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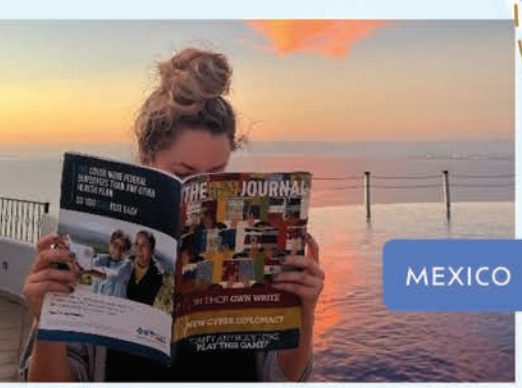

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THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

Cover art—Images from top left (clockwise): Afghan National Army (ANA) cadets practice drills on the parade grounds at the Afghan National Defense University in Kabul, on May 7, 2013 (courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense); a worker unloads bags of sorghum for distribution in South Sudan, June 2024 (courtesy of Julius Kaut); Indian women trained through a USAID program prepare mango bars (courtesy of Heather Sullivan/USAID/India); farmers in Afghanistan inspect wheat from seed USAID provided (courtesy of USAID's Afghanistan's ASAP Program); and Volodymyr Zelensky speaks to the U.S. Congress on Dec. 21, 2022 (courtesy of the Office of U.S. House Speaker).

As we go to press in mid-September, the issue of the possible lapse in overseas comparability pay (OCP) on September 30 is AFSA's top priority. We are working this day and night, doing all we can to help secure extension of this mission-critical pay in the continuing resolution of Congress. We are optimistic that OCP will be extended by the time you read this.

Welcoming New Hires

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

One of the most satisfying aspects of my job is hosting lunches at AFSA headquarters for new Foreign Service orientation classes to encourage them to join AFSA, as more than 80 percent of active-duty FS members have done.

We are expecting another large State Department class this month and potentially two USAID classes by the end of 2024. I want to take this opportunity to thank all our table hosts, both retired and active-duty members, who share their wealth of knowledge and experience with our newest colleagues.

It is also satisfying that we are still seeing incoming classes at State as large as 230 members, reflecting and responding to the overriding need to boost the size of the Foreign Service and fill the many vacant mid-level positions overseas that have strained our workforce. We need robust hiring in the other foreign affairs agencies as well.

We do not yet know what the budget reality will be in 2025. Class sizes will likely decrease markedly, although we have been assured by State that hiring will remain above attrition. There remains some uncertainty at USAID on hiring levels for 2025 and beyond. While we expect that hiring will exceed attrition, new hires will fall well short of the goal of reaching 2,500 USAID FSOs by 2025.

With such large classes coming in, there will also need to be a renewed effort to mitigate the effects of the so-called "pig in the python" problem, so that promotion opportunities are not skewed by the size of one's orientation class.

The makeup of orientation classes is different from when I joined the department back in October 1991. First, the average age has increased, from 28 to nearly 34. These new hires also have a lot more government and overseas experience, speak more languages, and are more diverse.

State Department FS orientation classes now comprise generalists and specialists, who learn together what the State Department is about and what each type of employee does. It took a pandemic to bring these two groups of new hires together, virtually. And AFSA successfully advocated to keep it that way when in-person training resumed. I know I would have benefited from learning what my specialist colleagues do by sitting side by side with them in class.

With greater life and government experience, today's new hires are more inclined to speak up about issues they see within our agencies. They have raised the lack of per diem for local hires, a decades-long inequity at State.

That resulted in AFSA's successful effort to have a provision mandating per diem for all hires included in the Senate version of the 2023 State Department Authorization Act (SDAA). Unfortunately, the provision was cut when the Senate and House met in conference. It was reintroduced in the 2024 Senate SDAA, and we remain hopeful that it will be accepted by the House this time.

New hires also drew attention to the four- to six-week gap from hiring until health insurance begins that created a real hardship for many employees and their families. That led AFSA to push State to direct the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to draft a new rule requiring health benefits to begin immediately upon entry—and for the entire federal workforce, not just the Foreign Service. The rule is currently in interagency clearance, and we expect it to be implemented this fall.

Today's new hires also stand out in that they aren't necessarily looking at the Foreign Service as a lifetime career. Back in the day, most of us were "lifers," thinking that this was what we would do for 20-plus years and then retire.

This shift means that State and the other foreign affairs agencies need to focus even more on retention—instituting greater job flexibility and opportunities that may have been inconceivable years ago, but that will invest in this new talent and keep them on board.

What has *not* changed is the sense of duty and sacrifice I see in these newest additions to our proud Foreign Service. They are focused on our mission and ready to serve.

Please let me know your thoughts by writing yazdgerdi@afsa.org or member@afsa.org. ■

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

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Looking Ahead

BY SHAWN DORMAN

In this month's focus, we offer a multifaceted look at U.S. foreign assistance—from a development professional's take on how USAID is the frontline national security tool in many parts of the world, to views on how foreign assistance succeeds, and sometimes doesn't, in places like Ukraine, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. There is much food for thought here on improving effectiveness to meet new challenges.

Of special note elsewhere in this edition—as AFSA prepares to present its 2024 awards for constructive dissent this month—is a Speaking Out article from 2022 Rivkin Award winner and Senior FSO Jennifer Davis, who makes a compelling case for transparency and reform in the State Department's discipline procedures.

A Speaking Out piece can lead to more attention to an issue of interest, lively discussion, and sometimes even change. We encourage you to write to us and share your ideas for change on these pages to inspire new ways forward.

And speaking of change: After reaching my own little centennial this spring—100 letters from the editor in 10 years at the helm of the *Journal*—I paused to consider that monthly framing exercise in the context of today's reader of this 100-year-old publication. Reading habits have changed. How many of you read the magazine front to back, and how many of you see the contents online, one article or soundbite at a time? What should we do to ensure that the *FSJ* continues to serve the foreign affairs community with content you want and also tells the story (your story) of the Foreign Service from an insider's perspective?

As the *FSJ* team and Editorial Board put together the editorial calendar of focus topics for 2025 over the coming weeks, we welcome your input and ideas. What issues do you want us to cover more, or less, in the *Journal*? And what format works best for you: print, digital, or a combination?

We are committed to print but also expanding the ways we bring you content, including a new series of videos introducing each edition and showcasing some of our authors—have you seen any yet? We invite you to engage with the *FSJ* across all AFSA social media channels, and especially *FSJ* LinkedIn.

Keep an eye out for an *FSJ* reader survey this month, and please do respond. We look forward to your input.

I also encourage you to consider writing for the *FSJ*. Find the author guidelines at https://afsa.org/fsj-author-guidelines, and send your submissions or pitches to us at journal@afsa.org.

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

Revisiting "Henry of the Tower"

I was so intrigued by Thomas Hull's article "Henry of the Tower Revisited" (June 2024 *Foreign Service Journal*) that I revisited the June 1969 *FSJ* article, "Henry of the Tower," he critiqued.

Mr. Hull's article did a great service in highlighting the role Henry Laurens played in the slave trade between England and the United States, and the self-interest of his insertion of a clause in the Treaty of Paris that protected this trade in the new United States.

As William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Thank you to Mr. Hull and the *FSJ* for providing this important perspective on the actions of one of our earliest diplomats.

Richard LeBaron
Ambassador, retired
Heathsville, Virginia

Time for a Chaplaincy Program

Given the State Department's continuing focus on workplace well-being and overall mental health services for Foreign Service members abroad (*FSJ*, April 2024 and July-August 2024), it is overdue for the department to create a chaplaincy program such as those in the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Department of Defense (DoD).

The new program should supplement (not replace) the robust mental health programs currently offered, such as the regional medical officer psychiatrist (RMO/P) program.

A chaplaincy program would be the next logical step. The department's "2022-2026 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan" states that one of its priorities is to "foster greater respect … for religious diversity." A chaplaincy program would do just that.

State should not reinvent the wheel but learn from existing programs. For example, DoD operates a successful chaplaincy program (via the Armed Forces Chaplains Board) and integrates this into the workplace while showing respect for all belief systems through their program.

A regional chaplaincy program would allow the department to recognize that mental health services go far beyond just psychiatry. We should expand to meet employees' holistic needs and recognize the unique challenges of working abroad.

An acknowledgment of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of employees would suggest the need for a comprehensive mental health program that includes chaplains.

U.S. direct hires and their family members serving in embassies and consulates abroad experience many stressors. An expansion of mental health services to include a chaplaincy program would help support employees and their families facing extreme pressures. Regional psychiatrists visit posts in their region, and a chaplaincy program could be managed in a similar way.

Officers from dozens of agencies serving in embassies and consulates around the world represent a broad swath of religious and spiritual backgrounds, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and many others. The DoD chaplaincy program respects those various faiths by employing chaplains from different religions.

A regional chaplaincy program could be modeled after the DoD program, albeit on a much smaller scale. In recognition of officers serving around the world in difficult conditions who need a multipronged support structure, the department should expand its workplace well-being services to include a chaplaincy program.

Philip Wilson, Benjamin Dieterle, and Darryl Woolfolk
FSOs
New Delhi, India

Workplace Well-Being

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to your team for elevating this topic in the April 2024 *FSJ* and providing resources and practical tips related to workforce health and well-being for all industries and settings.

I also wanted to offer additional resources to support the FS community and any other interested readers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (CDC/NIOSH) offers useful tools at https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/.

Further, "The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being," issued in October 2022, offers "Five Essentials" in reviewing organizational strategy, policy, and practice to support well-being in the workplace.

Thank you to AFSA for all you do to lead and support us. As a Foreign Service family member and workplace leader and peer myself, onward together with you, in service and strength.

Jeane Garcia Davis
MSN/MPH, RN
Washington, D.C.

A "Creating Unity" Precept

I was glad to read that AFSA remains engaged in discussion and negotiation of Foreign Service core precepts, as State VP Tina Wong stated in her AFSA News column in the April 2024 *FSJ*.

Much has been made about the newest core precept for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in the past few years. We have seen a strong focus in the State Department on recognizing that we all come from different backgrounds and that everyone needs to be included.

DEIA committees were created in Washington and at many overseas posts. And, of course, every FSO now needs to find ways to showcase their efforts to support DEIA when bidding or drafting their annual evaluations (EERs).

These are all steps in the right direction, but I believe we are missing the mark. Having a core precept that in large part is focused on diversity merely glorifies our differences. We should instead focus this precept on a skill—like creating unity—that will help us accomplish our mission.

DEIA should be a subset of a newly named core precept: *Creating Unity*.

We should establish a unified diplomatic corps where everyone feels needed and wanted.

All the other five core precepts—Leadership, Interpersonal Skills, Communication, Management, and the combined Intellectual Skills and Substantive Knowledge—focus on skills we need as diplomats in the 21st century.

Put bluntly, DEIA is not a skill. Learning how to create unity with foreign governments and cultures is, and it will better help us achieve our foreign policy and national security goals. While recognizing our diversity highlights our differences, creating unity with others will actually make a difference.

DEIA should be a subset of a wider focus on a skill that will translate into success. To create unity, you need to recognize the diversity of a group, its varied backgrounds, experiences, and its value as the group moves toward a common goal.

In fact, every aspect of DEIA is a precursor to creating unity in any organization or diplomatic relationship.

Creating this kind of "unity" culture at State will reap great benefits in our work. The threats to our national security and to the world are only growing in number and complexity. The need for skilled diplomats to match these challenges has never been stronger.

Diplomats focused on creating unity, not merely recognizing our differences, can help create longer-lasting, sensible solutions to these challenges that truly make the world a better place in which to live and thrive.

Jessup Taylor
FSO
U.S. Embassy Bucharest

Documenting Nonpartisanship

Recent press reports about Republican congressional staffers investigating allegations that Hunter Biden, President Joe Biden's son, sought to gain the support of a U.S. ambassador for a foreign investment project remind me of a similar situation 30 years ago and illustrate how much the Foreign Service's strictly nonpartisan stance matters.

I was serving in a G-7 country when the career U.S. ambassador asked me to sit in on a meeting with an American business executive and major donor to the political party in power. The businessman sought the ambassador's support for a sensitive investment, and the ambassador gave a noncommittal reply.

After the meeting, the ambassador twice reviewed my draft memorandum of conversation (memcon) and added more detail.

Eight years later, a congressional staffer with the political party not in power telephoned me to discuss that meeting, asking whether the U.S. embassy had inappropriately intervened with the host government on behalf of a political donor.

I insisted, truthfully, that "everything substantive that was said is in the memcon."

Finally, the disappointed staffer gave up. Wise ambassadors know that these sorts of efforts often attract later congressional interest, and they take appropriate action to prevent future problems.

Because of the well-drafted memcon, that congressional inquiry was stopped in its tracks.

Frederic Maerkle
FSO, retired
Vallabrix, France

Share your thoughts about this month's issue.

Submit letters to the editor: journal@afsa.org

AAP IMAGE/LUKAS COCH

Pacific Nation leaders pose for photo ahead of the leaders' retreat during the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Vava'u, Tonga, Thursday, Aug. 29, 2024.

U.S. Joins Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell represented the United States at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, held in Tonga Aug. 26-30, 2024.

Campbell, a key figure in U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, attended the summit in Nuku'alofa on Aug. 28, where he engaged with Pacific Island leaders on the U.S. Pacific Partnership Strategy, launched in 2022.

Following the summit, Campbell visited Vanuatu to dedicate a new U.S. embassy and highlight a U.S. Peace Corps project and repatriation of cultural artifacts.

Campbell's regional tour concluded in New Zealand, where he co-chaired a U.S.–New Zealand Strategic Dialogue meeting and launched a high-level technology dialogue in Auckland on Aug. 30.

Campbell's visit highlighted the U.S. commitment to strengthening ties in the Pacific region amid growing competition with China. The trip followed concerns raised by the U.S. over Chinese security influence in the Pacific, particularly in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands.

The Pacific Islands Forum, which once struggled to gain international attention, has now become a focal point for global powers vying for influence in the region.

This year's summit, attended by more than 1,500 delegates from more than 40 countries, is a testament to the growing importance of the Pacific in global geopolitics.

The event began with a stark reminder of the region's vulnerability when a magnitude 6.9 earthquake shook Nuku'alofa.

During the opening ceremony, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres delivered a powerful speech, praising the Pacific leaders for their leadership in climate action and calling on the world to support the region's efforts. "If we save the Pacific, we save the world," Guterres said.

For more on Pacific Islands diplomacy, see the article on page 42.

Military Aid Package for Ukraine

On Aug. 23, the United States announced a significant new military aid package for Ukraine as the country marked 33 years of independence. The assistance, drawn from Department of Defense stocks, includes weapons and equipment critical to Ukraine's defense against ongoing Russian aggression.

In a statement, President Joe Biden emphasized the enduring nature of Ukraine's sovereignty: "Tomorrow—as the people of Ukraine mark their Independence Day—let it be clear: When Russia's senseless war began, Ukraine was a free country. Today, it is still a free country. And the war will end with Ukraine remaining a free, sovereign, and independent country."

Additionally, Biden announced new sanctions on nearly 400 entities and individuals aiding Russia's war efforts.

He referenced recent international efforts, including the transfer of F-16 fighter jets, delivery of air defense interceptors, and the formation of the Ukraine Compact with 20 nations to bolster Ukraine's long-term defense capabilities.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed the administration's stance that the U.S. and its international allies will continue to support Ukraine in its struggle against Russian aggression.

This comes after a surprise Ukrainian incursion into Russia's Kursk and Belgorod regions beginning on Aug. 6. Ukrainian forces claimed to control almost 400 square miles of Russian territory after the first week of fighting.

Despite the ongoing drone and missile attacks, Russia and Ukraine exchanged more than 100 prisoners of war on Aug. 24, the third Ukrainian Independence Day since the start of the Russian invasion.

Contemporary Quote

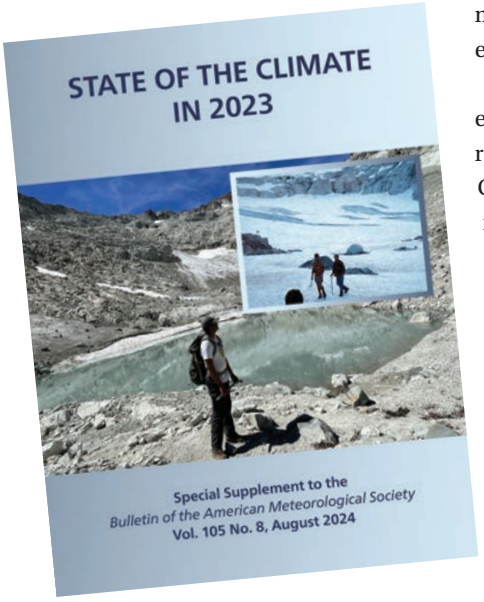
We believe that competition with China does not have to lead to conflict or confrontation. The key is responsible management through diplomacy. Beginning in May of last year, that diplomacy has been an all-hands-on-deck effort across the U.S. government and the Cabinet.

—National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in an August 29 press briefing at the conclusion of a three-day visit to Beijing.

Rising Global Temperatures

The 34th annual State of the Climate report, published by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information and the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, reveals alarming climate trends for 2023.

The report, compiled by nearly 600 scientists from 60 countries, documents record-high global temperatures, greenhouse gas concentrations, sea levels, and ocean heat content.



Key findings include the highest-ever global surface temperature, surpassing the previous record set in 2016.

The transition from La Niña to a strong El Niño in the Pacific Ocean contributed to this record warmth, making 2023 the warmest year since recordkeeping began in the mid- to late 1800s. The report also notes that the last nine years have been the nine warmest on record.

Greenhouse gas concentrations, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, reached new peaks, further exacerbating the global warming trend.

The global mean sea-surface temperature also hit record highs, with approximately 94 percent of the ocean surface experiencing marine heatwaves in 2023.

The report points to the effects of extreme weather events, including record-breaking wildfires in Canada and Greece, severe droughts, and the lowest recorded Antarctic Sea ice extent. The Arctic experienced its fourth-warmest year, with the seasonal minimum sea-ice extent being the fifth smallest in the 45 years since recordkeeping began.

Despite below-average tropical cyclone activity, 2023 still saw seven Category 5 storms, reflecting the increasing intensity of such events.

The full report is available online at https://noaa.gov.

COURTESY OF THE EMBASSY OF FINLAND

The entrance to the traditional Finnish sauna at the embassy of Finland in Washington, D.C.

Sauna Diplomacy

In Washington, D.C., the embassy of Finland has turned an age-old Finnish tradition into a unique diplomatic tool, hosting gatherings in their sauna as part of their "Diplomatic Sauna Society."

Ambassador Mikko Hautala of Finland told *The New York Times* on Aug. 25 that the informal environment of the sauna fosters deeper and more open discussions, contrasting with the formalities typical of Washington's diplomatic and political scene.

"When you are half-naked or even sometimes completely naked, it allows for deeper discussion," Hautala said.

The embassy's sauna gatherings have gained popularity, especially as Finland's international influence grows following its recent accession to NATO.

Seen as a healthier alternative to other networking events, they have become a coveted opportunity for Washington insiders to connect in a more personal and memorable way.

Participants are awarded a "Sauna Diploma," marking their initiation into the sauna society and their resilience in the 180-degree Fahrenheit heat.

Podcast of the Month: *The Negotiators* (https://foreignpolicy.com/podcasts/negotiators/)

Conflicts rarely resolve themselves—they require intense, behind-the-scenes negotiations, often out of the public eye.

This month's highlighted podcast, *The Negotiators*, a *Foreign Policy* podcast in collaboration with Doha Debates, offers listeners a front-row seat to some of the world's most challenging negotiations. It takes you through the dramatic stories of mediators navigating nuclear stand-offs, hostage crises, and gang mediations.

In each episode, one key player recounts the story of a significant negotiation—from the Good Friday Agreement that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland to the thorny issue of water rights between Mexico and the U.S.

Recent episodes delve deep into Afghanistan, with a seven-part series exploring the intricate and often perilous negotiations surrounding the country's tumultuous recent history, from clandestine talks with the Taliban to the controversial Doha agreement.

