing to a Roth IRA or Traditional IRA is April 15, 2025.

The IRS charges a penalty for Roth or IRA contributions over the allowed limits. Over-contributions for the tax year



being filed, however, may be removed without penalty by the filing due date (with extensions) of the tax return. Contributions to a 401(k), TSP, or 403(b) plan may be made only via payroll deductions, the last of which is possible during the last pay period paid by Dec. 31, 2024. MFJ self-employed spouses working outside the United States who elect the FEIE can make a spousal Roth or Traditional IRA contribution as permitted by income thresholds. Taxpayers with modified AGI above the permitted Roth contribution threshold may want to consider a back-door Roth contribution strategy.

In 2022, Congress considered legislation to eliminate back-door Roth contributions and Roth conversions. While this proposed legislation appears to have stalled in Congress, it could be reconsidered in future legislation.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act (which included the SECURE 2.0 Act) made some additional changes to retirement plans:

- Increases the age for required mandatory distributions (RMD). For 2023 through 2032, the RMD age is 73 and then changes to age 75 after 2032.
- Beginning in 2025, taxpayers between ages 60 and 63 can make a catch-up contribution of up to \$11,250. Taxpayers between ages 50 and 59 or 64 and older can make a catch-up contribution of up to \$7,500.
- Allows beneficiaries of 529 college savings accounts to roll over up to a total of \$35,000 from a 529 account that has been open more than 15 years to their Roth IRA starting in 2024. Readers should review all available IRS guidance before initiating a 529 plan rollover to ensure all requirements are met.
- The excise tax if a taxpayer does not take the RMD is reduced from 50 percent to 25 percent of the amount that the RMD amount exceeds the actual distribution in a given year. If the taxpayer corrects the failure to take the correct RMD amount in a timely manner (within two years), the excise tax is reduced to 10 percent.
- Provides new exceptions after Dec. 31, 2023, to the 10 percent early withdrawal penalty for distributions of up to \$1,000 per year for emergency expenses (unforeseeable or immediate financial needs for personal or family emergencies) and for certain victims of domestic abuse who withdraw the lesser of \$10,000 or 50 percent of their account (subject to self-certifying requirements). Readers should review the various IRS FAQs for the Secure Act 2.0 topics and other IRS information (including IRS Notice 2024-02) before initiating a withdrawal under these exceptions.
- As of Jan. 1, 2024, owners of Roth employer retirement plan accounts (such as the ROTH TSP) are no longer required to take required minimum distributions.

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Energy Credits

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 passed energy credits that became effective starting in 2023. These credits include the Energy Efficient Home Improvement Credit, the Residential Clean Energy Credit, the Clean Vehicle Credit (for new vehicles), the Previously-Owned Clean Vehicle Credit, and the Alternative Fuel Refueling Property Credit. We recommend readers refer to the following IRS FAQs: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/taxpros/fs-2024-15.pdf> (related to the home improvement and residential clean energy credits), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/taxpros/fs-2024-26.pdf> (related to both clean vehicle credits), and IRS Notice 2023-59 (related to guidance on home energy audits for purposes of the home improvement credit). The IRS has provided additional guidance on the alternative fuel credit, available at <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p6027.pdf>. Additionally, readers can refer to the Form 8911 instructions for assistance. For additional information, readers are also referred to https://www.energystar.gov/about/federal_tax_credits and <https://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/taxcenter.shtml>.

Foreign Earned Income Exclusion (FEIE)

Taxpayers living and working overseas may be eligible for the FEIE. In 2024 the first \$126,500 of gross taxable income earned overseas as a non-U.S. government employee or self-employed person may be excluded from federal income taxes but not from self-employment taxes.

To qualify to claim this exclusion, the taxpayer must:

- (1) Establish a tax home in a foreign country;
- (2) Either (a) meet the “bona fide residence” test, or (b) meet the “physical presence” test; and
- (3) File a Form 1040 tax return with Form 2555 for the year the FEIE is claimed.

Tax Home

The tax home is the general area of the taxpayer’s “main place of business, employment, or post of duty” (i.e., where the taxpayer is “permanently or indefinitely engaged to work as an employee or self-employed individual”).

The U.S. Tax Court has explained that the congressional purpose of the FEIE is to offset duplicative costs of maintaining distinct U.S. and foreign households. Increasing ties to the foreign country by personally paying for a foreign household, paying local taxes, waiving diplomatic immunity for matters related to your job, paying for vacation travel back to the United States, becoming a resident of the foreign country, and working in the foreign country long-term are other factors the federal courts have cumulatively recognized as establishing a foreign tax home.

Bona Fide Residence Test

The bona fide residence test is a facts and circumstances test aimed at assessing whether the taxpayer intends to make a home outside the United States for an indefinite period. This test requires that the taxpayer be a bona fide resident of a foreign country for an uninterrupted period that includes (at a minimum) an entire tax year (Jan. 1 through Dec. 31). The taxpayer may leave the foreign country for brief or temporary trips back to the United States (for periods not greater than six months in a calendar year) or elsewhere during the bona fide residence period but must have a clear intention of returning to the foreign country. Only U.S. citizens can qualify for the FEIE under the bona fide residence test. U.S. residents (substantial presence residents and green-card holders) cannot qualify for the FEIE under the bona fide residence test.

Physical Presence Test

The physical presence test requires that a taxpayer be present in a foreign country for at least 330 full (midnight-to-midnight) days during any 12 consecutive months that begin or end in the tax return filing year (the 12-month period may be different from the tax year). Taxpayers who qualify for the physical presence test using a 12-month period other than a full calendar year are required to prorate the maximum exclusion allowed for that tax year. Travel days to and from the United States generally do not count toward the total for days inside the foreign country (they are considered U.S. days). Both U.S. citizens and residents can qualify for the FEIE under the physical presence test.

Other FEIE Considerations

AFSA understands that IRS auditors have denied the FEIE for Foreign Service spouses and dependents for failing to meet the bona fide residence or tax home elements of this test. Members of the Foreign Service community have successfully used the physical presence test when bona fide residence cannot be established. Those who rely on physical presence should contemporaneously document travel days and retain copies of visas and tickets to substantiate their calculation.

