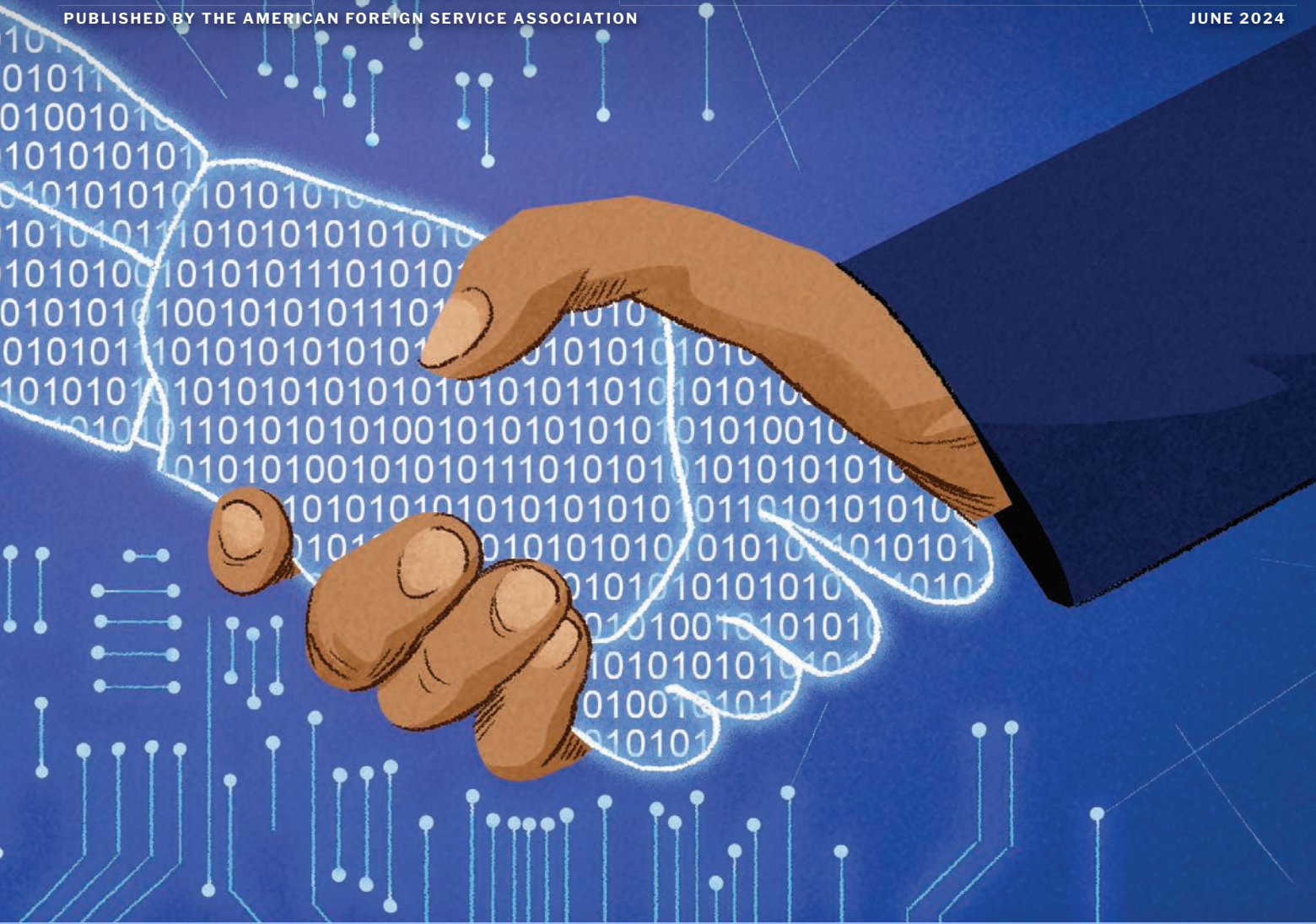


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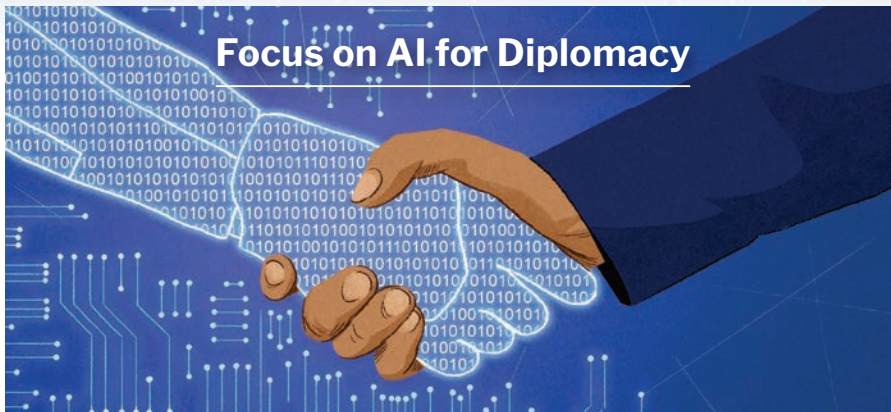


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THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

June 2024 Volume 101, No. 5



21

New Tools for Better Foreign Policy

Can the State Department integrate promising new technology without undermining the essential human aspects of diplomacy?

By Dan Spokojny

24

An AI Primer for Policy Professionals

As international affairs professionals, we need to understand the fundamentals of new technology so we can better address its evolution and application.

By Zed Tarar

28

At the Crossroads of Tradition and Innovation with AI

Making AI work at State requires challenging the culture that underlies the department's siloed structure.

By Paul Kruchoski

31

Toward Data-Informed Multilateral Diplomacy

Here is a case study of the adoption of AI and data science in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs.

By Paula Osborn

35

AI Disruption and Responsible Use in Diplomacy

A vision of how AI will be integrated into our U.S. democratic society is needed. State can contribute to the discussion.

By Evanna Hu

Feature

38

Beyond Scale: Three Steps Toward Modernizing the Foreign Service

By Darrow Godeski Merton,
FSJ Centennial Writing Competition
2nd Place Winner

FS Heritage



40

Henry of the Tower Revisited

It's time to take another look at how we remember 18th-century American envoy Henry Laurens.

By Thomas N. Hull

Education Supplement

53

Beyond Borders: Launching Third Culture Kids

Here are tips on managing the college and overseas transitions.

By Rebecca McPherson

58, 60

Education at a Glance

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

Perspectives

7

President's Views

Diplomacy Works:
Do Our Budgets Reflect That?

By Tom Yazdgerdi

9

Letter from the Editor

AI for Diplomacy

By Shawn Dorman

18

Speaking Out

The Foreign Service Deserves
Its Own Sorting Hat

By Eric Bernau

76

Reflections

MFO: Tipping the Scales
in Favor of Stability

By Joseph Anthony D'Agostino III

78

Local Lens

Los Cobanos, El Salvador

By Caitlin Hartford



Departments

10 Letters

12 Talking Points

67 Books

Marketplace

70 Real Estate

74 Classifieds

75 Index to Advertisers

AFSA NEWS

THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

- 44 Inside Diplomacy: DG Talks to AFSA Members
- 44 AFSA Hosts Road Scholars
- 44 Shop AFSA!
- 45 State VP Voice—Advancing Diplomacy for the Next Century
- 46 USAID VP Voice—Answers for Our Overworked Workforce
- 47 Retiree VP Voice—Mandatory Retirement: Why Still Age 65?
- 48 AFSA on the Hill—FY24 Appropriations Outcomes
- 49 AFSA on Havana Syndrome
- 49 AFSA Urges Clarity on Flag Restrictions
- 50 FSJ Welcomes New Associate Editor
- 50 AFSA Governing Board Meetings, March and April 2024
- 50 Training for Op-Ed Writing
- 50 AFSA Webinar—The View from Washington
- 51 AFSA's Good Works—Member Advocacy



On the Cover—Illustration by Bitteschoen.TV.

Diplomacy Works: Do Our Budgets Reflect That?

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

As members of the Foreign Service, we have devoted our lives to being America's first line of defense and working for a more secure, more just, and more prosperous world.

As I write this column in late April, we are focused on the final Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations for the State Department and the other foreign affairs agencies. We are disappointed that the FY2024 International Affairs Budget (IAB) has been reduced by 6 percent, the first time in five years that there have been cuts. (See Advocacy Director Kim Greenplate's full report, page 48.)

True, most cuts to the operational accounts for the foreign affairs agencies were below 3 percent, with the State Department's cut coming in at less than a percent. But with inflation running at more than 3 percent, this is going to hurt our country's ability to engage diplomatically—and even more so as these cuts must be absorbed in the last six months of FY2024 since it took so long for the appropriations bills to be passed.

For USAID and the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), budget cuts are deeper, at 10 percent for foreign assistance and 4 percent for FAS. It is unfortunate and

wrongheaded to cut resources for foreign assistance, agricultural, and commercial work, all of which are integrally tied to U.S. interests.



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

At State, we are hearing that Foreign Service hiring will have to be reduced by 15 to 30 percent for the remainder of the fiscal year. The cuts at the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) are so deep that no new FSOs are expected to be onboarded this year.

What Can Be Done?

First, I encourage our members to reach out to their representatives and senators in support of funding for diplomacy and development. FS retirees, resident in nearly every state and territory of the union, can play a pivotal role here. We also have strong relationships with our diplomats in residence (DIR) who are engaged at the regional and state levels.

We all can and should use the centennial year as a hook for telling our stories and detailing why appropriately funding the foreign affairs agencies is crucial to U.S. national security and prosperity.

I have heard arguments for the creation of a single national security appropriations bill that would encompass all the defense, intelligence, and foreign affairs agencies. All these agencies deal with national security.

This would create a single place where national security funding in all its forms could be discussed and decided, where there would be no separate cutout for the military function. This would put these agencies on a more equal footing. I realize the difficulty in achieving this, but at the very least, the idea should be considered and debated.

Please, No More Doing More with Less

There is no question that the foreign affairs agencies will have belt-tightening to do over the next 12 to 18 months. One hopeful sign: a supplemental national security package recently passed the House and Senate to address crises overseas in Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan.

This package includes an additional 26.8 billion for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations. For operational accounts, State received more than \$230 million and USAID received nearly \$40 million. But even with this additional funding, the foreign affairs agencies have seen disproportionate cuts to their functions over decades.

I hope never again to hear the words “doing more with less.” That did not work back in 1992 when I first heard that phrase as a first-tour officer, and it will not work now. We must look for ways to put funding the international affairs function—which accounts for about 1 percent of the federal budget—on a sounder, more rational footing.

To do otherwise is to cede the field to our rivals, who are all too willing to fill the void in a world that has grown increasingly dangerous and unpredictable. Nothing short of American leadership, which has kept the global peace for so many years, is at stake.

Please share your thoughts by writing yazdgerdi@afsa.org or member@afsa.org. ■

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

Email: journal@afsa.org
Phone: (202) 338-4045
Fax: (202) 338-8244
Web: www.afsa.org/fsj
Address Changes: member@afsa.org

© American Foreign Service Association, 2024

PRINTED IN THE USA

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



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AI for Diplomacy

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Welcome to the June edition, where we take on the question of artificial intelligence (AI) for diplomacy—promise or peril? Of course, AI is both. It has the potential to affect nearly everything we do, so it is worth hearing from practitioners working in this field to get an idea of how AI is being used for diplomacy and what the prospects are.

For this month's focus, we were fortunate to have assistance from *FSJ* Editorial Board member Dan Spokojny, who helped bring together an expert group of authors and wrote the lead piece, outlining the topic and showing how AI is growing in importance.

In this modernizing world, changes are afoot at the *Journal*, too. As reading habits and the ways we consume media continue to change, we want to keep up—without losing our grounding in print. And I am happy to report that as we adapt to the changing landscape, the *FSJ* is flourishing.

Many of you now see *Journal* articles as they flow through various channels before or instead of reading the magazine front to back in print. Almost all the individual articles are pushed out through AFSA and *FSJ* social media, as well as through the weekly *FSJ* Insider email newsletter.



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

The *FSJ* digital archive provides one of the most extensive records in existence of U.S. diplomatic history as seen through the eyes of the practitioners.

To increase access to its riches, we post the entire edition online and also curate content for Special Collections on critical topics, which can be found on the AFSA website.

This is a living and evolving resource. The issues we take on don't end with any particular edition, and we encourage responses to carry conversations forward.

We started the "Straight from the Source" department to give active-duty authors the chance to tell us, in an official capacity, about new policies or plans affecting the Foreign Service with the aim of sparking discussion and debate. And sometimes, *FSJ* coverage leads to action or change.

We are always looking for the right authors from the active-duty and retired Foreign Service community to shed light on the issues of the day. You are our eyes and ears, and your voices make this journal.

We want to hear your responses to articles, and we want to know what else you'd like to see in your *FSJ*. We will be reaching out with a reader survey soon to get your thoughts.

As always, please write to us at journal@afsa.org. You can also engage with us directly online through the *FSJ* LinkedIn page and any other AFSA social media platform. ■

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Anti-Bullying and Accountability

Congratulations to the editorial team on the *Journal's* powerful anti-bullying focus in April 2024. The State Department's announcement of a long-delayed anti-bullying office and policy mere months after AFSA and the *FSJ* raised the matter shows the power of union and employee advocacy to effect meaningful change.

While every article was thought-provoking, I was particularly impressed by Ambassador Ana Escrogima's take on how leaders can interrupt toxic behaviors—an approach she embraces in real life, as I can vouch from firsthand experience.

Strong, compassionate leaders like Amb. Escrogima and those who'll heed her advice are what we need. If the flood of messages I received after publication of my Speaking Out

essay, "State's Pledge to Stop Promoting Bullies," in the January-February 2024 *FSJ* is any indication, the prevalence of bullying across our institution is shocking.

From ambassadors to new hires, former colleagues to officers I've never met, people wrote and called from Washington, D.C., and around the world to talk about their experiences with toxic senior leaders. There was one unifying theme: concern over a lack of accountability that let their tormentors rise to even more senior levels or respectable retirement.

In this context, the Director General's "Focus on Accountability" initiative is timely and welcome, particularly when 65 percent of Foreign Service officers lack confidence in the department's accountability mechanisms, according

to survey data that the DG herself called "disturbing."

If the department has the necessary political will to implement this initiative, victim testimonies abound, including in the *Journal's* coverage of AFSA's 2023 Constructive Dissent Awards.

Zia Ahmed

FSO

U.S. Embassy Muscat

Learning Policy Lacks Resources

I read the March 2024 *Foreign Service Journal* article "A Look at the New Learning Policy" with great interest. I have

been following the development of the learning policy, and I appreciate the thoughtful and well-constructed framework it lays out.

However, I keep waiting for the second part, the one that would make it a serious policy and distinguish it from the countless initiatives—always billed as "revolutionary" and "culture changing"—announced under every administration with great fanfare and then quickly forgotten a few years later.

I am waiting for the announcement of resources.

One of the ironclad rules of a bureaucracy is that your priorities are where you put your resources: money and people. Talk is, literally, cheap. The learning policy calls on us to allow our staff more time for professional development but does not seem to recognize that we lead teams on which everyone is expected to do the work of multiple people.

Our people are stretched so thin that the biggest barrier to making time for

professional development is the need to find ways to mitigate the stress on the entire overworked team that must pick up the slack when one person is in training.

The policy also talks about the importance of long-term training opportunities, and it is spot-on. However, it does not provide any avenue to backfill these long-term gaps; and, in the fine print, it says that in most cases the bureaus are responsible for covering the costs of long-term training out of existing resources.

Unfortunately, the problem with the learning policy goes further. This declaration of admirable ideas was released at about the same time as two directives that will make it even harder to make time for professional development. First, every bureau must further cut staff from already strained offices, and second, we must cut funding from already bare-bones budgets.

Taken altogether, this sends an unambiguous signal of the lack of seriousness for the new learning policy.

We have a model for what a serious learning policy looks like, however. I had the honor of beginning my career under Secretary Colin Powell, who created the first management continuing education program for the State Department in 2001.

To do this, he personally went before Congress, multiple times, to secure commitments for additional funds that would support the initiative and give the department a large personnel increase to create training floats.

That was a serious policy that didn't just talk about respect for the work of the State Department; it demonstrated that respect. (After 9/11, the additional staffing needs for war-zone Iraq and Afghanistan took all the spots that would



have formed the training float, but that is a different story.)

Powell also truly modernized State by getting access to the internet on every desktop and replacing the “War Games”-era Wang computers with their almost-21st-century technology.

Again, this happened because he took the time to ensure we got additional resources, and he took the time to ensure senior leaders were held accountable for making it happen, despite some pretty serious resistance from those arguing the need to maintain the status quo.

In a very short time, Colin Powell made dramatic and lasting changes to State Department culture through real leadership: delivering on his promises to support us and holding himself and other senior leaders accountable to us.

Even as a first-tour officer at a small post in central Africa, I felt empowered, and we all strove to live up to his example.

Powell knew that our priorities are reflected in how we use our resources. He didn’t just say we needed more people, more technology, new skills, and better training. He personally went to the Hill to argue for the resources to do it, and he spent his own time—perhaps the most precious resource in the State Department—to ensure it happened.

We cannot modernize the department through rhetoric and directives alone.

Michael Honigstein
FSO
Washington, D.C.

Malcolm Toon’s Reminder

I want to congratulate *The Foreign Service Journal* on a brilliant 100th-anniversary edition (May 2024).

I got a particular chuckle out of the excerpt in “The U.S. Foreign Service and AFSA Through 100 Years of the *Journal*” from a 1982 interview with Malcolm Toon, who was my very first ambassador in the Foreign Service, at Embassy Belgrade (and again at Embassy Moscow).

In his candid and scathing fashion, he railed against the plague of unqualified political appointees populating the ambassadorial ranks: “It is no longer in the national

interest to use the Foreign Service as a dumping ground for people who have been defeated in elections or who have made heavy contributions to the party.”

His prescription: top career people should

speak out, and if nothing was done, “Let them resign with a *bang*, slam the door, make a big noise about it.” Toon spared neither party in his criticism, noting that “for every David Bruce, you get ten Mr. Klunks.” His descriptions of a few of the political appointees in Europe at the time, although he named no names, were readily identifiable and hilarious.

I recommend that everyone read the Toon interview to get an idea of what a real professional who spoke his mind was like.

And by the way, the Soviets couldn’t stand him—also because of his candor. The full Toon interview is in the April 1982 edition of the *FSJ*. It is well worth reading both for the laughs and, for some of us, the memories.

James F. Schumaker
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State Releases Chatbot

The State Department launched a pilot for its internal AI chatbot the week of April 19 in response to employee requests for help in streamlining processes such as translating and summarizing.

Secretary Blinken signed the Enterprise Artificial Intelligence Strategy FY 2024-2025 on Nov. 9, 2023, saying in a statement: “The Department of State will responsibly and securely harness the full capabilities of trustworthy artificial intelligence to advance United States diplomacy and shape the future of statecraft.”

Approaches toward generative AI vary across different sectors of the federal government. Certain agencies, such as the Social Security Administration,

Contemporary Quote

“Can you imagine if United Airlines, or Microsoft, or Google, or the University of Virginia had 13 percent of its positions unfilled? What happens is you end up with incredible workload burdens. You end up shifting certain duties. You end up with posts that don’t have enough people. ... We’re in this race to catch up, but you can’t catch up if your budget, like this past year, has been cut by nearly 6 percent.”

—Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Amb. Richard Verma at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on April 3.

Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Energy, have blocked the technology altogether. Others, such as NASA and the Department of Agriculture, have begun to cautiously explore this terrain by creating “sandbox” testing environments and

organizing boards to review potential use cases. Kelly Fletcher, the State Department’s chief information officer, stated that the agency is encouraging its workforce to use these AI tools to determine how they will best be used in the future.