The podcast is hosted by Jennifer Williams, the deputy editor at *Foreign Policy* and former senior foreign editor at Vox, who brings her extensive experience to the podcast, guiding listeners through these gripping tales of diplomacy and deal-making.

The Negotiators is about the process, the people, and the perseverance required to make peace and achieve justice.

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

Challenges for Havana Syndrome Patients

A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report documents the significant challenges faced by U.S. federal employees, contractors, and their families diagnosed with "Havana syndrome" in accessing medical care through the military health system.

The condition, known officially as "anomalous health incidents" (AHIs), has affected individuals worldwide, including in Cuba, where the first cases were reported in 2016. Symptoms include severe headaches, tinnitus, vertigo, and cognitive dysfunction.

GAO's findings, based on interviews with 65 of the 334 individuals eligible for care, highlight the difficulties these patients continue to face in navigating the military health system.

Issues include inconsistent support from home agencies, unclear points of contact, and challenges in scheduling appointments at military facilities.

The report notes that many patients felt they received insufficient guidance from the Department of Defense (DoD) and often relied on informal support groups, which sometimes provided inaccurate information.

In response to the report, Republican leaders on the House Homeland Security Committee have expressed deep concern over the Biden administration's handling of the issue.

In a letter to National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Chairman Mark E. Green (R-Tenn.) and Subcommittee Chairman August Pfluger (R-Texas) criticized the administration for its lack of clear communication and demanded a briefing from the National Security Council.

They also urged the administration to prioritize the allocation of unused funds to support AHI victims and to fully implement the HAVANA Act, a 2021 law that authorizes compensation for affected intelligence, diplomatic, and government personnel.

GAO recommended that DoD improve communication by developing written guidance, establishing a formal mechanism to provide information to patients, and adding monitoring provisions to its plan.

In a statement, the DoD concurred with GAO's recommendations and noted that it is developing a handbook to guide patients and enhance monitoring capabilities. The report highlighted, however, that as of May 2024, only 33 of the 334 eligible patients had been entered into the AHI Registry, a database meant to support research and treatment.

Republican lawmakers and others, including lawyer Mark S. Zaid, who has represented several AHI victims, have criticized the inconsistent standards for compensation under the HAVANA Act and the delays in DoD's response.

Zaid pointed out the disparities in treatment between different agencies, such as the CIA and State Department, and the lack of compensation mechanisms for active-duty military victims.

GAO's report calls for continued efforts to address the challenges faced by AHI patients and ensure they receive the care and support they need through the military health system.

100 Years Ago

Nascituri . . . .

Mindful of these legacies, the Editors of the *Journal*, representing both branches of the Foreign Service, desire to make it plain that the future of this magazine lies entirely with its readers, who are at the same time its owners, managers and contributors. The Board of Editors will reflect opinions impartially, receive criticisms graciously, and gladly attend to the technical details of makeup and form, if they can rely upon their colleagues in the field to supply material for publication.

If, in this political year, the *Journal* should be called upon to enunciate the bases of its platform, it might be stated that its purposes are to add to the understanding of the tasks and surroundings of the Foreign Service, to maintain and enlarge the acquaintance with one another of widely scattered colleagues, and to preserve and increase the zeal of the officers in the Foreign Service for the protection and promotion of American interests. For the fulfillment of these ends the Editors must call upon the loyal cooperation of their colleagues, and it is to be hoped that the diplomatic branch of the Service will be as generous with its contributions as the consuls have always proven themselves to be, and that the *Journal* may receive from the officers of both Services occasional sidelights on foreign affairs, either political or economic, which may be of import in the formation of well-considered opinion. However, the main purpose of the *Journal* will be inspirational and not educational, and personality will be at a premium in its columns. Photographs, the light touch in the narration of experiences, and personal items will be constantly desired.

—Opening note in the first issue of the newly renamed American Foreign Service Journal, *October 1924.*

OMB Releases Telework Report

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has released a comprehensive telework report to Congress, detailing the varied approaches of 24 major federal agencies in returning employees to office settings.

The nearly 3,000-page report, submitted on Aug. 9, reflects a broad spectrum of strategies in response to an April 2023 OMB memo urging agencies to increase in-person staff presence, particularly at headquarters locations.

The report reveals that while some agencies have already reinstated significant in-person work requirements, others are negotiating new terms with federal unions or tailoring telework policies based on specific job functions and managerial discretion.

The State Department's telework policy, codified in 3 FAM 2360, ensures that all employees, whether teleworking or reporting onsite full time, are held to the same performance measures. Supervisors have the discretion to cancel, suspend, or modify an employee's

telework arrangement based on performance.

Over the past year, USAID updated its Telework and Remote Work Program policy in ADS Chapter 405; required new telework agreements from its Washington, D.C., workforce; increased in-person presence to three days per week; and updated its Hours of Duty Policy to support work-life balance through the "Maxiflex" schedule.

OMB emphasized that despite these varying strategies, most federal employees (about 56 percent) are in positions that necessitate full-time, in-person work.

The agency expects continued adjustments to telework and office policies as offices refine their approaches to best meet their operational needs and ensure mission delivery.

The release of the OMB report comes amid ongoing debates over federal telework policies. House Republicans have been pushing for a reduction in remote work arrangements, but their efforts have faced significant resistance from labor unions and political opposition, leading to limited legislative progress.

U.S. and Russia Complete Largest Post-Soviet Prisoner Swap

On Aug. 1, the United States and Russia carried out the largest prisoner exchange since the Cold War, freeing 24 individuals in a high-stakes diplomatic deal.

Among those released by Russia were *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who had been detained on so-called espionage charges since 2023, and Paul Whelan, a former U.S. Marine and corporate security executive held since 2018 on similar charges.

Also freed was Alsu Kurmasheva, a journalist at Radio Free Europe with dual U.S.-Russia citizenship who had been convicted of spreading false information about the Russian military.

The Americans were greeted at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland by President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, who welcomed them home alongside their families.

The emotional reunion marked the culmination of months of complex negotiations between Washington, D.C., and Moscow. The swap took place despite the strained U.S.-Russia relations following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The negotiations, which reportedly included Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny until his death in February 2024, ultimately led to the release of a mix of journalists, political dissidents, and others.

In exchange, Russia secured the return of several individuals, including Vadim Krasikov, a convicted assassin serving a life sentence in Germany for the 2019 murder of a Chechen rebel in Berlin—a killing widely believed to have been ordered by Moscow's security services.

Other Russians released included alleged sleeper agents detained in Slovenia and convicted criminals in the U.S., such as Roman Seleznev, a notorious computer hacker, and Vadim Konoshchenok, accused of smuggling U.S.-made electronics and ammunition into Russia.

The exchange involved six countries releasing prisoners, with Türkiye hosting the swap in Ankara.

While Biden hailed the exchange as a significant diplomatic achievement, the deal also revealed the inherent imbalances in such negotiations.

The U.S. and its allies released individuals convicted of serious crimes, while those freed by Russia were largely seen as political prisoners or individuals held on trumped-up charges by the Russian legal system.

Despite the successful release of Gershkovich, Whelan, and Kurmasheva, several Americans remain in Russian custody. Among them are Marc Fogel, who taught the children of diplomats at the Anglo-American School of Moscow until his arrest on drug charges, and Michael Travis Leake, a musician convicted on similar charges.

The Biden administration has vowed to intensify efforts to secure their release.

The swap, while celebrated, has sparked debate over whether such deals encourage future detentions by adversarial nations. Critics argue that these exchanges may provide leverage to hostile governments, while proponents maintain that the priority must always be on bringing detained Americans home.

Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement: "I am thrilled Evan, Paul, Alsu, Vladimir, and many others who have been illegally held by Putin's regime are finally coming home to their families. But I remain concerned that continuing to trade innocent Americans for actual Russian criminals held in the U.S. and elsewhere sends a dangerous message to Putin that only encourages further hostage taking by his regime."

In a symbolic gesture during the reunion at Joint Base Andrews, President Biden gave Paul Whelan the American flag pin from his lapel. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.

The Case for Reforming State's Discipline Procedures

BY JENNIFER DAVIS

"This is every Foreign Service officer's worst nightmare," my career development officer said gently.

It was 2020, and I had just been informed that my security clearance had been suspended while Diplomatic Security investigated my use of a certain phrase during an official media interview two years earlier, in 2018, while I was serving overseas.

I was in shock. I had only learned of the investigation when my promotion was held in abeyance in 2019. What followed was a nearly five-year ordeal that involved both my security clearance, which was reinstated shortly after I was allowed to respond in 2021, and a subsequent lengthy disciplinary proceeding.

As the disciplinary proceeding ground on, in 2021, I wrote a letter of dissent to Secretary of State Antony Blinken about my case and sent a set of recommendations to improve State's administrative security clearance and discipline procedures to Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Brian McKeon. For this, I received AFSA's 2022 Rivkin Award for Constructive Dissent.

> Most antithetical to the basic principles of due process is that employees are not given the opportunity to provide evidence and be heard *before* department officials make decisions.

At the award ceremony, I told the audience I never wanted to become an expert on this aspect of the State Department's work. But my experiences had taught me that we cannot always choose what happens to us; we can only choose how we respond.

In the end, the Foreign Service Grievance Board fully exonerated me earlier this year, ordering my retroactive promotion, reconstituted performance and promotion boards, back pay with interest, and payment of attorney fees.

But the experience troubled me deeply. Several aspects of the State Department's security clearance and discipline process lack basic elements of due process and fairness and must be reformed to protect the integrity of our institution and the rights of our employees.

The basic facts of my discipline case are these: In 2018, as a consul general, I gave a media interview overseas at the request of our chargé d'affaires, relying on the standard practices of public diplomacy to do so. I had a pre-brief with my public diplomacy team; I worked from cleared talking points; and I checked in with my leadership before the interview.

During the media interview and after, while negotiating quotes and attribution, I used a phrase that is quite common in diplomatic parlance to explain our policy. The department would prefer I not share the details here, and I will honor that.

But it is fair to say the phrase is one uttered publicly by U.S. diplomats every day, and, in my case, it was used in pursuit of our mission's first priority—the protection of our staff and American citizens.

Jennifer Davis is a career Foreign Service officer currently serving as the senior U.S. coordinator for lawful migration in the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. She previously served as the chief of staff at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, consul general in Istanbul, as the executive assistant to Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, as special assistant to Secretary Condoleezza Rice, and in several other overseas and domestic tours. She is the 2022 recipient of AFSA's Rivkin Award for Constructive Dissent. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, she was an attorney in her native North Carolina. She is married to a fellow diplomat and is the proud mom of two sons. The opinions expressed here are offered in her personal capacity and are not intended to represent the positions of the Department of State.

U.S. CONSULATE ISTANBUL

Jennifer Davis in the peace garden the U.S. Consulate Istanbul staff created in appreciation for her efforts to protect them and wrongfully detained colleagues, 2019.

One might assume that if there had been concern in Washington about my use of a specific phrase at the time of the interview, someone would have raised that concern with me or the chargé right away. That did not happen.

Instead, I was not made aware of the department's concerns until two years later. By that time, I and the other officials involved had left post and no longer had access to our emails except the few we had burned onto disks (for those new to the department, I realize this will seem quaint).

I was not informed until 2021—*three years* after the original media interview—why and how the department, based on its regrettably erroneous and incomplete understanding of the facts, had decided that my use of the phrase was grounds for discipline.

The department based its understanding of the phrase I used on an action memorandum to the Secretary from 2017, but would not provide me with a copy of that memorandum or its analysis of why my use of the phrase might be problematic.

I would later learn that the department did not speak to the officials involved in drafting the action memorandum, nor seek to understand the context of our diplomacy or determine whether there were other contemporaneous unclassified documents that used the same phrase.

When the department refused to share the action memorandum, AFSA filed a successful unfair labor practice action with the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA). Only then did the department provide AFSA and me with a copy of the memo and agree, as well, to send an ALDAC cable committing to avoid similar future unfair practices.

In providing the memorandum, the department failed to include its two unclassified attachments (saying they were "lost"), one of which contained cleared talking points on the topic for the mission's use and the very messages I had shared. It took several months to obtain a copy of those attachments.

Currently, in security clearance and discipline cases, the department collects facts and information, sometimes without informing individuals that their conduct is under review. It prepares its conclusions of fact in a Report of Investigation and then determines whether misconduct has occurred and, if so, what penalty is appropriate.

Only *after* making these decisions does the department allow an employee to offer their own evidence—essentially as an appeal of a decision that has already been made (without the benefit of the employee's perspective and evidence).

The employee is then asked to convince the supervisors of decision-makers in various offices that the offices should reverse themselves, overcoming all the bureaucratic inertia that comes with defending decisions already made.

What became clear throughout my ordeal is that we have established systems that do not serve our institution, our diplomacy, or our employees. I have respect for the dedicated officials undertaking these cases, but they manage crushing caseloads without sufficient resources within systems that lack the basic elements of due process.

The reforms I recommended in 2021 are straightforward. They were not implemented but should be now.

Right to Be Heard and Review Evidence. Most antithetical to the basic principles of due process is that employees are not given the opportunity to provide evidence and be heard *before* department officials make decisions.

This not only prevents the department from understanding all the facts necessary to render a fair decision but also puts the employee in the unfair position of challenging narratives already solidified without the benefit of relevant information.

In this way, the burden is unwittingly shifted to the employee, who must prove that the department's conclusions are incorrect, instead of requiring the department to determine that misconduct occurred after hearing all the facts.

Also, it is self-evident that the department should not withhold relevant documents (in my case, documents that were the very basis of the department's case) from an employee.

Transparency. State should provide employees with fair and timely notice when they are alleged to have committed

misconduct. Pursuant to 3 FAM 4322.3(d), the department must give an employee "appropriate notice that an administrative inquiry has been opened." Yet many employees only find out about an inquiry when changes to their personnel files are frozen.

The department should not only routinely inform employees of inquiries, but also provide the employee with an explanation of the disciplinary process and what to expect. Several different offices are involved in these discipline inquiries, and for employees in shock, it becomes a sea of acronyms and procedures to which they have never been exposed.

Even providing this information as a one-page handout would improve the current opacity.

Length of Time. Two years into my case, I was told that it was being "expedited"—and that was after an official joked during an interview that the case was "so old it had whiskers." It should not have taken five years to move my case to a neutral arbiter.

The long delays often cause employees, whose careers and lives are placed on hold, to wave a white flag.

To achieve the correct outcomes while still protecting the rights of our employees, we must place limits on the amount of time these cases can remain pending and provide the relevant offices with the human resources they need to expeditiously and fairly adjudicate their backlogs.

I remain hopeful that the State Department will implement these reforms. Throughout my ordeal, I was buoyed by messages of support from colleagues, mentors, and friends, who at times had to inject steel into my spine to stay the course. Yet at my core, and despite the significant harm, I believed eventually justice would prevail. It did.

It goes without saying that the protection of our national security information is critical. The laws and regulations that ensure government officials protect sensitive information are essential to the proper conduct of diplomacy. I have taken great care, including in jobs where I was charged with protecting some of our nation's most sensitive information, to fully honor those commitments.

Before joining the Foreign Service, I practiced law, and in college I studied U.S. history and political science. I come from a military family, and, as with other Foreign Service officers, it was my profound love of country and our special experiment with democracy that led me to join our diplomatic corps. As a political officer overseas working on democratic reforms, I lauded our emphasis on transparency and due process and our protection of freedom of speech and dissent.

Today, the same love of country that brought me to the Foreign Service endures. I understand what a privilege it is to have an abiding faith that justice will prevail, to believe in the capacity of our systems to reform, to have the right to express my dissent, and to have benefited from the steadfast support of my colleagues and AFSA.

Every day, brave and committed U.S. Foreign Service officers step out into the diplomatic trenches, in complex and sometimes murky environments, promoting U.S. interests and protecting American citizens and our employees overseas.

The need for proactive and vibrant diplomacy in the field is as great as ever, and our diplomats must know that our institution will treat us with transparency and fairness as we conduct that challenging work.

USAID
A Critical National Security Tool

U.S. foreign assistance can play an outsized role in more than half the countries in the world. Here are five priorities for USAID in the period ahead.

BY STEVEN E. HENDRIX

FOCUS SECTION—ISTOCKPHOTO.GRID—YURA GRIDNEV. GLOBE—KEIKO TAKAMATSU

Steven E. Hendrix recently retired from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Foreign Service, where he served most recently as the USAID coordinator for the State Department's Office of Foreign Assistance and as the State Department's managing director for planning, performance, and systems for the Office of Foreign Assistance. Earlier USAID assignments include senior adviser for South America, deputy mission director in Ghana, program office director in Nigeria, peace negotiations adviser to the president in Colombia, director of national capacity development for Iraq, and others. Prior to joining the Foreign Service in 1997, he worked as an attorney, having received his JD degree in 1987 at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is a member of the FSJ *Editorial Board and the principal of Hendrix LLC.*

As a new administration enters the White House, it is opportune to look at the direction of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the spearhead for one of the essential elements of national security. The March 2006 National Security Strategy advanced the "3 Ds"—defense, diplomacy, and development—as the core components of national security. Since then, all administrations have carried forward this same framework in one version or another.

For more than half of the countries in the world, development is the most important tool in the U.S. national security toolbox, despite the fact that defense garners most "national security" interest and accounts for the bulk of the national security budget.

This article reviews the role of development, discusses how foreign assistance works, describes what effective foreign aid

looks like, and proposes five steps needed now to make it fit for purpose in the coming decade.

The Three Ds' Division of Labor

The three Ds are interdependent and work together throughout the world, but they each have particular areas of responsibility, and depending on the foreign policy situation, one or the other may be primary at any given time. To get a clearer perspective on the role of development and appreciate what it means, it is useful to review who does what in national security.

Where there is war, the Department of Defense (DoD) is the most important national security tool, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance—but of the 195 countries recognized in the world, that's at most three countries at a time. DoD is also the most effective tool in North Korea, where diplomacy and development are of marginal impact. Even where diplomacy is engaged, DoD may still play a central role, for containment (think Iran). Defense is also critical in Eastern Europe to contain and prevent Russian aggression. It guards against Beijing's encroachment on Taiwan and in the Pacific, and ensures the safety of the Gulf countries.

All told, defense may be the most important national security tool in, perhaps, 15 countries. Yet in terms of the White House and public attention, defense is what takes up most of the "national security" interest. And DoD gobbles up the lion's share of the national security budget (about 13 percent of the federal budget), too.

The State Department, of course, leads on diplomacy. This includes everything from arms control to commercial relations, trade sanctions, human rights, climate change, and narcotics control. Diplomacy is certainly the most important foreign policy tool for like-minded countries, such as the nations of Western Europe, Japan, Australia, India, Brazil, Argentina, and perhaps 30 other countries. After defense, this is what most people think of when they think of national security and foreign policy. While the State Department leads diplomacy, others also play critical roles, such as the Commerce, Agriculture, Justice, and Treasury Departments; the White House; USAID; the Development Finance Corporation; the Export-Import Bank of the United States; and others.

That leaves about 80-100 countries where the most important tool in the national security toolbox is development. For these countries, defense is not a significant component: We are never going to invade Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Sudan, Egypt, Niger, or Pakistan. In these places, though it can be important, our diplomacy is not getting the same traction as it would in Europe. However, here our foreign assistance can play an outsized role. These areas include the conflict countries, where there will be famines, civil war, food insecurity, organized crime, extreme poverty, and human rights abuse.

Congress straitjackets the use of funds and creates an accounting nightmare when it comes to tracking and monitoring funding against results.

How Development Assistance Works

Despite being the least developed, the nations where development assistance is most important are allocated a meager portion of the national security budget—about $51 billion (or 1 percent of the budget). USAID receives about half of that (i.e., 0.5 percent). In other words, as a government, we put our fewest financial and personnel resources into the most problematic, most difficult places. The public hears little about these programs, and the White House is engaged mainly in bigger issues—not development. So, Congress has an outsized role.