Taxpayers should note that the FEIE excludes the income from the bottom tax brackets, thus leaving remaining ordinary income on the return to be taxed at the higher tax brackets applicable to the return. Consequently, for certain married taxpayers, filing separately may result in a combined lower tax liability than filing jointly. We recommend that taxpayers consult with a qualified tax professional to ascertain the most advantageous filing status for each tax year.

Foreign Accounts and Asset Reporting

U.S. tax reporting is often more complicated for members of the Foreign Service community, particularly when offshore postings give rise to offshore assets. It is common for Foreign Service spouses to take jobs in the local economy, through which foreign bank account and pension interests are acquired, giving rise to enhanced U.S. tax and reporting obligations. Similarly, many Foreign Service spouses own businesses organized outside the United States, which require additional U.S. reporting beyond income and deduction items. Even the most well-intentioned and diligent taxpayers can run afoul of the minefield of reporting requirements that exist for U.S. persons (citizens, residents, and green-card holders) who have offshore income and assets. As the pool of accountants and tax attorneys with the expertise to identify and correctly complete the specific forms that need be filed is limited, it can be a challenge to obtain accurate advice and report correctly. The penalties for failing to file or making mistakes on foreign reporting forms are severe, often disproportionate to the infraction.

U.S. persons are taxed on their worldwide income and must file Form 1040, regardless of where they are living. In addition to the basic tax return, Foreign Service taxpayers may also be required to report a wide variety of offshore assets and activities on specific U.S. reporting forms, even if such activities occur abroad and even if the assets earn \$0 in income. For example, U.S. persons with ownership or signature authority over a foreign bank account must denote this interest in Part III of Schedule B of Form 1040. This often-overlooked section of the return (signed under penalties of perjury) lets the IRS know when to expect a Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts Report (FBAR). A Schedule B misstatement can be used against the taxpayer by the IRS when assessing penalties.

The FBAR form is required from taxpayers with non-U.S. bank accounts and other offshore assets (including life insurance policies and pensions) that have an aggregate value greater than \$10,000 at any time during the year. Failing to report an asset on an FBAR can lead to penalties ranging from \$16,117 per account, per year (for a non-willful error) or up to the greater of \$161,166 or 50 percent of each account balance, per account, per year (for a more serious offense, such as those with Schedule B errors). Willful failures and errors can result in additional penalties (which may exceed the value of the asset) and even jail time.

Taxpayers with interests in certain foreign financial assets must also file Form 8938 if the total value of such assets exceeds the applicable statutory reporting threshold. Errors relating to this form may result in a penalty of \$10,000 per year. Additional tax forms must be filed by taxpayers who:

(1) have interests in or engage in transactions with offshore entities, trusts, and pensions;

- (2) have investments in foreign mutual funds;
- (3) own business interests organized outside the United States;
- (4) receive substantial gifts or inheritances from non-U.S. persons; and/or
- (5) wish to claim the benefit of a treaty-based return position.

Many of these reporting forms must be filed even if they have no impact on tax liability. The statute of limitations for assessment on a foreign reporting form does not close until three years after the form is filed.

Domestic Company Reporting Requirement Beginning 2024

Pursuant to the Corporate Transparency Act passed by Congress in 2021, certain domestic (U.S.) companies are required to report beneficial ownership information (BOI) to FinCEN starting in 2024. We refer readers to the BOI website at <https://www.fincen.gov/boi>. According to the BOI FAQs found at <https://www.fincen.gov/boi-faqs>, domestic companies such as corporations, limited liability companies, and any other entities created by the filing of a document with a Secretary of State or any similar office in the U.S., and foreign companies such as entities (including corporations and limited liability companies) formed under the law of a foreign country that have registered to do business in the U.S. by the filing of a document with a Secretary of State or any similar office, are considered BOI reporting companies. Currently, 23 entities are exempt from this reporting. Readers should read question C.2. of the BOI FAQs for these exempt entities.

Qualified Business Income Deduction (QBID)

To equalize the taxes paid by sole proprietorships and pass-through entities with those paid by C corporations, the TCJA created a deduction for up to 20 percent of qualified business income (QBI), qualified real estate investment trusts (REIT) income, and publicly traded partnership income. Calculate the QBID on Form 8995, for which the associated instructions are essential.

Pass-through entities such as S Corporations, LLCs, and sole proprietorships located in the U.S. can claim this deduction if they otherwise qualify. Business income earned outside the United States is not QBI—the income must be earned in a U.S. trade or business to qualify. Although “trade or business” is not specifically defined in the Internal Revenue Code (Code), tax courts have taken a facts and circumstances approach in deciding whether an activity is a trade or business. If a taxpayer is renting out their personal residence while overseas, it is generally not a trade or business for QBID

purposes unless the taxpayer's main source of income and/or main employment activity is from renting and managing rental real estate, among other requirements. Some trusts and estates may be eligible for the QBID; however, income earned as an employee of a C Corporation does not qualify. The code specifies that certain trades and businesses, such as law firms, accounting firms, and consulting businesses, do not qualify for the QBID unless the taxpayer's taxable income is under certain thresholds (\$383,900 for MFJ, \$191,950 for MFS and all other returns). Other complicated limits and requirements may apply.

Federal Estate and Gift Taxes

In 2024 the first \$13.61 million of a decedent's aggregate estate (up to \$27.22 million for a surviving spouse with a portability election on Form 1041) was exempt from the federal estate tax. The same amounts apply to (and are reduced by) lifetime gift-giving over the annual gift exclusion, which is \$18,000 per donee (\$36,000 for gifts split by married couples on Form 709) for 2024. Other limits apply to gifts to non-U.S. citizens or gifts between spouses where both spouses are not U.S. citizens.

Those who contribute to 529 Education Savings Plans should note that such a contribution is considered a completed gift and is applied to that taxpayer's annual gift exclusion for the donee. Taxpayers interested in front-loading a 529 plan to maximize their tax-free earnings can select a five-year contribution option allowing them to contribute during one tax year up to the annual gift tax exclusion (\$18,000 for 2024) for up to five years (\$90,000 maximum for 2024). Taxpayers choosing this five-year option must file a Form 709 Gift Tax Return, selecting the five-year election, and they cannot give additional amounts to the same donee during the tax years in which they have chosen to contribute the \$18,000 per year maximum 529 plan contribution.