On Gaza Assistance

The U.S. embassy in Jerusalem announced the death of a 21-year embassy employee who worked for USAID’s mission to the West Bank and Gaza. Arab Israeli Jacob Toukhy was killed in an altercation with an off-duty police officer on April 13.

According to R. David Harden, a former USAID assistant administrator, Toukhy was a “good soul” who contributed to briefing senior U.S. government officials, helped Palestinians and Jordanians find common ground for shared water resources, and managed many of the mission’s youth programs.

Toukhy’s death comes in the wake of humanitarian violence in early April, when seven members of World Central Kitchen’s (WCK) team were killed in an IDF strike in Gaza. WCK’s convoy, made up of Australian, Polish, American, Canadian, and Palestinian nationals, was hit after it left its warehouse in Deir al-Balah, where it had unloaded

roughly 100 tons of humanitarian food aid to Gaza. WCK says Israeli forces were aware of the convoy’s movements and purpose when they fired on the vehicle.

In response, WCK paused its operations in the region, and the IDF launched an official investigation into the circumstances of the incident, resulting in the dismissal and reprimand of officials involved in the incident. On April 25, José Andrés, founder of WCK, delivered a eulogy to the fallen aid workers at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. On April 28, WCK announced that it would resume operations in Gaza.

The mission of aid workers at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza has also been stymied since Israel alleged in late January that 12 members of UNRWA staff took part in the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attacks and asserted that many UNRWA staff are military operatives in Gaza terrorist groups. After an investigation, UNRWA

terminated 10 of the 12 accused staff, with the remaining two being deceased. UNRWA maintains that remaining staffers have no ties to Hamas. On April 22, a final report of the Independent Review Group on UNRWA determined that Israeli authorities have yet to provide proof of their claims that U.N. staff are involved with terrorist organizations.

UNRWA employs 32,000 people across its area of operations, 13,000 of them in Gaza. Israel’s allegations led 16 countries to pause or suspend funding of \$450 million to UNRWA. The U.S. was UNRWA’s chief donor, contributing \$300-400 million a year; U.S. Congress officially suspended contributions after an initial pause in funding.

Janez Lenarcic, European commissioner for crisis management, called for a resumption in funding for the “Palestinian refugees’ lifeline.” Germany signaled that it would resume funding in the wake of the April 22 report, joining Australia, Canada, and Sweden.

New Director at VOA

Voice of America (VOA), the broadcasting network run by the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), announced on April 19 that Michael Abramowitz will take over as director this summer. The position is currently held by John Lippman, who has been acting director since October 2023. VOA has not had a permanent director since 2021.

Abramowitz has served as president of the nonprofit Freedom House since 2017. Prior to that, he was a director at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; he also spent 24 years as a reporter and editor at *The Washington Post*. He wrote “Diplomacy and Democracy: Putting Values into Practice” for the January–February 2021 *Foreign Service Journal*.

Abramowitz told *The New York Times* he appreciates VOA’s work to counter disinformation from authoritarian countries like China, Russia, and Iran: “These countries are waging ferocious information warfare aimed at undermining democracies, aimed at undermining the United States, and we need to fight back. I think that the VOA is one very important tool for the United States government in this information war.”

Abramowitz is a Foreign Service family member: His father, Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, was the 2006 recipient of AFSA’s Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award.

Dissent at State

As the crisis in Gaza has led to massive protests on college campuses across the U.S., dissent within the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies continues.

To date, three State Department officials have resigned in protest over the war in Gaza. First was Josh Paul in October 2023; then on March 27, Annelle

Podcast of the Month: *American Diplomacy* (<https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/>)

This quarterly online journal seeks to inform readers about international issues and diplomacy, promote greater understanding of the Foreign Service and the role of diplomats, and encourage readers to consider a Foreign Service career. *American Diplomacy* is published in cooperation with the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill’s College of Arts and Sciences and its curriculum in peace, war, and defense.

From analyses of postwar relations between the U.S. and Vietnam to firsthand accounts of American diplomats working under fire, *American Diplomacy* provides a window into the lives and work of Foreign Service officials abroad. In 2021 it celebrated 25 years of continuous online publication—its archives have grown to include more than 2,000 articles since its inception in 1996.

To subscribe, email join—amdip1_announce@listserv.unc.edu. In addition, if you wish to send a submission, email editor@americandiplomacy.org.

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Sheline, former foreign affairs officer in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, stepped down in protest.

On April 25, Foreign Service Officer Hala Rharrit became the first Foreign Service career diplomat to resign in protest of the war. She was serving as the State Department’s Arabic language spokesperson and as the deputy director for the Dubai Regional Media Hub.

On April 29, Rharrit spoke to NPR about her resignation, saying that after 18 years of service to the United States’ Gaza policy, she found it difficult to do her job given the continued flow of U.S. arms to Israel.

“The policy really became unacceptable. I was holding out, hoping to try to change things from the inside, until I realized at one point that this policy was undermining U.S. interests. It was destabilizing the Middle East. And it was indeed a failed policy. And with that, I decided I could no longer be part of the department and decided to submit my resignation.”

Rharrit maintains that U.S. diplomats are losing credibility: “We could no longer talk about human rights when we

were allowing and enabling the mass killing of civilians. We could no longer talk about press freedom when we remained silent on the killing of over a hundred journalists in Gaza.” Asked by NPR host Mary Louise Kelly about whether she had attempted to go through official internal dissent channels before resigning, Rharrit said that yes, she had.

Rharrit added her former colleagues at the department are “uneasy” about the policy and unable to talk about it internally: “I’ve never faced that before. We’ve always been able to talk about what’s working, what’s not working. We’ve been able to have very open and frank conversations. This has felt very, very different.”

When asked what she would say to Secretary Blinken, she said: “The answer is diplomacy. The answer is us leveraging our influence on Israel, working with our regional partners across the Arab world to put pressure on Hamas to get to a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel, which is a two-state solution that the U.S. has long supported. Arms and bombs are not going to achieve that, only diplomacy will.”



Cherry trees bloom in Washington, D.C., April 2024.

Japanese Prime Minister on Relations

In a speech to the U.S. Congress on April 11, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reflected on the long-standing friendship, or *tomodachi*, between Japan and the United States. In “For the Future: Our Global Partnership,” Kishida affirmed Japan’s commitment to partner with the United States in addressing pressing global issues.

“The U.S. shaped the international order in the postwar world through economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power. It championed freedom and democracy,” Kishida said. He went

on to address partisan divisions on issues such as foreign war aid: “I detect an undercurrent of self-doubt among some Americans about what your role in the world should be.”

Concerns about Russian aggression, stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and rapid development of AI emerged as themes that demand, in Kishida’s eyes, a globally active and engaged United States. “I want to address those Americans who feel the loneliness and exhaustion of being the country that has upheld the international order almost singlehandedly,” Kishida stated. “You are not alone.”



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks to Congress on April 11, 2024.

In anticipation of the National Park Service’s rehabilitation project at the Tidal Basin, Kishida said Japan is gifting the United States 250 cherry trees as a gesture of friendship. The new trees will serve as a symbolic gift for the 250th anniversary of U.S. independence in 2026.

New State-DoD Agreement on DETOs

First Lady Jill Biden hosted an April 17 signing of a DoD Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Departments of State and Defense on Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas (DETOs). After many months of negotiations, the MOA should reduce some major pain points among certain FS families.

The MOA facilitates DETOs for U.S. government employees authorized to accompany DoD sponsors on assignments abroad. It will cover any AFSA member wishing to convert to a DETO position when their DoD spouse has an authorized post change of station (PCS).

The MOA clarifies standard operating procedures between State and DoD that will enable our Foreign Service families to stay together by allowing DETO work in areas where DoD has established Military Housing Offices serving military communities.

Diplomatic Push in Middle East

On April 23, the U.S. Senate passed a security supplemental bill providing \$95 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. The bill cleared the House of Representatives on April 20; President Biden signed it on April 24. The legislation provides \$26 billion in wartime assistance to Israel and humanitarian relief to Gaza.

On April 25, the Biden administration announced the appointment of



AFSA/TINA WONG

First Lady Jill Biden speaks at the White House ceremony to sign DETO MOU, as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma looks on.

Lise Grande as the new coordinator for humanitarian aid to Gaza. The position was created one week after the Hamas Oct. 7 attack on Israel. Grande is the current CEO and president of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) and will replace Ambassador David Satterfield in the coordinator role.

Blinken headed out on his seventh diplomatic mission to the Middle East on April 29. “The most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, to alleviate the suffering of children, women and men, and to create space for a more just and durable solution is to get a cease-fire and the hostages out,” Blinken told the Gulf Cooperation Council on April 29.

On the same day, a Hamas delegation met with Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Cairo to respond to a 40-day cease-fire deal proposed by Israel on April 27. Israel demanded that Hamas release 40 hostages; the deal would also require that Israel release 900 Palestinian prisoners.

The international community has been concerned with Israeli plans for a possible offensive in Gaza’s southern-most city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians are sheltering. Blinken asserted that the U.S. would not support an Israeli ground offensive on Rafah without a “plan to ensure that civilians will not be harmed.”

Both Secretary Blinken and British Foreign Secretary David Cameron have

expressed hopes that Hamas will take the deal. “You’ve got to see a political future for the Palestinian people, but you’ve also crucially got to see security for Israel and those two things have to go together,” Cameron said on April 29 during the World Economic Forum meeting in Riyadh.

Hiring Cuts Expected

Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Ambassador Richard Verma remarked on April 3 that budget cuts for the remainder of 2024 will strain the department:

“The dollars are simply unable to stretch as far as we need to meet the moment.” Verma cited Ukraine, the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and global humanitarian needs as major global pressures demanding U.S. attention in the form of a well-resourced and adequately funded Foreign Service.

In response to the budget cuts, the State Department expects to have to halve the number of new hires for the remainder of 2024 after the large July orientation class comes in. Recent orientation class cohorts, which now combine generalists and specialists, have been averaging 200-220 Foreign Service members.

Blinken in Beijing

Against the backdrop of the Biden administration’s restrictive economic measures against China, Secretary Blinken traveled to Beijing the week of April 22 to meet with senior Chinese officials.

Budget Pressures

The pressures on the international affairs budget have become too great. Our process is overwhelmed. We are at a point where it is time to start making difficult choices, ones that we have to make and prioritize. I really feel that this budget does not do that.

—Senator James Risch (R-Idaho) during the April 10

Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the FY2025 United States Agency for International Development budget request.



Expanding the Pie

When we try to address one crisis, we often have to use money from somewhere else. We should not have to choose between addressing the climate crisis or helping vulnerable communities adapt to our rapidly changing world. Or housing refugees fleeing violence. Or funding anti-corruption programs. Or strengthening our global health initiatives. We need to expand the pie.

—Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.) during the April 10

Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the FY2025 United States Agency for International Development budget request.

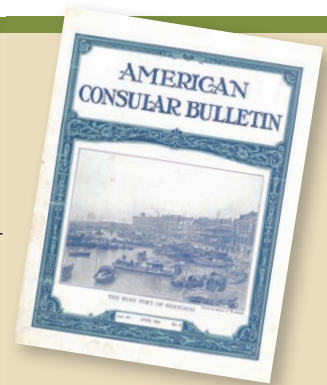
How Consuls Foster Good Will

In ever-increasing numbers, young men and women from England, America, Mexico, Cuba, Latin-America, China, Japan, India, Egypt, Australia, and elsewhere are leaving home to enter technical schools and colleges in other lands. The great, far-reaching influence of this movement is obvious. To grasp and appreciate its full import as a factor in international goodwill, you have only to talk, for example, with an American who has gone to school in Europe, or in England. It brings tolerance, patience, sympathy, a deeper understanding of the other fellow's "ways." ...

Consuls, again, are factors in this migration of students. ... Many schools send their printed matter to their consuls abroad, and request help in recruiting students. Time and again, for example, during my consular career, fathers and their sons came to ask about schools in America. ...

Just what part future consuls will be able to play in securing that world peace which is so urgently needed

is hard to say. But from the type of men who are being appointed to consular posts, from the very definite instructions which they receive as to the necessity for cultivating friendly relations, from the ever-growing flow of goods with which they must become familiar and the increasing international travel which they must direct, it seems likely that their opportunities will be even greater than they are at present. May they meet these opportunities with all the diplomacy and efficiency which they can master!



—From an article of the same title by Frederick Simpich, American Consular Bulletin (precursor to the FSJ), June 1924.

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Since Blinken’s last visit in June 2023, following an uproar in response to a Chinese spy balloon crossing the United States, relations between China and the U.S. have improved, with more frequent, less confrontational dialogues. Issues such as artificial intelligence, military communications, and counternarcotics have been cited as areas of progress in bilateral relations.

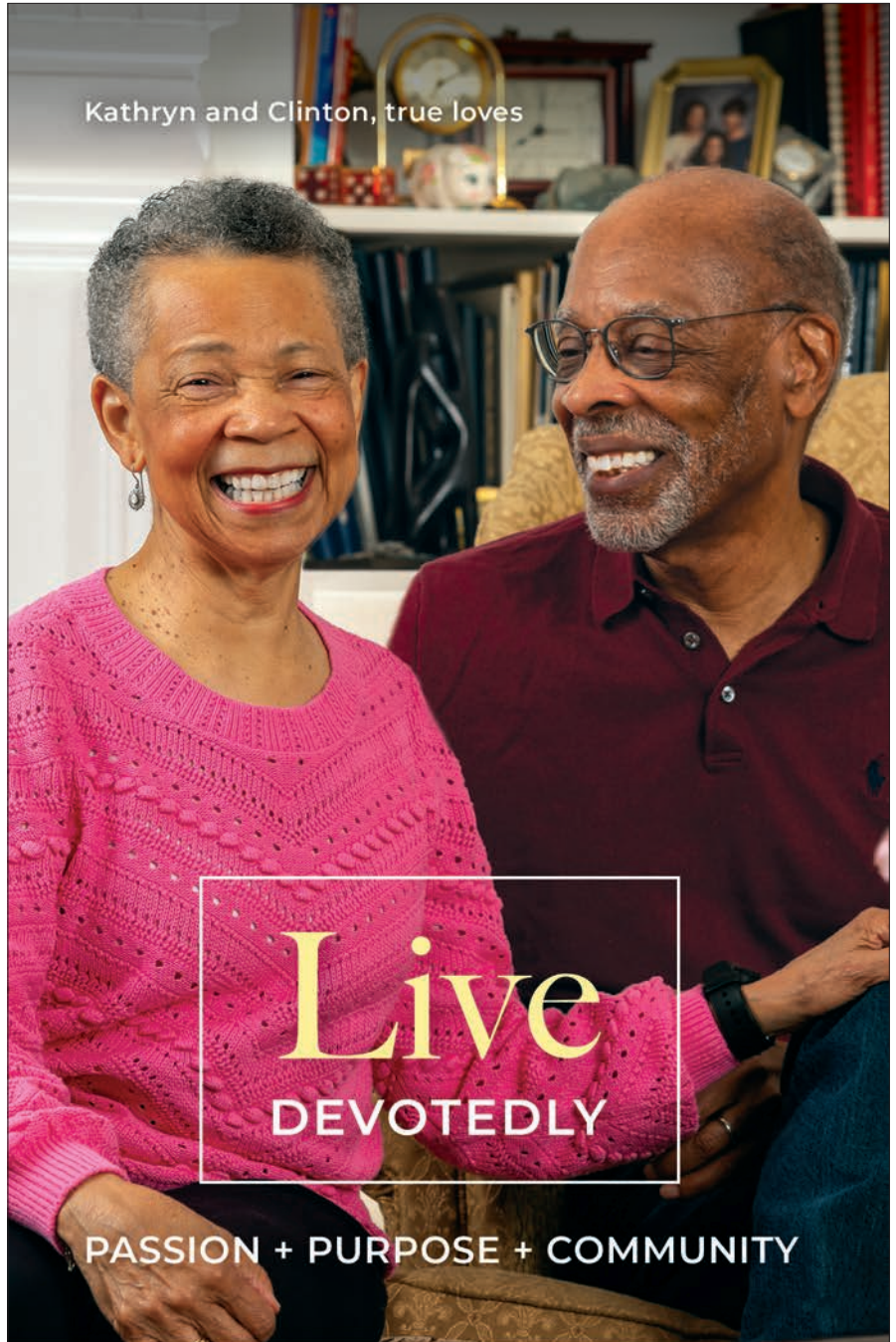
Nevertheless, Blinken maintained that “even as we seek to deepen cooperation, where our interests align, the United States is very clear-eyed about the challenges posed by [China] and about our competing visions for the future. America will always defend our core interests and values.”

During his meeting with Xi Jinping, Blinken discussed Russian-Chinese military cooperation, Chinese maritime activity in the South China Sea, and the influence China has “to discourage Iran and its proxies from expanding the conflict in the Middle East.”

As part of the \$95 billion aid package approved by the U.S. Senate on April 23, \$2 billion will go toward the foreign military financing program for Taiwan and other Indo-Pacific security partners, and an additional \$1.9 billion toward defense-related expenses provided to Taiwan. On April 24, ahead of Blinken’s visit, China criticized the aid as “violating” U.S. commitments to China.

“Overall, the China-U.S. relationship is beginning to stabilize,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Blinken at the outset of their talks. “But at the same time, the negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and building and the relationship is facing all kinds of disruptions.” ■

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



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The Foreign Service Deserves Its Own Sorting Hat

BY ERIC BERNAU

Hogwarts students and Foreign Service officers (FSOs) both begin their adventures with a path-defining event at the beginning of their journey. Hogwarts students place the sorting hat on their head; close their eyes; whisper “not Slytherin, not Slytherin, not Slytherin”; and wait for a magical hat to shout out their assigned house in front of the entire wizarding school.

FSOs receive their first assignments in an equally anxiety-inducing, albeit much less magical, fashion. One would be hard-pressed to find an FSO who couldn't recall seeing tears of disappointment during their flag ceremony. But does it truly need to be that way?

The current assignment process is time-consuming, and the high/medium/low selection system, which requires new FSOs to rank potential posts by preference, is imprecise. Tasking career development officers (CDOs) to find the optimal assignment distribution for each new class of generalists requires significant effort and is vulnerable to human error and unconscious bias.



Eric Bernau is a management officer who most recently served in New Delhi. He joined the Foreign Service in 2019

and currently serves as a program analyst with the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Unit.

In just seconds, with the click of a button, CDOs can find the optimal assignment distribution for the entire cohort using POST.

Just as computers aid accountants to rapidly perform their duties with reduced error, technology can, and should, play a larger role in helping CDOs to assign new hires.

Improving the Assignment Process

I proposed one possible solution at the department's 2023 inaugural “Innovation Shark Tank,” a contest to get innovative ideas in front of department leaders that was modeled after the reality television show “Shark Tank.”

My “Post Optimization Sorting Tool” (POST) would use an algorithm to match new FSOs with their preferred assignments while still prioritizing the needs of the Foreign Service. POST works by asking all new FSOs to allocate a finite number of points across all the available assignments to represent their lack of interest—not their interest—in each post.

That's an important distinction to note, one that golfers will recognize. By using the “lower is better” scoring system, POST minimizes gamesmanship by preventing an officer from assigning all their points to one assignment, thus trying to force POST to match them to that specific option.

Instead, POST presumes the new FSOs are truly “worldwide deployable” and happy with every assignment. This is represented by a default “zero” baseline score. FSOs distribute their finite points across all the assignments to express which assignments are of least interest. POST then optimizes for the lowest possible score among the cohort.

Before running POST's optimization program, CDOs can prioritize the needs of the Foreign Service by setting POST's constraints to either prevent or force the algorithm to make certain assignments. The CDOs can exclude FSOs from certain assignments, such as out-of-cone assignments or those with a language training requirement where the FSO already speaks that language.

CDOs can also force POST to assign an officer to a specific assignment, such as a “fill now” position with a language requirement where only one FSO speaks that language. Thus, while POST would enable FSOs to be more precise with their assignment preferences, CDOs retain control of the process.