In any given year, there are about 450 congressional directives or earmarks on foreign aid. In Nigeria, for example, the U.S. embassy and USAID may want funding for democracy, conflict, or trade, but most of the money it gets will be for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Ukraine, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan have specific assistance earmarks. The exact wording of earmarks varies from year to year. Congress straitjackets the use of funds and creates an accounting nightmare when it comes to tracking and monitoring funding against results by multiple funding year streams.

The limited foreign assistance is spread across 100 countries; yet it manages to have a real impact. By helping other countries address poverty, health crises, and political instability, the U.S. reduces the likelihood of conflicts that may require more costly military interventions. Aid programs that combat infectious diseases like Ebola and HIV/AIDS prevent these diseases from spreading to the U.S., protecting American citizens.

Foreign assistance works best when Washington leadership allows initiative to come from the embassy team–level to respond to emerging problems in real time. For example, in South America, my team at USAID worked with the U.S.

What USAID Does

Humanitarian Assistance	***Emergency Food Aid:*** Includes support for food security and nutrition in crises. ***Disaster Relief:*** Provides immediate aid for natural and man-made disasters.
Health	***Global Health:*** Focuses on combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. ***Maternal and Child Health:*** Supports programs to improve health outcomes for mothers and children.
Education	***Basic Education:*** Provides funding for primary and secondary education programs. ***Higher Education:*** Supports scholarships and educational exchanges.
Economic Development	***Infrastructure:*** Includes building roads, water systems, and energy facilities. ***Economic Growth:*** Promotes trade, investment, and private sector development.
Governance and Democracy	***Rule of Law:*** Supports legal and judicial reforms. ***Anti-Corruption:*** Aims to improve transparency and accountability in government.
Security and Stabilization	***Counterterrorism:*** Provides aid to support counterterrorism efforts. ***Conflict Resolution:*** Includes support for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the respective health ministries to establish a network for disease surveillance in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Then came a Zika virus outbreak in 2014. This network detected the Zika virus and alerted the CDC. The news that the virus can be transmitted to a fetus during pregnancy, leading to severe birth defects like microcephaly, where a baby is born with a smaller head and brain, exploded in the American media.

Due to the early detection, Brazil contained the virus, and the U.S. was able to trace the few women who had traveled to Brazil so that they could get treatment. The story then evaporated from the news. Effective work, well done. That is textbook development work.

As a second example, look to Ghana, 2016. Fall armyworm, known for its voracious appetite and ability to cause significant damage to crops, especially maize, threatened widespread hunger, spikes in food prices, and greatly reduced income for farmers. With no additional funding or personnel from Washington, my team in Ghana worked with the host government to implement control measures like pesticides, biological control agents, and integrated pest management. We educated farmers to identify the pest early and apply appropriate measures. That intervention was fast, nimble, and effective. There was no famine, no political instability. That, again, is textbook development.

Priorities for a Time of Tight Budgets

What should be some of the top concerns for an incoming administration? First, expect constrained budgets. President Donald Trump paid for tax cuts with record budget deficits. President Biden used the justification of COVID-19 for his stimulus package, which continued to expand budget deficits. With Ukraine and Palestine, foreign aid was at a record high last year.

Those days are gone. Whoever wins the White House, expect federal budgets to be squeezed. The budget enactment and debt ceiling will return as headaches, with threats of government shutdowns. During its time in office, the Trump administration proposed budget cuts to foreign assistance by more than 30 percent each year, although that was never enacted. Regardless of the election results, we could see draconian cuts—as happened during the Clinton administration years.

Given a constrained budget, where should a new administration take foreign assistance? Here are five top priorities.

First, USAID must embrace diversity in a way it has never done. Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines has noted that the most serious threat to our national security is not China, or Russia, but rather our blind spots resulting from groupthink, a product of our lack of diversity in the national security institutions.

To address this, USAID Administrator Samantha Power signed agreements with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to create a recruitment pipeline of highly qualified talent. While that itself is good, it did not address the fundamental diversity problem at USAID: its ability to retain, advance, place, and promote its diverse workforce.

Senior leadership at USAID should look like America. While a few women of color are serving as USAID mission directors, their numbers are still not representative of the American population. In the 1990s, USAID did better at recruitment of Latinos than it does now. It does USAID no good to recruit the nation's top talent and invest a half million dollars in each new employee to train them in development, management, contracting, and accountability, only to have them walk out the door because we could not retain them.

> Foreign assistance works best when Washington leadership allows initiative to come from the embassy team–level to respond to emerging problems in real time.

We need a financial return on this important investment. We will not address Director Haines' concern until decision-making reflects the benefits of our diversity.

Second, plan for the long term and keep politics out of assistance decisions. Politics changes with the news cycle.

Given a constrained budget, where should a new administration take foreign assistance? First, USAID must embrace diversity in a way it has never done.

American foreign policy, however, has always strived to be stable, bipartisan, and consistent. Development is a generational project. We have been at our best when we have stuck to our values in diplomacy and taken the long-term approach to our foreign assistance. When the development agenda reflects stability and commitment, it generates greater results. So, the next administration should throttle the political impulse to put forth a flashy new agenda and, instead, make clear why there will be *no new administration initiatives*. Staying the course on what is already there is the best bet for achieving measurable progress.

Third, work with Congress on a bipartisan basis. The reason there are 450 earmarks and directives per year is because USAID and State are not listening to Congress: they have not been responsive.

Thanks to the efforts of Administrators like Mark Green, and going back to Brian Atwood, there has been more effective engagement with the Hill. When Administrator Samantha Power saw a member of Congress, she would always start by mentioning a particular project or organization in that member's district that benefited directly from USAID.

That's effective communication, and USAID and State need to do much more of that, across the aisle and in both chambers. That also means working hand-in-glove with the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Inspector General, and the Congressional Research Service to make sure that accountability is accessible and comprehensive. It also means being frank when things don't go as planned.

As we work to improve accountability, there must be an evaluation of cost-effectiveness and return on investment. This includes impact evaluation. Twenty years ago, USAID talked about "manage-to-budget," an initiative established in 2005 to improve transparency and accountability and control costs, but lost sight of that. USAID needs to return to that fiscal discipline. That, in turn, will require that USAID focus on its priorities. It may mean that USAID cut fringe "would be nice" programs to focus on the areas where it has a comparative and competitive advantage. Over time, as USAID is more responsive to Congress and presents greater focus of purpose, it can propose to Congress the removal of some of those excessive earmarks and directives.

Fourth, work with other donors on joint programming. USAID does not have to fully fund everything. If the Export-Import Bank of the U.S. or the Development Finance Corporation can partially fund something, USAID budgets will go further. Similarly, look to complement programs from the World Bank or regional financial institutions—perhaps helping countries to meet conditions required to unlock large sector lending in key target areas like health, sanitation, or agriculture.

At the same time, helping local organizations to establish financial controls on funding, set personnel systems, and manage for results could set them up for grant funding from other private funders like the Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, or the MacArthur Foundation. Working together with others will allow USAID to stretch its scarce funding further.

And fifth, USAID must stop downplaying itself. While DoD may be the most important player in 15 countries, and State in another 50, USAID may be the best foreign policy tool in 80 to 100 countries. An ambassador is the administrative chief of mission, but the USAID mission director has cash and programs. USAID is operational. It gets things done. USAID must play to its strength.

Former USAID Assistant Administrator for Policy and Program Coordination Doug Menarchik used to say that USAID needed to be proud of its work and "walk with swagger." The U.S. will not be able to counter China without an effective USAID. We will not be able to meet our climate change commitments or help other countries to meet theirs without an effective USAID. People will starve, wars will break out, disease will spread, and organized crime will expand—unless our foreign assistance is effective. USAID is doing its work so that our military and diplomats can focus where they have to. USAID should not be shy about saying that our country needs USAID.

Menarchik was right. The bottom line is that the U.S. Agency for International Development is an essential, critical national security organization. It needs adjustments to rise to the new global demands of the day, given the impending budget constriction. These five recommendations will make USAID fit for purpose for the coming challenges. ■

Foreign Assistance Lessons from Afghanistan

How to Balance Accountability and Learning

An insider to the two-decade-long U.S. mission in Afghanistan offers a refreshing look at the challenge of effective foreign assistance oversight.

BY DAVID H. YOUNG

David H. Young is deputy director of the Lessons Learned Program at the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). He was the lead researcher for SIGAR's reports on U.S. stabilization efforts, U.S. support to elections, the agency's lessons-learned compendium report "What We Need to Learn," and the congressionally mandated report, "Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed." He has extensive field experience in six conflict/post-conflict environments: Afghanistan, the Sahel, Israel/Palestine, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Northern Ireland. In the past, he has worked as an adviser to the U.S. Department of Defense, the World Bank, the U.S. Institute of Peace, Adam Smith International, and Interpeace.

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Despite having a reputation as bean counters and thorns in the sides of agencies, government oversight organizations are integral to ensuring U.S. foreign assistance is effective. The organization I work for, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), reports directly to Congress and has oversight of all U.S. assistance to Afghanistan—from any agency providing it—totaling $148 billion since 2002. Our audits, inspections, and investigations have cumulatively saved the taxpayer $3.97 billion since our founding in 2008.

Yet in important ways, oversight offices can sometimes introduce new challenges to the delivery of U.S. foreign assistance. Traditional oversight work by Congress, SIGAR, and similar government organizations tends to reinforce a zero-sum battle between holding U.S. agencies accountable on the one hand, and helping them learn from their mistakes on the other. As the deputy director of SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program, I spend most of my time at this strange crossroads in U.S. foreign assistance.

It seems intuitive that accountability for mistakes would naturally lend itself to learning from those mistakes. After all, upon being dragged through the coals for failure, which U.S. official or agency wouldn't want to avoid that frustration in the future? It turns out, however, that the way oversight is conducted can have surprising effects on the incentives of senior U.S. officials and what precisely they learn from the oversight.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

U.S. NAVY

Afghan National Army (ANA) cadets practice drills on the parade grounds at the Afghan National Defense University, where future ANA officers were trained, in Kabul, on May 7, 2013.

Inset: Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Craig Gold (at left)—assigned to the Border Mentoring Team of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 7—instructs an Afghan soldier on proper weapons handling at the border patrol compound in Shamshad in Helmand Province on May 15, 2010.

It may help State and USAID diplomatic professionals see the bigger picture of this problem when they look at it as "outsiders." Consider, therefore, an example from the Department of Defense (DoD).

Building the Afghan Army and Police

In early 2011, nine years after the U.S. government started rebuilding the Afghan Army, none of its 134 battalions could operate independently, and only 32 percent were deemed "effective with advisers." The rest still needed significant handholding or worse, and the Afghan police were in almost identical shape.

In March of that year, at a hearing held by the House Armed Services Committee, Representative Robert Andrews (D-N.J.) told General David Petraeus, then commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan: "I notice that on both the police and army readiness measures, none of the units are at the 'green' or 'independent' level yet. … What do you think is going to happen to that pace in both the police and the army, let's say, in the next six-month window? What can we expect?"

This is what traditional congressional oversight generally looks like: the overseer requests and reviews government documents, asks senior U.S. officials to testify, engages them on comparisons between a policy's objectives and its results, and reminds U.S. officials that their work is being scrutinized. The hope is that U.S. officials will thoughtfully absorb this feedback and use it to improve U.S. foreign assistance. Yet what often happens is closer to a perversion of that feedback loop.

Three months after this hearing, the U.S. "surge" of troops ended. The pressure to transition responsibility for security to Afghan forces was immense. So, to plausibly demonstrate progress toward that goal, in August 2011, the U.S. military changed the Afghan forces' highest capability category from "independent" to "independent with advisers." Lowering the bar in this way allowed 12 Afghan Army battalions to be recategorized into the top tier by February 2012, artificially quickening the "pace" of improvement that Rep. Andrews and many other U.S. policymakers were concerned about. The gimmick was used for the Afghan police as well. In a report to Congress in April 2012, DoD wrote: "The number of [Afghan police] units rated 'Independent with Advisers' increased from 0 in August 2011 to 39 in January 2012."

A conventional oversight approach by Congress or an organization like SIGAR would correctly draw attention to this subterfuge and argue that DoD was simply hiding failure, rather than addressing it. Yet the prevalence of this trend by State, USAID, and DoD across America's 20 years in Afghanistan is symptomatic of something far worse and more entrenched than U.S. officials occasionally trying to make themselves look good.

Experts at Distortion

For two decades, the American people heard claims that we were on the right track in Afghanistan, that with a little more time, the Afghan government and its institutions could become self-sustaining and allow a U.S. withdrawal. It was mostly nonsense. DoD knew Afghan security forces were not on track—a third of them had to be replaced every year. State and USAID likewise knew corruption and poor capacity in the Afghan ministries were prohibitive—they kept most U.S. funds away from Afghan government coffers to prevent Afghan officials from stealing or misallocating those funds.

So why did these officials give such rosy assessments to Congress and the American people year after year? The answer is simple: The U.S. government's foreign assistance machinery structurally motivates senior officials to distort, embellish, and spin—even if it means significantly hurting the quality of that foreign assistance or enabling failures to continue.

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program has conducted more than 1,200 interviews with government officials and contractors who worked in or on Afghanistan, leaving us with a detailed composite of how this incentive system works. Senior U.S. officials were often in a very difficult position. Keeping with the DoD example, legislators and administration officials constantly told them, in effect: "We've been at this for years, and Afghan forces are not improving fast enough. Let's see some progress."

Building a military from scratch takes many decades, and constant turnover in U.S. staff at all levels meant that people who were not around when poor decisions were originally made were still expected to answer for those decisions years later. Under scrutiny, these U.S. officials transferred the pressure coming from

above downward onto their staffs until it eventually reached the trainers and mentors working side by side with Afghan security forces.

Yet those trainers were also perpetually new to the job and inherited problems beyond their power to fix. Still, they heard the message loud and clear—demonstrate progress or else. Unable to accelerate the improvement of Afghan forces, they did what *was* in their power—namely, to change how improvement was measured to give the impression of more improvement.

Between 2010 and 2014, when the pressure to transition authority to Afghan forces was greatest, DoD cycled through seven different systems for evaluating the capabilities of troops and police. After the seventh, DoD opted to start classifying the assessments. Several iterations in the framework allowed senior U.S. officials to take credit for gains that were almost entirely on paper, perpetuating the illusion that sufficient progress could be made to permit withdrawal in the near future. In SIGAR's experience, many U.S. staff working in Afghanistan were genuinely devoted to building Afghan institutions. Still, these DoD officials—like those at State and USAID—became experts at distortion, in part because they were held accountable for the wrong things.

Progress vs. Learning

Oversight of foreign assistance often centers on the question, "What progress have you made?" This is certainly an important question, but learning and improving is far harder when U.S. officials constantly feel the pressure to demonstrate tangible progress on timelines that are often absurdly short. Foreign assistance frequently fails and, even when successful, takes considerable time to yield results. Pressure to show progress in such conditions creates a very simple path of least resistance—game the system. Even a leader with integrity who demands fast progress from their staff may unintentionally pass down the message that the appearance of progress is more important than progress itself.

So rather than learn why those Afghan battalions were not becoming independent and speak openly about constraints that must be addressed if that independence is to be achieved, it seemed that DoD as an institution learned that avoiding criticism was more important than exploring meaningful ways to improve.

Indeed, avoiding the appearance of failure often seems to be the North Star for large bureaucracies operating under traditional oversight. The daily expectation of progress makes real learning far harder because staff are too preoccupied finding quick victories, even if they are fleeting or, worse, pyrrhic. Over

UPI/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

General John F. Campbell, commander of Resolute Support Mission and United States Forces–Afghanistan, testifies during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the ongoing situation in Afghanistan on Oct. 6, 2015.

time, the effort hollows out to become a house of cards and collapses, just as the U.S.-supported Afghan government did.

What is Congress or an oversight office to do—*not* ask about progress? Not exactly. Rather than asking, "What progress have you made?" perhaps the overriding question guiding oversight of foreign assistance should be: "What have you learned?" In different ways and in varying degrees, DoD, State, and USAID are slowly coming around to the idea that they need clear evidence demonstrating that any given strategy or program is likely to work. That low bar is quite an improvement over their work in Afghanistan, where SIGAR's lessons learned reports describe in detail many U.S. government strategies and programs based on dubious or false assumptions, untested theories of change, and mere hope.

When Congress and SIGAR criticized U.S. agencies for problems in Afghanistan, those agencies seldom raced to collect the evidence necessary to improve, but rather they opted to find creative ways of avoiding the appearance of failure. This is certainly an accountability problem but one that deserves a different approach. Particularly with foreign assistance, U.S. agencies should be held accountable first and foremost for their failure to learn, not their failure to succeed at any given moment.

Moreover, the answer to the question "What have you learned?" will likely lead Congress or an oversight organization to the same information as asking more directly about progress, but through a much healthier pathway—one that incentivizes U.S. officials to base their decisions on evidence and convince overseers of the merits of doing so.

A New Model for Assessment

What would this look like in practice? Members of Congress and oversight organizations would direct more scrutiny toward the systems the agencies have in place for collecting and analyzing data about their efforts, what their evidence tells the

agencies about progress when measured against their goals, and what the agencies plan to do differently given this evolving body of evidence.

Indirectly, Congress and the oversight organizations would still receive ample information about progress and performance, but in a way that cultivates a culture of self-scrutiny at the agencies and a tolerance among oversight professionals for a learning curve on immensely complex issues. Indeed, if failures lead to demonstrable learning and verifiable improvement, it will become less controversial for a senior U.S. official to admit to facing significant challenges.

Under this model, senior officials would still be held accountable for foreign assistance failures, but the basis for those failures would instead revolve around, for example, asking the wrong questions, doing sloppy data collection and management, having insufficient or unqualified personnel to translate that data into actionable evidence, and failing to take any actionable evidence about what works and what doesn't and do something meaningful with it.

Too many decisions at State and other agencies are based on the judgment of senior officials, many of whom have significant personal experience but often rely on that experience as a sacred oracle. When a strategy or program fails, if these officials can credibly tell Congress, "We simply followed the available evidence," it helps create a more reliable North Star, brings attention back to the institution rather than a specific official, and forces the more important question, "Why didn't the evidence lead to success?"

What the Agencies Can Do

It may be tempting for agencies to think that responsibility for kickstarting reforms such as these rests entirely with Congress and oversight organizations, but the agencies themselves have more power than they think. As agencies have the most to gain from this shift, State, USAID, and others should lean into it.

First, they should find opportunities big and small to demonstrate how learning has improved their work. This will require investing more in research capacity—from data

collection all the way to formulating courses of action—or more thoughtfully leveraging research already completed or underway.

Second, agencies should take the time to craft and tell compelling stories. This is not a call for anecdotes about beneficiaries but rather stories about positive and negative trends, related both to the substance of what agencies are learning and the challenges of the learning process itself. For example, Congress and oversight offices need to understand how difficult it is to define and measure "success" in foreign assistance.

This knowledge is not intuitive for the uninitiated. The agencies tend to think that sharing how hard a task is opens them up to criticism for being bad at that task, but doing so is likely to change the nature of oversight over time, as long as the bad news is followed by "and here's what we're doing differently as a result." Only the agencies can describe the challenges and importance of their work, but that story will not tell itself.

And **third**, agency leadership—certainly including all political appointees and their senior staff—should move away from the traditional oversight mindset in their own management practices. This mentality is not simply inherited from Congress and oversight organizations. The traditional oversight mindset is traditional for a reason—it's widespread across most thinking about motivation and achievement from a workforce. Instead, at every meeting, supervisors at agencies involved in foreign assistance should be asking their staff, "What are we learning?" and then deploying the staff and resources necessary to get better at learning, which will in turn improve their performance.

Initially, the incentive to distort will still seep into discussions about evidence as this shift takes root, but over time officials conceiving and implementing foreign assistance will see that building a culture of evidence will actually help them succeed, get promoted, and build credibility with Congress and the American people.