Wage Overpayments

Each year, many readers of this article receive an overpayment of wage income that they must repay in a future year.

If you are overpaid wages in a tax year and you repay the full overpayment in the same tax year, then generally no action is required on that year's tax return. Your employer should have already accounted for the repayment of overpaid wages in your W2 for the tax year without further action required by you.

If you are overpaid wages and you repay the overpayment in a later tax year, then you must determine if you can recoup any of the taxes you paid on the repaid wages.

Wage Repayments Less Than \$3,000. If you were overpaid less than \$3,000 and you repaid the overpayment

in a later tax year, then you will not be able to recoup any of the federal income taxes you originally paid on the repaid wages. The TCJA eliminated most miscellaneous itemized deductions subject to a 2 percent AGI floor, including the itemized deduction permitted for wage repayments of less than \$3,000. Please note that you cannot file a Form 1040X (amended return) for the year of overpayment to reduce your taxable wages for wage amounts repaid in a later tax year.

Wage Repayments of \$3,000 or More. If you were overpaid \$3,000 or more, and you repaid the overpayment in a later tax year, you can file an IRC 1341 claim of right credit for the federal income taxes you paid in the year you received the overpayment on the tax return for the year you repay the wages. IRS Publication 525 provides detailed examples of how to calculate the credit for your tax return under the "Repayments" section of the publication.

Repaid Social Security and Medicare Taxes

You can recoup repaid Social Security and Medicare taxes paid on wage overpayments by filing a claim for refund using Form 843. If you repaid wages subject to the additional Medicare tax, you must file a Form 1040X for the year in which you received the overpaid wages to claim a refund of overpaid additional Medicare taxes. However, you cannot recoup the federal income taxes from a wage repayment on Form 1040X.

Itemized Deductions Still Allowed via Schedule A

Although the TCJA removed the overall cap for itemized deductions, it suspended miscellaneous itemized deductions, to the extent they exceed 2 percent of AGI, through 2025. Schedule A and the instructions are the best guide for what remains deductible for itemizers. The following three sections provide updates on a few often-used itemized deductions.

(1) Medical and Dental Expenses Over 7.5 Percent of AGI

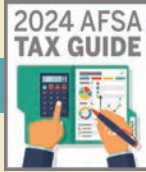
The 2024 deduction for unreimbursed medical and dental expenses is possible only to the extent qualifying expenses exceed 7.5 percent of a taxpayer's AGI. AFSA recommends that members claiming these deductions read IRS Publication 502, Tax Topic 502, and IRC Section 213.

(2) Taxes, Including State and Local Property

The TCJA limits itemized deductions for state and local taxes to \$10,000 (\$5,000 for married filing separately). For more on these provisions, refer to IRS Notice 2019-12, Treasury Decision 98-64 Tax Topic 503, and IRC Section 164.

(3) Charitable Contributions

For 2024 returns, deductible cash contributions are limited to 60 percent of the taxpayer's adjusted gross income. Contributions must be made to a qualified organization (e.g., a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organized in the U.S.). Taxpayers are required to retain documentary evidence (e.g., canceled



checks or written communication from the charity) for all cash contributions. Non-cash contributions require a receipt regardless of the value of the contribution. For cash and non-cash contributions of \$250 or more, the charity must provide an official tax receipt along with an additional acknowledgment stating whether any goods or services were given in return for the donation. If any goods or services are received, the acknowledgment should provide a description and a good faith estimate of the goods or services received by the donor. Taxpayers must have the complete official tax receipt of contributions on or before the earlier of the date a return is filed or the due date (including extensions) for filing such return. Taxpayers obtaining receipts from a charity after these dates may be denied a charitable deduction. For non-cash contributions in excess of \$500, the taxpayer must complete Form 8283 (Non-cash Charitable Contributions) and attach it to their Form 1040. Contributions over \$5,000 require a written appraisal. Readers should note that in *Duncan Bass v. Commr. T.C. Memo 2023-41*, the court affirmed that individual donation values of similar items of property (e.g., clothing, furniture) must be added together to determine if the \$5,000 donation value threshold is met, thus requiring an appraisal.

For more information, AFSA recommends Tax Topic 506, Publications 526 and 1771, the Schedule A and Form 1040 instructions, and IRC Section 170. Readers should review 1.170A-13(c)(1)(i) and 1.170A-13(c)(7)(iii) for more information about similar items of property.

Conclusion

There were minimal changes to tax law impacting individuals during 2024, which is also reflected in the minor changes made to draft Form 1040 and the numbered schedules for 2024.

The results of the 2024 presidential and congressional elections (which were unknown when this article was written) and the expiration of the TCJA provisions for individuals at the end of 2025 will probably bring many significant changes to individual tax law in the coming months and years. Consequently, we encourage readers to monitor significant tax law changes that may be finalized in the coming months and retroactively applied to 2024 tax returns and that may significantly impact future year tax planning strategies. While AFSA encourages its members to continue their tax education by reading the Internal Revenue Code, IRS regulations, and referenced IRS publications, there is no substitute for professional help for specific questions, particularly for complex international income and assets issues. Though not comprehensive, we hope this guide provides a useful summary of the significant tax laws and updates that may have an impact on your 2024 tax returns. Best wishes for the coming tax filing season. ■

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AFSA Honors 2024 Sinclaire Language Award Recipients

Proficiency in foreign languages is a vital skill for members of the U.S. Foreign Service, not only for professional development but also for personal security and effectiveness at post.

Each year since 1982, AFSA has recognized the outstanding accomplishments of FS members in the study and use of difficult languages through the Matilda W. Sinclaire Awards program.

AFSA established this program with a generous bequest from former Foreign Service Officer Matilda W. Sinclaire, who sought “to promote and reward superior achievement by career officers of the Foreign Service ... while studying one of the Category III or IV languages under the auspices of the Foreign Service Institute.”

Any career or career-conditional member of the Foreign Service from the Department of State, USAID, Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Agency for Global Media, or Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is eligible for the award. For full nomination criteria, please visit afsa.org/Sinclaire.