In just seconds, with the click of a button, CDOs can find the optimal assign-

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

ment distribution for the entire cohort using POST. They can then analyze the results, add any constraints they overlooked, and re-run the algorithm until they're satisfied with every generalist-to-assignment match. This will save CDOs countless hours without sacrificing any of their control over the process.

POST can further mitigate gamesmanship if CDOs include restrictions akin to the current second tour "valid/invalid" bid concept. For context, a valid bid is a potential follow-on assignment for which the FSO is qualified based on myriad factors such as their cone, language qualifications, and the date they'll depart from their current assignment. CDOs could use POST to eliminate assignment options, such as nonconsular, out-of-cone positions, or those with a report date that would create an unacceptable training timeline.

It's also important to note that Frontline Systems' Solver, the Microsoft Excel add-in I used to design POST, is simple, trustworthy, and cost-efficient. Solver doesn't require CDOs to be tech savvy—anyone who knows how to use Excel will be able to use Solver. In addition, because Solver is already in use by the Department of Defense and other federal government agencies, there aren't any security-related concerns. Furthermore, a subscription to Solver will set the Department of State back only \$2,000 each year—a small investment for a tool that could significantly improve retention rates.

Beyond Flag Day

In its current form, POST is basically a Blackberry circa 1999. But given the resources, a dedicated team could turn POST into a technological wonder that goes beyond merely assigning positions to new FSOs. And, if the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) were to convert its course catalog into an AI program-readable database, POST could use the database to develop the entire cohort's training schedule, greatly reducing the administrative burden on training officers.

In addition, if each FS member's personnel file could be converted into a database, second-tour bidding could also be redesigned with the AI program automatically presenting first-tour officers with all valid second-tour bidding options available to them, enabling them to rank order those options before a more complex AI version of POST optimizes their second-tour assignments by tranches.

This would eliminate the need for entry-level officers to painstakingly identify all their valid bids independently and the entry-level HR team to validate each of them—currently, FSOs must research each available post to propose intricate training timelines for each potential assignment, ensuring they would depart their current assignment on time, complete all required training for the follow-on assignment, and arrive



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This would eliminate the need for entry-level officers to painstakingly identify all their valid bids independently.

at their next post on time. This system offers fertile ground for human error.

An automated training timeline AI could also be implemented across the entire Foreign Service during the bidding process, showing bidders the timelines for all valid permanent change of station (PCS) moves. This would require a dedicated tech-savvy team to implement but would ultimately save FSOs hundreds of thousands of hours departmentwide by automating these laborious processes we're currently doing manually. A visual explanation of POST can be viewed at bit.ly/how-POST-works.

POST would be efficient, accurate, transparent, and cost-effective. It may not be as enchanting as the Hogwarts Sorting Ceremony, but POST could help the department improve future FSOs' first major career-shaping event, resulting in fewer tears on Flag Day. While every FSO commits to worldwide deployment, the department, in turn, must tenaciously pursue innovative solutions such as POST to increase employee satisfaction if it hopes to remain competitive in the Generation Z labor market. ■

New Tools FOR BETTER FOREIGN POLICY

Can the State Department integrate promising new technology without undermining the essential human aspects of diplomacy?

BY DAN SPOKOJNY

It is fitting that on the 100th anniversary of the creation of the modern U.S. Foreign Service—brought into existence by the 1924 Rogers Act—an entire *FSJ* issue is dedicated to the future of diplomacy, specifically how the rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), data collection and analysis, and scientific thinking can improve the conduct of international relations.

Perhaps no topic is more enduring in the pages of this magazine's century of publication than how to improve the State Department and its diplomacy. It is the gift (and burden) of all public servants to be afflicted by visions of a better world, to be dissatisfied with the status quo but also motivated toward improvement.

Yet many of us suspect that we face an inflection point today. Few other moments in modern American history have presented such a rising tide of international challenges at a time when the role of the State Department seems less clear. The next hundred years of American diplomacy must look different from the last. But how?


This edition of the *Journal* offers no easy answers. Written by innovative practitioners pushing the boundaries of their field, the articles share an underlying question: With an exponential increase in the complexity of the international environment and the simultaneous advance of new technologies, how can we improve the quality of our foreign policy?



Dan Spokojny is a member of the Editorial Board of The Foreign Service Journal. He is also the founder and CEO of fp21, a think tank dedicated to studying foreign policy reform. He served in government for more than a decade, as a U.S.

Foreign Service officer and a legislative staffer in Congress, and on the AFSA Governing Board. He is finishing his Ph.D. in political science with the University of California, Berkeley, focusing on the role of expertise in foreign policy.

ILLUSTRATION BY BITTESCHOENTV



Any new approach in diplomacy must be judged by its ability to help policymakers better understand the world.

Two articles in this collection, by Zed Tarar and Evanna Hu, challenge the State Department to think harder about its appropriate role in shaping the rapidly developing landscape of AI policy for the rest of the world. They examine AI as a policy question unto itself, rather than an internal tool. Another two articles, by Paula Osborn and Paul Kruchoski, focus on each of the authors' experiences developing new tools to improve the quality of knowledge and decision-making in foreign policy. They evaluate the promise and peril of using AI tools and suggest that good evidence and data may be a prerequisite for improving American foreign policy.

I encourage you to read each of these articles carefully; they're all fantastic.

Preserving the Essential Human Aspects of Diplomacy

I should admit my bias here. I have argued in these pages before that the State Department would benefit from an upgraded culture of decision-making, that diplomacy should be "more science and less art," and I run a think tank dedicated to that mission.

But just as it would be a mistake to ignore the promises of scientific advancements, it would also be dangerous to disregard the "art of diplomacy." Any experienced diplomat will tell you that navigating the international environment requires more than cold, hard calculations. Effective diplomacy requires creativity, a strong moral compass, a keen sense of politics, empathy, and a knack for building trusted relationships with people across cultures. These fundamentally human qualities need to be nurtured and celebrated in the hallways of Foggy Bottom.

So, while we look toward the future of diplomacy, it is worth gazing over our collective shoulders to make sure that we do not leave behind what makes diplomats and the Foreign Service so great.

Here are four areas in which foreign policy must remain an inherently human enterprise. Just as an artist interprets the world through their unique lens, capturing the essence of a scene with their brushstrokes, skilled policymakers practice their art to shape a more just and prosperous world.

Defining National Interests. Every masterpiece starts with a vision. In foreign policy, this vision translates to defining national interests. This requires a deep understanding of our nation's history, culture, and politics—including the priorities of the president and Congress. National interests emerge from a complex mosaic of security, economic, and normative priorities. These priorities constantly evolve with the changing global landscape. The artful diplomat must be able to identify these priorities, understand their interrelationships, and prioritize them strategically, making informed decisions about which brushstrokes to use and where to focus their efforts.

Setting Goals. The world is not a coloring book with pre-drawn lines. Just as an artist explores an infinite variety of colors, mediums, and techniques, foreign policy demands creative solutions. Traditional approaches may not always suffice in a constantly evolving global landscape. One must constantly think outside of the box. This requires intellectual agility, the courage to challenge orthodoxy, and the willingness to embrace the unexpected. For instance, as scholar Naazneen Barma and her colleagues explain: "Scenario analysis constitutes the art of juxtaposing current trends in unexpected combinations in order to articulate surprising and yet plausible futures, often referred to as 'alternative worlds.'"

Living Our Ethics. A masterpiece reflects not just the artist's skill but also vision and values. Foreign policy fundamentally requires moral considerations. Policy practitioners must balance light and shadow, carefully navigating the ethical complexities of international interactions. This involves recognizing the human cost of decisions and striving for solutions that uphold core values even in the face of trade-offs. This requires moral clarity, empathy for the diverse stakeholders involved, and the courage to make difficult choices.

Interpersonal Skills. Foreign policy is ultimately about people. The art lies in building relationships, forging alliances, and navigating the intricate dance of diplomacy. The foreign policy practitioner must be a skilled communicator, their words carefully chosen to bridge cultural divides and build trust. They must possess a deep sense of empathy for their allies and opponents and the ability to appreciate the nuances of human emotions and motivations. This requires emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to build genuine connections

across diverse cultures and perspectives. Our public diplomacy colleagues call this critical work bridging “the last three feet.” Any good manager will tell you that interpersonal skills are just as necessary for building relationships with one’s colleagues as with one’s foreign interlocutors.

Past and Future Must Work Together

With these four classic brushstrokes, practitioners can begin to master the art of foreign policy, shaping the international landscape with creativity, empathy, and a deep understanding of the human condition. These domains also constitute a “danger zone” into which technologists and future-minded reformers should tread carefully.

Yet there’s also great risk in letting one’s comfort with the status quo prevent one from experimenting with new approaches. Overconfidence in one’s artistry can blind a person to the weaknesses of the status quo and the opportunities provided by new approaches. In a more competitive, multipolar world, sharp-

ening the tools of diplomacy will be essential to achieving our foreign policy goals and securing our national interests.

One of the strengths in this set of articles is the authors’ eagerness to experiment and to learn from successes and failures along the way. Ultimately, any new approach in diplomacy must be judged by its ability to help policymakers better understand the world, select policy options more likely to achieve their goals, and support more effective foreign policy. Any new tool or approach must empower—not dampen—our best human impulses.

The future of diplomacy is deeply uncertain. Some believe emerging technologies like AI can usher in an unprecedented age of peace and prosperity. Others fear that new technology poses an existential threat to our species and must be contained.

No matter what the future holds, the United States—and everyone on this planet affected by our actions—deserves the best possible State Department. Judging by the articles in the following pages, I am optimistic about its future. ■

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Health & Wellness

When I was around 10 or so, I looked at the grown-ups around me and noticed how, in general, they were in not that great physical shape. Granted, this was the early 1970s and you could find ads in magazines for “jiggle belt” devices that were supposed to somehow shake the fat off (I guess!) while you stood there smiling. Ha! Like THAT would work!



At this young age, I thought: “what thing do I want to be able to do when I’m ‘old’ (like... 30!)?”

Out of anything I could have chosen, I thought: “sit on the floor cross-legged.” Thanks to my starting to do yoga 30 years ago, I CAN still comfortably sit on the floor.

Things like: climbing stairs, your shoulder’s range of motion, good posture, and touching your toes are abilities that people lose over time simply because they STOP doing them.

FACT: Your body’s ability to maintain strength, balance, and flexibility as you age is a response to how much you regularly ASK your body to be strong, balanced, and flexible.

In essence: “If you want to be able to do the thing, you have to keep doing the thing.”

Otherwise, you will never be able to do the thing again.

According to the CDC, falls are the #1 cause of death for people over the age of 65. What if, as people got older they continued to practice getting down and up off the floor safely, so that they knew if they fell they could get back up again?

Ongoing care of your musculoskeletal system helps all the more, and that’s where we come in! Chiropractic care, massage, and acupuncture all help you get the most out of optimizing your symmetry, flexibility, and mobility, and can help counter the effects of body challenges and stresses that our life can bring us.

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An AI Primer FOR POLICY PROFESSIONALS

As international affairs professionals, we need to understand the fundamentals of new technology so we can better address its evolution and application.

BY ZED TARAR

A

rtificial intelligence (AI) is everywhere you look, seemingly infused into every conversation. But is this another tech hype cycle, or are we on the cusp of a step change in productivity, akin to the birth of the modern internet? And what should international affairs professionals make of the technology?

To thoroughly answer these questions, we need a brief primer on the history of AI, what it is today, and where it might go in the next few years. As we will see, breakthroughs in several different domains—from data collection to processing power and programming—have given way to a breakthrough in AI, allowing us to deploy the technology in ways that would have seemed impossible even five years ago. That means we must also reckon with AI’s sociopolitical ramifications and the technology’s military applications.

First: a working definition. The inside joke among AI researchers is that AI is whatever we can’t do yet. Applications that were once described as AI are now considered routine algorithms. The original spam filters that Google and Microsoft use are examples of AI, as is machine vision that makes character recognition possible. For our purposes, we can define AI as any computer program developed through iterative learning and not by manual coding of instructions. For example, a toy mouse programmed to follow a set path through a maze is not AI; but a mouse programmed to use sensors to “learn” a path by bumping into obstacles and iteratively adjusting trajectory is.



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How to Think About AI

There are many kinds of AI applications, and they are designed to solve various tasks. Some models help search and prioritize knowledge; others are trained to identify and categorize sounds like human speech or images like cancerous tumors in X-rays.

A “model” is simply a particular architecture for an AI program—think of it as a recipe. Once you have a recipe, you train the model on a dataset, and then you deploy that model on a specific task. Much of AI development rests on the “recipes” (or hyperparameters) AI researchers use.

When poking around under the hood of these models, one might find a relatively simple, if vast, base architecture known as a neural network. We see layers of billions of neurons connected via weights and functions, trained using a set of algorithms on large sets of data. Diagrams of large models seem laughably simple—we see lines moving to nodes from left to right like a giant garden trellis, with simple math functions along the path. This simplicity led many AI researchers in the 1980s to deride neural networks as a dead end.

The type of AI getting the most attention right now is called a large language model (LLM). LLMs are used to predict the next word in a series, the next pixel in an image, or the next waveform in audio. They are sometimes called “stochastic parrots”—like our loquacious feathered friends, these models excel at mimicking their training data, giving us everything from haikus to convincing scientific jargon. And as with a real parrot, we know little of what goes on inside the LLM’s computational framework. That’s why an LLM is fantastic at summarizing a given document but untrustworthy if queried without constraints.

When we train large models like GPT4 on immense data sets and reduce error on “word prediction,” we train the model to build complex representations of the world. OpenAI co-founder Greg Brockman made this point in a TED talk in April: “We just show [the model] the whole world, the whole internet and say, ‘Predict what comes next in text you’ve never seen before,’ and this process imbues it with all sorts of wonderful skills. ... If you are shown a math problem, the only way to complete that math problem, to say what comes next ... is to actually solve the math problem.” An LLM’s ability to perform tasks the original programmers could not predict are known as emergent properties. For example, Google discovered a multilingual property in its model, Bard, when it returned responses in Bengali, even though the model hadn’t been explicitly programmed or trained for that function.

One way to think of LLMs is as the distillation of human knowledge compressed into machine language. The compression carries a loss in fidelity while allowing for faster processing.

By compressing immense amounts of human knowledge, we can deploy these models in new ways, leveraging natural language properties that have, until now, existed in science fiction alone.

Is AI a National Security Threat?

The current debate can be illustrated by studying two feuding AI researchers—the pair responsible for much of the architecture that underpins AI today—Geoffrey Hinton and Yann LeCun. They are on opposite sides of the AI-threat debate. Hinton left Google in 2023 over concerns that AI could end humanity. LeCun, now with Meta (Facebook’s parent company), calls that notion preposterous, noting that today’s LLMs, while impressive in their ability to contain knowledge, lack common sense and are less intelligent than a cat. Models have a poor understanding of the world and often make basic mistakes.

LeCun notes it will take another breakthrough before AI is smarter than a cat, let alone a human. Even then, building safety into the model architecture will guarantee that none of us ever serve robot overlords. In LeCun’s view, any group that can create sophisticated AI would have apparent incentives to ensure the software performed as required. That means little risk of AI “breaking free” of its programmers and acting in ways that produce negative externalities. In any case, the fears of AI leading to catastrophe are primarily academic, by contrast with some safety issues AI developers are grappling with today.

One primary concern with the new LLMs, for instance, is the ability to create convincing synthetic media that could further erode public trust, leading to a “post-truth” era. We’ve already seen deepfakes deployed in the U.S. election and can expect more. Still, this concern may be overstated. As anyone who has worked on countering disinformation will attest, the larger societal context matters much more than the technical means of spreading propaganda. Studies confirm this: People will reject false information that does not accord with their worldview but will accept it if it aligns with their preconceived notions of reality. The latter pushes societies toward conspiracy theories, not technology alone. The Soviets used misinformation effectively long before chat rooms and encrypted messaging. And when ISIS leveraged new tools to recruit violent fanatics, the underlying societal currents are what made their radicalization attempts successful, not their use of private chatrooms alone.

Nonetheless, implementing AI carries real risks, just as implementing any technology might. In the case of LLMs, there is a risk that they could provide dangerous instructions when prompted. For example, an AI might offer directions for making explosives or biological weapons. There is concern, for

instance, that AI might help a nefarious actor invent the next deadly pathogen. Makers of LLMs continually test their models to prevent abuse, yet as with any adversarial pursuit, those intent on “breaking” the models have found inventive ways to bypass safeguards. Even here, security experts note that knowledge of this sort already exists on the dark web and in private forums, so new AI may not have any effect on fundamental capabilities.

There is another, more basic type of risk—and we are not talking about LLMs here—that involves design errors. For example, a poorly designed AI tool to allocate medical staff led to worse outcomes in a hospital, according to researchers who published their findings in *Science* in 2019. The problem was traced to its design: The program’s creators, lacking accurate patient data, used billing records as a proxy for ill health. The higher a person’s hospital bills, the worse the system assumed their health must be. This meant that two patients with the same ailments, one wealthy and one poor, would receive a disparate allocation of resources. As a result, the gap in outcomes grew, the opposite of what hospital administrators had intended. The researchers examining this system recommended thorough audits before any AI is deployed in real-world settings.

Are Global AI Rules the Answer?

AI will almost certainly find its way into a host of illicit activities, just as every preceding technology has. But before we fear a world ruled by robots, Georgetown computer science professor Cal Newport reminds us that intelligence alone does not equal domination. Imagine putting the most intelligent person on earth in a cage with a tiger—despite all that intelligence, the tiger still wins. Humanity is the tiger—we may not be the most intelligent species on earth once we create computers that surpass us, but we certainly can be the most destructive.

Still, the risks of AI must be balanced against the upsides. We’re only at the beginning of this current wave of AI-powered efficiency gains. Just as the internet changed how most businesses function and boosted economic productivity, so will LLMs. And just as the internet enabled criminals and rogue regimes, AI will likely unlock new capabilities for them too.

Even with the potential for abuse by bad actors, deliberate and careful consideration focusing on trade-offs should form the foundation of any debate around AI regulation. We should ask: “What precisely are the risks of this technology, and what are the trade-offs from stricter regulation?” In the early years of the World Wide Web, Congress considered a proposal requiring anyone interested in creating a website to obtain a license from the government. This sounds incredible to us now, but there was

a real fear of change then. Ultimately, regulators adopted a “first do no harm” policy for the internet, a wise decision that let the ecosystem mature and unlocked trillions in economic growth.

An effective policy approach to AI could accelerate economic growth, promote pluralism and democracy, and make it harder for dictators to flourish.

AI and Diplomacy

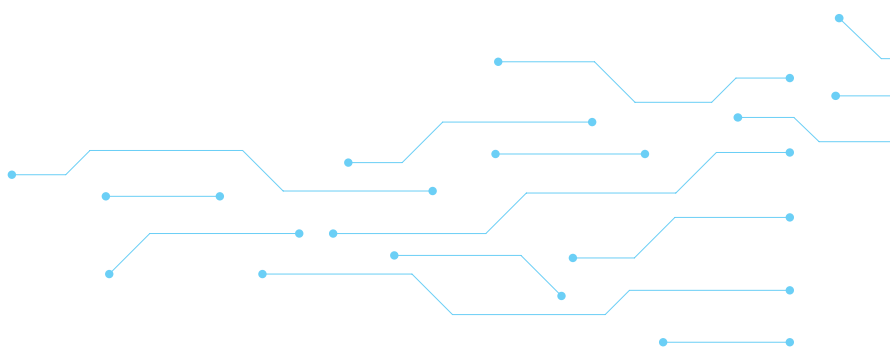
One of the founding pioneers of today’s LLM technology, Stanford professor Andrew Ng, likens AI to a revolution. As he said in 2017: “Just as electricity transformed almost everything 100 years ago, today I actually have a hard time thinking of an industry that I don’t think AI will transform in the next several years.” While Professor Ng sees AI changing everything, others in the field believe the technology will play out more like social media—overhyped, problematic, and of marginal utility.