In Congress, oversight organizations, and in the agencies themselves, our notion of accountability in foreign assistance needs a reset, where mistakes are no longer prohibited but repeating them is. ■

15 Minutes That Mattered
Wartime Assistance to Ukraine

The massive U.S. assistance mission to Ukraine began at a roadside council of Embassy Kyiv evacuees in Poland. An FSO who was there tells the story and draws some lessons.

BY DAVID SCHLAEFER

Foreign Service Officer David Schlaefer is deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Consulate General Hong Kong and Macau. He was senior assistance coordinator at Embassy Kyiv during Russia's full-scale invasion in 2021-2022 and again in 2023-2024. He joined the Foreign Service in 1994 and has also served in Brazil, Mexico, Finland, Iraq, Japan, Romania, and has had several assignments in Washington, D.C., including as deputy special envoy to the D-ISIS Coalition and deputy coordinator for Counterterrorism.

This article is written in memory of the late FSO Sarah Langenkamp, Embassy Kyiv's superhero who did so much for Ukraine.

You never know when it's going to happen, when those 15 minutes are going to come. It's usually unexpected—a midnight phone call, a shrieking klaxon siren, or a hastily arranged Emergency Action Committee meeting that changes your life and career trajectory. You can't be sure of timing, location, or impact; but for most members of the Foreign Service, there will come a moment once or twice in your career when a sharp line neatly divides everything that came before and everything that came afterward.

That inflection point came for me in February 2022. As the senior assistance coordinator at U.S. Embassy Kyiv, I had been managing an annual Ukraine appropriation of just over a half billion dollars. Now, with Russia's invasion imminent and the embassy evacuated, I found myself standing on the side of the road just across the Polish border with about 10 colleagues. Just that morning, we had received hazy instructions from Washington to flee Ukraine and use ordered departure to return immediately to the States.

U.S. EMBASSY KYIV

Ambassador Bridget Brink (center) and the Embassy-Kyiv-in-exile team in Rzeszow, Poland, immediately before returning to Ukraine in June 2022. The author is seventh from right.

There we were, a ragtag group with phones that didn't work, near empty gas tanks in our stuffed-to-the-brim POVs, and no clear idea of what to do. During the next 15 minutes, as the first wave of refugees pushed past us, we made a collective decision to ignore our sketchy instructions from D.C. and stay the course, finding some way to continue to support Ukraine at the most critical of times. We wheeled our sputtering cars around, and instead of heading north to Warsaw and flights back to the States, we turned south to Krakow, our nearest consulate.

None of us knew it at the time, but that short roadside war council was the start of the largest U.S. assistance mission in Europe since the Marshall Plan.

Coming Together

A quick call to Principal Officer Patrick Slowinski confirmed that they could accommodate us, and within hours, we were up and running at the consulate in Krakow and in touch with our local staff inside Ukraine. Our chargé and several other colleagues from whom we'd been separated wound up in Rzeszow at the Polish-Ukrainian border. We eventually all reunited and got to work.

Over the coming weeks and months, this small interagency team—from consular, economic, political, and management sections; USAID; the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement; and the Justice Department—the remnant of what had been a sprawling mission, worked feverishly to facilitate the flow of emergency assistance into Ukraine.

As the invasion unfolded, every significant assistance delivery was brokered in whole or in part by this team. It meant thousands of pieces of body armor, hundreds of vehicles, tankers full of fuel, precious medical and food supplies, and, of course, security items reaching Ukraine in the nick of time. Lives were saved and Ukrainian resistance immeasurably strengthened. To quote Margaret Meade: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world."

Over the past two and a half years, our efforts in Ukraine have evolved into an assistance effort not seen since immediately after WWII. I'm always somewhat skeptical about the ability to distill universal lessons from so exceptional a set of circumstances. Another famous quote, this one from Ralph Waldo Emerson, often comes to mind: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." But I have to think that somewhere amid the complexity of our assistance efforts are some hard-earned lessons with applicability beyond Ukraine.

One thing is for certain. Our assistance to Ukraine has had a greater impact than any other contemporary large-scale assistance mission. We have made a difference.

Convening Authority

When thinking about some of the keys to our success, the overarching importance of **lateral coordination among stakeholders** is an obvious place to start. In Ukraine, we achieved this through a set of sectoral and thematic working groups at post. I had little subject matter expertise in any given area, but as the storm clouds gathered and invasion loomed ever larger, I used the only real authority I had, convening authority, to bring agencies together for discussions. Border issues, cybersecurity,

DAVID SCHLAEFER

The exodus begins: Ukrainians queue for U.S.-provided emergency assistance prior to fleeing the country into Poland as Russia's forces launch their invasion in February 2022. The U.S. provided food, medicines, clothing, and other forms of humanitarian aid to tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in the war's opening stages.

strategic communications, energy, health, Black Sea export issues, and several others provided a solid platform for planning efforts.

We used a variable-aperture method in deliberations, sometimes keeping discussions at the 30,000-foot level, as with larger-scale USAID humanitarian assistance efforts, and sometimes digging into project-level coordination, for example, with cyber, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) activities. Most importantly, we employed Ambassador Bridget Brink's prime directive, a relentless proactivity to inform Washington planning from the field and give senior decision-makers the options they needed to maximize results.

Leveraging reforms is another vital piece of the assistance puzzle. Challenges provide opportunity. From the outset, we approached large-scale assistance provision as an opportunity to help Ukraine improve systemic concerns like anti-corruption, good governance, and strengthened institutional capacity. As the crisis moved from the acute existential phase of early 2022 to a more protracted conflict, we adjusted our reform agenda to include a focus on improving the legal climate and regulatory environment to better attract foreign investment, increase revenue generation, and create the basis for a strong, sustainable recovery. Implementing reform agendas is often like pulling teeth; but in the case of Ukraine, our efforts have proved to be a catalyst for real change and social transformation. We hope this will continue.

The adaptability applied to our reform agenda is really just one aspect of the larger **flexibility** we strove for throughout the crisis. There's no shortage of strategic assistance plans, but responding to changing conditions on the ground in real time and making continuous adjustments based on shifting needs and priorities have enabled U.S. assistance to Ukraine to remain effective. USAID, in particular, has been nimble in its constant evaluation and recalibration of activities across the board, and this is nowhere more evident than in the energy sector, where Russian attacks have significantly degraded Ukraine's generating capacity. USAID, the Department of Energy, and others have replied with agility and continue to do so despite tremendous challenges. Flexibility in planning and willingness to course correct in midstream when circumstances warrant is often easier said than done, but it has been an important part of our success story in Ukraine.

The sheer volume of U.S. assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion—$136 billion, including the last supplemental—creates special challenges and responsibilities regarding **monitoring and accountability.** Accountability for this money—doing everything we can to ensure that assistance effectively serves its intended purposes—is difficult, but we have prioritized it from the outset. The biggest challenge we face is obvious: Many of these programs and projects are in areas either close to the shifting front lines or subject to continuous pounding from missile attacks. Kinetics and their attendant security concerns amid the biggest conventional conflict since World War II limit our ability to use traditional monitoring in some cases.

We've developed, however, a robust system of measures to ensure effective oversight, starting with coordinated, missionwide prioritization of monitoring targets, site visits, expanded end-use monitoring, third-party monitoring mechanisms, remote-monitoring technologies, and embedded advisers. We also have a team of USAID, Defense Department, and State Office of Inspector General (OIG) personnel in-country and integrated into our operational rhythm. I served in Iraq and have done assistance monitoring before, but the mosaic that we've developed in Ukraine in response to the inherent challenges is exceptional.

No Guarantees

There are other aspects I could mention. A focus on **inclusivity**, **gender equality**, and **local partnerships** comes to mind. But I think the broad concepts discussed above are crucial and probably replicable in different ways in most crises. Coordinating laterally and nurturing stakeholder buy-in strengthens planning and implementation. Leveraging reforms helps to win the future. Flexibility ensures relevance and effectiveness. And a razor-sharp focus on oversight guarantees fiscal responsibility.

Outcomes are never guaranteed, and there's no way to know what the endgame in Ukraine will eventually be. But those 15 minutes on the roadside and the commitment of my colleagues moved mountains. Everything we've accomplished since stems from that. ■

South Sudan at 13
Reflections on Crisis, Aid, and the Road to Recovery

The situation in South Sudan points to the strategic importance of moving from humanitarian aid to long-term development and resilience-building.

BY JULIUS KAUT

Julius Kaut is a humanitarian practitioner and PhD researcher specializing in food system resilience in protracted crises and the relationship between humanitarian aid and conflict. For the past three years, he has worked with humanitarian organizations and universities in South Sudan, focusing on projects in humanitarian aid, sustainable development, and resilience building. He has co-authored several publications on food systems resilience and has a background in conflict management, disaster risk reduction, and international development.

In July 2024, South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, marked its 13th year of independence. Though observed, this year's Independence Day was celebrated quietly for the most part, with few funds available for official festivities. The initial euphoria of 2011 has largely dissipated, and in 2024 the nation is grappling with numerous challenges, including a serious economic crisis characterized by hyperinflation and skyrocketing food prices.

In the meantime, the civil war that broke out in 2013 between South Sudan President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, the leaders of the two largest ethnic groups, concluded in August 2018 with a cease-fire and power-sharing agreement, and the two formed a unity government in 2020. But implementation of the 2018 peace agreement has been slow and halting. Though the government extended the transition period, initially scheduled to end in February 2023, to February 2025, critical issues such as security arrangements and electoral preparations have not yet been dealt with.

Though not engaged in a civil war anymore, South Sudan remains in crisis and vulnerable, and its dependence on humanitarian aid has blocked off avenues for economic development. As donor fatigue grips governments and major international institutions, it is essential that South Sudan's leadership and its

international partners work together to move toward sustainable development and self-reliance.

Economic Pressures and Political Uncertainty

A major driver of recent economic challenges in this landlocked country has been the conflict that erupted in April 2023 in its northern neighbor Sudan, through which South Sudan exports most of its oil. The war in Sudan has disrupted the flow of oil, and revenues, into the state treasury. Instead, it has brought a wave of refugees and returnees into South Sudan, further straining the country's already limited resources and conditions of humanitarian crisis.

Also significant, the young nation's first elections are scheduled to take place in December, after having been repeatedly postponed for many years. In a nation that is home to some 64 ethnicities, the elections are expected to replace temporary peace agreements with a more permanent resolution, paving the way for lasting peace and sustainable development. But with December only a few months away, there is widespread uncertainty whether the elections will be held.

This is a critical point of concern. A priority for parts of the international community that have pressured Juba to schedule them, the elections are meant to be a milestone in South Sudan's democratic journey. Yet because basic preparations are still lacking and no census has been conducted, there are fears that elections might either trigger new conflicts or fail to take place altogether. Critics argue that fundamental conditions for a fair election are not in place.

From taxi drivers, students, and waiters to international aid workers and academics, opinions are divided on the potential outcome. While some fear that holding elections might trigger new conflicts, others worry that *not* holding elections could have the same effect. There are concerns that 2024 might see a widespread deterioration in the security situation, similar to what the country experienced between 2013 and 2018, although this scenario has fortunately not materialized yet.

At the same time, among young people in Juba, connected to smartphones and social media as they are, the U.S. election, and the potential return of a candidate who rejected the outcome of the last presidential election, is one of the most discussed topics. They are watching closely; and in the view of some, the U.S. as an intervening international body is losing credibility.

Whether or not the elections take place, it is possible that 2024 will pass without major escalations in conflict. Though the political elites in Juba are still divided, and still prefer not to share power, they also learned lessons from the past. A return

JULIUS KAUT

A worker unloads bags of sorghum for distribution to vulnerable people in Aweil East county in northern South Sudan to stave off anticipated famine, June 2024.

to civil war is not a preferred option for either party. Memories of the brutal civil war years, which buried many hopes for the young nation's quick development and traumatized many South Sudanese, are still vivid. Most do not wish to return to such a state of conflict. While competition for power and communal and interethnic violence remain threats, they are currently mostly limited to localized incidents, and the situation now in South Sudan is far from the civil war–like situations of the past.

Some politicians are working toward peace and stability. Local peace initiatives and ongoing dialogues involving national and state leaders show a commitment to working toward reconciliation and stability in the country. Some of these initiatives might be very localized, yet they have an impact and are dependent on the political buy-in of politicians, which is given in some areas of the country.

The Aid Dependence Trap

The truth, however, is that South Sudan remains in perpetual crisis. The absence of stability and peace is still the primary challenge for the country, underpinning many other issues such as food insecurity and hunger. The food security situation is dire, with many people relying on food aid, despite the country's fertility and abundant resources. South Sudan is home to the River Nile and the second-largest animal migration in the world. Yet the hungry population depends on aid, as does the economy as a whole.

The United States, among other countries, has not only provided significant amounts of aid to the South Sudanese but also played an important role in the country's journey since independence. American diplomatic efforts were crucial in brokering the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which eventually led to South Sudan's independence in 2011. And the U.S. remains the largest donor of humanitarian aid to the country, supporting millions of South Sudanese through food assistance, health and education services, and other initiatives.

Humanitarian aid is a significant contributor to South Sudan's GDP—not only providing essential services, but generating substantial employment (estimated at 10 percent of overall employment). In a country characterized by an otherwise dramatic lack of employment and extremely low wages—where a police officer earns as little as $3 per month, and wages haven't been paid in more than six months—the aid industry and its periphery are a crucial lifeline for many.

Despite the billions of dollars invested, however, South Sudan's progress has been glacial, and the country's stability remains precarious. Though a lifeline for many, humanitarian aid also poses challenges. Originally meant to alleviate immediate suffering during crises, continuous aid during South Sudan's protracted crisis has affected local markets and mindsets. Markets are heavily influenced and sometimes damaged by prolonged aid. Over time people have learned to respond strategically to food security assessments and to manipulate standard methodologies to maximize their chances of receiving aid, whether needed or not, which, in turn, affects the local economy.

Local peace initiatives and ongoing dialogues involving national and state leaders show a commitment to working toward reconciliation and stability in the country.

Further, the effect of large, sustained quantities of aid on conflict dynamics in a country or region is another question that is coming under investigation. There are still significant gaps in understanding aid's impact on conflict dynamics, with limited empirical evidence and data from South Sudan for informed decision-making.

JULIUS KAUT

A village in Torit county in the state of Eastern Equatoria, southeast of Juba, June 2023.

Time for a Development Reset?

Still, the realization that good intentions do not always result in good assistance implementation is growing. Despite many years and billions of dollars in aid, South Sudan continues to rank poorly on major indicators such as GDP, education, life expectancy, stability, freedom, infrastructure, and basic services—the country came in at 192 of 193 on the 2022 UN Human Development Index. This phenomenon of limited returns on aid investments has contributed to decreased funding and heightened competition among aid organizations.

Coupled with the severe economic crisis and looming elections, however, a drop in donor funding might constitute an opportunity for South Sudan to seize the moment and reclaim control. Currently, aid organizations manage many government responsibilities, including education, health, infrastructure, and aid for the poor. As this support wanes, the government and people of South Sudan have a unique chance to assume greater responsibility and take the initiative. It would be beneficial for Western partners to collaborate with South Sudan on a strategic transition plan, empowering the nation to achieve greater self-sufficiency.

Many will argue that South Sudan is not yet ready and that humanitarian aid is the only viable form of assistance in such a fragile context. They maintain that humanitarian aid is the most appropriate response in the face of hunger and, at times, potential famine. This perspective reflects what could be labeled the "humanitarian reflex"—that is, to jump into business-as-usual mode at the sign of crisis, and repeat the same initiatives over and over again, despite their contested effectiveness. Today, after years of mixed success with humanitarian projects, it is time to shift from humanitarian assistance to long-term development and resilience-building.

This year may be ideal for this transition in South Sudan because previous interventions have laid the foundations for sustainable progress. South Sudan can now capitalize on the current relative stability to invest in systems and infrastructure that empower communities, promote self-reliance, and address root causes of vulnerability. A significant challenge here might be aligning the interests of the various countries providing aid in South Sudan to act in an organized joint effort rather than with limited coordination and competing interests that is otherwise typical.

Indeed, some international nongovernmental organizations have already begun experimenting with novel approaches, such as partnering with local universities to strengthen food system resilience. These and other initiatives are creating momentum and opportunities for dialogue and change.

JULIUS KAUT

A research team stands in a sorghum field in Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan, November 2022. The field excursion is part of a multistakeholder dialogue on food system resilience.

Building a Brighter Future

After many experiences in this country—some frustrating, others inspiring—I remain optimistic and hopeful. South Sudan, which many aren't even aware is an independent nation, is full of young people with potential and a vision for the future of their nation. (About half of the country's 12.7 million population is under the age of 18.) They live in a sparsely populated land rich in natural resources and full of raw materials.

Some say that South Sudan has the potential to overcome its current calorie deficit and to feed *all* of East Africa, if peace is achieved and agricultural production scaled. And peace is, indeed, what is needed, along with a phased, but determined, reduction of humanitarian aid to enable and encourage the people to cultivate their lands again.

Shaping the future is first and foremost a task for the South Sudanese. However, the West and the United States have an important supporting role to play in this transition. American support has been crucial to South Sudan since its independence, and now, the focus should shift toward fostering sustainable development and self-reliance.

By primarily supporting initiatives co-created with the South Sudanese that promote education, infrastructure, and economic development, while phasing out humanitarian aid where possible, the U.S. and partners can help South Sudan build a more stable and prosperous future. I am convinced that with the right support and a strategic exit from dependencies on aid, this country can have a bright future.

While South Sudan faces significant challenges, there is hope. The country's future depends on its ability to navigate challenges and build a foundation for lasting peace and development. The coming months will be crucial in determining the direction of this young nation for the years to come. ■

FEATURE

REIMAGINING Public Diplomacy for the Digital Age

Three new books make a powerful case for reimagining the practice and the power of public diplomacy for the digital age.

BY VIVIAN S. WALKER

What is public diplomacy? Why does it matter to the conduct of foreign policy? How can it effectively promote state power and legitimacy in a competitive—and increasingly disruptive—digital environment? These questions of function, relevance, and effect have consistently beleaguered and occasionally undermined the practice of public diplomacy, defined here as a state's effort to inform and influence foreign audiences in the service of its national interests.

A retired Senior Foreign Service officer and a former executive director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, Vivian S. Walker, PhD, serves as chair of The Foreign Service Journal *Editorial Board, an adjunct professor in Georgetown University's MSFS degree program, and a faculty fellow at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. Previously she taught at the Central European University's School of Public Policy, the National War College in Washington, D.C., and the National Defense College of the United Arab Emirates.*

Uncertainty about the nature and value of public diplomacy (PD) has contributed to the perception that it is an afterthought rather than integral to diplomatic practice. Former State Department Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Charlotte Beers noted that during her tenure, public diplomacy was viewed as a "barnacle on the ship of State." Legendary U.S. Information Agency Director Edward R. Murrow had famously harsh words for the failure to include public diplomacy professionals at the policy "takeoffs" as well as the "crash landings."

PD's Origin Story

Three new books from practitioner, policy, and academic perspectives make a powerful case for reimagining the practice for the digital age, offering explanations and assessments of its potential while tempering expectations about outcomes. Multidisciplinary and expansive in their definition of key actors and practices, these studies reevaluate influence management in a highly contested media environment.

Bruce Gregory's *American Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Practitioners as Change Agents in Foreign Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024) fills a critical knowledge gap about the history, evolution, and nature of American public diplomacy, giving it an origin story and a philosophical foundation. Drawing

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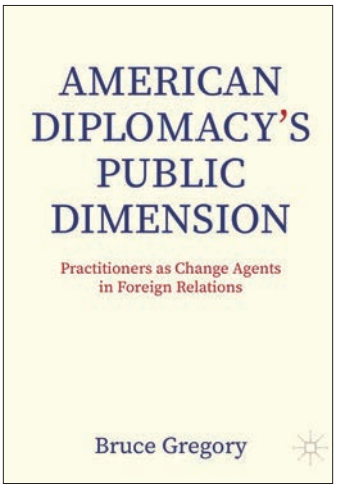
Diplomacy is an essentially public function, relying on the use of information and influence strategies to further foreign policy objectives.



on extensive experience in the oversight of U.S. government public diplomacy institutions and practices, Gregory offers an informed and proactive defense of PD as an essential tool of statecraft.