Recipients are selected by a committee comprising the dean (or designee) of the FSI School of Language Studies and the AFSA Awards and Plaques Committee. Each winner receives \$1,500 and a certificate of recognition.

This year’s recipients demonstrated dedication to and extraordinary skills in their chosen language through engagement in a variety of in-language activities in and out of the classroom to improve fluency.

We are pleased to announce the 2024 Sinclaire Award recipients:

- **Elizabeth Blumenthal:** Slovak
- **Diana Braun:** Azerbaijani
- **Emma Browning:** Russian
- **Diane Carroll:** Russian
- **Kevin Geiser:** Khmer
- **James Hildebrand:** Mandarin
- **Shobhit Kumar:** Vietnamese
- **Shelbie Legg:** Montenegrin
- **Caitlin Meyers:** Urdu
- **Bibi Voyles:** Turkish



For more information on the Sinclaire Awards, contact awards@afsa.org. Nominations for the 2025 Sinclaire Awards are now being accepted; the deadline is Aug. 22, 2025. ■

AFSA Dues Increase for 2025

NEWS BRIEF

In accordance with Article IV of the AFSA Bylaws, the Governing Board can choose to increase dues by no more than the cumulative increase in the national Consumer Price Index, published by the Department of Labor, since the effective date of the previous dues increase.

For 2025, AFSA has increased dues by 2.4 percent for all individual membership categories. In concrete terms, this amounts to an increase of 12 to 49 cents per pay period for active-duty members and 14 to 50 cents per month for retirees, depending on an individual’s membership category.

Active-duty and retired members paying dues via payroll and annuity deduction will see a small increase in the amount automatically deducted from their paychecks and annuities. Those paying annually will be billed the new rate on their regularly scheduled renewal date. AFSA last increased its membership dues rate in January 2024. ■

Active-Duty Dues Rates

Category	2024 Annual	2024 Biweekly	2025 Annual	2025 Biweekly
SFS	\$534.14	\$20.54	\$546.96	\$21.04
FS 1, 2, 3	\$416.52	\$16.02	\$426.52	\$16.41
FS 4, 5, 6	\$237.35	\$9.13	\$243.04	\$9.34
FS 7, 8, 9	\$129.20	\$4.97	\$132.30	\$5.09

Retiree Dues Rates

Category	2024 Annual	2024 Biweekly	2025 Annual	2025 Biweekly
Annuity over \$75,000	\$248.43	\$20.70	\$254.40	\$21.20
Annuity of \$50,000-75,000	\$201.34	\$16.78	\$206.18	\$17.18
Annuity of \$25,000-50,000	\$147.75	\$12.31	\$151.30	\$12.61
Annuity Under \$25,000	\$96.89	\$8.08	\$99.21	\$8.27
Retiree Spouse	\$69.95	\$5.83	\$71.62	\$5.97

2025 Associate Dues Rates

Category	2024 Annual	2025 Annual
Associate Member	\$143.77	\$147.22

■ **Ingrid Mack Byers, 87**, a Foreign Service spouse, passed away at home in the care of her husband, Bruce Byers, on June 20, 2024, after a struggle with myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS).

Ms. Byers was born in 1937 and grew up in Munich. She studied accounting and worked for several banks in their international affairs departments. She then studied English in London and French in Paris before becoming a financial correspondent for Privat Bank Merck Finck & Co. in Munich. She met her husband in 1962 on a weekend ski trip to the Bavarian Alps.

In early 1972, Ms. Byers, her husband, and their children moved to Tehran for their first Foreign Service assignment.

When they moved to Bombay in 1974, she engaged in many local and several long-distance trips and sight-seeing adventures, including to her favorite vacation spot, Goa.

In 1977 the family moved to Vienna. The assignment lasted only one year, and they were transferred to Kabul shortly after the overthrow of the Daoud government and the takeover by a pro-Soviet Marxist regime.

She was responsible for most of the shopping at a time when the stability of the new government was shaky, and everyone had to observe a nightly curfew. Her children attended the American International School of Kabul. After the abduction and murder of Ambassador Adolph “Spike” Dubs on Valentine’s Day 1979, she packed up the family and prepared for evacuation.

The family returned to Virginia, and Mr. Byers began his first Washington assignment. Ms. Byers went house-hunting and managed the logistics of receiving family household effects, a car, and the family pet from Kabul. She worked with a real estate agent to find a

house where the family could settle and helped her children cope with reverse culture shock as they adjusted to local public schools after having lived seven years abroad.

In 1982 they moved to Bonn. Ms. Byers joined other embassy wives in support of several charitable projects, including the monthly “Tea for the Elderly” that was held at the American Club in Plittersdorf, the residential community for embassy families.

She was also much closer to home and her family; she enjoyed visiting them in Munich and going on skiing trips in Austria. She considered Bonn to be the best Foreign Service family post, a major change from the harrowing year in Kabul.

In 1987 the family returned to Washington and their home in Reston, Va. Then, in 1989, Mr. and Ms. Byers began Polish language studies at FSI and moved, without children, to Warsaw in 1990, where Mr. Byers served as cultural affairs officer at the embassy.

It was a difficult three-year assignment at a time when Poles were emerging from decades of communist oppression and the country lacked for almost everything, including food in the wintertime. Nevertheless, she and her husband enjoyed many cultural events—attending operas at the Opera Kameralna and concerts at the Teatr Wielki (Grand Theatre) that hosted international orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic. They went on excursions to Kraków, Gdansk, Szczecin, and Wrocław.

Ms. Byers was able to visit her family in Munich and accompany her youngest son, Robert, to begin studies at the University of Maryland–Munich Campus, where Mr. Byers had studied many years before.

In 1993 they returned to Washington where Mr. Byers served as AFSA

vice president for USIA. In 1996 they embarked on their last Foreign Service assignment, to Manila, where Mr. Byers served as embassy press officer.

They returned to Washington in 1998, and Mr. Byers retired in 2000 to work part-time at the State Department.

In the ensuing years, Ms. Byers and her husband went on several study tours to Italy, France, Greece, Hungary, and Germany. Their last excursion was a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam in 2015.