Diplomats need to be prepared for both eventualities. Should AI continue progressing at its current pace, it is easy to imagine dystopic scenarios. Situations that seem like science fiction could be executed using today’s technology. For example, a military could deploy machine-vision-enabled drones over a battlefield that loiter for hours, waiting for a human to step out into the open (there is some evidence Ukraine may be doing this now). Or consider a less-than-lethal turret mounted along a border that autonomously targets and fires on intruders.

Beyond the battlefield, dictators could use new AI systems to suppress their populations by turbo-charging intelligence collection. A significant obstacle to effective signals intelligence has been the sheer volume of collected data—trillions of text messages, emails, and telephone conversations—too much for manual review. But with an LLM at the helm, a police agency could make natural-language queries and, within hours, have dossiers in their hands.

Similarly, mass surveillance has meant the need for mass employment to review real-time CCTV footage. But now that AI can recognize people with better-than-human accuracy, we may soon see a future as depicted in the film “Minority Report,” in which the protagonist narrowly evades capture by authorities who use a sophisticated camera network (CIA Director Bill Burns notes this eventuality is already hampering human intelligence gathering).

Then, there are the societal implications of yet more technology that promotes “para-social” relationships—those that are one-sided and lack the option of reciprocity. The term was coined in 1956 by sociologists Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl to describe how audience members grew attached to



television personalities. Today, New York University psychologist Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Anxious Generation* (2024), argues that AI will make social media even more toxic for our most vulnerable members of society, including children and adolescents.

According to researchers, lifelike conversations with chatbots could widen social distance and increase loneliness. And this, in turn, could further polarize democratic societies. Diplomats tasked with forming a global consensus on a contentious issue may find it impossible to reconcile differences with polarized national governments.

Be Ready for Surprises

Another surprising cultural shift driven by AI is foreign language study. According to the Modern Language Association, total enrollment in courses teaching a language other than English at American universities was down more than 16 percent from 2016 to 2021. The causes are multifaceted; still, the ubiquity, accuracy, and ease of AI-based translation tools make foreign language study less appealing. How that trend could

change diplomacy 10 or 20 years from now is anyone's guess.

As an old Danish proverb states, it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. One thing we can be sure of is that, just as personal computers and the internet changed our day-to-day reality, this next technological leap will similarly transform much of our lives in ways we can scarcely imagine.

Another analogy that could help us navigate AI might be globalization. Economists are largely united in the net positive effect of global trade—but the key word for diplomats is “net.” Globalization produced winners and losers, and the latter may be driving a resurgence in right-wing politics among Western democracies. Similarly, AI may be a net positive for the global economy—yet managing its negative externalities could be vital to preventing another set of unforeseen consequences.

Ultimately, our responsibility as international affairs professionals is to understand the fundamentals of this new technology so we can better address its evolution. We must watch AI closely or risk being caught off guard when the ground shifts beneath us. ■

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At the Crossroads OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION WITH AI

Making AI work at State requires challenging the culture that underlies the department's siloed structure.

BY PAUL KRUCHOSKI



Paul Kruchoski, a career member of the Senior Executive Service, is the director of the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources for Public Diplomacy (R/PPR). Earlier, he led the creation and growth of the Research and Evaluation Unit (REU), which helps public diplomacy practitioners use evidence and knowledge to make better-informed decisions. Previous assignments include deputy director of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Collaboratory, special assistant in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and several positions in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. Outside his work, Paul is an accomplished cellist.

The benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) for diplomacy are not a foregone conclusion. AI promises to revolutionize our work lives, save us time, enable collaboration, and make us more productive—just like email and Teams both did. If you shuddered when I said that, you understand my point: attending to our email and

Teams has become a dominant task, and often one that feels totally disconnected from the human relationship-building at the core of our diplomatic craft. It is entirely possible that AI will suffer the same fate, becoming a distraction at best and a time-drain at worst. But it does not have to be that way.

If we address our institutional faults, we can again put people at the center of our work. And I am more convinced than ever that adopting AI is a critical part of how we can successfully navigate the difficult geostrategic moment we are in.

The Strategic Imperative

Adopting AI to support our diplomatic work is not just a matter of efficiency; it's a strategic imperative. In a world beset with multiple, overlapping crises, our diplomatic corps is stretched thin. AI can help automate administrative tasks, analyze complex data, and provide actionable insights. In doing so, AI can

free up diplomats to focus on our core mission: fostering international relationships, negotiating with foreign counterparts, and advancing national interests on the global stage.

First, our diplomatic corps is overworked and stressed, as seen in the State Department's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS): The percentage of personnel who believe their workload is reasonable has dropped in the last four years, falling from 62 percent in 2020 to 48 percent in 2023. The Global Satisfaction Index at State dropped by seven points over the same period, underperforming other large agencies. We have too few people trying to undertake too many missions around the world. This dissatisfaction not only affects morale; it also undermines the department's ability to attract and retain talent, further exacerbating the challenges it faces in an increasingly complex and resource-constrained global environment.

Second, our diplomatic operations are simply more complex today. As Secretary Antony Blinken explained in his modernization speech in 2021, we need more expertise in a broader array of areas: climate, global health, cyber security and emerging technologies, economics, and multilateral diplomacy, among others. Building teams (and an organization) that incorporate multiple types of expertise is hard—coordination costs increase, and mastering those skills takes precious time in an organization already stretched thin.

AI won't solve these problems on its own. But it is a critical ingredient in addressing them. The alternatives aren't feasible: The cost of our personnel overseas increases every year, and Congress has clearly signaled that we will not grow our way out of the problem. The multiple crises in the world limit our ability to "pivot" away from any part of the world (or any major area of work). Our only choices are to become more efficient in our work (i.e., offload administrative work) and become more effective (i.e., use actionable insights gained from automated data analysis to spend more time on work and relationships that will deliver value). Continuing with the status quo is to become weaker, less resilient, and less competitive as an employer and a diplomatic force.

Data Accessibility and Cultural Change

So how do we avoid missing the moment? Our problem is not technology but the department's culture. We have much of the underlying technology we need, with more coming online every day. In 2021, the State Department launched "Data.State," an internal platform that serves as a departmentwide repository for shared data and provides department staff access to analytics products and data science tools. Department practitioners are already using generative AI for unclassified work, with a wide

range of best practices shared through the AI for Public Diplomacy (AI4PD) campaign. The department is working toward provisioning access to multiple generative AI tools that draw on official, nonpublic information within the next six months. The StateChat tool deployed this spring is an example.

All AI capabilities depend on having accurate, relevant, and (relatively) complete data. This will be our greatest challenge. Information and data stewardship remain largely localized at State. Information is often stored in fragmented systems, captured in ad hoc ways, and hoarded by individuals, hindering accessibility and utility. While the Center for Analytics has done impressive work—making data more accessible, placing chief data officers in bureaus across the department, and ensuring that the right technology is in place—it is not enough.

In part, this is a business process challenge: laying out ground rules at the office, bureau, and agency level for how we structure, store, and share data. But the far larger issue is cultural: We often don't want to share information, because we are worried about whether others will understand it the same way we do or treat it with the same discretion that we demand. This is a phenomenon I witnessed as the department rolled out its first enterprise contact relationship management system between 2017 and 2020.

This fragmented, stove-piped environment risks us replicating the problems we encountered with other technology adoptions, including both email and Teams: Rather than enhancing productivity, new technology tools have become sources of inefficiency because of a culture that fails to prioritize their effective use. We could end up with thousands of separately trained AI systems, all with incomplete information—and, consequently, drastically limited utility. The result could be a workforce mired in yet more internal coordination and in-house work, far removed from the proactive and strategic engagement that diplomacy requires.

The Path Forward

Addressing these challenges requires technological innovation through data accessibility and a cultural shift toward open information-sharing.

Data Accessibility. Initiatives like Data.State represent a promising start toward making the department's vast data assets visible, accessible, and interoperable. But we have to go further in unlocking the dramatically siloed data if we ever hope to truly leverage AI to generate insights and support evidence-based decision-making. AI modernization will rely on quality data being shared across the organization. Our current cultural norms and data policies hinder the rapid advances that AI can deliver.



We need to go beyond making existing datasets accessible, though. In 2016, then-Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom worked with MITRE and IDEO to develop a series of recommendations on knowledge management, including an information framework. We need to revive that work, building toward a common data model that covers the core aspects of our diplomatic work: associating our information with the *issues, organizations, relationships, contacts, and actions* that we are taking.

Open Information-Sharing. Nurturing a culture that values and practices open information-sharing is essential for maximizing the potential of AI. This involves breaking down silos, encouraging collaboration, and ensuring that information is readily available to those who need it, when they need it. We will need ongoing training and a shift in organizational culture to value and reward collaboration and innovation.

But above all, this takes a leadership commitment to shifting the organizing paradigm around information. Information is power. Our goal at the department should be to *make every one of our diplomats powerful* with the information and nuance neces-

sary. This is a scary leap for many leaders, myself included. People will make mistakes. We have to help our teams learn from those mistakes by providing honest feedback about the impact and consequences of their actions and helping them improve. And I know our diplomatic corps will master working in this new, more open environment, just as we have in the past.

Human Relationships. Ultimately, the success of diplomacy hinges on the quality of human relationships. It's time to rethink our culture and technology so they enhance our operations, enabling our people to focus on the human element of diplomatic engagement. By embracing data accessibility, fostering a culture of open information-sharing, and reaffirming the primacy of human connections, the State Department can leverage AI not only to enhance its operational efficiency but also to elevate its diplomatic mission.

As we stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, the choices made today will shape the future of diplomacy for generations to come. The promise of AI in diplomacy is too great to ignore, and the time to act is now. ■

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TOWARD DATA- INFORMED *Multilateral Diplomacy*

Here is a case study of the adoption of AI and data science in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs.

BY PAULA OSBORN

In the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape that the United States faces today, using data analysis and artificial intelligence (AI) to efficiently analyze information and patterns, anticipate potential crises, and understand public sentiment will be critical for all diplomats.

I work in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), and we are especially excited about the new possibilities AI brings and have specifically prioritized bringing data science into the art of diplomacy to advance national interests at the United Nations (U.N.) and other multilateral organizations. Leveraging data is particularly important to IO because the U.N. is the public messaging forum for global strategic competition in diplomatic matters. However, effectively integrating new technology into a legacy organization faces significant hurdles. Fostering a culture that embraces AI technology, particularly the modernization of AI infrastructure, is challenging.

Utilizing the Data and AI

There are numerous ways in which the State Department can utilize data and AI to bolster our diplomatic efforts; three will be outlined here, as well as obstacles the department faces to achieving these desired end-states.

Future State of Diplomacy 1: Employing data and AI to enable diplomats to spend more time on core diplomatic functions.

Limited resources and increased policy mandates have left diplomats with less time for strategic thinking and international



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Mexico City, Kyiv, and Kabul, and was an elections monitor for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Siberia. She joined the State Department in 2016 as a Presidential Management Fellow and is a civil servant.



IO Assistant Secretary Michele Sison (left), Chief Data Officer Paula Osborn, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Brian Grimm spoke at the Secretary's Open Forum on "Driving Strategic Multilateral Diplomacy Through Data" on June 8, 2023.

collaboration. Effective data tools, particularly those focused on the automation of routine tasks, can reclaim much of this lost time. In 2023, IO saved more than 600 labor hours and improved data quality by partially automating the quantitative portion of an annual congressional report on U.S. government financial contributions to international organizations. Currently, IO is also working on other automation efforts, including for communications, clearances, and public affairs activities to free up time for high-value diplomatic work that is not easily replicated by machines.

In addition to automation, dashboards—visual interfaces that display important data points—help supercharge the work of our modern diplomats. Well-crafted dashboards enable easy data sharing and analysis of real-time information in a consolidated, user-friendly format, saving time across working levels. The Bureau of International Organization Affairs has developed multiple dashboards, including those related to U.N. financial contributions and personnel, voting coincidence, peacekeeping, and more. These dashboards live on the IO Multilateral Data Center (a website internal to the department) and are available to all department staff. To date, they have been used effectively by overseas posts, IO's missions to international organizations, and U.S. participants at the most recent U.N. General Assembly High Level Week.

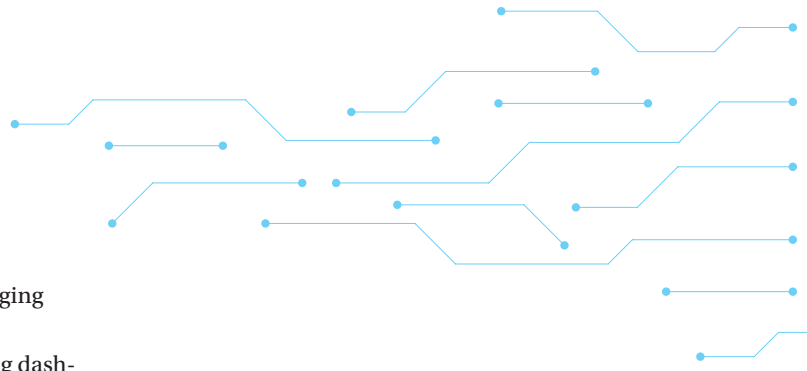
Generative language tools, such as ChatGPT, use AI to generate human-like text in response to input. Diplomats can save countless hours by using ChatGPT and similar tools for first-draft writing of speeches, memos, cables, and other department documents. These tools are currently available for unclassified material but can be used for anything sensitive once they are approved for internal department use (one of many AI infrastructure approval difficulties detailed a little later).

When diplomats use tools such as ChatGPT, it remains crucial that they critically review and refine the AI-generated drafts, ensuring that these reflect the nuanced understanding and strategic objectives unique to human diplomacy. Without this human review, the AI text may miss important reference material or provide incorrect information (known as an AI hallucination). Addressing big global challenges, meeting with foreign counterparts, representing U.S. interests and policies at international forums, negotiating treaties and resolutions, promoting positive relations and international cooperation between the United States and foreign countries, and fulfilling other core diplomatic functions cannot be replicated by machines. However, using AI can save time and enable diplomats to focus on the high-value work of diplomacy.

Future State of Diplomacy 2: Maintaining our global strategic advantage over competitors.

International challenges of today are often first addressed at the U.N., making it an enticing forum for our global competitors to actively engage in influence campaigns that run contrary to U.S. foreign policy goals. Effectively countering these influence campaigns and promoting democratic interests are crucially important. Advanced analytics and AI can allow the department to pinpoint where the United States should invest in strategic alliances and identify like-minded groups in the international fora, helping us build cohesion and coordinate voting.

At IO, we have used AI to develop an application to review draft U.N. resolutions for problematic language that would undermine U.N. principles. This functionality will save staff countless hours that would otherwise be spent manually finding and flagging language contrary to U.S. interests; it also



increases the accuracy of identifying existing and emerging problematic language.

In addition, data helps us be more persuasive. Sharing dashboards demonstrating trends over time or identifying patterns enables us to get complex points across quickly with partners. Citing statistics in speeches garners trust from listeners. Refuting objective data is challenging, and the development and use of data and AI-enabled tools is a powerful communications instrument for any organization. Incorporating data into the talking points and public messaging of our U.N. representatives not only strengthens our arguments but also positions us as a credible and authoritative voice.

Future State of Diplomacy 3: Making more tactical decisions.

To be clear, data tools are not here to replace information the State Department gets from our counterparts in the field, subject matter experts, or advisers. Instead, such tools work in concert with all these resources as they provide enhanced visibility into complex data sets and allow for improved analysis to be effectively combined with information from experts in the field. Data on how a particular country voted on U.S.-sponsored U.N. resolutions over time may help inform our decision to support a future resolution sponsored by that country. Data on which international organizations a particular government funds indicates their strategic interests and helps inform how we should prioritize engagement with that government.

Similarly, IO is expanding its investment in more tactical and strategic decision-making regarding *démarches*—formal diplomatic requests to persuade or inform host-nation governments on a given subject. In collaboration with State’s Center for Analytics, IO engaged in the first analysis of State’s largest corpus of internal data—cables. A study on recent *démarches* indicated that the quality of the outcome information received from post in “*démarche delivered*” cables was too poor to enable measurement of statistically significant results. IO is currently working on ways to improve *démarche* response data quality to improve future U.N. vote tracking.

Challenges

Fully and effectively incorporating data tools into the State Department’s diplomatic efforts will require hard work. First, we need more internal data expertise dedicated to the development of AI-enabled data tools. Data science is a very specialized skill set, and experienced practitioners are in constant demand and command high salaries. According to Glassdoor, the average salary for an entry-level data scientist in 2023 was \$113,894 per year, which is above a Washington, D.C., localized GS-13 pay rate.

Leveraging data is particularly important to IO because the U.N. is the public messaging forum for global strategic competition in diplomatic matters.

In late 2021, the Center for Analytics brought the Office of Personnel Management’s data scientist occupational series to State, making it easier to hire for this specialized job. The following year, the center partnered with the Bureau of Global Talent Management to create chief data officer positions in the various bureaus at State, with the first cohort onboarded in 2023. These personnel have technical data backgrounds and serve as in-house experts who oversee data-based projects and drive innovation in concert with wider department data-focused initiatives.

As one of the pilot bureaus for this program, IO has made the intentional decision to dedicate a GS-15 and a GS-14 Civil Service position for a chief data officer and deputy. In addition to these Civil Service positions, IO relies on a contract team of data scientists to build its data program, from the foundational data infrastructure, management, and governance to its advanced analytics and AI tools. Contract staff enable IO to add and remove different data skill sets quickly, but direct-hire employees are critical for institutional knowledge, are more cost-effective, and provide long-term commitment.

The State Department also needs robust data infrastructure, including cutting-edge software and servers, to give data scientists the computing power necessary to extract valuable insights. Unfortunately, approving needed software within the department can be a long process because of security concerns and other bureaucratic issues. This bottleneck greatly constrains the effectiveness of all data work currently underway at State. The number-one complaint I have received from my data scientists, both at the Center for Analytics and IO, is how long it takes to get software approved and what a big impediment this is to doing their jobs. Not having access to the correct tools is akin to asking a chef to cook a gourmet meal without kitchen appliances. Of course, security is a top priority for the department, but there

needs to be a balance between an extremely lengthy process to get software approved and the necessity of creating cutting-edge AI-enabled data tools to bolster our national security.

Another significant barrier to data-informed diplomacy is user adoption. “I’m not a numbers person” is a statement I frequently hear from foreign affairs experts. But the reality is that times are changing and, frankly, we are already behind. Everyone should be confident with the numbers behind important metrics for their bureaus, and the mandate to familiarize oneself with relevant data must come from the top.

In IO, Assistant Secretary Michele Sison requires data attachments in all meeting preparation papers written for her by staff. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Dave McFarland attends every single IO data training and event, introducing each with brief remarks on the bureau’s commitment to building and fostering a culture of evidence-informed diplomacy. Deputy Assistant Secretary Brian Grimm always carries around multiple copies of our U.N. Security Council Snapshots (please ask him for one if you see him), which he hands out in meetings. Most of

the IO front office has the IO Multilateral Data Center hyper-linked in their email signatures. These are just a few examples of how IO leadership emphasizes the importance of data, which signals to the bureau their need to prioritize data as well. This prioritization is critical for data and AI to succeed in making cultural inroads at State.

There are many challenges on the road to effectively using data and AI, particularly at an organization as large and established as the State Department. However, in a rapidly evolving global landscape marked by complex challenges and competitive pressures, using AI-enabled data tools is not only a strategic imperative but a critical transformative step toward enhancing the effectiveness of our diplomatic efforts. The vision for a data-informed future state of diplomacy hinges on successfully navigating talent acquisition and development, resource allocation, data infrastructure and prioritization, and forward-thinking leadership.