Perhaps most importantly, *American Diplomacy's Public Dimension* highlights public diplomacy's centrality to the practice of diplomacy. Diplomacy, as Gregory defines it, is "an instrument used by states … sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviors; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values." In other words, diplomacy is an essentially public function, relying on the use of information and influence strategies to further foreign policy objectives. By placing PD at the heart of diplomacy rather than relegating it to a secondary support function, Gregory makes a persuasive case for its enduring relevance.

The first major scholarly work to explore early prototypes of American public diplomacy, the book reframes pivotal moments in colonial and revolutionary history, highlighting the cross-cultural nature of nascent American diplomatic practices. This historical overview covers the transformative communication technologies that have driven major shifts in public diplomacy institutions and practices. Despite our current preoccupation with the digital age, diplomatic communications were similarly disrupted (and empowered) by the effects of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television.

Gregory identifies a set of unique and enduring patterns in American diplomatic practices, including an episodic focus on public diplomacy that coincides with existential threats to national interests. Those interested in institutional reinvention would do well to remember that all major shifts in PD priorities, institutions, and practices have been motivated by conflict. World War I led to the formation of the Creel Committee; World War II led to the emergence of the Voice of America; the Cold War led to the establishment of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA); and the Global War on Terror led to a series of counterterrorism communications centers within State.

In keeping with what Gregory identifies as the social nature of diplomatic engagement, his book offers a definitive expansion of the community of practice, broadening the definition of a PD practitioner well beyond the diplomatic service. Although driven by rivalries, competing interests, and distinct, sometimes incompatible, operational imperatives, these "change agents," as he calls them, make an elegant case for the robust give and take of democracy.

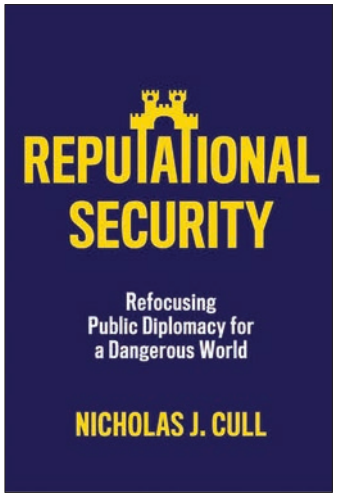
At the same time, Gregory calls out the historical tension between "ideals and self-interest" inherent in American diplomacy, and the use of American exceptionalism as a "rationale for strategies that combine hard power—force, intimidation, and bribery—and the soft power attraction of ideals, resources, and alliances." He makes a cogent case for the risks and costs associated with an "outsized view" of American "virtue, democracy, and capacity to steer history." As we know all too well, nothing is more damaging to U.S. soft power than public perceptions of the gap between its values and its actions.

Ultimately, this book pushes on the boundaries of diplomacy's public dimension, providing helpful advice about the embrace of disruption, the cultivation of lateral knowledge, and the mitigation of resource constraints. Unfortunately, these are not qualities easily captured in government institutions and practices. Gregory is right about the rich and multitudinous history of American diplomacy's public dimension but has little to say about how these qualities can be operationalized within a bureaucracy.

Reevaluating Soft Power

While Bruce Gregory creates a unifying origin story for American public diplomacy, historian Nicholas Cull offers a groundbreaking reevaluation of soft power and the projection of national legitimacy in the global media space. In *Reputational Security: Refocusing Public Diplomacy for a Dangerous World* (Polity, 2024), Cull argues that Joseph Nye's conception

Nothing is more damaging to U.S. soft power than public perceptions of the gap between its values and its actions.



of soft power, "a perfect idea for the post–Cold War world," has run its course. The era of "benevolent unipolarity" has been overtaken by the "return of full-fledged power competition in a media-saturated age" and weakened by unprecedented and disruptive developments in information technologies.

In this environment, Cull argues, the unilateral "beauty pageant" of soft power attractiveness that focuses exclusively on the positive aspects of national values and policies cannot protect relatively unknown countries against the corrosive effects of a fractured information space in which a country's shortcomings can easily become a strategic vulnerability.

Enter Cull's transformational reformulation of soft power attractiveness—reputational security, or "the idea that if and when a country is well thought of and seen as relevant by international audiences, it fares better in moments of crisis than states that are unknown." States with reputational security are "more likely to find allies" and to have their behaviors in the international arena seen as credible and worthy of support, especially when a challenge emerges.

Indeed, much of Cull's inspiration for *Reputational Security* derives from "the shock of 2014": "Ukraine's loss of territory with little response from the global public—serves as an object lesson of exactly what can happen to a country if its national narrative is not known."

Ukraine has since made dramatic improvements to its image projection, positioning itself in 2022 as the champion of democracy on the front lines of freedom. Other striking examples include Taiwan's effort to build and preserve its reputation in the face of Chinese aggression, and Kazakhstan's affirmation of pluralism as an antidote to external perceptions of its social and economic inequities.

In addition to filling critical knowledge gaps about a country, a successful reputational security campaign can address perceived shortcomings in its behaviors and policies, or, as Cull says, "accentuating the positives while eliminating the negatives." Chapters on counterpropaganda, media development, information disarmament, diaspora engagement, and cultural relations offer comprehensive and accessible pathways to the enhancement of reputational security.

In truth, the concept of reputational security works best when applied to countries appealing for support during a clearly defined existential crisis such as an invasion or environmental disaster. Cull is correct that a "secure national reputation requires policies that protect the integrity of the most admirable elements of that nation, akin to the quality control mechanism of a corporation." But a country is not a business. There is no "quality control" when it comes to policy outcomes—or how publics perceive them.

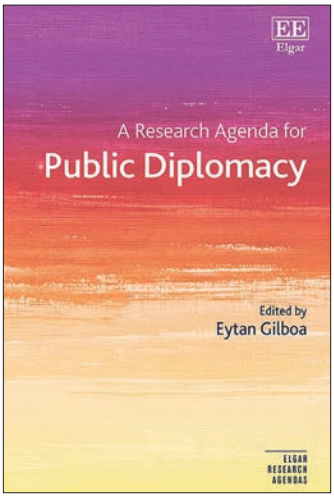
By arguing that efforts to improve public perceptions of a country's image can be improved by positive changes to national policies, Cull sets an impossibly high bar for the practice of PD. Public diplomacy can explain and contextualize a country's policies, but it can't alter them. Moreover, like Gregory, Cull has no ready solution for the functional integration of reputational security management into existing public diplomacy institutions. He writes: "There is no clear strategy in play and certainly no vision of the kind necessary to rally the U.S." in the global imagination.

Exploring New Trends

While Cull and Gregory seek policy and practitioner-driven approaches to the definition, legitimization, and institutionalization of public diplomacy, Eytan Gilboa looks at these issues from a scholar's perspective. His *Research Agenda for Public Diplomacy* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023) offers a carefully curated overview of recent trends in PD scholarship, teaching, and practice, while also establishing a research agenda for the next decade. Acknowledging the "considerable" gap between theory and practice that has long frustrated practitioners and scholars, Gilboa seeks to establish a "common language" for public diplomacy while mapping out the boundaries of the discipline.

Although academic in focus, this collection of essays by emerging and established scholars is refreshingly accessible

Unfortunately, this is where practitioners and scholars inevitably part ways. While scholars can indulge in the pursuit of meta constructs, practitioners and policymakers are on the hook for concrete answers.



to practitioners, policymakers, and even those new to the field. As editor, Gilboa deftly organizes *Research Agenda* around three new trends in public diplomacy scholarship: the growing diversity of PD actors, the creative reformulation of PD as a discipline, and long overdue redefinitions of PD instruments.

Part I, with its focus on state and non-state actors, reveals how international organizations leverage institutional assets in the service of public diplomacy interests. Here, too, are insights into the growing coordination between corporate and government PD actors, as well as the extent to which digital empowerment has put ordinary citizens at the nexus of globalization, democracy, and civil society development.

Part II will appeal to public diplomacy scholars and practitioners in search of a historical overview of the discipline as well as a review of emerging trends and practices. These include new ways to think about soft power, the overlap between PD and public relations, changes to the relationship between PD actors and their audiences, and the relatively new development of a theory of management for PD professionals.

Part III explores how the digital age has transformed the use of traditional instruments of public diplomacy. These shifts include the emergence of non-human actors and stakeholders, the value of face-to-face exchanges in an increasingly digital context, the impact of digital technologies on diplomatic norms and values, and the integration of live and digital elements in the new "hybrid" public diplomacy.

Happily, as Gilboa notes, there is a growing consensus that public diplomacy deserves serious attention as a legitimate science, or method of inquiry, and that the findings of this science merit serious attention from foreign affairs policymakers, especially when it comes to confronting contemporary challenges to national power and legitimacy in the digital media space.

However, while research has arguably lessened confusion about the value of public diplomacy to foreign policy, there remains "a considerable gap between scholars and officials and theory and practice." Gilboa's desire to build a set of navigable bridges between scholarship and practice has been thwarted by the emergence of more and more "islands of theory." The multiplicity of disciplinary approaches to PD threatens to overwhelm efforts to make sense of them.

Gilboa's solution? More "theory construction … not only to guide research, but also to unify and consolidate" it. In short, says Gilboa, we need "a unifying theory of theories of public diplomacy." Unfortunately, this is where practitioners and scholars inevitably part ways. While scholars can indulge in the pursuit of meta constructs, practitioners and policymakers are on the hook for concrete answers.

Gregory, Cull, and Gilboa each make a powerful case for the emergence of a multidisciplinary, innovative, and expansive practice equal to the challenges of a digital age. They elevate, in turn, the centrality of diplomacy's public dimension, public diplomacy's essential role in the defense of national security, and the importance of examining PD from multiple disciplines and theoretical frameworks. Their serious and knowledgeable attention to public diplomacy is a great service in an environment in which the practice is poorly understood outside its narrow band of devoted practitioners.

Alas, none of the three provides much in the way of solutions to persistent deficits in leadership and resources. The problem remains that so much is expected of PD actors and institutions: to positively influence global public attitudes toward government policies and behaviors; serve as the standard-bearer of national political values; and shore up state legitimacy in contested media spaces.

And yet public diplomacy remains the most undervalued element of foreign policy—no other instrument of national power is called on to do so much with so little.

FEATURE

MAKING OUR RHETORIC REAL
U.S. Diplomacy in the Pacific Islands

The "Blue Continent," historically viewed as a backwater of U.S. diplomacy, has become the scene of a new great power contest.

BY JOHN HENNESSEY-NILAND

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

At the U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit in September 2022, Secretary of State Antony Blinken (second from right) meets with (from left) President of the Republic of Palau Surangel Whipps Jr., President of the Federated States of Micronesia David Panuelo, and President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands David Kabua at the State Department in Washington, D.C.

As the former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Palau, let me be the first to admit that I have a bias. I believe that "the security of America, quite frankly, and the world depends on the security of the Pacific Islands."

This was President Joe Biden's statement at the U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit in September 2022, where the president unveiled the first-ever "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States." One has only to look at a map or know a little about history, particularly World War II in the Pacific, to appreciate the strategic importance of these islands.

America's official diplomatic footprint in the Pacific Islands dates largely to the conclusion of WWII. Today, more than *60 percent* of global maritime trade transits the Indo-Pacific, much of it passing through the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Pacific Island countries. This region matters, always has, and will continue to do so.

Yet, despite this understanding and some questionable claims in the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" document, U.S. attention and engagement with the region has, in fact, waxed and waned over the decades. Administrations over the years have issued numerous policy documents and periodically stated that the U.S. "is back," and that America has "pivoted" to the Indo-Pacific (again)—so much so that some commentators have asked, "When does a pivot become a pirouette?"

What is indisputable today, however, is that the Pacific Islands, at the center of the global maritime crossroads connecting America with Asia, are increasingly the scene of a new great power contest. And the challenge for America's diplomats in our small and remote island posts there is to make our rhetoric real regarding U.S. interests in the region.

Newly retired FSO John T. Hennessey-Niland is the former U.S. ambassador to Palau. He has worked at the National Security Council, as a United Nations war crimes investigator, and at a number of diplomatic posts in Europe, as well as multiple assignments in the Pacific—including Fiji, Australia, and Hawai'i, where he was the foreign policy adviser to the commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC). He is currently head of the diplomacy concentration and professor of practice at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

The "Blue Continent"

The small-island nations that make up the vast geographic area of the Pacific Islands are sometimes called the Blue Continent. The EEZs of just three island nations—the "Freely Associated States" of Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of the Marshall Islands (FAS)—are equivalent to more than half the size of the continental United States. But they have largely been viewed as a backwater for U.S. diplomacy, at least until recently. Official U.S. presence has been limited, with U.S. policy often considered one of benign neglect. Indeed, the view from the region was summed up in 2022 by then–Acting Prime Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum: "Fiji and our small-state neighbors have felt at times, to borrow an American term, like a flyover country. Small dots spotted from plane windows of leaders en route to meetings where they spoke about us, rather than with us, if they spoke of us at all."

At the policy level, the belated approval and funding by Congress of $7.1 billion in March 2024 for the next 20 years of the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands was critical. Although these are agreements with sovereign nations, it is the U.S. Department of the Interior that will continue to manage the bulk of the funding to support basic public services in the three countries in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure, while bolstering the management and oversight of Compact trust funds previously established for each of the states. Congress also included $634 million over the next 20 years to ensure continued provision of U.S. Postal Service to the FAS, a key link between the U.S. and these islands even in this era of email and messaging apps.

Our partners in the Pacific viewed the congressional negotiations on COFA as a litmus test of U.S. credibility and commitment. They see the success as a basis for further engagement and expansion of U.S. ties, not the limit of this relationship. Extension of benefits for the first time to veterans of the U.S. military in their home islands (something we worked very hard on while in Palau) and access to new health and education programs to citizens of the three states are so important and very welcome.

In addition to the Biden administration's hosting of two U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summits in Washington, D.C., announcement of the opening of new U.S. embassies in the region also signals a renewed commitment. New posts in the Solomon Islands and Tonga opened in 2023; a new embassy in Vanuatu is planned for later this year; and discussions continue with Kiribati regarding a U.S. diplomatic presence there sometime in the future.

U.S. EMBASSY KOROR

At the ribbon cutting ceremony for U.S. Embassy Koror's solar energy project on April 12, 2022, from left: U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Ambassador John Hennessey-Niland, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Secretary John Kerry, Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr., and Paramount Chief Reklai Raphael Bao Ngirmang.

The Peace Corps is coming back to the region as well. Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga again have Peace Corps volunteers; Vanuatu will have volunteers later this year, and Palau will see their return in 2025. USAID is also expanding its presence across the region, as are other U.S. agencies and departments. These are important steps.

Making Rhetoric Real

It is important to acknowledge, however, that while the COFA agreements are a huge step forward, many of the other announcements and plans for increasing U.S. engagement in the Pacific Islands remain contingent on additional funding. As Bill Burns wrote in the March/April 2024 edition of *Foreign Affairs*: "Priorities aren't real unless budgets reflect them." Leaders in the Pacific have observed that despite pledges of more than $8 billion in U.S. assistance since 2022, much of this funding has still not arrived in the region. As I have written elsewhere, U.S. overpromising and underdelivering is a real risk to American credibility in the Pacific.

Our newly announced embassies in the region, for now at least and for the foreseeable future, are not full-service posts. For example, these tiny posts, staffed with one or two officers on temporary duty, are not equipped currently to provide the consular services that are so important to Americans and host-country nationals alike in these distant and remote locations. Rather, they are small, micro posts, similar to "Presence Posts" that were established in other parts of the world in past years. Filling these few positions has proven difficult because these jobs have not been seen (with some justification) as career enhancing, even if they can be career enriching.

While these posts are not high threat in terms of the potential for terrorism or violence, this is somewhat misleading because rising crime is a concern even in the islands. A number of these countries have experienced political unrest. Further, access to health services and education and opportunities for spousal employment can be limited at the small island posts. Even our embassies in the Pacific are undersized, though they do now have more staff, interagency presence in the country teams, and additional new resources.

Still, the discrepancies with larger U.S. missions in the Indo-Pacific can add to the perception that the Pacific Islands do not matter as much to the U.S. government. These real or perceived "slights" can be significant in a region where there is competition for allegiance and to be the partner of choice. The islands are located far from Washington, but they follow closely what is happening in our government. They pay attention to budget discussions and inside-the-Beltway policy machinations and issues like appointments and staffing charts. These governments have noticed that while there used to be a director at the National Security Council solely responsible for Oceania,

as well as a deputy secretary of State responsible for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, both roles are now subsumed in larger portfolios.

These changes are seen as inconsistent with U.S. claims of an increased focus on the region, even though the U.S. has also established a new envoy position to the Pacific Islands Forum. I think it is fair to acknowledge that some of our challenges in the region are in part a result of our bureaucratic approach and policy "own goals," as our Australian friends would say, but this only heightens the challenges.

So how can we make our rhetoric real in the Pacific? I have served multiple tours in various positions at our embassies in Palau, Australia, and Fiji, and as the foreign policy adviser with the U.S. Marine Corps Forces in the Pacific (MARFORPAC). While I am not the first to observe this, I agree that the future of America and our role globally will be determined by what happens in the Indo-Pacific. We need our best there.

What We Are Doing in the Pacific

At Embassy Koror, during my time as ambassador to the Republic of Palau, we prioritized three issues: the "3 Cs." The first issue was **the People's Republic of China (PRC)** and the competition with China playing out in Palau and across the Pacific Islands. The second was **climate**, and how the U.S. was working with partners to help vulnerable and low-lying island nations manage this threat to their existence. The third was what we called **capacity**—building up human capital as well as the bricks and mortar of infrastructure projects in these remote countries to strengthen development and their connection to the global economy.

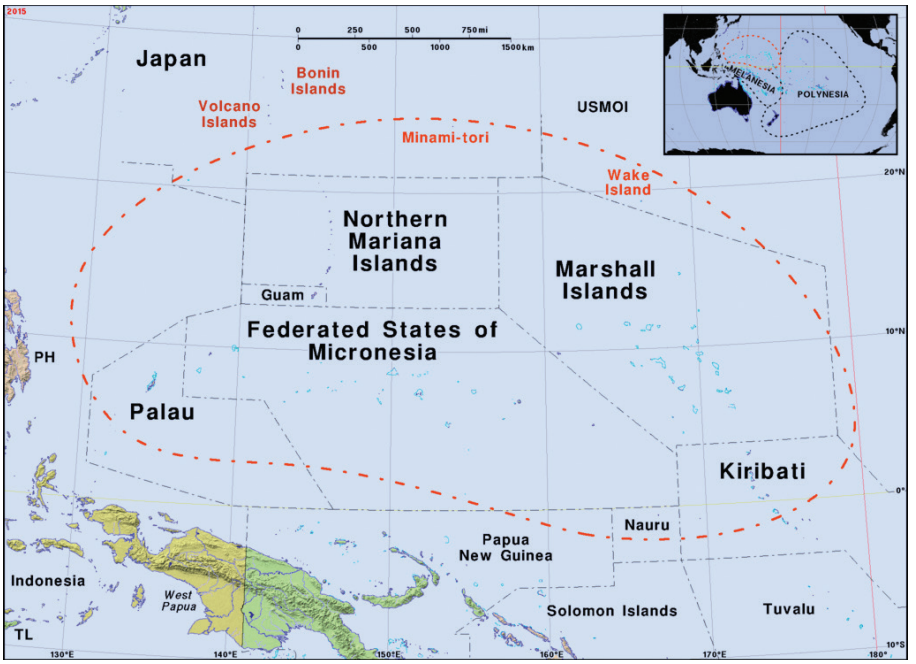
> Many of the other announcements and plans for increasing U.S. engagement in the Pacific Islands remain contingent on additional funding.