She was an avid contributor to the Senior Living Foundation and to the Inova Loudoun Hospital Foundation. She underwent many treatments at the Inova Loudoun Hospital in Landsdowne, Va., where she received excellent care.

Ms. Byers is survived by her spouse, Bruce K. Byers; their children, Christine, Alexander, and Robert Byers; and nieces in Germany.

■ **Neal P. Cohen, PhD, 79**, a retired USAID Foreign Service officer, died on Oct. 9, 2024, at the E.T. York Haven Hospice Center in Gainesville, Fla.

Mr. Cohen was born March 9, 1945, to Aaron and Edna Cohen in Brooklyn, N.Y., and started to explore the world at age 10 when the family moved with the U.S. military to Ramstein.

The family explored Europe, and Mr. Cohen was an eager learner. After graduating from the Kaiserslautern American High School in Germany, and then the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, he earned a PhD in development economics at the University of Wisconsin.

In Wisconsin, he met Jan, his wife of 55 years. Mr. Cohen taught at Eastern Michigan University and St. Louis University, but he craved overseas work where he felt he could truly make a difference.

His first international stint was teaching economics at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria, where eldest son Matthew was born. Second son Richard moved with the family as an infant when Mr. Cohen accepted a Fulbright teaching fellowship in Kathmandu, and the family moved to Arusha with Development Alternatives, a New Delhi-based nonprofit.

Their international lifestyle now decided, Mr. Cohen joined the United States Agency for International Development as an economist in 1980, serving first in Washington, D.C., and then overseas in Mbabane, Colombo, Kathmandu, Nairobi, and Pretoria. Mr. Cohen retired as an FSO in 2000 but continued with USAID as part of President G.W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to combat AIDS in Africa.

Mr. and Ms. Cohen moved to Gainesville, Fla., in 2006 to live near son Matthew; his wife, Leah; and their three grandchildren. Mr. Cohen continued short assignments overseas, including in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Cambodia.

Overseas travel enriched their lives, including a Himalayan trek, taking teenage grandsons to southern Africa, attending the Edinburgh Festival, and exploring Portugal.

As Mr. Cohen's health worsened, he and his wife still managed trips to New York City with friends, attending the Metropolitan Opera theater and dance performances.

Mr. Cohen was a runner and biker, racing for pleasure and good causes, from ultramarathons to charity events. His haul of medals and trophies lines his study, but it was always about being outdoors with friends and testing his own limits. He followed the news and read nonfiction. He was a proud Rotarian and Fulbright board member.

Mr. Cohen was predeceased by his parents, Aaron and Edna; brother Jeff; and beloved second son Richard. He leaves friends across the globe and his loving family—Jan, Matthew, Leah, and grandchildren Sawyer, Grady, and Calyra.

Mr. Cohen donated his body to medical research.

■ **Sheldon Jack Kryz, 90**, an ambassador and career Foreign Service officer, died on Oct. 18, 2024.

Born in New York on June 15, 1934, Mr. Kryz graduated from Coolidge High School in Washington, D.C., and the University of Maryland. He went on to work in radio, public relations, and for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign. He joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1962.

Throughout his years at the State Department, he held several notable positions, including U.S. ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, assistant secretary of State for administration, and assistant secretary for diplomatic security. He played a vital role in bringing both the Canadian and American hostages home from Iran in 1981.

Mr. Kryz received a State Department Distinguished Honor Award and the Presidential Meritorious Service Award. He served six years on the Peabody Awards Board of Jurors, serving as board chair from 1993 to 1995. He received an honorary PhD from St. John Fisher College in 1996.

Friends recall his intellect and wry humor, as well as his ability to connect with people from all walks of life. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Mr. Kryz was predeceased by his beloved wife of nearly 50 years, Doris Kryz (née de Hemptinne). He is survived by his children, Wendy Calvert (and

spouse Scott), Madeleine Menashe (and spouse Jack), and Susan Kryz (and spouse Ken Bocam), and grandchildren Ella Kryz Menashe and Edouard "Teddy" Bocam.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Senior Living Foundation of the American Foreign Service or to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

■ **Thresia Martino, 95**, a former Foreign Service executive assistant, passed away on Aug. 29, 2024.

Ms. Martino was born on Nov. 3, 1928, in Clarksburg, W.Va., the youngest of 14 children and a coal miner's daughter.

She began her government service in 1950 working for the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in Washington, D.C., as a civil servant. In the early 1960s, she went on to serve at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York, where she was the executive secretary for three USIA representatives: Edward Stanbury, Fitzhugh Green, and Frankie Childers.

While working at the UN, Ms. Martino recalled seeing famous figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and the former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who was smoking a cigarette in the UN lounge, she remembered. She often told relatives that the UN was an exciting place to work during a time of heightened Cold War tensions.

After the UN, Ms. Martino went to work in Washington for Richard T. Davies, USIA's assistant director for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In the summer of 1971, she traveled outside the United States for the first time as part of a USIA inspection team to Japan and Hong Kong with the American author James Michener. The purpose of the monthlong trip was to build cultural ties with Japan. The trip

sparked her interest in seeing the world, and she switched from the Civil Service to the Foreign Service in 1971.

Ms. Martino's first overseas assignment was to Belgrade, where she worked from 1972 to 1974 as the executive secretary for USIA's first secretary for press and culture.

From Belgrade, she was selected to be part of the staff to open the first U.S. embassy in East Berlin. She again worked as an executive secretary for the first secretary for press and culture but also worked as needed for the first U.S. ambassador to East Germany, John Sherman Cooper.

From East Berlin, she served in Bonn (1976-1980), where she helped staff some of the final meetings of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II. She was present when Presidents Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev signed the final treaty in Vienna in 1979.

Her final overseas assignment was to U.S. Embassy Moscow, where she worked from 1980 until 1982, again as executive secretary for USIA First Secretary for Press and Culture Wallace W. Littell.

Working in Moscow during the height of the Cold War was difficult but also exciting, and Ms. Martino often told relatives stories of the Russians trying to tunnel beneath the embassy and of being followed by KGB agents when out of town.