A commitment to innovation positions data and AI as fundamental pillars in shaping the future of diplomacy, the U.S.’s global position, and our national security posture. ■

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AI DISRUPTION AND RESPONSIBLE USE in Diplomacy

A vision of how AI will be integrated into our U.S. democratic society is needed. State can contribute to the discussion.

BY EVANNA HU

“Good first morning of 2030. You logged 3 hours, 41 minutes of total sleep with only 9 percent in REM and 12 percent in slow wave sleep, with a recovery score of 14 percent due to the consumption of 2 glasses of alcohol the night before. While you were asleep, I compiled an intel memo of the crisis in the Middle East from real-time verified OSINT [open-source intelligence] sources. The BLUF [bottom line up front] is that overnight, chatbot Netanyahu continues to shift policy positions to the orthodox right while chatbot Abu Mazen is writing the latest version of two-state solution legislation in real-time based on public comments and engagements on his Viber channel.”

“Thank you, AI. And what about our AI regulation on the Hill?”

“It continues to be deadlocked as lawmakers can’t agree on what American society should look like with the existence of AI. The tech evangelists want AI to be meshed in everyday life, close to singularity; the decelerationists want to limit the use of AI until they know exactly what the impact is; and the defense hawks want no regulations at all so that the U.S. can beat China. The American public is apathetic and only wants to use AI to simplify their lives.”



Evanna Hu is the CEO of Omelas and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, specializing in the intersection of emerging technologies and national security. She is also a part of the Aspen Global Leaders Network and has won numerous awards for her work in using tech for good.

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Although this is a made-up scenario, a version of which was used at a war-gaming exercise at a prominent think tank in Washington, D.C., it is not far-fetched from current reality; the technology already exists. With the explosion of ChatGPT into the consumer market a year and a half ago, AI adoption continues to grow at an exponential rate. This has forced governments, civil society, and the private sector to think about what roles AI should play and how it should be regulated.

Plenty has been published arguing for various positions, but the two common poles of the debate are the decelerationists, who want a pause in AI development and a minimal role for it in society, and the accelerationists, including OpenAI and Meta, who are gunning for AI to be embedded in every aspect of society and making huge investments toward the goal of achieving artificial general intelligence (AGI), or AI with capabilities that rival those of a human.

The State Department has dipped its toes into these discussions with the October 2023 publication of “Enterprise Artificial Intelligence Strategy FY 2024-2025: Empowering Diplomacy Through Responsible AI,” guidelines for the use of AI within the State Department. While it is a good start, the document is so focused on specific implementation steps that it misses the forest for the trees. It does not offer a vision of how statecraft will be affected by AI.

Decisions determined by AI can be life-changing or life-and-death.

Just as a leader needs to have a vision with which to inspire and gain support, the State Department needs to have a vision so that its important stakeholders—both Americans and the international community—know where we are headed. Given the technical complexities and rapid development of tech tools, the American public will benefit from a shared understanding of how AI will be integrated into our society. Once the vision is in place, building the strategic blueprint and implementation plan can begin in earnest and be sustained in the long run.

With the establishment of State's Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, the department has the platform to push not only for effective use of AI by a government agency but also, more vital to global leadership, for a more general vision of a society with AI in keeping with democratic values.

U.S. Foreign Policy and AI's Scope

AI's potential for disrupting the entire world order is one of the biggest reasons it should be treated separately from other technological advancements, including social media and quantum computing. Previous advancements have focused on automating and facilitating existing workflows, but AI will upend how we live, work, and function as a society. It will change our social contract nationally and with the international community.

Consider four of the core elements of America's foreign policy, as Vice President Kamala Harris presented them at the 2024 Munich Security Conference. What are the implications of AI for each of them? Here are some questions we should be asking.

1. International Rules and Norms (as opposed to chaos).

How much automation is safest? Who is in the driver's seat, and to what extent? Who should govern the biases of AI algorithms when the algorithms are the intellectual property of private companies in an adversary country, or even in our own country? Who should hold parties accountable when, say, an autonomous weapon accidentally kills civilians instead of a military target? What are the limits of digital sovereignty and self-determination? What role should international organizations play in these debates?

2. Democratic Values (as opposed to authoritarianism).

Should AI be used to create and spread disinformation and deepfakes (freedom of speech), or should it be used to censor speech when truth can be political or nebulous? How can AI be used to break through echo chambers if they are anti-democratic

and connect people online and offline? Is disinformation truly fake facts or simply politically opposing speech? What information should be public? What are the accountability mechanisms on AI systems?

3. Collective Action (as opposed to unilateralism). Can AI be used to get nations and the international community to work better together rather than being used to build more effective weapons for unilateral kinetic operations? Can the international community come together and create regulations as openly and broadly supported as the Geneva Convention? What measures of accountability should be put into place?

4. Global Engagement (as opposed to isolationism). Are we using algorithms to help us connect with people we normally would not connect with or people from different backgrounds? How can we use AI to deter isolationist tendencies?

Given its influence on the global stage and its mission to spread democratic values, the State Department needs to be in the critical conversations about the AI vision and help fill the narrative vacuum. Though this is a weighty task, State can offer valuable input.

So far, much of the discussion on ethics and values in the cyber realm has focused on what the State Department does not stand for: digital authoritarianism—that is, censorship of political speech and mass government surveillance and control without reasonable cause. But there are always limits to freedom of speech and regulations on the roles that private companies, such as social media companies, have in moderating speech. Moreover, there is the fact that anonymity online protects good (such as pro-democracy activists in authoritarian regimes) and malign (hacking into another country's election) actors alike. The antithesis of digital authoritarianism is digital democracy, a nebulous concept that does not yet exist in practice.

Responsible AI

Developing a globally accepted vision for digital democracy might be a first step for the State Department. In any case, one approach to articulating the vision is to begin with the concept of Responsible AI (RAI). RAI was initiated by the private sector, which has led the way in terms of AI research and development for the past half century. It focuses on seven values: accuracy and reliability, accountability and transparency, fair and human-centric, safe and ethical, security and resiliency, interpretability and documented, and privacy-enhanced and data-governed. By choosing most, if not all, of these values, the State Department can clarify what digital democracy is—not only to the American public but also its international partners.

The second step is to understand all the stakeholders

involved in any AI application: both the creator, whether that is an individual or organization, and the end users, as well as “third party” beneficiaries. For example, if a predictive policing algorithm is developed for State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, stakeholders might include diplomats and their international law enforcement partners as well as local community members and potential false positive communities who will be affected by the algorithm.

With AI development, the most affected stakeholders are often neglected and excluded from the process. Decisions determined by AI can be life-changing or life-and-death. Yet at present affected parties are rarely a part of any AI system evaluation. That should change.

The vision for responsible AI should be designed to survive well beyond the average two-year political cycle. If we think about America’s grand narrative during the Cold War period or during the Global War on Terror, these decades-long visions and policies not only displayed America’s identity and values, but they also showed what success would look like spanning

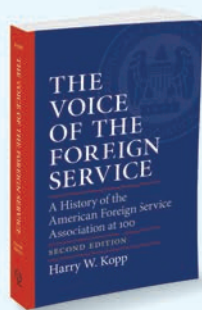
generations. They were also easy to understand for our international partners and did not change regardless of who was in the White House and Congress.

To help design a durable vision for AI, State needs to work closely with the rest of the U.S. government with meaningful engagements from civil society and the private sector. The AI Safety Institute at the Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology is a public-private consortium that can offer insights and collaboration. This requires a cultural mind shift because AI is one of the few fields driven first and foremost by nongovernmental organizations and companies. Then, once the vision and values are set, through public diplomacy efforts, they should be communicated strategically and be held as the North Star for subsequent strategy and implementation plans.

We can’t continue passing the buck down to the next generation, because if we don’t get this right from the get-go, it will be too late. We need to have these hard conversations now, which the State Department, through its unique position of influencing the world, should not shy away from. ■

The U.S. Foreign Service and the American Foreign Service Association were born together in 1924, the direct and indirect progeny of an act of Congress.

This is their story.



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“Marking the centennial of AFSA and the Foreign Service, *The Voice of the Foreign Service* is a must read for those who want to learn more about both.”

—**Ambassador Marie “Masha” Yovanovitch**

“Anyone concerned with reform of the State Department or American diplomacy needs to read this history of AFSA.”

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“This book makes clear the inestimable importance of AFSA and the reason it is imperative to support the organization’s efforts on behalf of the U.S. Foreign Service.” —**Ambassador Ruth A. Davis**

“Harry Kopp educates us all about the valuable work AFSA has done in the past century.” —**Ambassador Lino Gutiérrez**

afsa.org/voice-foreign-service



Beyond Scale

Three Steps Toward Modernizing the Foreign Service

BY DARROW GODESKI MERTON
FSJ Writing Competition 2nd Place Winner

Most studies on modernizing American diplomacy call for more officers and funding for the State Department, which aligns with our traditionally resource-intensive approach to foreign policy. Yet the perennial call for more resources can serve as a distraction from more cost-effective reforms. In coming years, it will be critical to find ways to enhance the Foreign Service—without relying on institutional expansion—for two reasons. First, the American public broadly believes we should freeze or cut our spending on foreign affairs, not increase it. Second, the department needs to adapt to a more competitive global landscape where our historical advantage in diplomatic budgets and personnel, relative to other powers, can no longer be taken for granted.

While the U.S. may or may not have more military marching band members than diplomats, we greatly outnumber other countries' foreign services—to give just one example, the U.S. has nearly as many personnel in Mission India as India has foreign service officers abroad. Competitors have learned to do more with less: the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs budget was roughly one-tenth the size of the State Department operations budget in 2022, but it is increasing rapidly—and the PRC already has 265 bilateral diplomatic missions around the world, compared to our 249 posts.

To honor the 100th birthday of the U.S. Foreign Service—and AFSA's role as the "Voice of the Foreign Service"—the *Journal* held a writing competition for members with cash prizes. The topic: Looking ahead to the next century, describe the ideal Foreign Service, as an institution and a profession.

We were thrilled to receive 65 submissions, and judging was challenging. Name-blind submissions were evaluated

In that spirit, here are three suggestions to make the Foreign Service more effective, dollar for dollar, officer for officer.

Train for Functional Job Skills, Hire for Language

State is currently expanding the Foreign Service Institute, aiming to more closely match the training float that the Department of Defense enjoys. But *how much* we train is not nearly as important as *what* we train. Today, many FSOs can count the time they spent in language training in years and the functional training in weeks. This is backward, as it plays against one of our great national strengths—a deep pool of linguistic talent—while neglecting our institutional weaknesses.

State lags behind other diplomatic services in functional job training, both in terms of learning basic tradecraft as well as specialty topics like technology and energy diplomacy. Outside of FSI's standout Econ Course, opportunities for officers to dive deep into practice areas are scarce. Given these gaps—and the increasingly specialized nature of many job portfolios—it is paradoxical that we allocate the bulk of our limited training time to language study.

Consider that for virtually any language, from Russian to Tagalog to Swahili, the U.S. already has tens of thousands of citizens whose fluency far surpasses what most FSOs can attain

by a volunteer panel on the basis of originality, cogent and concise reasoning, clarity, and applicability.

This essay, by Darrow Godeski Merton, won second place; first place was published in the May edition, and third place will appear in the July-August edition.

We congratulate Mr. Godeski Merton and extend sincere thanks to our judges.

—The FSJ Team

after FSI language training. We should capitalize on this natural bounty of language talent. Instead of rewarding modest language skills with a modest bump on the FSOA, the department should vigorously recruit candidates with ILR Level 4 speaking/reading skills, which would not only improve our overall language proficiency, cultural insight, and diversity but also allow officers more time for functional training.

This is not to say that we should shut down FSI's language programs or only hire candidates already fluent in critical languages. Circulation of officers across geographic regions is key for disseminating fresh ideas. We should rather aim for a more equal split between language and functional training and expand the number of specialized courses that FSI offers. Many overseas roles would benefit more from six months each of functional and language training rather than a full year of language alone, and we should give posts and officers the latitude to choose what will best serve their portfolios.

Embrace Generative AI as a Force Multiplier

While technology has not traditionally been the department's strong suit, our Center for Analytics is now piloting one of the first large language models (LLM) specifically designed for a federal agency. State is a perfect fit for generative AI: Our voracious hunger for "paper"—the decision memos and briefing checklists that consume countless hours of productivity—has produced terabytes of archived documents that can be used to train proprietary models. The real challenge, however, lies not just in developing generative AI services tailored for diplomacy but also in transforming our work culture to fully embrace the labor-saving potential of these tools.

While data privacy and security are valid concerns, the biggest hurdle to AI implementation will be traditional mindsets about how officers should spend their time and what tasks require a human touch. As the pilot LLM program rolls out, the department should authorize and train officers on how to use generative AI for every kind of SBU work product: cables, media analyses, congressional reports, and yes, even EERs. Each hour spent at the



Darrow Godeski Merton is an economic officer at U.S. Consulate General Shanghai. He has previously served at Embassy Juba, Consulate General Guangzhou, and the U.S. Mission to the African Union, in addition to domestic tours with the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, the Somalia desk, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee as a Pearson Fellow.

office working on paper is an hour not spent engaging directly with foreign audiences—a duty that will remain uniquely human. Embracing generative AI will produce more timely and relevant paper while increasing the time available to achieve our primary function: engaging external, not internal, stakeholders.

Create a Culture of Accountability

The State Department has taken a positive step in conducting exit interviews to glean insights into talent attrition. Knowing is half the battle—but only half. If we want to retain talent, State needs to take stronger action against harassment and abusive behavior, which are well-documented drivers of the diversity deficit in the upper ranks. The Foreign Service's frequent rotations and chummy personal-professional relationships often lead managers to wait out problematic officers until they are shuffled off to the next post.

Fortunately, there is a blueprint to tackle these problems: In 2020, former Representative Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) introduced the State Harassment and Assault Prevention and Eradication (SHAPE) Act. Although it stalled in committee, nothing stops State from adopting its straightforward measures.

The SHAPE Act creates an Office of Employee Advocacy to aid victims of harassment and abuse during investigations, setting up a 24/7 international hotline for officers, eligible family members (EFMs), and locally employed (LE) staff (who are often particularly vulnerable to retribution). Critically, it also makes it easier for State to suspend or separate staff who have engaged in sexual harassment or assault. Too often, harassment cases are handled informally, despite the Foreign Affairs Manual stating that measures like involuntary curtailment are not to be used as a substitute for disciplinary action.

While the recently announced anti-bullying policy and the Ombuds Office getting started on staffing the Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (wCPRC) are positive developments, those and similar efforts will require teeth. We need to overhaul areas in which the current system is overly deferential to bad actors, which is a surefire way to undermine morale and productivity, entrenching deadweight at the expense of our best talent.

No living American policymaker has known a time in which the U.S. did not enjoy a lopsided advantage in foreign policy resources. That era is coming to a close. Our future lies in adaptation—mastering functional training, leveraging AI, and enforcing accountability—to ensure the Foreign Service remains effective on the world stage. ■

Henry of the Tower

REVISITED

It's time to take another look at how we remember
18th-century American envoy Henry Laurens.

BY THOMAS N. HULL



Thomas N. Hull was ambassador to Sierra Leone (2004-2007), where he had earlier been a Peace Corps volunteer. He served as director of African affairs at the U.S. Information Agency, deputy chief of mission in Addis Ababa, and public affairs officer in Pretoria, Prague, Lagos, Mogadishu, and Ouagadougou. After retiring from State in 2007, he served as a WAE (rehired annuitant) adviser to the president of Malawi, Warburg Professor of International Relations at Simmons University, and president of Foreign Affairs Retirees of New England.



In a crisp London day in the autumn of 1780 a thickset, firm-jawed South Carolinian stood unhappily beside the Thames River, looking upward at the stones of the ancient fortress known as the Tower of London.”

A historical snapshot often does not capture the full picture. This certainly applies to the article “Henry of the Tower” by former Foreign Service Officer Ralph Hilton, published in the June 1969 *Foreign Service Journal* and excerpted in the June 2019 edition. Hilton introduces the American envoy Henry Laurens in a heroic pose, as described above, and proceeds to tell his saga, asserting that “with honor and sacrifice,” Laurens helped “to lay the cornerstone” of our Foreign Service. Revisited today, Hilton’s assessment does not stand up to scrutiny.

Hilton’s article relates how Laurens, en route to the Netherlands to negotiate a commercial treaty during the Revolutionary War, was captured by the British Royal Navy and incarcerated in the Tower of London. Upon being released, he participated in negotiation of the Treaty of Paris that officially recognized American independence from Britain. Although obscure today, Laurens was no ordinary envoy: He had been president of the Continental Congress when the Articles of Confederation establishing our first national government were enacted.

Hilton’s sympathetic portrayal of Laurens as a model of loyalty, suffering, and professional perseverance for modern Foreign Service officers to emulate may have seemed appropriate when written more than a half century ago. Now we view our country’s Founding Fathers through a wider lens as we reconcile our past with our ideals. In the case of Laurens, these aspects would include his leading role in slavery, how that was reflected in the Treaty of Paris, and how it affected U.S. foreign relations in the decades to follow.

“A Cosmopolitan Product of the Times”

Hilton tells us vaguely that Laurens was “a cosmopolitan product of the South Carolina plantation and mercantile society of the times.” This phrase smoothly obfuscates that Laurens owned six plantations with hundreds of slaves and was the largest slave importer in the American colonies in the 1750s and into the 1760s, thereby making him one of the wealthiest Americans at the time of the Revolution, according to Edward Ball’s *Slaves in the Family* (1998).

Hilton also informs us that while Laurens was in the tower, “his imprisonment ... brought pressure from influential



A portrait of Henry Laurens by John Singleton Copley, 1782.

Englishmen for his release” without specifying who they were. The most influential was Richard Oswald, a wealthy merchant, financier, and confidant to the prime minister. He was also a prominent slave trader.

Sir Simon Schama describes Oswald in his book *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (2005) as “a slave trader who had made a cool fortune from his slaving entrepôt of Bance Island at the mouth of the Sierra Leone river, where he bought slaves from the Temne people. And when those human cargoes had docked at Charleston en route to being auctioned for the low country planta-

tions of South Carolina it was none other than Henry Laurens who took a nice ten per cent of the transaction.”

These slaves were the economic engine of the Carolinas and Georgia in the 1700s because they brought skills from West Africa’s Rice Coast that the British lacked. Rice was the primary product of those colonies long before cotton and was the main source of wealth for Laurens and other plantation owners.

This commercial relationship proved significant when Oswald was named the lead British negotiator of the Treaty of Paris and Laurens was added to the American delegation. Due to poor health exacerbated by the damp chill and foul air while in the tower, Laurens went to the south of France to recuperate and only joined fellow peace commissioners Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams on the final day of negotiations, Nov. 29, 1782.

Laurens’ Obfuscations

Hilton, citing Adams, makes the point that Laurens put forth, and the negotiators accepted, a proposal that the British reimburse the Americans for any property that they took when

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



ALBUM/ALAMY/STOCK PHOTO

This unfinished painting by Benjamin West depicts (from left) John Jay, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and William Temple Franklin at the signing of the Treaty of Paris, 1783.

withdrawing. Again, Hilton obfuscated an important point—namely, that Laurens was equating human beings with property in a founding document of the United States.

A more forthright description of what occurred is provided by David McCullough in his biography *John Adams* (2001): “Laurens’s one contribution to the proceedings was to provide a line to prevent the British army from ‘carrying away any Negroes or other property’ when withdrawing from America. Oswald, who had done business with Laurens in former years, when they were both in the slave trade, readily agreed.”

The Laurens amendment protecting the interests of slave owners became a point of contention between the British and Americans almost immediately upon the signing of the Preliminary Treaty of Paris on Jan. 20, 1783. At that time, the remaining British troops under General Sir Guy Carleton had

retreated to New York along with 3,000 liberated slaves. During the Revolutionary War, the British had offered freedom to any enslaved person, male or female, who deserted a rebel owner and crossed into British-held territory. Thousands did so, including those of prominent patriots George Washington, James Madison, and Patrick Henry.