Palau is one of just 12 countries in the world that recognizes Taiwan. Although the PRC has no official relations with Palau, it is the focus of much attention from Beijing. In addition to Palau's relationship with Taiwan, Koror's location as the anchor of the Second Island Chain in the Pacific draws Beijing's attention. The PRC has used coercive measures, involving criminal networks and economic pressure, to try to force Palau to switch recognition and distance itself from the U.S.

We worked hard to push back against PRC interference and to support Palau by increasing U.S. military presence and strengthening good governance. We also worked with Palau and other partners in the Pacific on issues of shared concern,

U.S. EMBASSY KOROR

U.S. veterans and Gold Star families gather in Palau, Nov. 11, 2021. Ambassador Hennessey-Niland is third from left.



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The "Freely Associated States" of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands—with which the U.S. recently extended a 20-year support contract, the Compacts of Free Association (COFA)—make up the bulk of one of the three major regions of Oceania, Micronesia. Together with the other two major regions, Melanesia and Polynesia (see inset), this vast area in the Pacific is known as the Blue Continent.

such as responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, supplying U.S. vaccines to the region truly saved lives and was one of the most important accomplishments of our work in Palau.

On climate, Palau is a global leader in efforts to protect the ocean environment. While in Koror, I had the privilege to host the U.S. delegation to the 2022 Our Ocean Conference. Co-hosting with the U.S., Palau was the first island nation to welcome this major international event. The gathering brought together hundreds of representatives from government, civil society, and industry, and succeeded in raising $16.35 billion and 410 specific commitments to protect the world's oceans.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Palau is a global leader in efforts to protect the ocean environment. Co-hosting with the U.S., Palau welcomed the annual Our Ocean Conference in April 2022. It was the first time an island nation had hosted this major international event launched by the State Department in 2014.

Coming just after Palau opened its borders post-pandemic, it was a huge accomplishment for this small post. We were honored to have Special Presidential Envoy for Climate and former Secretary of State John Kerry lead the U.S. delegation. Embassy Koror contributed in its own unique way: Working closely with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and in cooperation with State's Greening Diplomacy Initiative, Embassy Koror has the distinction of being the first net-zero U.S. diplomatic facility in the world. Small posts can achieve great things.

A Call to Serve

In Palau, the U.S. embassy is fortunate to have a resident U.S. Civic Action Team (CAT), the only one remaining in the world. A tri-service (Navy, Army, Air Force) rotational deployment, CAT has been present in Palau for more than 50 years, well before the opening of our small diplomatic post.

The CAT team has completed millions of hours of service and support, assisting with small construction projects, providing free medical care, maintaining historic monuments and battle sites, and assisting with so many other community-focused projects and events. In terms of winning hearts and minds, these military diplomats are such an important part of our country team and whole-of-government effort to ensure we have the strongest possible relationship with Palau.

Embassy Koror continues to partner with Palau on issues of real substance and strategic consequence for both of our nations, for the region, and globally. So, for anyone in the Foreign Service who has a spirit of adventure and wants to be at the top of the wave in navigating these challenging dynamics, bid on a job in the Pacific Islands. While the embassies may be small, and service in the Pacific can be difficult, this is a unique experience with the opportunity to have an impact on issues that matter.

One of my favorite island sayings is the following: "There is an island of opportunity in the middle of every difficulty." If you want to be on the front lines of expeditionary diplomacy, working on some of the world's most complex and consequential challenges, consider serving in one of America's small island posts in the Pacific.

FS HERITAGE

Through His Lens

The Legacy of Pioneering U.S. Foreign Service Officer Griff Davis

Senior USAID FSO Griff Davis was an inspiring pathbreaker who brought photojournalism and diplomacy together to chart changing times.

BY DOROTHY M. DAVIS

> Griff Davis stood at the vortex of history and the future as a Buffalo Soldier in Italy during World War II, the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., and the Independence Movement in Africa. … Through his camera, writing, and diplomatic skills, he fought for freedom and independence by documenting changing times and being on the cutting edge of changing those times by shaping image, narrative and policies. … He was both an observer and interpreter of the times.
>
> *—Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., director, Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University*

Dorothy M. Davis is president of Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives. She was born in Liberia and raised in newly independent Tunisia, Nigeria, Switzerland, and the U.S. She followed in her father's footsteps in project management and international development communications through her company, Dorothy M. Davis Strategic Global Consulting. Starting as the executor of Griff Davis' estate in 1993, she has unearthed, preserved, and promoted her father's legacy as a photographer, journalist, and Senior Foreign Service officer. Ms. Davis is the primary source and contextual authority on his kaleidoscopic life. For more information, visit https://griffdavis.com.

Griff Davis leaves behind a rich legacy: internationally recognized pioneer photographer, journalist, and U.S. Senior Foreign Service officer. Since September 2023 alone, six exhibitions of his photography in four countries on three continents have honored this man and his work. These include permanent installations of his photographs at the Museum of Broadway in Times Square, at U.S. Embassy Liberia, at *Jazz Magazine* in Paris, and in the U.S. Supreme Court Archives. Filmmaker Spike Lee even has his own personal collection.

Held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York City, the exhibition, "The Ways of Langston Hughes: Griff Davis and Black Artists in the Making," provides insight into how Davis started his unusual career path to the U.S. Foreign Service. It all began with Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes.

The First Steps Down an Unusual Path

In the spring of 1947, during his last semester at Morehouse College, Davis met Atlanta University Visiting Professor Hughes as a student in his creative writing class. On realizing Davis was the campus photographer for various Atlanta University campuses,

Griff Davis standing in front of a portrait of himself taken by J. Edward Bailey III (at right) as part of the "Living Legends in Black" exhibition at the Detroit Historical Museum in Detroit, Michigan, in March 1976.

Hughes enlisted him as his photographer until the end of his tenure.

Their 20-year friendship continued through Davis' graduation from Morehouse and landing his first job, as the first roving editor of *Ebony* magazine. Hughes had recommended Davis to John H. Johnson, founder and publisher of *Ebony*. After 18 months at the magazine, Davis went to Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, again at the recommendation of Hughes. He was the only Black American student in the class of 1949.

While attending Columbia, Davis rented a room in Hughes' Harlem home and sometimes accompanied Hughes on assignment as his photographer. Shot during one of these assignments, Davis' photograph of legendary actor Canada Lee is now permanently installed in the Museum of Broadway in Times Square.

Davis simultaneously took a photojournalism course taught by Kurt Safranski at the New School. Safranski was one of three Jewish émigrés who escaped Germany during World War II and brought the photojournalism industry to the United States through their creation of Black Star Publishing Company, the first privately owned picture agency in the U.S. Most famously, Safranski was responsible for helping Henry Luce create *Life* magazine.

After graduation, Davis was hired as the first and only Black American international freelance photojournalist at Safranski's company. Said the late Benjamin J. Chapnick, onetime president of Black Star, the co-founders "considered [Davis] one of the best photojournalists of his generation."

Cutting His Teeth Abroad

Davis' first trip overseas was to Liberia, where he covered the missionary movement and iron ore industry in 1949. He wrote: "Africans across the continent had begun to scream for their independence. The spirit of the African people and their strong desire for freedom captured my photo-journalistic instincts to witness the rebirth of a continent and the birth of new African nations."

Working for Black Star from 1949 to 1952, Davis made three separate trips to Liberia and other parts of Africa and Europe. In addition to being a stringer correspondent for *The New York Times*, he had stories and photographs appear in a host of publications in the U.S. and Europe, including the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Time* magazine, *Fortune*, *Life* magazine, *Ebony*, and *Der Spiegel*. While in Liberia, he was even asked by *Ebony* to interview Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia for the cover story, "The Private Life of Emperor Selassie," in its November 1950 fifth-anniversary issue.

Of the 521 photographs Davis took for Black Star, eight of Liberia were featured in the recent exhibition, "Stories from the Picture Press: Black Star Publishing Company and the Canadian Press," at the Image Centre at Toronto Metropolitan University. As an offshoot of the exhibition, the Image Center's book, *Facing Black Star*, includes a full chapter, titled "Telling on Archival Erasure: The Stories Behind Griffith Davis' Liberia Photographs."

At the time Davis started to freelance for Black Star, President Harry S. Truman outlined the Point Four program in his 1949 inaugural speech. It was the fourth point that established the U.S. policy of technical assistance and economic aid to underdeveloped (now referred to as "developing") countries, the forerunner of the present-day U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The first appropriations under this program were made to Liberia in 1950, laying the groundwork for Davis' Foreign Service career.

Joining the Foreign Service

During his time with Black Star, Davis developed the trust and a professional friendship with President of Liberia William V.S. Tubman. As he finished editing Liberia's first promotional film, "Pepperbird Land" (1952), John W. Davis (not related), first director of the Point Four program of the U.S. diplomatic mission there (and a 1911 Morehouse classmate of Davis' father, Philip M. Davis) encouraged Davis to apply for employment with the U.S. government and do "picture stories."

After passing the Foreign Service exam in the summer of 1952, Davis and his newlywed wife, Muriel Corrin Davis, returned to Liberia that November. As the first information officer and audio/visual adviser of the U.S. embassy in Monrovia, he, along with two other Morehouse College graduates, John W. Davis and Robert Kitchen, became one of the pioneers of President Truman's program for foreign aid.

Under the initial leadership of the first African American ambassador, Edward R. Dudley, the program was established worldwide during the Jim Crow era, in part due to their efforts. In this capacity, Davis ultimately became a trailblazer for Black Americans in the U.S. Foreign Service. (Forty-two of Davis' photographs of U.S. Embassy Monrovia under the leadership of Ambassador Dudley are included in the PBS American Experience/Flowstate Films documentary "The American Diplomat" that aired in February 2022.)

Davis' Influence Through Images

In Liberia (1952-1957) and the newly independent Tunisia (1957-1962), Davis assisted the governments in establishing their respective ministries of information and broadcasting. During Davis' years in Liberia, President Tubman commissioned him to do a one-man exhibition of 100 images about Liberia, titled "Liberia 1952," at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. This was at a time when African Americans were not allowed to show in that museum.

He also commissioned Davis to do a two-page picture story on Gold Coast (Ghana) Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah's visit to Liberia for *Time* magazine's Feb. 9, 1953, edition and four documentary films: the official inauguration films of 1952 and 1956 of President Tubman for the government of Liberia; "Progress Through Cooperation," on Liberia's agricultural development program in 1957; and the aforementioned "Pepperbird Land," the first promotional film of Liberia (and possibly any noncolonized African country at the time). "Pepperbird Land" was narrated by then-unknown actor Sidney Poitier. The film was distributed to all of Liberia's embassies around the world and remains a classic.

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Official commissioned photograph of President William V.S. Tubman (at left) and Prime Minister of Gold Coast (Ghana) Kwame Nkrumah in Monrovia, Liberia, in January 1953.

During this period of President Tubman's presidency, Davis took a total of 7,000 images of Liberia. From 2009 to 2011, U.S. Ambassador to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield displayed four of those photographs in her residence through the Art in Embassies program. In 2012, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield permanently installed them in the new U.S. embassy she christened that year. In attendance, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reflected: "Most Liberians have fond memories of Muriel and Griffith, who did so much to promote the historical memories of Africa's first independent nation through Griffith's remarkable photography."

Before ending his tour of duty as a Foreign Service officer in Liberia, Davis was assigned by U.S. Information Service headquarters in Washington, D.C., to be the official photographer for the U.S. delegation led by Vice President Richard Nixon to

Vice President Richard Nixon and Second Lady Patricia Nixon unexpectedly meet Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, for the first time during independence ceremonies in Accra, Ghana, on March 6, 1957. Griff Davis took this famous shot. The photo is included in the newly released 2024 official biography, *The Mysterious Mrs. Nixon: The Life and Times of Washington's Most Private First Lady*, by Heath Hardage Lee and remains in the archives of the King Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Ghana's Independence Day celebrations on March 6, 1957. He was one of only 20 photographers in the world granted official credentials to cover this historic event.

Arguably, his most famous photograph was of the unexpected first meeting of Richard Nixon and Second Lady Patricia Nixon with Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King at one of the Independence Day receptions. (Davis and King had grown up together in Atlanta.) Having ended the Montgomery Bus Boycott only a few months before, the Kings were invited to the Independence Day celebrations by Prime Minister Nkrumah. It was the first trip to Africa for both couples. The U.S. government banned the photograph from being publicly published due to the volatile nature of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement at the time.

Work in Education

During the Biafran War in Nigeria (1967-1970), Davis assisted the federal and regional ministries of education in utilizing radio and television for educational purposes. He served as the deputy chief education officer of USAID/Lagos, which coordinated U.S. technical assistance to joint U.S.-Nigeria education projects and the restoration of the eastern region education facilities destroyed by the war. He also encouraged the emerging film industry of Nigeria through his friendship with pioneer and legendary Nigerian filmmaker Francis Oladele, founder of Calpenny-Nigeria Films.

Between 1973 and 1983, Davis was assigned to USAID's Washington headquarters, where he directed the Information, Education, and Communication Branch of the Office of Population, which backstopped family planning programs worldwide. This assignment expanded his impact beyond Africa. Approximately 1,500 foreign nationals from 102 countries were trained in U.S.-based summer workshops and MA and PhD degree programs, principally held at the University of Chicago under the direction of Donald Bogue. Davis managed all of these workshops and programs for USAID.

He was nominated by President Ronald Reagan to the U.S. Foreign Service rank of Counselor, which was ratified by the Senate in the congressional record of Sept. 26, 1981. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1985.

©GRIFF DAVIS/GRIFFITH J. DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHS AND ARCHIVES

"Liberian Woman Walks Alongside Iron Ore Train," 1952, by Griffith Davis. It was the second place winner of USAID/ FrontLines 50th Anniversary People's Choice Global Photo Contest in 2011.

A Prolific Life and Body of Work

From 1952 to 1985, Griff Davis worked in many capacities f or USAID. As an adviser to African governments such as Liberia, Tunisia, and Nigeria, and to the Bureaus for Africa and Population and Humanitarian Assistance, he had the fortuitous opportunity to document in rare still photographs and motion pictures historic moments in the developmental evolution and activities of the first years of independence of many African countries and African leaders. During his professional career, he influenced these countries' development policies in the communications, education, population, and economic areas. He also repeatedly traveled to more than 25 of Africa's then 51 countries, and to several European countries, during his career.

After retiring to his hometown of Atlanta in 1985, Davis periodically served as an official escort for more than 50 international visitors brought to the United States by the U.S. Information Agency. He tried to initiate the concept of having escorts like himself document the visits through photographs as well as written reports, so that these visitors could have a lasting visual memory of their experiences in the United States.

Before he died, in July 1993, Davis' friends from Atlanta curated his final exhibition, "An Exhibition Honoring the Career of Griffith Jerome Davis, Photographer, Journalist, Diplomat and Native Atlantan," at the Atrium on Sweet Auburn in Georgia.

My father received multiple awards for his work during his lifetime and posthumously, and I dedicate the Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives to excavating, highlighting, and sharing his images and stories. May he serve as an inspiration to others to take the road less traveled. ■

2024 AFSA National High School Essay Contest

Ian Rosenzweig, a junior at the Haverford Academy in Haverford, Pa., is the winner of this year's AFSA National High School Essay Contest. He wrote about the threat that disinformation poses to democracy. The runner-up is Sarah Hutchison of Pulaski Academy in Little Rock, Ark., who wrote about China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Ian Rosenzweig

This year, AFSA received 435 submissions from students across 43 states and numerous locations abroad. The winners were selected through three randomized, blind rounds of judging.

In addition to the winner and runner-up, the judges also named eight honorable mentions: Salma M. Eid from Little Rock, Ark.; Kenji P. Farrell from Commerce Township, Mich.; Kaleolani Ilac from Santa Maria, Calif.; Jason N. Lee from San Jose, Calif.; Bradley A. Miller from Vadnais Heights, Minn.; Maadhavan Prasanna from Lakeville, Conn.; Gerald Qiu from Westborough, Mass.; and Sofia D. Yeromenko from Tulsa, Okla.

AFSA is pleased to have received so many essay submissions this year and appreciates the support of our valued educational partners: the National Student Leadership Conference and Semester at Sea.

Read Ian's winning essay on page 67.

CALENDAR

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

October 7
12-1; 1:30-2:30 p.m.
AFSA Welcomes October 2024 Orientation Class (I)

October 8
12-1:15 p.m.
USAID Transition Webinar

October 15
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board meeting

October 16
12:30-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Welcomes October 2024 Orientation Class (II)

October 16
3-5 p.m.
AFSA Awards Ceremony

October 17
12:15-1 p.m.
AFSA Welcomes the JSTP

Dog Ban Negotiations Underway

Following heavy pressure from both State and AFSA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agreed to relax restrictions on importing dogs to the U.S. for government employees on orders, but only until Dec. 3, 2024.

COURTESY OF WALTER PENNY

Macaroni Penny getting ready to move overseas.

U.S. government employees located in high-risk rabies countries who will transfer (PCS) to the United States with their pet dog(s) between Sept. 1 and Dec. 31, 2024, will still need to apply for a special authorization from the CDC if their dog holds only a foreign certification of rabies vaccination.

FS members can apply to the CDC on the form at https://bit.ly/DogBanForm. State Department employees can find the link on the PCS Portal and at the A/LM/OPS/TMP SharePoint. Note that the application must be submitted to CDC using your official government email.

After Dec. 31, 2024, the new regulations will apply—see 24 State 57712 for details.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, State VP Tina Wong, and AFSA staff met with members of CDC's Office of Policy and Regulatory Affairs in the Division of Global Migration Health on July 25.

Yazdgerdi emphasized that some 40 percent of Foreign Service members are dog owners, and many of them serve overseas in high-risk countries. He thanked the CDC representatives for hearing AFSA's concerns and for temporarily relaxing the restrictions for government employees.

Continued on page 62

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Deconstructing Accountability at State

Let's take stock of the State Department's Year of Accountability.

Director General Marcia Bernicat told the workforce: "We all have a role to play to create a better workplace through personal accountability, and the supervisor's role is to hold employees accountable for their conduct and performance."

The Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) resources are great, but what does the department mean by accountability?

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) current guidance states: "Accountability means being held answerable for accomplishing a goal or assignment.

Managers can practice accountability for positive results by … setting clear, challenging yet attainable goals and objectives and give [employees] the authority to accomplish those goals; coach employees when they request help, and support employees in all aspects of the job; monitor progress towards goals, and provide feedback that includes credible, useful performance measures; provide the training and resources employees need to do the work; and recognize employees for good performance, both formally and informally."

Our institution has many of the mechanisms to promote accountability, but we need to make sure they are used effectively. The recent federal employee viewpoints survey and the department's DEIA climate survey underscore the pervasive workforce perception that accountability is weaker at the higher levels of the department. That perception is grounded in employees' lived experiences.

The department's career senior leadership must consistently show how they are held to account for taking care of the workforce across a set of measurable standards. Here are some best practices:

Take Mandatory Trainings Seriously. Put into practice what you learn from these courses, such as EEO/Diversity Awareness, No Fear Act, Ethics Training, Mitigating Unconscious Bias, and Fundamentals of Supervision—they provide critical training and information for our workforce.

Support Each Other. Take part in bystander intervention and mandatory reporting of any suspected incidents of workplace assault, violence, or discrimination. Employees are protected from retaliation and should be courageous in reporting unacceptable behavior in the workplace, immediately. Read more in the department's EEO Complaints: Demystifying the Formal Process (24 State 86134) and the new Anti-Bullying Policy (24 State 33868).

Take Ownership of Performance Evaluations (EERs). Managers must document performance issues and offer supervisees timely opportunities to improve and share their perspectives. An EER with documentable negative performance issues must not be a surprise to the employee and should be considered a last resort during that rating period when all other interim measures to help the employee improve have not worked. Managers can seek further resources from the department's Manager Support Unit.

Employees need to take counseling sessions seriously and show tangible evidence of how they are working on those deficiencies and communicate further training needs.

Interpersonal conflicts must be resolved. The new Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center can help when it is up and running. Deputy chiefs of mission, section heads, deputy directors, and other managers need to have oversight over more junior managers and mentor entry-level officers. Everyone in a team, office, and mission must create a safe and encouraging workplace.