After Moscow, she returned to the United States and worked in the registrar's office recruiting new officers to the service and calling them when they had been accepted. She retired in 1986, after 35 years of government service.

She is survived by her great-nephew, Patrick Martino, whom she inspired to join the State Department as a Foreign Service officer.



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■ **Thomas “Tom” Walsh Switzer**, 82, a retired Foreign Service officer, passed away peacefully, surrounded by his family, on Oct. 26, 2024, in Chantilly, Va., after living with dementia for several years.

He was born on April 19, 1942, in Denver, Colo. He was raised there, attending Regis High School and continuing his studies for two years at Regis College, before attending and becoming a proud graduate of the University of Notre Dame in 1964.

Inspired by President John F. Kennedy’s call for Americans to “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,” Mr. Switzer volunteered for the U.S. Peace Corps right after his Notre Dame graduation.

He served for two years in Malawi, providing medical and educational support to local communities. During that time, he traveled throughout Africa and summited Mount Kilimanjaro.

He then attended graduate school at the University of Colorado–Boulder, where he studied law and foreign affairs, earning a master’s degree in 1968.

In 1968 Mr. Switzer passed the Foreign Service exam and moved to Washington, D.C., to begin his career as a U.S. Foreign Service officer with a focus in public diplomacy and communications.

He served overseas in Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, North Macedonia (formerly Yugoslavia), Spain, and various countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkan region.

While serving in Morelia, Mexico, in the early 1970s, he met and married his beloved wife, Sheila. Together, they traveled the world.

They both enjoyed music and the arts and led a very active social life engaging with the local, international,

and diplomatic communities wherever they resided. The couple actively supported local organizations and encouraged others to volunteer.

Mr. Switzer’s career highlights include his involvement in the 1987 Reagan-Gorbachev summit, the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference focused on Arab-Israeli negotiations, and the 1992 Seville Expo, as well as his role in monitoring the first democratic elections in former Soviet states.

He proudly served his nation in the Foreign Service for more than 30 years, visiting more than 120 countries.

Following his retirement in 2001, Mr. Switzer joined the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) in Washington, D.C., as communications director.

For more than a decade there, he helped promote awareness of the vital role of U.S. diplomacy and encourage the next generation to pursue careers in public service and diplomacy.

As the head of AFSA’s Speakers Bureau, he organized speaking events for former ambassadors and diplomats at universities across the United States.

Friends recall that Mr. Switzer had a voracious appetite for knowledge and was an avid reader. A history and art lover, he greatly enjoyed visiting historical sites around the world. He studied and spoke 11 languages and would often delight people with his heartfelt, energetic way of conversing and vast understanding of many topics.

Mr. Switzer’s zest for life and his desire to connect and communicate with people never waned, even throughout his illness, family members recall.

A spiritual man, he was committed to the teachings of the Catholic Jesuits who educated him and, above all, to love, peace, kindness, tolerance, and compassion. Friends remember him as



If you would like us to include an obituary in In Memory, please send text to journal@afsa.org.

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, as well as details of the individual’s Foreign Service career. Please place the name of the AFSA member to be memorialized in the subject line of your email.

a devout family man and a good friend and confidant to many.

Mr. Switzer loved nature and animals. He loved to hike, bike, fish, swim, play sports, paint nature scenes, and spend time in the natural world, often returning to his home state of Colorado.

He was predeceased by his father, Charles McCormick Switzer; his mother, Kathryn Theresa Walsh Switzer; his older brother, Charles “Charlie” Switzer; his baby sister, Kathleen Switzer; aunts Dorothy Walsh and Marjorie Walsh; and uncle Thomas “Tom” Walsh (his namesake).

Mr. Switzer is survived by his wife, Sheila Switzer; his two daughters, Christine and Jacqueline; two sons-in-law; and grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to any of these organizations in Tom’s honor: the Bridge Project (<https://bridgeproject.org/>), Alzheimer’s Association (<https://www.alz.org/>), or Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (<https://www.aafsw.org/Donate>). ■

Service Under Siege

Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West

John J. Sullivan, Little, Brown and Company, 2024, \$32.50/hardcover, e-book available, 416 pages.

REVIEWED BY BART GORMAN

John Sullivan's *Midnight in Moscow* is novelistic nonfiction at its finest—an insider's account of Vladimir Putin and his sycophantic regime that threatens the post-World War II international order.

The former ambassador to Russia's book is replete with seemingly nonstop crises—COVID-19, mass expulsions of embassy personnel, harassment of his employees by the local security services, the deterioration of America's diplomatic platform, the unlawful imprisonment of U.S. citizens, and the Kremlin's illegal (and ultimately failed) invasion of Ukraine that the author and his team sounded the alarm about for months.

Like any good memoir, *Midnight in Moscow* is universalistic and truthful. Those who are not Russia specialists will appreciate the historical and political context Sullivan provides to explain the irrational and violent actions the Russian government takes.

More experienced "Russia hands" may find some of Sullivan's extended reflections on Russian history too extensive; nevertheless, they should look closer at the many connections he makes between modern Russia and its imperial and Soviet predecessors to get a better sense of the firm grip Putin holds on his country.

Readers seeking an exhaustive account of the decision-making process

that led Russia to further invade Ukraine in February 2022, and the many attempts by the Biden administration to forestall it, will not be disappointed.

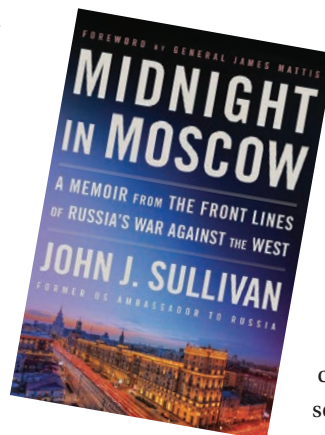
From assessing Putin's publications and speeches on Ukraine to recounting behind-the-scenes details of U.S. national security council meetings and efforts by the CIA director and senior State Department officials to meet with Putin and his team in Moscow, Ambassador Sullivan provides both sides of the story.

As we learn, its ultimate ending—wider war in Ukraine—was reluctantly accepted by U.S. officials as the likely outcome weeks, if not months, prior to the actual incursion.