“Prophets and Rebels”

When General Carleton met with General Washington in May 1783 to discuss the terms of the British withdrawal from America, the first item on Washington’s agenda was “the preservation of Property from being carried off, and especially the Negroes.” According to Adam Hochschild’s account in his book *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves* (2005), Washington was infuriated to learn that some had already embarked and insisted that the remaining be turned over in accordance with the terms of the peace treaty. Carleton refused, contending that the liberated slaves were not property covered by the treaty because of the earlier British proclamation giving them freedom, but he conceded that slave owners might eventually be compensated for their losses.

Southern slave owners, encouraged by the Laurens provision, descended on New York in gangs to recapture their human property. Terror and violence ensued, forcing Carleton to evacuate the former enslaved to the nearest British territory, which was Nova Scotia. However, Nova Scotia proved inhospitable, and in 1792 most of them sailed back to Africa with the support of the British antislavery movement and government where they settled Freetown, the capital of present-day Sierra Leone.

The issue of compensation for human beings as property sparked by Laurens lasted for decades with strong resistance from Britain where the antislavery movement was strong. The matter was not resolved until arbitrated by the tsar of Russia in 1826, with the British agreeing to pay American slave owners or their heirs half the market value of their former slaves.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Laurens and his associates published this newspaper advertisement for the sale of enslaved people at Ashley Ferry outside Charleston, South Carolina, on April 26, 1760.

A Misleading Vestige

The significance of the enslaved Africans shipped from Bance Island (now known as Bunce Island) to Charleston has not been lost—but not in ways that Laurens would have anticipated. The contributions by their American descendants to our country’s development and diversity have been significant. To recognize that connection and to bear witness to the horrors of the slave trade in which Laurens and Oswald engaged, the Department of State made grants from the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation to Syracuse University in 2007 and the World Monuments Fund in 2017 to protect the remaining ruins on Bunce Island.

As former Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote in his 1995 autobiography *My American Journey*, when visiting Bunce Island in 1992: “I felt something stirring in me that I had not thought much about before. ... I am an American. ... But today I am something more. I am an African too. I feel my roots, here in this continent.”

Hilton’s portrayal of Laurens as a hero of American diplomacy and a precursor to the Foreign Service that rests in the

Laurens was equating human beings with property in a founding document of the United States.

archives of *The Foreign Service Journal* is a misleading vestige of an era when the complicity of our Founding Fathers in slavery was overlooked. This needs to be rectified by telling the truth of who Henry Laurens was and what he represented. His values were not the “cornerstone” of the Foreign Service. Although it has been asserted that he renounced slavery at the end of his life, he still owned 298 slaves shortly before he died in 1794. ■



CALLING ALL FOREIGN SERVICE AUTHORS!

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS AUGUST 19.

In November 2024
THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL
will highlight recently published books by Foreign Service-affiliated authors.

Authors from the Foreign Service community whose books have been published in late 2023 or 2024 are invited to send us a copy of the book—either printed or digital—along with a press release or backgrounder on the book by August 19.

For more information, and for instructions on how to submit your book and materials, email journal@afsa.org.

Inside Diplomacy
DG Talks to AFSA Members

AFSA was pleased to welcome State Department Director General Marcia Bernicat for an “Inside Diplomacy” discussion on April 8.

For this popular speaker series, AFSA invites senior foreign affairs agency leaders to share their views on the state of the Foreign Service with both our membership and a broader audience that includes stu-

dents, journalists, and foreign diplomats. More than 200 people joined the hour-long event, which was moderated by AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi.

DG Bernicat discussed how she got her start at the State Department and outlined her goals as Director General before answering questions from the audience. The wide-ranging discussion

covered emerging technology, multilateral diplomacy, diversity, changes to the Foreign Service Officer Test, the role of family members overseas, and more.

We thank DG Bernicat for taking the time to share her thoughts with our audience. Look for excerpts from the conversation in the July-August issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*. ■



Director General Marcia Bernicat

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AFSA Hosts Road Scholars



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi addresses Road Scholar participants at AFSA HQ on April 16.

It's the 28th year of AFSA's collaboration with the Road Scholar lifelong learning organization, and we invited Road Scholar D.C. participants to join us at AFSA HQ for a lunch-and-learn session with AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and other AFSA leaders.

Yazdgerdi gave the visitors the inside scoop on diplomacy and told them all about AFSA's 100-year history and its work supporting the Foreign Service.

For more on AFSA's programs and course offerings through Road Scholar, see <https://afsa.org/road-scholar>. ■

CALENDAR

Please check <https://afsa.org> for the most up-to-date information.

June 12
 12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board meeting

June 19
Juneteenth AFSA offices closed

June 26
 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
FS Youth Awards Ceremony

July 4-5
Independence Day AFSA offices closed

July 17
 12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board meeting

SHOP AFSA!

It only took 100 years, but AFSA's new merch store is finally open.

You and your family can show your pride in the Foreign Service with our new hats, shirts, and other fun products.

All proceeds benefit the *Fund for American Diplomacy*.

Check out our new shop at https://bit.ly/AFSA_merch.





Advancing Diplomacy for the Next Century

It was exciting to see so many of you at our May Foreign Service centennial events—Foreign Service Day, the Foreign Service centennial gala, our AFSA birthday party celebration, and other side events. Our 100th year celebration continues strong.

Since the beginning of this centennial year, I have joined forces with department leaders to advance reform initiatives that sharpen our tools and shore up our workforce talents for the next century of diplomatic challenges.

I am part of a community of like-minded practitioners within State and across our interagency working to build up our workforce's abilities to leverage new capabilities, beginning with artificial intelligence (AI). In particular, I am thankful for the leadership of the Bureau of Cybersecurity and Digital Diplomacy, the Meridian International Center, and the U.S. Diplomatic Studies Foundation for launching their inaugural cohort of cross-sector mid-level leaders interested in AI policy and diplomacy.

It was exceptional to personally witness the open exchange of ideas between the executive and legislative branches of government and the private sector. With internal testing of various AI tools underway, including the April launch of an internal ChatGPT-type tool, "Statechat," the State

Department is fostering a culture of innovation ahead of many parts of the U.S. government.

Not only do we collaborate across sectors for a new era of U.S.-led diplomacy, but the acceleration of global challenges requires us to navigate and excel in new and ever-changing multifunctional settings—a key part of the department's modernization agenda.

Additionally, the new cross-functional competency aims to incentivize our workforce to work within multilateral institutions and in multifunctional roles in our overseas missions. The Director General's launch of cross-functional competency scoring as outlined in 24 STATE 32372 establishes the baseline standards for every generalist at FS-2 and above to build out-of-cone/skill code assignments throughout their career.

I know some members worry about how the new "sixth area" will affect their promotion prospects. The department explains these promotion opportunities will grow progressively with each rank above FS-2, and AFSA will continue to press the Office of Performance Evaluation for clarification on guidance to the promotion boards regarding its implementation. The scoring rubric was negotiated with the intent to give our Foreign

Service generalists the chance to learn and have a positive effect at the agency, department, bureau, or unit levels while in cross-functional capacity.

Those going into long-term training (such as two-year language programs) can discuss these aspects within their EER employee narrative before and after language training. For example, they can discuss their intent to use language to increase their cross-functional skill sets and how learning a language enabled them to develop future assignment cross-functionality.

The bottom line: Whether you planned an out-of-cone next assignment or not, there are still many ways to show cross-functional competency, at every rank and throughout your career.

This career, of course, is not just about serving out of cone, as an acting chief or deputy chief of mission, or on an interagency detail. I welcome Director General Bernicat's announcement that 2024 is the "Year of Accountability," offering employees training opportunities to increase their awareness of accountability in all its facets.

However, we need to see measurable change in the retention data and climate surveys showing that more African Americans, other employees of

color, and women are heard and that their concerns are addressed.

AFSA has long been a champion for measures to investigate and resolve workplace conflict, bullying, harassment, and other toxic behaviors that weaken our workforce. We are stronger in facing our adversaries on the global stage when our internal house is healthy, barrier-free, equitable, inclusive, and self-aware.

We need tangible measures that lead to long-term systemic improvements. AFSA welcomes the appointment of new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Zakiya Carr Johnson, and we hope to see positive momentum on these matters not just during this Juneteenth celebration month but through the rest of this year and beyond.

A final note to all our "next-gen" State AFSA members: If you are inspired by these columns, consider running for State vice president or any of the State representative positions. We need your experience and your voice. Our institution is better when our members step up to serve. Look for 2025-2027 elections information later this year.

Write to wong@afsa.org or member@afsa.org if you have any questions. ■



Answers for Our Overworked Workforce

Looking for inspiration in the archives of USAID vice president columns, I found, at least back to 2016, a recurring discussion of workforce planning.

While there has been some progress on workforce planning over the past decade, the continued discussion points to larger questions about expectations and political realities.

According to the recent AFSA-USAID Staff Care mental health survey, 80 percent of respondents reported an “excessive workload,” while 69 percent said “long work hours” were affecting their mental health.

Supporting qualitative responses included long work hours, relentless deadlines, unrealistic expectations, pressure to perform, and managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

These results represent everyday reality across backstops; at conflict and non-conflict posts; high crime and “safe” posts.

What does this have to do with workforce planning? Everything.

For context, the FY 2019 budget for USAID operating expenses (OE), which covers salaries, rents, and infrastructure, was \$1.37 billion, versus a program budget—the part of the budget that funds development work through contracts and grants—of \$16.8 billion.

The 2024 OE budget request was \$1.9 billion (a 27 percent increase) versus a program budget of \$31.9 billion (a 47 percent increase). Both are exclusive of any COVID-19 or Ukraine supplemental funding.

As the program budget grew by 47 %, the number of USAID FSOs went from 1,675 to 1,920—a mere 12.7 percent increase. Simply put, the OE portion of the budget that allows us to hire new FSOs is not keeping pace with the overall budget, meaning there are not enough officers on the ground to do the work that the program budget needs to cover—and this is before new initiatives were added.

What is the agency doing about the disconnect between budget and staffing numbers?

The **Global Development Partnership Initiative** (GDPI) was well received by the Hill when it was introduced in late 2021. The GDPI’s goal was to expand the size of USAID’s Foreign Service to 2,500 officers by FY25 and, with early budget support in FY22 and continued funding in FY23, some 280 new officers were on-boarded.

Sadly, this is when political realities hit. Training and funding decreased, and the odds of reaching the 2025 goal are long. With the current state of affairs on the

Hill, we expect to meet the FY23 goal to have a total of 1,980 USAID officers this calendar year, but will likely see no new significant increases afterwards. Credit the agency; GDPI was well received by the Hill and kicked off overdue and much-needed strategic workforce planning. GDPI also set targets for CS and other staff mechanisms.

Last year the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM) undertook an exercise to “cull” long-term vacant overseas positions and began to explore “grade resizing” to better match the supply and demand of FSOs overseas, provide needed career pathways, and minimize stretch assignments.

Additionally, they began testing a model to facilitate and determine overseas needs. This exercise to assesses where the needs are and how to best realign and respond to emerging crises and threats. Enter the **Strategic Workforce Planning Committee** (SWPC).

Stood up in January 2024, the SWPC analyzes and recommends how the agency should deploy its workforce. Using the results of the HCTM model, as well as input from missions, bureaus/independent offices, and the Foreign Service Center, SWPC makes recommendations on

allocating positions, rebalancing existing positions, new hiring, and projecting growth areas, not just for FS positions but for *all* hiring categories. While AFSA is not a member of the SWPC, we are briefed after each SWPC meeting.

Why is this important? SWPC recommendations should help the agency better understand its workforce needs across mechanisms and indicate where those resources should be deployed. This addresses many of the workforce planning concerns AFSA has raised in the past and gets to the heart of many of the questions posed in last year’s letter from Senator Markey’s office regarding workforce needs and planning at USAID.

Overall, GDPI and the SWPC constitute an effort to improve USAID’s workforce strategy, developed in response to a long-term ask from both AFSA and the Hill.

Is it perfect? No. Could it be misused? Possibly. Will it lead to more FSOs and better work-life balance? That’s my hope. The broader question, however, requires more work, more resources, and continued support from leadership.

I don’t agree with everything in this new approach, but it is a big step forward, and one that requires continued vigilance. ■



Mandatory Retirement: Why Still Age 65?

It has been 40 years since Congress made Social Security part of the retirement package for new Foreign Service members. Why, during those four decades, hasn't Congress raised the Foreign Service mandatory retirement age from 65 to match the Social Security full retirement age of 67 for people born after 1959?

Allowing Foreign Service members who have not already voluntarily or involuntarily retired prior to age 65 to work until their full Social Security retirement age would benefit them financially while further employing their skills and experience to advance our nation's foreign policy goals.

But a number of potential downsides have impeded a legislative change.

- Keeping large numbers of Foreign Service members—many in upper pay grades—working for two years longer would likely reduce promotion opportunities. Promotions could slow with many Foreign Service members spending longer in each grade. About 20 percent of Foreign Service retirements currently occur at age 65, so the numbers are substantial.

- Unless Congress simultaneously increased the size of the Foreign Service, the number of members staying on active duty to age 67 would need to be offset by a reduction in hiring.

- Retaining Foreign Service members who were hired 20, 30, or more years earlier could slow efforts to increase diversity if those staying were less diverse on average than those who would have been hired and promoted into their positions.

- Foreign Service members with less than 20 years of service as they approach mandatory retirement must work to that age to have their pensions calculated at the 1.7 percent retirement factor instead of 1 percent for those with less than 20 years. Therefore, raising the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 67 would all but compel those members to work two additional years. Some of them might prefer to start their long-awaited retirement without that delay.

To weigh the balance between those pros and cons, authoritative projections would be needed of the effects on hiring, promotions, and diversity. Because raising the mandatory retirement age would affect Foreign Service members at all foreign affairs agencies, separate projections would be needed from each agency. Those projections would have to be done by agency human resources analysts with the expertise and access to data required to crunch the numbers.

A key reason that no one has taken up this issue over the past 40 years is that revising the Foreign Service Act's retirement section could have unintended negative consequences.

Additionally, it would be useful to survey employees who entered the Foreign Service after age 47 to determine how many would rather retire at age 65 instead of feeling compelled to work to 67 to get the higher retirement calculation.

Even if detailed consideration indicated that the pros outweighed the cons, a key reason that no one has taken up this issue over the past 40 years is that revising the Foreign Service Act's retirement section could have unintended negative consequences. Some lawmakers might seek to insert harmful changes, such as eliminating the option of retiring on a full, unreduced annuity at age 50 with 20 years of service.

Clearly, some potential changes could disadvantage far more Foreign Service members than would be helped by raising the mandatory retirement age. So, before moving forward, proponents of raising the retirement age must carefully "take the temperature" on Capitol Hill to gauge the likelihood of passage without unintended harmful consequences.

Finally, it is useful to remember why the Foreign Service has had mandatory retirement for age since the Rogers Act in 1924, which was reaffirmed in the Foreign Service Acts of 1946 and 1980. An authoritative explanation can be found in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1979 decision rejecting a suit filed by a group of Foreign Service officers alleging that the policy represented unconstitutional discrimination (*Vance v. Bradley*).

The Supreme Court upheld the policy, finding that Congress advanced legitimate national interests by setting different rules for the Foreign Service as a "relatively small ... and particularly able corps, separate and apart from the Civil Service system."

Those national interests, the Supreme Court decision explained, included the need to maintain the Foreign Service flow-through personnel system and to remove from the Service those whose age may make them less equipped or less ready than younger persons to face the rigors of overseas duty. ■



FY24 Appropriations Outcomes

On March 8, Congress passed the first Fiscal Year 2024 minibus, which includes funding for six of the 12 annual appropriations bills and three of AFSA's six represented agencies—the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

On March 22, Congress passed the second minibus for the remaining six appropriations bills, including funding for the remaining three foreign affairs agencies that AFSA represents—the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

While partial federal government shutdowns were avoided with passage of the two minibuses, any enacted funding cuts will need to be absorbed by agencies in the remaining months of FY24.

Significant FY24 funding cuts were expected as part of the bicameral and bipartisan appropriations minibuses, a compromise to prevent even deeper cuts proposed by the House earlier in 2023.

Foreign aid accounts, rather than operational accounts, received the deepest cuts—about 10 percent—within the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropri-

ations (SFOPS) bill. Without final FY24 appropriations signed into law before the end of April, an automatic 1 percent across-the-board cut would have gone into effect due to provisions in the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.

The final FY24 minibuses include a total of \$60.1 billion for the International Affairs Budget (IAB), funding for diplomacy and development activities. This is a \$3.6 billion cut for the IAB from the final FY23 level with emergency funds taken into account.

While this is the first IAB decrease in more than half a decade, operational accounts for foreign affairs agencies did not suffer as severely as other IAB accounts. Most cuts to foreign affairs agencies' operational accounts remained below 3 percent.

Diplomatic programs (DP), the main State Department personnel and programs account, was cut by less than 1 percent. Congress also included language stating that funding for public diplomacy programs within the DP account is either level with the FY23 level or not subject to cuts.

USAID's operating expenses account and the USAGM accounts were cut by just under 3 percent.

The APHIS salaries and expenses account received

Significant FY24 funding cuts were expected as part of the bicameral and bipartisan appropriations minibuses, a compromise to prevent even deeper cuts proposed by the House earlier in 2023.

a cut of less than 1 percent, as did the International Trade Administration account that contains FCS. FAS received a 4 percent cut, the most of all the foreign affairs agencies.

The explanatory statement for the SFOPS appropriations bill included language expressing support for addressing anomalous health incidents (AHIs), specifically mentioning funding for compensation of those affected by AHIs eligible under the Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks (HAVANA) Act of 2021.

Finally, the Commission on Reform and Modernization of the State Department was funded in FY24 appropriations. This commission will examine the changing nature of diplomacy and the ways in which the department can modernize to advance the interests of the United States; it will then offer recommendations to the president and Congress.

As I write this column, Congress is scheduled to pass a supplemental

national security package that includes an additional \$26.8 billion for SFOPS appropriations to help address ongoing crises globally including in Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. For operations, this package includes more than \$230 million across the State Department and nearly \$40 million for USAID Operating Expenses.

Moving into the next fiscal year, AFSA will urge appropriators to provide a robust FY25 International Affairs Budget with funding equivalent to at least the amount requested by the administration.

AFSA will also urge the foreign affairs agencies to minimize the effect of the FY24 cuts on personnel as much as possible, discouraging any pauses in hiring and encouraging our 2023 State Department Authorization Act wins to be fully funded. ■

AFSA on Havana Syndrome

On April 9, shortly after “60 Minutes” aired a report presenting compelling new information on anomalous health incidents (AHIs), commonly known as Havana syndrome, AFSA issued a public message urging the State Department to undertake an investigation of the new information.

AFSA also called on the department to share information concerning posts where AHIs have occurred, so that potential bidders are aware, and to provide an update about what protective measures are being undertaken to help employees feel safe.

AFSA continues to press for inclusion of members who became ill before Jan. 1, 2016, who are currently considered ineligible for benefits under the Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks (HAVANA) Act of 2021. AFSA also continues to support relief efforts for cases in which Havana Act benefit applications were denied on “other incident” grounds, and upon appeal, were again denied by the department.

If you have any questions about AFSA policy regarding AHIs, please do not hesitate to contact us at member@afsa.org. ■


AFSA Urges Clarity on Flag Restrictions

A provision in the recent congressional 2024 appropriations bill prevents the flying of Pride flags at U.S. embassies and missions around the world. This decision was made as part of a political compromise aimed at preventing a government shutdown. While we recognize the practicalities of current budget politics, we are concerned with the message this action sends to our LGBTQ+ members and LGBTQ+ communities around the world.

AFSA has raised the issue of the flag ban with leaders at the Department of State and USAID and will continue to do so across all our member foreign affairs agencies. While this provision is now law and must be implemented, AFSA is urging the department to clarify the rules with the Foreign Service community, including whether flying of Pride flags at U.S. government-provided housing abroad is also prohibited.