Prioritize Mental Health. If you see any colleagues struggling, take the time to check up on them and encourage them to seek counseling. Dedicated counselors and social workers in Employee Consultative Services will work with you confidentially.

Speak Up. Engage with GTM and regional bureau human resources professionals on a regular basis, not just when problems arise. When needed, the DG Direct channel is available to every member of our workforce.

GTM puts out names of volunteers approved to serve on EER tenure boards, promotion boards, and meritorious step increase boards. Check out the cables announcing these names and seek recusal requests, when applicable, and report other concerns about any names on those lists. The department vets them and seeks AFSA's concurrence before their release. It is rare, but possible, that the vetting system misses something.

We each play a role in shifting attitudes within our institution. What really matters is that our actions enable human flourishing within the Foreign Service. We are the best representatives of the United States when we care about each other and about the people we interact with around the world, every day.

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Prepping for Your Retirement

Every year we lose colleagues and friends to retirement, but we tend to see more retirements in years of political transition. Not surprisingly, then, 2025 is shaping up to be a big year. So, what better time than to remind members that it's never too early to prepare? Whether you're thinking about retiring in 12 months or 12 years, plan early and plan to change your plan.

There are many personal and professional questions to answer ahead of retiring: Can I afford it? Can I work for USAID or an implementing partner after I retire? How much will my pension be, and how much will I pay for health insurance? How do I withdraw money from my TSP?

Helpful resources are available through HCTM (https://my.usaid.gov/HCTM/esb-retirement) and AFSA (https://afsa.org/retirement-resources), but the answers will depend on your situation.

First, you need to become familiar with the various terms and types of retirement. Do you know your minimum retirement age? Are you planning to defer or postpone retirement? Are you eligible for a retirement supplement? Did your Peace Corps or other U.S. government (USG) service get credited correctly?

The answers affect not only your retirement pay but also the process and paperwork you need to prepare. The agency has a handy "FACT Sheet" to walk you through these definitions and get you started on your retirement paperwork. Step 1: check your eOPF (this isn't the only time I'll remind you to refer to your eOPF—it's an important document).

Too often, AFSA talks with FSOs trying to retire, or already retired, who run into complications that delay their final day, the start of their retirement checks, or the amount of their monthly payment. The most common issue is creditable service.

When you joined, you most likely completed a form listing any previous USG employment. Depending on the type of position, you received "credit" for that service. This went to setting your service computation date.

It also may have allowed you to "buy in" to the pension system for those years served if you were not previously part of a USG retirement plan. Sadly, many FSOs forget to buy in for past service, notably prior Peace Corps service. Missing service years or failure to buy in will reduce your pension.

If you have creditable service but failed to buy those years back, it may not be too late. If you're uncertain whether you did it correctly, check your eOPF file (second eOPF reminder!). The State Department has an excellent primer on the Foreign Service retirement system (www.state.gov/rnet/), and USAID FSOs are 100 percent covered by this system.

AFSA has many retirement resources for members and sponsors several retirement seminars each year.

The second most common mistake is financial. As FSOs, we have three retirement income streams: pension, Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), and Social Security. We control two of these. Our pension is determined by the average of our "high three" salary years, while our TSP is determined by our contributions and investment portfolio.

You can maximize your pension by serving longer at higher levels and buying in for creditable service, but there is a limit. Your eOPF should include all your SF-50s showing every step and grade increase throughout your career (another eOPF reminder). Double-check your eOPF every year to ensure these are in your file.

AFSA has many retirement resources for members and sponsors several retirement seminars each year. You can also access a list of investment advisers, financial planners, and other experts via the AFSA website.

The agency holds similar retirement and investment seminars throughout the year. The best advice I got when I joined was to maximize my TSP contributions. Check your TSP account at least once a year to make sure your salary deductions are correct (not an eOPF reminder, but a good reminder nonetheless). Knowing your portfolio distribution and your account balance will help you plan your retirement.

Finally, you can find additional planning resources and a good retirement calculator to help you strategize your retirement at https://tsp.gov.

It's never too early, but it can be too late. Making a smooth transition to a secure retirement is largely within your control, but it can get complicated. Save yourself some anxiety by seeking out advice and checking your eOPF (final reminder!) and your TSP account at least once a year.

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A Season to Harvest

Here in the northern hemisphere, autumn is upon us. The days are growing shorter. The air is crisper. Leaves are turning crimson, grapes are being pressed, and friends gather around tailgates each weekend.

Throughout most of our nation, it's harvest season. It's the time when we gather fruits from the year's labor. As I write this, it's still blueberry season in the upper Midwest. I'll continue to treasure the time I spent as a boy helping my grandfather harvest blueberries on the farm in northern Indiana. Biased perhaps, but I've never tasted better.

In our line of work, it's also harvest season. The turning of the fiscal year brings both reflection and preparation.

In the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), it's also a time of celebration for an exceptional year. By statute and by principle, our Service is one that has clear organizational metrics. This helps us measure our overall "rubber meets the road" results for U.S. companies and for our economy as a whole.

In recent years, FCS has returned to the U.S. taxpayer more than $400 for every $1 invested in appropriations as we have supported and enabled billions of dollars of advocacy, export promotion, and foreign direct investment wins.

If FCS had an annual report, all our graphs would be trending up and to the right. The photos in such a report would highlight handshakes, ribbon cuttings, and celebratory smiles resulting from business wins that improve our foreign policy and strategic competitiveness.

From microchips and telecom to energy and critical minerals, FCS leads the government in our ability to deliver tangible and tactical results for U.S. companies that advance our foreign policy agenda.

Our metrics this year will be exceptionally impressive. Our SelectUSA summit had the highest-ever turnout, and we assisted tens of thousands of companies, large and small. We have helped close more advocacy deals than ever before.

Our influence is lauded by our clients, strategic partners, and senior interagency leadership. With all our incredible success this past year, it's right to celebrate. Yet as with every harvest, weeds have been sown amid the grain.

We closed the past fiscal year with fewer officers than we've had in recent memory. The number of FCS local staff has also decreased by more than 15 to 20 percent in some markets. The lead time to deliver our core services is being measured in months rather than weeks.

Officers are regularly working 70-80 hours per week. Home leaves and R&Rs are being delayed, and 97 percent of our corps believes that the budget situation is negatively affecting morale. Of the positions hired in the past few years in the International Trade Administration, most have been for roles in HQ.

While strategic global competitors threaten to salt our fields, FCS is underfunded for the 45th year in a row. With ever-growing demands from HQ, clients, and chiefs of mission, FCS offices are spread so thin that more than 50 percent of our officers are considering leaving the Service.

To be fair, there have been notable and important operational wins as well. Our assignments process has started earlier, promotions have been announced faster, and relations between management and AFSA are collaborative and cordial.

The challenging weeds that hinder our ability to thrive are well known: shrinking budgets with increasing expenses, delayed and often convoluted internal processes, misaligned incentives, uncertainty about the future, and so on.

As an organization we must constantly ask if we should plant more seeds of policy efforts to please principals or if, instead, we should continue to deliver bread-and-butter services for our clients—American businesses.

Unfortunately, our clients don't write our EERs, and pleasing the principal never got anyone fired. Recent organizational surveys, as well as several early retirements, have revealed the gravity of our current situation.

While strategic global competitors threaten to salt our fields, FCS is underfunded for the 45th year in a row. With ever-growing demands from HQ, clients, and chiefs of mission, FCS offices are spread so thin that more than 50 percent of our officers are considering leaving the Service.

These challenges are a blight on the grain of our organization. As our awesome FCS teams around the world reap impressive wins and strategic deals, during the year ahead I will continue to urge leadership to invest in removing the weeds so that, together, we can thrive.

AFSA Welcomes New Foreign Service Cohort

AFSA hosted three welcome lunches for approximately 225 new State Foreign Service members on July 29 and Aug. 8.

This group included 39 Rangel Fellows, seven Consular Fellows, six Pickering Fellows, and three Presidential Management Fellows.

In a shift from recent trends in which the majority were specialists, 53 percent of the class are generalists and 47 percent specialists. The class is composed of 57 percent men and 43 percent women, with women representing more than half of the generalist cohort (52 percent) but only 34 percent of the specialist group.

About half the class has prior affiliations with the State Department, while another quarter brings experience from other federal government roles. A significant portion of the class, 37 percent, has four to 10 years of experience, while 38 percent have 11 to 20 years. More than 60 percent hold master's degrees, with the rest holding at least a bachelor's degree.

This linguistically rich class speaks nearly 50 languages, with a third fluent in two or more languages. Common languages include Spanish, French, Arabic, German, and Chinese, while others speak rarer languages such as Edo, Hausa, Mooré, and Twi.

The professional backgrounds of the new members range from architects and attorneys to wedding planners and medical professionals.

Among the group are individuals with unique experiences, such as discovering a Roman legion base, surviving a bear attack, and even performing as a backup singer for Aretha Franklin.

AFSA wishes them all the best as they embark on their global journeys!

2023 Annual Report: Legal Defense Fund

The AFSA Legal Defense Fund (LDF) supported one active-duty Foreign Service member and one retired member in 2023, for a total of $25,000.

The first employee was contesting disciplinary action before the Foreign Service Grievance Board. While such cases normally would not meet the criteria for LDF support, the facts in this case were compelling.

The department waited more than a decade to propose discipline against the employee, sustained a charge that Diplomatic Security had not sustained in its investigation, and imposed a penalty that was extremely harsh compared to penalties the department imposed against other employees who committed similar offenses.

The second case involved a member who was called to testify before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations relating to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

As with the position AFSA took regarding members who were called to testify on the performance of their official duties in connection with the impeachment inquiry, the association does not believe members should have to pay out of pocket in such circumstances.

Member dues are not used for the LDF. It is funded through donations and, occasionally, through attorney fees paid by the agencies when AFSA prevails in a case before the Foreign Service Grievance Board. In 2023, $11,575 was raised through donations from members and supporters.

The fund ended calendar year 2023 with $371,705.

The Legal Defense Fund was created in 2007. The fund provides financial assistance, typically to one or two members a year, whose cases present legal issues of far-reaching significance to the Foreign Service as a whole.

Such cases often include issues of due process, fundamental fairness, or, as noted above, involve the employee's performance of their official duties. The LDF enables members to retain private attorneys with expertise in a particular area of law, such as federal workers compensation law or litigation before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that AFSA attorneys do not have.

In other cases, while AFSA staff possess the legal expertise to represent the member, they do not have the necessary time to represent the member due to the high number of cases and labor management issues they handle.

For additional information about the LDF Fund, please visit afsa.org.

—Jay Carreiro, LDF Committee Chair

2024 AFSA Professional Development Program Survey

In July 2024, AFSA asked its members to respond to a Professional Development Program (PDP) survey.

More than 800 generalist and specialist members shared their understanding of and experience with PDP, the sole checklist of requirements to compete for the Senior Foreign Service once the Career Development Program (CDP) sunsets at the end of 2025.

Note: While generalists all complete the same PDP requirements, specialists have requirements tailored to their specialties. Hardship and leadership training requirements are shared by both groups.

Principal Findings

Survey stats. The survey had 856 respondents, all currently at the FS-2 and FS-1 levels. Respondents comprised 699 generalists and 157 specialists, with 376 total women respondents, 451 men, 2 nonbinary, and 27 who chose not to say.

White respondents numbered 603, Black American 54, Asian American 54, Hispanic American 42, mixed race 38, and Hawaii or Pacific Islander 1. Another 64 respondents marked "other" or chose not to specify.

PDP hardship requirements. Approximately 36 percent of respondents reported they had not yet completed the PDP hardship requirements. When asked why, the most common reason given was that serving in hardship posts would entail family separation.

Gender gap in hardship service and bidding. The survey highlighted a significant gender gap among generalists, with 41 percent of women generalists not fulfilling the hardship service requirement, compared to just 32 percent of men generalists.

The survey also highlighted a gender gap in generalist bidding on hardship posts, with a significant difference between bidders on 25 percent and 20 percent posts. Forty-three percent of generalist respondents said that since being promoted to FS-2, they had not bid on 25 percent hardship positions.

In examining further, we found that 50 percent of women (versus 36 percent of men) have not bid on 25 percent hardship posts since promotion; however, slightly more women than men (46 percent versus 44 percent) have bid on 20 percent hardship posts since promotion.

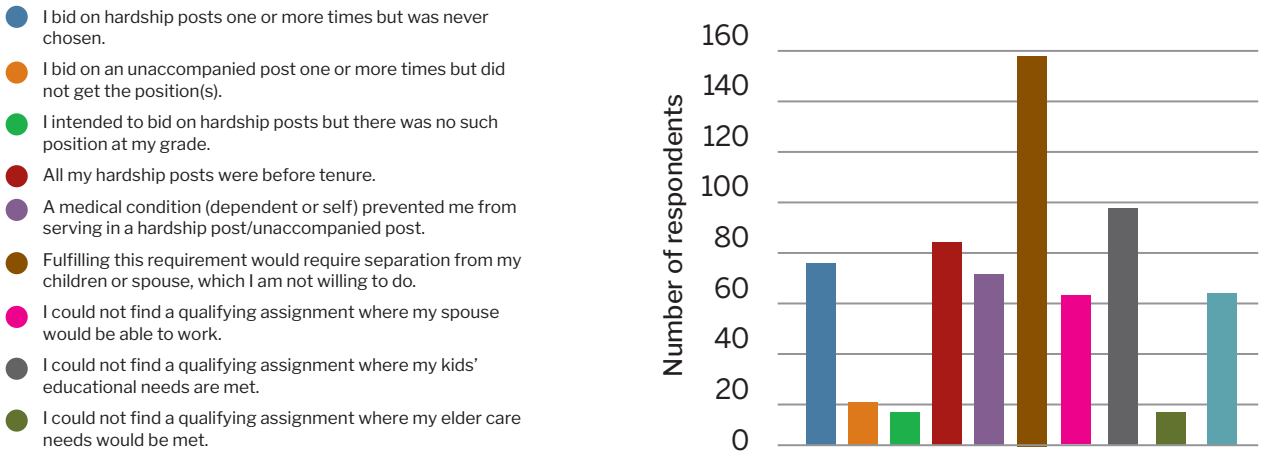
Note: When we examined the percentage of generalist respondents who did not complete the PDP hardship requirements by various ethnic and racial groups, we found that these groups were either completing the requirements at the same rate or better than their white counterparts.

Generalist Special Incentive Post (SIP) gender gap. Forty-six percent of men generalist respondents had served in SIP posts versus just 28 percent of women generalists.

FS-2 vs. FS-1 hardship completion. As expected, there was a gap between FS-2 and FS-1 respondents, with nearly twice as many FS-2s refraining from bidding on 25 percent and 20 percent posts as FS-1s.

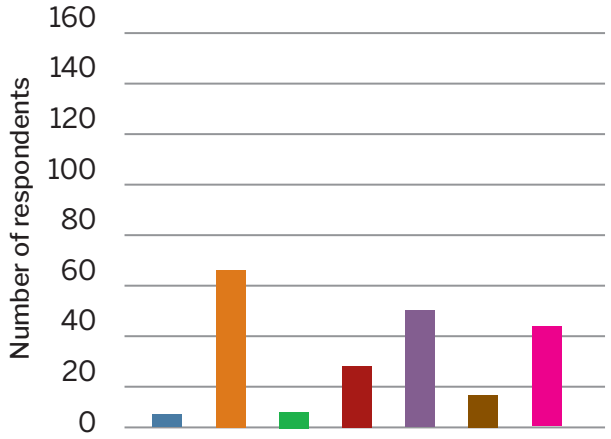
Continued on next page

If your answer was no to completing the hardship requirements, what is the reason(s) you have not yet completed them? (Check all that apply.)



If your answer was no to the foreign language requirement question, what is the reason(s) you did not complete it? (Check all that apply.)

- My dependent's educational requirements precluded service in a non-English-speaking country.
- I spoke a foreign language and tested at 3/3 prior to tenure but have not been able to serve again in a country using that target language.
- I have a learning disability that has hindered my ability to acquire the foreign language.
- I completed my language training but could not test at FSI at the required level to complete this part of the PDP.
- I have some foreign language skills but have not been able to secure time for additional language training that would get me the required score.
- I believe I speak one or more foreign languages at the required level for the PDP, but despite multiple FSI language tests, I have not achieved the required score.
- Other.



Seventy percent of generalists said they did not consider the PDP when planning their bidding strategies.

Language requirements. Eighty-one percent of generalist respondents said they had already completed the PDP language requirements.

The most common reason given for not completing is that the Foreign Service member already has the required level of language skill. We interpret this to mean the Foreign Service is recruiting those who already have second-language proficiency and/or training Foreign Service members early on to a proficiency level in foreign languages.

Other PDP requirements, including leadership training. Eighty-one percent of generalist respondents said they had completed the mix of overseas and domestic posts required by the PDP. The cost of living in Washington was a factor steering bidders away from domestic jobs.

Sixty percent of generalist respondents had completed the global/functional positions, and 77 percent had fulfilled a PDP "elective" such as a detail, long-term training, or an out-of-cone assignment.

Forty-four percent of generalist respondents had not fulfilled leadership training requirements, citing scheduling difficulties or lack of training slots.

Waiver process. Eighty-five percent of all respondents said they were unaware of the CDP/PDP waiver process.

AFSA Recommendations

AFSA recommends the State Department explore why many Foreign Service members associate high-differential service posts with family separation and review bidding incentives accordingly.

In addition, the department should evaluate whether specific PDP requirements disproportionately affect certain groups, including women, parents, and tandem couples, and consider piloting a limited "point" system that allows cumulative service to count toward the requirement of 20 percent differential service after tenure.

AFSA endorses respondent recommendations to count Foreign Service tandem spouses not working in the mission at a hardship post as having fulfilled a hardship requirement and, similarly, to enable tandem spouses holding DETO positions at hardship posts to have fulfilled a hardship post requirement.

AFSA sees a need to analyze how the recent "freezing" of positions overseas, especially language-designated positions, has prevented some Foreign Service members from fulfilling the PDP requirement to serve in hardship posts and to have served in a mix of domestic and overseas posts.

The creation of an employee profile platform would allow Foreign Service members to self-assess which PDP criteria they need to fulfill as they are bidding.

AFSA agrees with specialist respondents who called for the expansion of out-of-cone (or out-of-specialty-and-language) assignments for generalists and detailees.

AFSA believes State has more educating to do on the PDP requirements—fully 25 percent of generalists and 37 percent of specialists said they were unaware of the PDP requirements, including hardship, before taking the AFSA survey. ■

—Julie Nutter

Medical Clearance Modernization

As part of the State Department's modernization initiative, the medical clearance process was substantially reformed in 2024.

For decades, the Bureau of Medical Services (MED) determined where you could not be assigned if you or one of your family members did not have a Class 1 clearance (cleared for worldwide service).

MED would determine whether a medical condition could be successfully managed at a particular post, and then the employee or the family member would receive a post-specific Class 2 clearance (e.g., "Class 2, cleared for Ruritania").

Parents of children with special educational needs faced another hurdle. Those parents had to get a provisional acceptance letter from a school at post before MED would issue the child a Class 2 clearance and the employee could be paneled to their assignment.

AFSA advocated for years against this practice, arguing that it inappropriately conflated educational and medical issues, and the department should not be acting *in loco parentis*, because parents could be trusted to do what was best for their children.

In 2024, MED adopted an entirely new philosophy toward clearances, which was reflected in dramatic changes to the process.

MED has now taken the position that its role is to help employees and their family members manage their care wherever they choose to go, not to dictate where they can be assigned.

These changes were outlined in three cables: 24 State 39412, 24 State 41964, and 24 State 55578. All are available in the SMART archives, and AFSA recommends members read them.

Reflecting this change, the old clearance terminology is being updated and will be implemented starting January 2025. Individuals will receive a clearance using the new terminology when they update their clearance.

In 24 State 39412, MED explained that with the evolution and advancements in the global healthcare industry, the new clearance process would "engage the employee in a collaborative dialogue regarding their health needs in the context of potential posts of assignment in which they are interested" to help employees make informed decisions about their bidding priorities and take ownership of their health care needs.