Humor and Positivity

Beyond issues of war and peace, the ambassador returns again and again to the people who supported him throughout his tenure in Moscow—embassy employees and their family members.

Sullivan's cataloging of their struggles during the pandemic, the Russian government's ban on embassy hiring and retention of Russian national employees, the meritless expulsions, and the closure of two consulates is juxtaposed by the work he and his team did to overcome (or at least manage) those challenges.



From building a two-story outdoor bar made of ice in the winter (named "Sullivan's Post 5" by the Marine Security Guards) and hosting employees and families for dinners at his residence, to coming up with entertaining pop-culture derived code words to confound the security services who monitor nonsecure conversations at the embassy, Sullivan was relentless in efforts to improve operational effectiveness and morale.

As someone who served for more than two years with the ambassador, I can attest that the positivity he exuded and his self-described Bostonian sense of humor were contagious.

Sullivan's focus on people's welfare extended far beyond the walls of his embassy. His advocacy for multiple U.S. citizens who were unjustly arrested, convicted, and imprisoned is well documented in his memoir, as is his decision—unprecedented for any U.S. ambassador to Russia—to visit those same Americans, who were serving

Sullivan was relentless in efforts to improve operational effectiveness and morale.

sentences in harsh conditions in Soviet-era prisons eight hours outside Moscow.

He brought the same passion to his engagements with the American Chamber of Commerce, warning them of the coming conflict and the perils of continuing to do business in Moscow. Whether it was due to the pandemic or Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the ambassador also led his

embassy's efforts to evacuate Americans from Russia, personally processing people at the airport before their departure.

Two Central Characters

Two people loom large throughout Sullivan's memoir—his wife, Grace Rodriguez, and George Kennan, former FSO and ambassador to the Soviet Union and author of the well-known policy of containment, which guided the United States in its relationship with the Soviet Union for nearly 50 years.

Ambassador Sullivan kept copies of Kennan's "Long Telegram" and "X" articles in his Moscow office and refers to the precepts in those writings throughout his book to reveal that many of Putin's pronouncements and actions have their origins in the Soviet period.

In *Midnight in Moscow*, Sullivan also urges the United States to pursue a 21st-century version of Kennan's containment policy vis-à-vis Putin's Russia, underscoring that the United States and its allies must remain resolute in their support for Ukraine because disengagement would spell disaster for the United States, Europe, and much of the world.

Grace Rodriguez's role in Sullivan's memoir is even more central than Kennan's. A successful and well-respected attorney, Grace was—to borrow a term from "The Godfather," Ambassador Sullivan's favorite movie—his *consigliere*, or chief adviser, the person who supported the ambassador most throughout his distinguished career in government in senior positions at four cabinet agencies for presidents of both parties.

With every new position the ambassador seeks or is asked to consider, Grace is the first and last person to sign off on the decision. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond their control, they were separated for much of the

ambassador's tenure in Moscow—they were apart for well over a year due to the pandemic, missed spending multiple major holidays together, and had more than one vacation interrupted or canceled due to Putin's irrational desire to go to war.

Undoubtedly, the most moving chapter in Sullivan's memoir is titled "Two Funerals." Grace's sudden and tragic death, and the ambassador's 11th-hour arrival from Moscow (after attending the funeral of Mikhail Gorbachev) to be with his wife on her hospital deathbed, is depicted in such a moving way that readers may have to put the book down briefly to collect themselves.

Ultimately, *Midnight in Moscow* is the story of a dedicated public servant who successfully served his country in one of the most challenging positions in the Foreign Service. Ambassador Sullivan took a nonpartisan, savvy approach to contend with an unscrupulous adversary; exhibited unwavering, positive leadership of an embassy under duress; and prioritized his own employees and his fellow American citizens above himself.

He did all of this—and more—because, as he notes at the end of his memoir, he "believes in America." His is an example for all State Department leaders to follow.

Bart Gorman is a retired Diplomatic Security special agent who served in Moscow (three times), Yerevan, Almaty, Beijing, Amman, Baghdad, and Washington, D.C., rising to the rank of deputy assistant secretary. His last assignment was deputy chief of mission in Moscow. He retired in 2023 and now works for Bechtel as its chief security officer and as a visiting instructional professor at George Mason University's Schar School of Government and Policy.

The Future of Democracy

Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World

Anne Applebaum, Doubleday, 2024, \$27.00/hardcover, e-book available, 224 pages.

REVIEWED BY STEVEN ALAN HONLEY

Anne Applebaum's latest book, her fifth, warns that the world's dictatorships—Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, among others—are working together (and with prominent American billionaires) to enhance their power and undermine the West.

Autocracy, Inc. is a must-read for anyone who cares about the international order and the future of democracy—both at home and abroad.

In her introduction, Applebaum sets forth the traditional view of an autocratic state: A bad guy (or group of bad guys) at the top controls the police, using the threat of violence and imprisonment against citizens to keep a vise-like grip on power. That setup, in turn, enables regime members to profit from monopolies they, their supporters, and family members create and operate—i.e., "Autocracy, Inc."

That view is still broadly accurate in many countries. But what it misses, as Applebaum details, is the rise during this century of networks that not only support these autocracies but extend their reach—not just to neighboring countries but across the globe.

Chapter 1, "The Greed That Binds," documents an uncomfortable truth about capitalism. Far too many Americans, Brits, and Europeans have been happy to allow Russia and other authoritarian governments to "invest" (launder) money in their countries, no questions

The book documents how Moscow and Beijing collaborate with other members of the autocrats' club to sabotage and destroy faith in the democratic system.

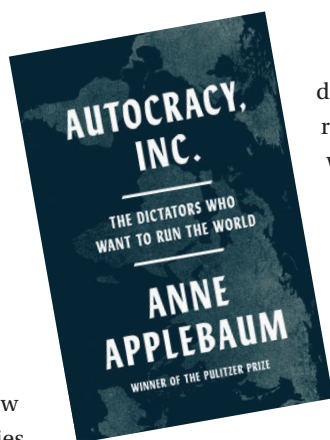
asked, via purchases of property, banks, and other assets.