AFSA remains steadfast in our core values of respect for difference and support for diversity and inclusion. We will continue to advocate for the rights and protection of our members from the LGBTQ+ community and beyond. ■


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David L. Mortimer, CPA, has over 25 years of experience in tax planning and research, including developing tax minimization strategies, planning business/real estate transactions and audit representation.

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FIRST CONSULTATION FREE

FSJ Welcomes New Associate Editor

AFSA is thrilled to welcome Mark Parkhomenko to the *Journal* team as our new associate editor.

Mark arrives with a wealth of experience from the Association of Corporate Counsel, where he refined his skills in writing, editing, and reporting as an editor for their flagship publication, *The Docket*. He also managed the ACC “Top 10 30-Somethings” program, an annual awards ceremony celebrating the accomplishments of young in-house counsel professionals globally.

Originally from Ukraine, Mark moved to the U.S. at age 6, beginning a life of academic and cultural exploration that took him from New England to the University of Toronto, where he earned a B.A. in history, political science, and anthropology.

While at the University of Toronto, he worked as a research assistant at an archaeology lab and wrote for his school’s music magazine.

Now back in the DMV, Mark is an avid cyclist and photographer, always chasing the perfect golden hour shot.

Reach Mark at parkhomenko@afsa.org. ■



Mark Parkhomenko

Training for Op-Ed Writing

On April 4, AFSA invited a group of Foreign Service retirees across the U.S. to join a virtual session on how to write and submit op-eds for publication in local and national newspapers.

The seminar—part of AFSA’s yearlong centennial outreach campaign—was led by Director of Communications and Outreach Nikki Gamer, who has years of experience writing op-eds for corporate and nonprofit communicators.

The goal of the seminar was to offer tips to our members who want to share their Foreign Service stories with hometown papers, helping their communities

understand the nonpartisan nature of the Foreign Service and the return on investment that it offers the American public.

Gamer talked about developing a “hook” for a story, as well as a framework and talking points that would make for a compelling op-ed. She explained what editors look for in a story, such as a meaningful connection to the news cycle and links to credible data sources, and offered resources for finding editors’ contact information online.

We look forward to seeing articles by our participants in newspapers across the nation in the coming months. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meetings, March and April 2024

The Governing Board met on March 20 and April 24, 2024. At the April meeting, these action items were decided upon:

Awards Committee: The board approved the committee’s recommendation for the 2024 Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award.

The board agreed on several changes to award nominations eligibility language to be announced and implemented ahead of the 2025 nominations cycle.

Committee on Elections Membership: The board authorized the appointment of new and returning members to the AFSA Committee on Elections.

New Board Member: The board authorized the appointment of Kimberly McClure to serve as a new AFSA State Representative, following the resignation of David Josar.

Updates to Advocacy List: The board authorized updated language to AFSA’s advocacy list for the 118th Congress, second session. ■

AFSA Webinar

The View from Washington

On March 21, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi hosted “The View from Washington,” a periodic webinar that gives retirees the opportunity to hear directly from AFSA about current advocacy work on Capitol Hill and with leadership at the various Foreign Service agencies.

Yazdgerdi outlined the current dynamics around the international affairs budget and gave an update on fiscal year 2024 funding. He offered an overview of top policy areas being discussed with agency leadership, the status of nominations and confirmations, and other topics of interest to our retired members. Of course, Yazdgerdi also shared AFSA’s plans to commemorate the Foreign Service Centennial and plans for Foreign Service Day.

A recording of the webinar is available to members only at afsa.org/video. ■



Defending and Advising Members Member Advocacy

Providing legal counseling and representation to members has long been one of AFSA's top priorities. One third of AFSA's staff and \$2 million of its annual budget are dedicated to individual member advocacy. AFSA's labor management team at the State Department and USAID comprises seven attorneys and four non-attorney counselors who assist more than 1,600 individual active-duty members per year from all Foreign Service agencies.

In addition, AFSA's retiree counselor assists more than 450 retired members each year. Assistance varies from answering simple questions to dedicating scores of hours providing legal advice and representation.

AFSA's labor management team assists members with grievances, investigations, disciplinary actions, and Equal Employment Opportunity complaints. They assist members who have questions about their federal benefits or about rules and procedures relating to medical clearances, performance evaluations, transportation, leave, and a host of other day-to-day issues connected to their Foreign Service employment.

They represent members in interviews with Diplomatic Security, the Office of Inspector General, and the Office of Civil Rights. And they represent members before the Foreign Service Griev-

ance Board, Security Appeals Panel, Accountability Review Boards, and in agency disciplinary proceedings.

AFSA seeks to ensure that members are afforded a fair and effective system for the resolution of individual grievances, one that provides the fullest measure of due process. When members are proposed for discipline, AFSA works to ensure that the agency has met its burden of proof to establish the facts and that any penalties imposed are consistent with those previously imposed on other employees for engaging in similar conduct.

If the legal matter is outside the expertise of AFSA's attorneys and the issue is of institutional importance to the Foreign Service, the member may seek financial assistance from AFSA's Legal Defense Fund (LDF). When 12 AFSA members were called to testify during the 2019 Trump impeachment hearings, the LDF paid \$468,000 in private attorney fees to help save our colleagues from the severe financial hardship of paying for their own representation.

In addition to one-on-one assistance to individual members, AFSA takes on cohort grievances affecting groups of employees. For example, AFSA helped win retroactive meritorious step increases (MSIs) for more than 1,000 State Department employees,

and got 49 Diplomatic Security agents the overtime pay they deserved.

AFSA attorneys also file implementation disputes and unfair labor practices when Foreign Service agencies violate a collective bargaining agreement.

AFSA's labor management team negotiates with agency management to improve conditions of service. As the exclusive representative of the Foreign Service, AFSA negotiates on behalf of all 16,000 Foreign Service members across six foreign affairs agencies, including employees who are not AFSA members.

Excellent results over the decades include securing family-friendly reforms to the Special Needs Educational Allowance program, securing reforms to the State Department's assignment restrictions program, and convincing the State Department to give employees administrative leave during the peak years of COVID-19.

AFSA provides a wealth of written guidance to members on legal and federal benefits issues. The AFSA website's Labor Management Guidance page (<https://afsa.org/labor-management-guidance>) has nearly 50 documents and links, ranging from

AFSA's Good Works

Each month during our centennial year, The Foreign Service Journal is profiling an AFSA program that advances the collective or individual interests of its members.

This month we feature member advocacy.

"EEO Investigation Guidance" to "Foreign Contact Reporting Requirements." The Retirement Resources page (<https://afsa.org/retirement-resources>) has nearly 100 documents and links on retirement issues.

Every two months, AFSA's Retirement Newsletter updates members on benefits issues. Each fall, AFSA provides free online access to the Consumers' Checkbook Guide to Federal Health Plans to help members evaluate their health insurance options. In addition, throughout the year AFSA presents a variety of webinars to educate members on federal benefits issues. One recent webinar, "Retirement Planning 5 Years Out," had 492 attendees.

AFSA's labor management team and retiree counselor stand ready to assist members with any question or problem related to their Foreign Service employment or federal benefits. They provide legal assistance and counseling free of charge to those who have been AFSA members for at least six months or since hiring if newly employed. The labor management office can be reached at afsa@state.gov and the retiree counselor at member@afsa.org.

—John K. Naland ■



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Beyond Borders

Launching Third Culture Kids

Here are tips on managing the college and overseas transitions.

BY REBECCA MCPHERSON

In August 2023, my spouse and I departed for post, leaving our three daughters at different universities, all in different time zones. While we were familiar with managing the transition to a new assignment as a family, moving overseas without our college students added another layer of preparations.

As the education and youth program specialist for the Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO), I had the opportunity to participate as a panel member in the “Lunch and Learn” events hosted by the Foreign Service Institute’s Overseas Briefing Center (FSI/TC/OBC), titled “Moving Overseas Without Your College-Aged Children.” These sessions inspired the focus of this article: legal considerations,

effective communication strategies, and potential challenges for our Third Culture Kids (TCKs) as they embark on this new phase of their lives.

Legally Speaking: The Top 10 Documents All College Students Need

As we move around the world, Foreign Service families need to keep track of numerous legal and financial documents, and our college kids are no different. As we prepare our children to head off to university, we focus on finding bacteria-resistant shower shoes, signing up for care package deliveries, and checking off every item on the dorm essentials list, but we must also remember the important legal documents they

should have in their possession. *Best Colleges* and the *National Law Review* list the following as the top 10; the first three can be prepared by an attorney or using an online service:

1. HIPAA Form: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 authorization form should name a parent as an authorized party to ask for and receive information about the student’s health situation.

The absence of this form complicates your ability for access in an emergency and will leave you no option but to get a court appointment as guardian.

2. Health Care Power of Attorney: This designates a parent as a “medical agent” to view and make health care decisions.

3. General Durable Power of Attorney: This authorizes a parent to make financial decisions on the student’s behalf.

4. Bank Information—Debit/Credit Card, Checks: If your student is under



Rebecca McPherson is the education and youth program specialist at the Global Community Liaison Office. She has been a Foreign Service family member since 2014, posted both overseas and domestically. She is currently a Domestic Employee Teleworking Overseas (DETO) in Angola while all three of her children are attending universities in the U.S.

As we prepare our children to head off to university, we must also remember the important legal documents they should have in their possession.

age 21, consider opening an account with your banking institution to access and review their finances without requesting permission. One Foreign Service mom said this helped her to have a conversation about how paying \$40 for a GrubHub or UberEats lunch every two days instead of using the prepaid meal plan at the school dining facilities might be the reason why the student did not have any money by the end of the month.

- 5. Birth Certificate.**
- 6. Driver's License, Passport, or Other Photo ID.**
- 7. Digital and Hard Copy of Emergency and Other Important Contacts.**
- 8. Medical Records and Insurance Card:** Most insurance plans allow the employee to cover their dependents up to age 26. Universities also offer health insurance plans, but those can be expensive,

and many provide the same services that your student can access under your existing plan. When we forgot to opt out of the university insurance plan for our oldest daughter's first semester, the mistake cost us an additional \$1,600.

9. Official School Records and Documents: Make sure they bring official records the university requires. Keep in mind, some of those forms may need specific information and parental guidance to fill out. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that gives parents the right to access and amend school records and protect disclosure of personally identifiable information from those records. If you want to retain this access—not all families do—once your



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Striking a balance between checking in and giving space can be difficult.

child is 18, a legal document must be in place to continue to have access.

10. Social Security Card (original or scanned copy).

Communication Matters

As parents, we go from seeing and talking to our children daily to being separated by time zones, oceans, and thousands of miles. It can be confusing to figure out how—and how frequently—to chat. Striking a balance between checking in and giving space can be difficult. Dur-

ing the FSI/TC panel discussion, I had the opportunity to ask several TCKs and their parents to share their insights on communication strategies and tips for those embarking on this new journey.

Have a conversation before the start of the school year. Set realistic communication expectations that you all can agree on. Be patient and flexible.

Remember communication is a two-way street. It's important to not compare your student with others, as some kids want to share more about their adven-

tures than others. Start the conversation by asking, "Is this a good time to talk?" Tell them what's going on with you if they seem reluctant to open up, but it's not fun for them if you do all the talking, so let them initiate sometimes. And remember they may also want some space. Listen, and be respectful.

Think about the time difference. One parent said they have the world clock on their phone, with all of the cities their students live in saved, and they check it all the time. The greater the time difference, the harder it can be to communicate. Many of the TCKs I spoke to said when they had a moment and wanted to call, they realized it was the

(Continues on page 62)



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|--|-------------|------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fairfax Christian School, The | 63 | 330 | 50/50 | 15 | 20 | PK-12 | AP | N | Limited | 3 | Y | Y | 60,100-68,150 ^{abdeg} |
| Ojai Valley School | 62 | 330 | 50/50 | 58 | 28 | PK-12 | AP | Y | Y | 84 | Y | Y | 67,800 ^{ddf} |
| Rochambeau The French International School | 66 | 1239 | 46/54 | NA | 30 | PK-12 | AP/IB | N | Limited | 60 | Y | N | 70,500 ^b |
| ■ JUNIOR HIGH/SENIOR HIGH | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| New England Innovation Academy | 65 | 133 | 60/40 | 30 | 31 | 7-12 | NA | Y | Limited | 38 | N | Limited | 68,856 ^{be} |
| Oak Hill Academy | 61 | 140 | 60/40 | 100 | 15 | 8, 9-12, PG | AP | Y | Y | 98 | Y | Limited | 41,550 ^{abdg} |
| ■ SENIOR HIGH | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Christchurch School | BC | 230 | 60/40 | 70 | 30 | 9-12 | AP | Y | Y | 50 | Y | Y | 64,900 ^d |
| EF Academy New York | 57 | 250 | 40/60 | 98 | 90 | 9-12 | AP/IB | N | Y | 40.5 | Y | N | 46,200-76,100 ^{ab} |
| EF Academy Pasadena | 57 | 250 | 54/46 | 85 | 75 | 9-12 | AP | N | Y | 32 | Y | N | 46,200-76,100 ^{ab} |
| Fountain Valley School | 63 | 240 | 50/50 | 70 | 25 | 9-12 | AP | Y | Limited | 80 | Y | Limited | 69,950 ^b |
| George School | 52 | 544 | 46/54 | 47 | 30 | 9-12 | AP/IB | Y | Limited | 36 | Y | Limited | 74,900 ^b |
| Oldfields School | 64 | 30 | All Girls | 70 | 3 | 8-12 | AP | Y | Y | 35 | Y | Limited | 31,000-59,000 ^b |
| Marvelwood School | 62 | 120 | 50/50 | 80 | 14 | 9-12, PG | AP | Y | Y | 55 | Y | Limited | 66,200 ^{abce} |
| St. Andrew's School | 57 | 320 | 50/50 | 100 | 11 | 9-12 | NA | Y | Limited | 49 | Y | Limited | 66,400 ^{ddf} |
| St. Mark's School | 59 | 375 | 50/50 | 75 | 24 | 9-12 | NA | Y | NA | 29 | N | Limited | 76,199 ^{bf} |
| ■ OVERSEAS | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| American Overseas School of Rome | 63 | 593 | 50/50 | NA | 70 | PK-12 | AP/IB | N | N | 20 | Y | Y | 11,900-27,600 ^{bc} |
| Berlin Brandenburg International School | 54 | 907 | 50/50 | 10 | 70 | K-12 | IB | N | Y | 22 | Y | N | 51,000 ^c |
| Carlucci American International School of Lisbon | 55 | 650 | 48/52 | NA | 78 | PK-12 | IB | N | Limited | 18 | Y | N | 10,490-22,232 ^{abc} |
| EF Academy Oxford | 57 | 125 | 42/58 | 100 | 100 | 11-12 | IB | N | Limited | 43 | Y | N | 65,000 ^g |
| Frankfurt International School | 66 | 1800 | 50/50 | NA | 80 | K-12 | IB | N | Limited | 12 | Y | N | 11,744-29,608 ^{bc} |
| Leysin American School in Switzerland | 56 | 310 | 50/50 | 100 | 85 | 7-12, PG | AP/IB | N | Limited | 75 | Y | N | 120,000 ^{abd} |
| St. Stephen's School - Rome | 61 | 300 | 47/53 | 20 | 64 | 9-12, PG | IB | N | N | 12 | Y | N | 54,560 ^b |
| TASIS The American School in Switzerland | 66 | 750 | 46/54 | 37 | 93 | PK-PG | AP/IB | N | Y | 45 | Y | Limited | 110,000 ^{bcdde} |

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



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|-----------------------------|-------------|--|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ SPECIAL NEEDS | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gow School, The | 66 | 130 | 70/30 | 90 | 10 | 6-12, PG | NA | N | Y | 25 | N | Limited | 80,000 ^b |
| New Haven | 59 | 86 | All Girls | 100 | NA | 9-12 | AP | N | Y | 45 | N | Y | 237,250 ^b |
| ■ DISTANCE LEARNING | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bryn Mawr Online | 55 | 17 | All Girls | NA | Varies | 8-11 | AP | Y | Limited | NA | Y | NA | 6,150-26,400 ^{abcd} |
| Dwight Global Online School | IFC | 430 | 56/44 | NA | 17 | 6-12 | AP/IB | N | Y | NA | Y | NA | 41,895 ^{abde} |
| Hemispheres Academy | 63 | 24 | 50/50 | NA | 100 | 2-12 | AP | N | Y | NA | Y | NA | 10,297-12,797 ^{de} |
| ■ OTHER | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Skool-ed Education Center | 60 | We offer virtual tutoring in multiple time zones for Dyslexia, ADHD, Executive Function. And in-person education support in Loudoun County, Va. www.skool-ed.com | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GCLO | 60 | Global Community Liaison Office: Information and resources for Foreign Service families. Contact GCLOAskEducation@state.gov . | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate **Attention Deficit Disorder/Learning Disabilities ***Dec. 25-Jan. 1 NA, Not applicable
^aSibling discount ^bFinancial aid available ^cDollar value subject to exchange rate ^dAid for federal employees
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If there are things to discuss like travel logistics or finances, consider sending the details and requests for information in an email.

(Continued from page 56)

middle of the night where their parent or parents were posted.


Decide on methods and frequency of communication. Choose a platform to text, call, and share online calendars. You may also use social media apps. Most of the parents I spoke to said it is helpful to choose a consistent day, time, and method (video preferred) for communicating.

Encourage and expect your kids to keep in touch with each other. One parent told me she had her students sign a “college contract” (she is a former lawyer) that they would talk to both the parents and siblings once a week.

Separate the fun from the business. If there are things to discuss like travel logistics or finances, consider sending the details and requests for information in an email. If they don’t respond, send a text

the next day asking them to please check their email and respond within 24 hours. You want most of your face-time interaction to be connecting about life in college, learning about their friends, finding out what their most interesting class is. Ask lots of questions like: What’s your favorite hang-out spot on campus? Have you found a great coffee shop? How is it going with your roommate and hall mates? The point is to make memories even though you are apart.

Set response time expectations. Not all students are prompt responders when their parents text. Decide on a code word (or phrase) that communicates: “This is a proof of life request. I need to hear from you within 24 hours, or I will be forced to contact campus police.”



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Being a TCK is not an identity— it is a profile and an experience.

Try not to surprise them. One TCK student said he started to leave his phone in his dorm room because his parents would call him unexpectedly all the time—in the middle of class, during a study session, or when he was out with friends—and it embarrassed him. They agreed to text first and then figure out a time to talk.

Pictures are worth a thousand words. Photos, memes, social media, video messages—these are all great touchpoints.


College Is a Journey, There Will Be Bumps

Starting college is an exciting and challenging time in the life of a student. It is also a memorable one, a first step on the journey into adulthood, with students changing both physically and emotionally, exploring newfound independence, and finding the balance between academics and a new social construct.

For TCKs, it can be even more challenging. TCK Megan Norton is a founder of Intercultural Transitions, an organiza-

tion that works with TCKs to empower them through the university experience and beyond. She emphasizes that being a TCK is not an identity—it is a profile and an experience. TCKs who start college often experience reverse culture shock, describing themselves as aliens and strangers in their “home” country. For them, home is not a static geographical location, but the place where their family is at any given time. As new college students, they are faced with processing and owning their story and finding a sense of belonging based on an evolving narrative of life overseas.

TCKs may experience loneliness and isolation. The physical absence of family close by and the shift from a multicultural to monocultural experience can be



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disorienting. Forging new friendships and figuring out where they fit in can exacerbate these feelings. Your student might find it stressful to figure out how to get their laundry done, manage their finances, eat well, and get enough sleep, and they may be anxious about their academic performance.

Megan reminds TCKs that university life is demanding, and it can take a few months to establish a rhythm and routine that works. She says parents can help by planning reunions with extended family during shorter breaks and organizing travel to post for the longer winter and summer breaks. If possible, be a part of the move-in process at the start of the semester.