As Applebaum ruefully observes, “The globalization of finance, the plethora of hiding places, and the benign tolerance that democracies have shown for foreign graft now give autocrats opportunities that few could have imagined a couple of decades ago.”

The next chapter, “Kleptocracy Metastasizes,” offers case studies from Venezuela and Zimbabwe to demonstrate how autocracies band together to help countries hit by Western sanctions to withstand those fiscal pressures. While it’s a fair bet that nearly all *FSJ* readers are already familiar with those situations, it is still helpful to see them spelled out so clearly.

The same is true of chapter 3, “Controlling the Narrative,” which reminds readers how effective “illiberal democracy” (an oxymoron if ever there were one) can be at consolidating power and undercutting international opponents.

That brings us to “Changing the Operating System,” which documents how Moscow and Beijing collaborate with other members of the autocrats’ club to sabotage and destroy faith in the



democratic system and the rule of law. My one quibble with Applebaum here is her claim that so many regimes are operating in lockstep to achieve that goal. That degree of coordination feels overstated, particularly in regard to the Middle East. But there is no denying that it goes

on—and is effective.

Her final chapter, “Smearing the Democrats,” explains how autocrats use trolls (professional and volunteer) to harass, intimidate, and drive brave dissidents into exile. As she ruefully notes, our own country is no stranger to such tactics.

It’s unclear why Applebaum relegated her one faintly hopeful chapter, “Democrats United,” to an epilogue. Perhaps it is a signal that she has little faith in the will of the West to fight back against Autocracy, Inc.? If so, let us hope she is overly pessimistic. ■

Steven Alan Honley, a State Department Foreign Service officer from 1985 to 1997, went on to serve as editor in chief of The Foreign Service Journal from 2001 to 2014. He is the author of Future Forward: FSI at 70—A History of the Foreign Service Institute (Arlington Hall Press, 2017).

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A Latin Love Affair Spanning 60 Years

BY LOUISA ROGERS

Little did I know as an 8-year-old attending the bilingual school *Colegio Americano* in Quito that Latin culture would become a recurring thread throughout my life.

My family was in Quito for only a year and a half. My father, a career diplomat trained in economics, worked on the Pan American highway and consulted with the Ecuadorian government on trade issues. I liked everything about Quito, a city that in 1959 had a population of only 300,000 (compared to more than 2 million today).

We lived on Garcia Street, in a funky house with multiple inner and outer balconies and passageways, and a terrace on the third floor where my sisters and I roller-skated. From one of those inner balconies we placed the star on top of the Christmas tree.

I loved Quito's dramatic mountain backdrop and cool equatorial weather, bicycling or walking to school, my classes (Spanish in the morning, English in the afternoon), and great friends. Sixty years later, my Quito phone number is the basis of my password.

Even more strikingly, I still remember the names of my best Ecuadorian friends: Alicia Davalos, Esperanza Suarez, Rocio Ruales, Luisa Chiriboga, and Gioconda Faini. In fact, when my husband, Barry, and I visited Quito together 40 years ago,

my father's former secretary, who was still working at the embassy, was able to help me connect with two of them. And I'm still in touch with a close American friend from my Quito days.

Back then, I spoke 8-year-old conversational Spanish but never studied formal grammar. After Quito, my family returned to the Washington, D.C., suburbs—my toughest posting—where the *de rigueur* foreign language was French.

In the seventh grade, my junior high school offered a pilot program in French, and for the next several years, that's what I studied, which suited me. French seemed exotic and sophisticated, whereas Spanish was a bit down at heel and had less cachet (to use a French word).

It wasn't until I was a high school junior that I finally studied Spanish grammar. Then, in college, I returned to French. It was as though I couldn't decide which orientation I preferred—Europe and French, or Latin America and Spanish? That dilemma continued for another 30 years.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when Barry and I started traveling to Latin America, we often signed up for Spanish classes, but then we'd return to the States and lose the incentive to study. Meanwhile, we often also explored Europe. Because Barry is British, we'd visit his family in England

and, while over there, tack on a bicycle trip to a different part of the continent—the Dordogne, Tuscany, Sicily, Ireland, Croatia, and more.

Somehow, though, we kept returning to Mexico, which was closer to our home in California and much cheaper than flying to Europe. We were particularly drawn to the UNESCO World Heritage City of Guanajuato, which we visited several times.

Gradually we realized that the city, with its colorful pedestrianized *centro*, great weather, vibrant arts scene, and nearby hills easily accessible for hiking, was the perfect place to satisfy our dream of an international base. In 2005, after several visits, we bought a 200-year-old adobe house, and only then did I finally get serious about learning Spanish.

Nineteen years later, we still love living here part of the year. I'm now fluent, though I still study with my tutor, Camila, who helps me with the hundreds of *modismos* (slang) in Mexican Spanish. And just as in Quito, in high-elevation Guanajuato I walk everywhere, speak Spanish every day, and hear the church bells toll. The rhythm of the city and the clackety sound of the language feel almost like my genetic heritage.

Some State Department kids return to the U.S. and never leave; others, like me, can't stay away from international life. Growing up in Quito, my favorite childhood home, gave me a gift I could never have anticipated: a deep, abiding love for Mexico, a country that has claimed my heart. ■



Louisa Rogers is a writer who divides her life between Eureka, California, and Guanajuato, Mexico. The daughter of Jordan Thomas Rogers, who served as an FSO from 1947 to 1975, she grew up in Hungary, Argentina, Ecuador, Maryland, and Pakistan. Her Reflection, "It Took Me 30 Years, but I Finally Put Down Roots," appeared in the October 2023 FSJ.

LOCAL LENS

The Inca Lagoon is in front of Portillo Ski Resort high in the Chilean Andes next to a border crossing with Argentina. It is common for U.S. Embassy Santiago ski enthusiasts to visit this resort, which is just a two-hour drive from the Chilean capital. Ski teams from around the world, including the U.S. women's team, visit each year to train during the Northern Hemisphere's offseason. ■

Martin Claessens is the senior commercial officer and commercial counselor at U.S. Embassy Santiago. He has served in Mumbai, Bogotá, Kyiv, and Toronto. He took this photo using a Pixel 8.



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