What Parents Can Do

Becky Grappo, founder of RNG International Educational Consultants and a mom to TCKs of her own, has helped hundreds of FS families going through the college process. She says most parents just want to know the answer to a question she saw posted on Instagram, “Do you want to be hugged, heard, or helped?”

We may not be able to physically hug our kids, but we have the technology at our disposal to help bridge the distance between us and make them feel heard. We can encourage them to build a support network on campus by seeking out other international student organizations and TCKs as well as local opportunities outside of campus for culture, service, and community. Additional resources for the college process and transition are available on GCLO’s College and Beyond webpage, and the Overseas Briefing Center (FSI/TC/OBC) has a checklist for FS families with college students.

Self-care techniques can help to manage stress and anxiety and provide balance to the busy demands of college life. Stu-

dents should prioritize their mental and emotional well-being by getting exercise and proper nutrition, practicing mindfulness, and making time to pursue interests and hobbies; most campuses offer informational sessions to introduce students to wellness options on campus. Megan encourages TCKs to enjoy the journey of figuring out who they are becoming, to be curious and explore new things.

Sometimes the anxiety and pressure may lead the student to need professional mental health help. Becky noted there are college counseling services and mental health professionals on campus that can offer some guidance, but many of them are meant for triage or short-term assistance, not ongoing support. Most campuses and insurance companies can provide a list of options both for telehealth and local service providers; contact them as soon as possible as there may be wait-lists.

Ensuring that mechanisms are in place legally, staying connected, and encouraging our TCKs to practice self-care and find support networks, including professional help if needed, will help them navigate this transition with success.

There may be a situation, however, that requires a plan B—and maybe even a plan C. I remember the exact spot where I stood in the embassy when I received a call from my best friend telling me our daughter was in the hospital. It was not what I wanted or expected to hear, but it was clear that she needed to take a medical leave of absence her second semester of sophomore year and come stay with us at post. Looking back on that time now, as she prepares to finish her graduate degree this June, I realize that everyone’s journey is going to be bumpy in some way. In the end, in the words of another FS mom, “We want our kids happy, healthy, and whole.” ■



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On the Beat with VOA

Behind the White House Curtain: A Senior Journalist's Story of Covering the President—and Why It Matters

Steven L. Herman, Kent State University Press, 2024, \$29.95/hardcover, print only, 248 pages.

REVIEWED BY ERIC RUBIN

Voice of America Chief National Correspondent Steve Herman has written a fascinating insider's account of what it was like to cover the White House during the Trump administration in his new book, *Behind the White House Curtain*.

The book is part memoir, part history lesson. In it, Herman makes a strong case for reinforcing the protections and firewalls that enable reporters to play the role envisioned by our Founding Fathers, and for restoring the fundamental concept of a nonpartisan, objective, balanced Fourth Estate.

Steve Herman is a journalist's journalist. He is not only a talented, award-winning reporter but also a ferocious advocate for freedom of the press and the right of the American people to know what their government is doing in their name. Herman served on AFSA's Governing Board for many years doing regular battle on behalf of his colleagues with the leadership of the Voice of America (VOA) and its parent agency, the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

In the book, Herman traces his career from his early days as a novice reporter in the 1970s to his travels with presidents across the globe. He goes back further to his experience as a child growing up in suburban Cincinnati, developing a precocious fascination with politics and public affairs, starting

at the age of 8 in 1968 when he handed out bumper stickers for the Republican candidate for senator.

When his family moved to Las Vegas, he began his reporting career in local radio there as a teenager. He attributes some of his success to his favorite teachers in junior high school, noting with particular gratitude that one of them taught him to touch-type, something many journalists to this day have never mastered.

Herman devotes extensive attention to the uniqueness of VOA's mission, challenges, and restrictions. Founded in 1942 at the height of World War II, VOA from the start was charged with providing balanced, nonpartisan, fact-based journalism while at the same time airing editorials representing the views of the U.S. government.

Herman continues to draw on his passion for journalism and a deep understanding of what it takes to deliver solid reporting to a global audience.

Although VOA correspondents overseas (today there are fewer than you can count on one hand) are represented by the American Foreign Service Association as members of the Foreign Service, they are not State Department employees and must adhere to a strict firewall protecting their reporting from official government influence.

These realities set up a clash with the Trump administration, as Herman recounts in detail. Senior White House officials were unhappy and uncomfortable with VOA reporting the news as they

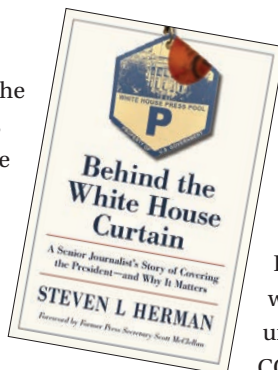
saw it, and bristled at what they saw as a liberal bias against President Trump and his team.

As VOA's senior White House correspondent, Herman was in the crosshairs. He came under fire for his reporting on COVID-19 cases in the Trump administration, the president's illness included.

In the book, Herman shares the particularly difficult challenge dealing with Trump's appointee as head of USAGM. Michael Pack, a right-wing filmmaker, was determined to eliminate noncitizen foreign journalists whose work was essential to VOA's foreign language services. Herman joined with other senior VOA colleagues in signing a letter to the acting director of VOA expressing concern about the firings and the apparent politicization of the agency.

Pack was infuriated by the letter, only half-jokingly telling a reporter that he intended to "drain the swamp" at VOA by "banning masks and turning off the air conditioning." Pack retaliated against Herman directly by launching an investigation charging Herman with political bias against Trump and by seeking to have him removed from the White House beat.

The Washington journalism community joined in supporting Herman in federal court, where an injunction was ultimately issued barring VOA leadership from interfering with editorial



assignments. That was followed by an investigation by USAGM’s inspector general, and then Pack’s referral to the Office of Special Counsel for possible violations of the Hatch Act.

Herman’s efforts played a major role in saving his agency and its journalism from these partisan threats. He is now chief national correspondent for VOA and continues to give VOA’s listeners a nuanced, nonpartisan, and timely look at our country and both its challenges and its successes.

Having traveled as a journalist to more than 75 countries, and having lived overseas in multiple foreign postings,

Herman continues to draw on his passion for journalism and a deep understanding of what it takes to deliver solid reporting to a global audience.

At a time when objective, fact-based and nonpartisan reporting overseas is under serious assault, while our country struggles to get its messages to the global audience, Steve Herman’s book provides a primer on how we can tackle those challenges in a very uncertain world.

Eric Rubin was president of AFSA from 2019 to 2023 and U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria from 2016 to 2019. He retired last year after 38 years in the Foreign Service.

A Warning on Toxic Partisanship

Beyond the Water’s Edge: How Partisanship Corrupts U.S. Foreign Policy

Paul R. Pillar, Columbia University Press, 2023, \$35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 328 pages.

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH L. NOVAK

We are currently in the early stages of a hard-fought presidential election campaign that will decide the direction of U.S. diplomacy for the next four years. Paul Pillar’s well-timed new book, *Beyond the Water’s Edge*, sends up a flare on the threat posed to U.S. national security by extreme political polarization.

The arc of Pillar’s narrative sketches how domestic dynamics have affected the conduct of U.S. foreign relations through history. His book’s title is based in part on a statement made by Daniel Webster, the eminent 19th-century statesman and two-time Secretary of State, who memorably proclaimed:

“Even our party divisions, acrimonious as they are, cease at the water’s edge.”

The author, by way of introduction, is currently a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University and a nonresident fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He has written several well-received books, including *Why America Misunderstands the World: National Experience and Roots of Misperception* (2016).

Pillar also worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for 28 years before retiring in 2005. His senior positions at Langley included service as executive assistant to the CIA director and national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia.

In *Beyond the Water’s Edge*, Pillar underscores that he fully understands that foreign policy is an appropriate matter of public debate. What concerns him is unrestrained, corrosive partisanship.

In trying to pinpoint what sort of activity crosses the red line, he notes: “Making partisan calculation the primary consideration is a perversion of the constructive role of political parties in articulating competing interests and grand strategies.”

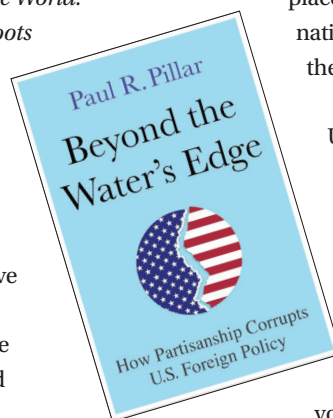
At times, Pillar employs the word “corruption.” He explains that, in line with the views of political philosophers like Niccolò Machiavelli and David Hume, he uses the term to mean “factionalism run amok.” But given that modern usages mainly focus on financial malfeasance, throwing in the word “corruption” to describe instances of excessive partisanship only seems to obfuscate the complicated matters under discussion.

In making his argument, Pillar highlights a clutch of episodes where hyperpolarization has inhibited the making of sound foreign policy. He cogently relates how the bitter Federalist and Democratic-Republican rivalry undercut the U.S. government’s ability to deal with fallout from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Thrown unprepared into conflict with Britain, the American polity was riven with discord, and U.S. military forces were

placed on the defensive. The new nation was lucky to emerge from the War of 1812 fully intact.

Fast-forwarding through U.S. history, *Beyond the Water’s Edge* skillfully reviews how John F. Kennedy’s oft-repeated claim that there was a “missile gap” helped skew the 1960 presidential campaign. The issue was a vote-winner for Kennedy, but

the Soviet Union had not in fact pulled ahead with respect to ballistic missile development and deployment. Richard Nixon, the losing candidate, felt badly burned by Kennedy’s tactics.



In making his argument, Pillar highlights a clutch of episodes where hyperpolarization has inhibited the making of sound foreign policy.

A particularly graphic example of off-the-rails partisanship involves the Nixon campaign's machinations to impede the Johnson administration's peace efforts in the lead-up to the 1968 election. *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate* (2015) by Ken Hughes is an excellent resource on this tale of political intrigue.

Also shocking was a reported effort led by William J. Casey, Ronald Reagan's campaign manager and soon-to-be CIA director, to convince Iran via intermediaries not to release the American hostages until after the 1980 election. *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (1991) by Gary Sick remains required reading on this.

Pillar is highly critical of the previous administration, asserting: "Under Trump, the Department of State and machinery of U.S. diplomacy were more thoroughly subjugated to partisan politics than ever before." To justify this sweeping conclusion, he cites multiple violations of the Hatch Act as determined by the Office of Special Counsel in addition to investigative findings made by the State Department's Office of Inspector General.

In discussing the Trump presidency, the author also places a spotlight on the mistreatment accorded to U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, who courageously stood in the way of a scheme targeting political opponents. Taking into account the copious amount of evidence proffered, it's impossible to deny that all of this did inestimable damage to American diplomatic capabilities.

The author makes the point that one

of the risks in hyperpolitical contexts is the intrusion of foreign powers into internal American affairs. This happened in the early 1790s when Revolutionary France sent an emissary who blatantly meddled in the American political scene. More recently, we have witnessed covert efforts by Russia and other countries to interfere in U.S. elections. Pillar emphasizes that Americans must continue to be vigilant and act to prevent the exploitation of our open society by those pushing a malicious agenda.

Beyond the Water's Edge singles out prominent Americans who placed an emphasis on bipartisan collaboration. Of those cited, the contributions of Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg (R-Mich.) are perhaps the most noteworthy. An isolationist prior to World War II, he possessed a willingness to make common cause with the Truman administration, which was crucial in forging collective support for the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, and NATO.

A former government official himself, Pillar dedicates his compelling and well-written book "to the nonpartisan public servants who work on behalf of the entire nation." His reminder that partisan divisiveness should "cease at the water's edge" is a salient one and needs to be taken with the utmost gravity by foreign affairs professionals. ■

Joseph L. Novak is a writer based in Washington, D.C. He is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in London and a retiree member of the American Foreign Service Association. A former lawyer, he was a Foreign Service officer for 30 years.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Calling All Authors / 43
Foreign Service Night at
Nationals Park / Inside
Back Cover
Look for 2025 Summer
Camps & Programs / 64
*The Voice of the Foreign
Service*, 2nd edition / 37

CLASSIFIED LISTINGS

Classifieds / 74, 75

EDUCATION

American Overseas School
of Rome / 63
Berlin Brandenburg
International School / 54
Bryn Mawr Online / 55
Carlucci American
International School
of Lisbon / 55
Christchurch School / Back
Cover
Dwight Global Online School /
Inside Front Cover
Education-at-a-Glance
Chart / 58, 60
EF Academy / 57
Fairfax Christian School,
The / 63
Fountain Valley School / 63
Frankfurt International
School / 66
George School / 52
Global Community
Liaison Office / 60
Gow School, The / 66
Hemispheres Academy / 63
Leysin American School in
Switzerland / 56
Marvelwood School / 62
New England Innovation
Academy / 65
New Haven / 59
Oak Hill Academy / 61
Ojai Valley School / 62
Oldfields School / 64
Rochambeau French
International School / 66
Skool-ed Educational
Center / 60
St. Andrew's School / 57
St. Mark's School / 59
St. Stephen's School –
Rome / 61
TASIS Switzerland / 66

FINANCIAL PLANNING & TAX SERVICES

David L. Mortimer, CPA / 49
Windecker Financial
Planning LLC / 49

INSURANCE

AFSPA – Dental / 20
AFSPA – Life / 27
AFSPA – Travel / 30
Clements Worldwide / 3
FEDS Protection / 11

MISCELLANEOUS

Body Harmony of
Arlington / 23
Change of Address / 72
FSJ Digital Archive / 9, 69
FSJ Gift Subscription / 34
FSJ Marketplace / 19
State Department Federal
Credit Union / 4

REAL ESTATE & PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Corporate Apartment
Specialists / 73
FSJ Guide to Extended Stay
Housing / 72
FSJ Guide to Property
Management / 72
McEanearney Associates / 73
Peake Property
Management / 16
ProMax Management / 71
Property Specialists, Inc. / 73
Richey Property
Management / 70
Washington Management
Services / 72
WJD Management / 71

RETIREMENT LIVING, PLANNING & SERVICES

ACTS Retirement –
Life Communities / 17
AFSA Retiree
Membership / 20

MFO: Tipping the Scales in Favor of Stability

BY JOSEPH ANTHONY D'AGOSTINO III

Forty-three years ago, the United Nations Security Force withdrew as peacekeepers from the Sinai Peninsula. At a meeting on Aug. 3, 1981, the United States, Egypt, and Israel formed the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) to enforce the peace between Egypt and Israel, employing both military and civilian leaders to support diplomatic solutions to real and potential treaty violations.

A small but powerful organization, the MFO is important to U.S. power and influence throughout the region. Spread across Egypt and Israel, with its headquarters in Rome and the support of some 22 nations, MFO now consists of about 1,200 troops contributed by 15 nations and a civilian staff of about 160, drawn from many nations and including local Egyptians and Israelis. For two years, I was fortunate to be one of them.

Although I served quite a few years after its formation, I felt the MFO's presence and history every day of my tour. Upon reflection now, as the Israel-Hamas conflict rages, severely testing Egypt-Israel relations and threatening regional security, I can't help thinking that the MFO has an important role in finding a solution.

The Multinational Force and Observers helped build and continues to facilitate a practical relationship between Egyptian and Israeli leaders that has endured.



I departed Washington, D.C., on Feb. 15, 2020, for Sinai, Egypt. After a very long flight and a layover in Cairo, I looked out the plane window on the last leg of the trip to the amazing view—endless shades of orange sand, dark red mountain tops, and valleys cut deep into the earth.

Once the plane landed in Sharm el-Sheikh, and the door opened, walking into the desert heat felt like entering a sauna. Ancient Egyptian images covered the walls of the modern airport, and on the drive to camp, I admired the Peace Square sculpture with beautiful, broad dove wings, the symbol of peace.

I had arrived at my new home. Sharm has gotten some recognition over the years, for a deadly Islamist terror attack that killed 88 in 2005 and, more recently, for hosting the COP 27 climate

change conference in 2022. But the real diplomatic significance of this little city is that it is home to MFO–South Camp. My role was to review and process potential treaty violations between Egypt and Israel, and I was ready to get started, armed with the Treaty of Peace and Protocol as my guide.

Each day I learned what it takes to be a peacekeeper and how building relationships—not just between Egypt and Israel, but with my international colleagues—is the key to successful diplomacy. I had never imagined myself discussing strategy over pizza with members of the Fijian Army or performing an observation mission in the Red Sea with the Italian Navy over a cup of coffee. I hadn't envisioned bonding with Bedouin colleagues in the Sinai desert at a lamb and chicken zarb.

The individuals who make up the Force account for its success in maintaining peace between Egypt and Israel for more than four decades. Professional, dedicated, driven, energetic, and hardworking, they are all part of the same mission though their jobs may differ. Each member has their own expertise that helps them succeed and, in turn, accomplish the MFO goal.



Joseph Anthony D'Agostino III served as a legal assistant with the Multinational Force and Observers from 2020 to 2022. Prior to MFO service, he worked for Covington & Burling and held several roles at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. He currently serves in the Office of Legislative Affairs at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. He has traveled extensively in the Middle East and North Africa region and holds a master's degree in global diplomacy from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, with a focus on Middle Eastern affairs.

In 2024 the MFO will have completed 1,000 verification missions and performed countless observation missions through the Strait of Tiran and all four treaty zones. Its ability to engage to ensure maintenance of the Treaty of Peace agreed to by Egypt and Israel in 1979 will also be tested to the maximum.



The framework for the Treaty of Peace was laid out in 1978 as part of the Camp David Accords. Negotiations between U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Egypt's President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat, and Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin took two weeks to complete.

The treaty was finally signed in 1979, establishing the number of soldiers, tanks, and other pieces of military equipment allowed in each treaty zone. The protocol specified the leadership and structure of the MFO.

U.S. citizens hold several powerful leadership positions—including MFO director general (DG) and the deputy DG of Cairo and Tel Aviv, respectively. These are former U.S. government officials dedicated to Middle Eastern peace. Since the MFO is an independent international institution, these U.S. citizens work directly for the Force, based on the 1981 Protocol. The U.S. provides about one-third of the organization's funding and roughly 500 troops.

Members of the important civilian observer unit tasked with navigating the

As the Israel-Hamas conflict rages, I can't help thinking that the MFO has an important role in finding a solution.

Sinai Peninsula on treaty observation missions are Americans, usually retired military service members and including secondees from the State Department Civil and Foreign Service ranks. Besides verification missions, the U.S. role consists of frequent military training exercises and relationship-building through cultural and diplomatic ties.

The MFO helped build and continues to facilitate a practical relationship between Egyptian and Israeli leaders

that has endured through ups and downs over the years as a kind of anchor of stability in the Middle East.

Broadening the scope for stability, Jordan normalized ties with Israel in 1994; and in 2020, as part of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords, the UAE became the third Arab nation to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and three more followed.

While the Oct. 7 Hamas attack

thoroughly upended Israel's defense and security assumptions, some commentators suggest that Tel Aviv now has "the necessity and opportunity to evolve in the direction of a multilateral security framework," and away from self-sufficiency and sovereignty in decision-making. This approach can be traced in part to the establishment of the MFO.

The MFO, of course, is not involved in enforcing a cease-fire; it is dedicated to enforcing a treaty agreed to by both sides. Though a formal resolution of the core Israel-Palestine conflict will be difficult to achieve, the existence and activity of the MFO in the meantime surely tip the scales in favor of stability and solutions.

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The Sinai Peninsula.

LOCAL LENS



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Caitlin Hartford is a consular-coned officer who explored every corner of El Salvador with her husband, Tim, during their four-year tour there. She is now with FSI's Orientation Division as a deputy course coordinator, welcoming new Foreign Service professionals to their own careers and foreign adventures. This photo was taken in July 2022 using a Canon EOS M50.

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