For example, if someone with asthma wanted to bid on a post with bad air pollution, MED would have a conversation with that person about what would be involved in managing their care at that post, but the ultimate decision on whether to bid would be the employee's. That person would receive an "OZ" clearance.

MED did reserve the right not to issue a clearance if an individual seemed "unable or unwilling" to take on responsibility for their care needs that weren't available at post, or if MED determined there was a "substantial risk of harm."

OLD TERMINOLOGY

Class 1	Worldwide available
Class 2	Post-specific
Class 5	Domestic only
Class 7	Pending

NEW TERMINOLOGY

O	Overseas eligible
OZ	Overseas eligible, enrolled in MED Care Management
D	Domestic only
R	In review

24 State 41964 clarified that the same consultation process will apply to mental health as well, and that the mental health review period has been reduced from seven years to two.

24 State 55578 announced that children with special educational needs no longer needed to be provisionally accepted to a school before they could receive a MED clearance.

Instead, the parents of children with identified special educational needs would be required to engage in a mandatory consultation process with MED's Child and Family Program (CFP), one meeting per clearance review period (per PCS).

MED will no longer deny a medical clearance to a child with special educational needs on the basis that the child has not been provisionally accepted to a school, and the medical clearance will be adjudicated only on the basis of medical needs.

After the mandatory consultation, it will be the parents' choice whether to stay involved with MED regarding their child's needs.

It's important to note that the medical clearance process for children with special educational needs is separate from the Special Needs Education Allowance (SNEA) approval process, which is detailed in 3 FAM 3280.

Continued on next page

Medical Clearance
Continued from page 59

MED has taken pains to emphasize that the new procedures will not result in anyone who has a Class 2/OZ clearance, or a family member with such a clearance, being forced to serve at a post without the medical or educational resources to support them and their family.

Everyone will have an administrative opt-in to make sure the medical clearance is attached to their file to prevent them from being assigned to a post without those resources.

Those who feel comfortable, however, managing their and/or their family's care at a post even though there are resource concerns will not be barred from an assignment to that post.

The referenced cables include links to FAQs and other resources providing more information about these changes, as well as POCs for more information, including AskMED@state.gov, and we encourage our members to familiarize themselves with those.

Members with questions that aren't addressed by those resources can contact AFSA at member@afsa.org.

—Heather Townsend

AFSA Governing Board Meeting, July 17, 2024

The Governing Board met on July 17, 2024.

Committee on Elections
The board agreed to appoint an individual to serve on the Committee on Elections.

***Foreign Service Journal* Editorial Board**
The board agreed to appoint an individual from FCS to serve on *The Foreign Service Journal* Editorial Board.

Awards and Plaques Committee
The board agreed on the winners of the William R. Rivkin, Avis Bohlen, M. Juanita Guess, Nelson B. Delavan, and Mark Palmer awards.

Notes from the Office of General Counsel

Your Weingarten Rights

AFSA would like to remind members of the right to union or other representation (e.g., private counsel) during certain interviews conducted by their agency that could lead to disciplinary action.

Under the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, Foreign Service members in AFSA's bargaining unit have the right ("Weingarten Right") to be represented by AFSA in an investigative interview if they reasonably believe it could result in disciplinary action, and they request representation.

Weingarten Rights are not like Miranda warnings. The investigating official is not required to inform employees of this right at the beginning of each interview.

When employees invoke their Weingarten Right, investigating officials must either allow a reasonable period of time for a union representative to attend the interview (3 FAM 4322.3(h)) or advise the employee that they do not wish to wait until union representation is available and plan to carry on their investigation without interviewing the employee.

The employee then has the choice to stop the interview or to proceed without representation. We strongly advise employees to stop the interview and contact AFSA immediately.

All Foreign Service members, regardless of bargaining unit status, have the right to have a legal or other representative (e.g., a co-worker) present during a Diplomatic Security, Office of Inspector General, Office of Security, or other investigatory interview (3 FAM 4322.3(g) and 4325.2).

AFSA is available to assist its members in such interviews. Alternatively, employees may retain private counsel to represent them. If an employee maintains a professional liability insurance policy, they should contact their insurance carrier to see if the carrier will provide private counsel.

If employees are contacted by DS, OIG, or their agency's office of security, they should ask the individual requesting the interview if they are the subject of the investigation and whether their participation is required (i.e., compelled) or voluntary.

We strongly advise that employees seek guidance and representation from AFSA or private counsel prior to agreeing to any interview.

We encourage you to review our guidance on investigations, which can be found at https://bit.ly/AFSAweingarten.

To contact AFSA, email us at afsa@state.gov or member@afsa.org.

State and Local Advocacy

AFSA Meets with D.C. Councilmember Anita Bonds

AFSA recently had a productive meeting with D.C. Councilmember Anita Bonds, marking a significant step in our ongoing efforts to advocate for Foreign Service members and their families.

AFSA thanked Council member Bonds for her leadership in sponsoring a resolution in the Council of the District of Columbia to commemorate the centennial of the Foreign Service. The resolution was adopted on May 7, 2024.

Bonds, who successfully garnered support across the council for this resolution, acknowledged the importance of recognizing Foreign Service members, many of whom call Washington, D.C., home when not on overseas assignment.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi highlighted the organization's role as the leading voice for the Foreign Service both on Capitol Hill and at state and local levels across the country.

Yazdgerdi also raised a pressing issue affecting many of our members: enrollment inconsistencies in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) system that create problems for Foreign Service families attempting to enroll their children in D.C. public schools upon returning from overseas assignments.

Currently, DCPS enrollment and residency guidelines offer exceptions for military and foreign embassy personnel who wish to enroll their children in D.C. schools before physically residing in the district. However, these exceptions do not extend to Foreign Service families, who face similar challenges with frequent international relocations.

AFSA urged the D.C. Council and DCPS to address this discrepancy by extending the same enrollment residency guideline exceptions to Foreign Service personnel. We emphasized that this change would provide crucial support to our families, ensuring educational stability and continuity for Foreign Service children.

AFSA/SEAN O'GORMAN

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi with Councilmember Anita Bonds.

AFSA looks forward to continued collaboration with Councilmember Bonds and her staff on this and other D.C.-specific issues that may arise in the future. We remain committed to advocating for the interests of our members and their families, ensuring that their unique needs are recognized and addressed at all levels of government.

We will keep our membership updated on any developments regarding the DCPS enrollment policy and other initiatives that affect our community in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. ■

—Sean O'Gorman

AFSA Meets with New Employee Organization

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, Secretary Sue Saarnio, State VP Tina Wong, and AFSA staff recently met with representatives of the newly established Limited Non-Career Appointment Association (LNAA).

LNAA President and U.S. Vice Consul to Islamabad Donald Valicenti expressed gratitude for AFSA's ongoing advocacy on behalf of LNAs and outlined the group's goals on behalf of its membership, emphasizing the interests of Consular Fellows, CA-EFMs, CS LNAs, RN LNAs, and others.

During the meeting, LNAA and AFSA discussed LNA advocacy items, such as positive changes to current recruitment processes for LNAs who wish to become career members of the Foreign Service, additional points for LNAs on the FSO register, and the rectification of pay and leave issues.

For more information, please contact LNAA at LNAAMember@state.gov. ■

Dog Ban
Continued from page 52

The CDC reported on several areas of concern to AFSA members:

Airline Waivers. The CDC reported that, while an air waybill will remain necessary for dogs transported as cargo, airlines will be able to seek a waiver—initially for 90 days, but extendable for up to an additional nine months—for dogs traveling in cabin or as checked baggage without a waybill.

More than 100 airlines (including Lufthansa) have already applied for 90-day waivers, and several have been granted the initial 90-day waiver.

Certification of Foreign Rabies Vaccination. AFSA pointed out the difficulties, in many countries, of finding a host government official empowered to certify the legitimacy of a veterinarian's signature and credentials.

The CDC recognized the problem and stated that a signature will not be required before Dec. 31. The CDC is assessing the feasibility of the requirement for the future. (Note that Mission China has reached an agreement with the Chinese government on a procedure to satisfy this requirement beginning on July 31, 2024.)

CDC-Registered Animal Care Facilities. The CDC website lists only six CDC-registered animal care facilities (ACFs) at ports of entry (POEs) to the U.S. They are working to increase the number of ACFs, up to the 18 airports with port health stations. Several ACFs have already applied and are being evaluated. Staffing more than 18 POEs would be problematic.

Serology Test Laboratories. AFSA raised the issue of the lack of serology test labs in Africa and Central Asia. CDC acknowledged the problem and is looking into further labs but acknowledged that there are issues in developing countries.

The good news, however, is that the CDC will consider a serology test valid for the life of the dog.

Overseas Tours. AFSA emphasized, and the CDC acknowledged, that many Foreign Service members (including USAID, FCS, and FAS) serve 4-year tours—often in countries where government capacity and access to official government services are difficult or nonexistent.

DoD Veterinarians. The CDC mentioned that there are Department of Defense veterinarians overseas who serve all USG personnel. However, these veterinarians are generally not in countries that are at high risk for rabies.

AFSA will continue its important work on behalf of our members who are pet owners.

FSJ Editorial Board Welcomes and Farewells

The Foreign Service Journal proudly introduces three new members to its Editorial Board: Foreign Service specialist medical practitioner Suzanne August, public diplomacy FSO Mathew Hagengruber, and Foreign Commercial Service Officer Paul Oliva.

Suzanne August currently serves as a medical provider in Juba, after joining the Foreign Service in 2016. Her FS career includes assignments in Guatemala City, Islamabad, Amman, and Ankara.

August's academic credentials include a doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degree from Rush University in Chicago, a master's in public health (MPH) from the University of California, Berkeley, and both a bachelor's and master's degree in nursing from the University of San Francisco and the University of California, San Francisco, respectively.

Paul Oliva

Suzanne August

Mathew Hagengruber

Mathew Hagengruber is currently in the economic tradecraft course at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). He joined the State Department Foreign Service in 2011 and has been posted to Hermosillo, Moscow, Sofia, and Kyiv.

Hagengruber's academic background includes a bachelor's in science journalism and natural resources management from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He also has prior experiences as a newspaper reporter and Peace Corps volunteer in Ukraine.

Foreign Commercial Service Officer Paul Oliva brings a wealth of experience in international trade and economic diplomacy to his current role as a senior adviser to the deputy assistant secretary for Asia in the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration.

Oliva has also served in Mexico City, Kuala Lumpur, and Frankfurt. He has a bachelor's in international studies from the University of the Pacific and a master's in international affairs from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

A fond farewell and deep thanks to Harry Kopp, Aileen Nandi, and Larry Wohlers, who are leaving the board. We thank them for their thoughtful guidance and contributions to the editorial direction of the *Journal*.

NEWS BRIEF

Foreign Service Selection "Bump Up"

In an Aug. 12 departmentwide email, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma announced a significant change to the Foreign Service selection process.

Starting with the Fiscal Year 2025 orientation classes, entry-level candidates who have served a minimum of 48 months in positions abroad graded FS-6 or above will receive a "bump-up" to their register score.

This adjustment acknowledges the valuable experience gained by those who have served overseas, including consular fellows, limited non-career appointments, and other roles. The credit will be akin to the additional points awarded to candidates with critical language skills.

This new initiative is part of the department's ongoing efforts to modernize its workforce under the Secretary's Modernization Agenda.

Employee Spotlight

25 Years of Service: Zlatana Badrich

This month, we shine a spotlight on Zlatana Badrich, senior staff attorney in AFSA's Office of the General Counsel. She has been with AFSA since 1998.


Zlatana Badrich

Growing up as a first-generation American in Washington, D.C., Zlatana is a native Washingtonian. She cultivated an early passion for international affairs with a bachelor's degree from the Elliott School at George Washington University and a law degree from the Catholic University of America.

Before joining AFSA, Zlatana held a part-time job at GW's Engineering School and interned for a judge at the Court of Claims during law school. A pivotal summer internship as a law clerk at the Federal Labor Relations Authority introduced her to federal sector labor law.

Zlatana Badrich served as AFSA's deputy general counsel for 17 years and continues to make a significant contribution in her current role as senior staff attorney.

She assists members daily with grievances related to tenure and promotion, low rankings, and EER issues, as well as disciplinary matters and security clearance suspensions and revocations. Zlatana also provides vital support during DS and OIG investigations.

Her experience includes serving on negotiating teams for the CBAs of the State Department, FAS, APHIS, and USAGM constituencies. Zlatana has also played a key role in numerous Bylaw amendments and Governing Board elections, serving as a staff liaison for the relevant committees.

What stands out most about working for AFSA? "The people are the heart of AFSA, both my colleagues and our members. If I did not work with such a dedicated, conscientious, and caring set of colleagues, I would not have stayed for 25 years," Zlatana shares.

Zlatana is fluent in four languages, cherishes traveling with her family, and takes great pride in her role as a mother. Additionally, she is an avid fan of Arsenal FC.

When asked where she sees herself in the future, Zlatana reflects on her deep commitment to AFSA: "Hard to say, but given how the last 25 years have gone, it's quite likely I will still be at AFSA in some form or another!"

Here's to many more years of dedicated service!

AFSA Welcomes New Program Coordinator

Indigo Stegner has joined AFSA as a program coordinator on the membership engagement team. There, she will focus on supporting AFSA's scholarship and awards programs.


Indigo Stegner

She joins AFSA from Meridian International Center, where she spent two and a half years implementing and designing cultural exchanges and professional development programs funded by the U.S. State Department, Fortune 500 companies, and other U.S. government agencies.

Before joining Meridian, Indigo interned at the Women's Foreign Policy Group and the office of Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colo.).

Indigo graduated from The George Washington University with a BA in international affairs, concentrating in conflict resolution and minoring in Spanish and cross-cultural communication (anthropology).

At GW, Indigo was a part of the global bachelor's program and studied abroad at the Queen's University Belfast, where she researched the Northern Ireland peace process.

You can reach Indigo at stegner@afsa.org.

NEWS BRIEF

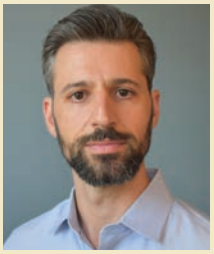
AFSA's *FSJ* Wins APEX Award for Publication Excellence

AFSA's flagship publication, *The Foreign Service Journal*, has been honored with a 2024 APEX Award for Publication Excellence in the Magazines, Journals & Tabloids print category. The award was given for the May 2023 edition of the *Journal*: "Public Diplomacy—The Cold War and Beyond."

The APEX Awards evaluate excellence in graphic design, editorial content, and overall communication effectiveness. The annual awards program is sponsored by Communications Concepts, Inc., consultants on business writing and communications.

What Is Foreign Policy Expertise?

On July 31, Dan Spokojny led an AFSA speaker series webinar on the critical question: What constitutes true foreign policy expertise? Spokojny is a former FSO, former member of AFSA's Governing Board, current *FSJ* Editorial Board member, and CEO of fp21, a foreign policy research nonprofit.


Dan Spokojny

Spokojny highlighted a concerning gap in the training and development of foreign policy professionals in his presentation. Unlike other public policy fields, foreign policy lacks standardized educational requirements, tradecraft, and professional skills necessary to prepare future leaders.

This absence, according to Spokojny, leaves U.S. foreign policy vulnerable to inefficiency and diminishes the role of diplomacy within national security.

Spokojny pointed to the limitations of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). While FSI offers more than 800 courses, he argued that the curriculum is fragmented and lacks coherence, with courses like "Negotiation Techniques" lasting only a few days and often taught by outside consultants.

Moreover, there is no system in place to ensure that best practices learned in training are applied on the job; nor are lessons from practical experience integrated back into the training programs.

This lack of focus on skills development is reflected in the growing number of political appointees occupying leadership positions in the State Department, particularly in geopolitically significant ambassadorships—a trend Spokojny attributes at least in part to the absence of rigorous training and standards.

The former FSO identified four essential components of foreign policy expertise: knowledge of U.S. foreign policy history and contemporary issues, understanding of bureaucracy and management, familiarity with academic theory and social science research methods, and proficiency in policymaking skills.

He emphasized that these components should form the foundation of a standardized curriculum to elevate the State Department's capabilities and ensure its leadership in global policymaking.

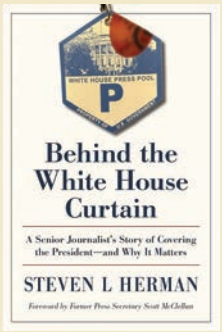
The webinar concluded with a call to action for career diplomats to demand higher standards for training and professional development. Spokojny urges the State Department to implement a robust curriculum that would professionalize diplomacy, enhance collaboration, and ensure that U.S. foreign policy is guided by expertise rather than politics.

AFSA members can access a recording of the event at afsa.org/video.

AFSA Hosts Book Notes Webinar

On July 23, AFSA hosted a Book Notes event with Steve Herman, a seasoned Foreign Service officer and former Voice of America (VOA) White House correspondent.

Herman was there to discuss his latest book, *Behind the White House Curtain*, which provides a glimpse into the Trump administration's White House press operations and the shifting landscape of journalism in a polarized era. The conversation was moderated by former AFSA President Ambassador Eric Rubin.



Herman, who has been an active member of the AFSA Governing Board as the U.S. Agency for Global Media representative for eight years, delved into his experiences covering the White House during a period marked by significant political and media turmoil.

He shared personal anecdotes and professional insights about the challenges journalists faced during this time, including the intense scrutiny and political pressures that often sought to undermine objective reporting.

Discussion also covered broader topics, such as the critical role of a free press and the ways in which political divisions have influenced media coverage.

Herman reflected on the historical evolution of White House press interactions, emphasizing the enduring importance of a free and independent press.

"A free press is fundamental to democracy because it allows for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives to be heard and scrutinized," he said.

Read Eric Rubin's review of Herman's book in the June 2024 edition of the *FSJ*.

AFSA's Good Works

Congressional Advocacy

To make the Foreign Service a more effective agent of U.S. international leadership, AFSA advocates on Capitol Hill for adequate resources for diplomatic readiness and for laws improving the quality of life of Foreign Service members and their families.

AFSA's congressional advocacy began in the 1970s when AFSA secured legislation establishing a Foreign Service grievance system to provide due process to those deprived of a right or benefit authorized by law or regulation. In 1982, AFSA hired its first congressional lobbyist. In 2002, AFSA formed a political action committee (PAC) to raise its profile on the Hill.

There is a long list of legislation over the past half-century for which AFSA was the leading proponent or played a key advocacy role beginning with the creation of the FS grievance system in 1975.

AFSA also helped secure the first of two decades of increased annual funding to upgrade embassy security following the terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998. The year after the attack, AFSA successfully negotiated for legislation to get law enforcement availability pay (LEAP) for Diplomatic Security special agents.

In 2002, AFSA convinced Congress to authorize retirement credit for certain eligible family members (EFM) who performed part-time, intermittent, temporary (PIT) service abroad. That same year, AFSA helped convince Congress not to move the visa function to the Department of Homeland Security after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Another big win occurred in 2003, when AFSA secured an exemption for Foreign Service members from capital gains taxation upon the sale of their primary residence after overseas service of up to 10 years. And in 2009, AFSA played a key role in the establishment of overseas comparability pay (OCP). Subsequently, AFSA has pushed for implementation and funding for the final third tranche of OCP to ensure Foreign Service members at the FS09-01 levels receive the equivalent of full D.C. locality pay when overseas.

AFSA led four years of successful efforts during the previous presidential administration (2017-2021) to build bipartisan congressional support to block massive budget cuts to diplomacy and development.

More recent AFSA advocacy wins include: blocking legislation that would have authorized a large mid-level entry program for the Foreign Service, and gaining parity with the military on a range of benefits, including in-state college tuition rate eligibility and the ability to break leases without financial penalties when given orders to serve overseas (both in 2021).

AFSA's Good Works

Each edition during our centennial year, The Foreign Service Journal *is profiling an AFSA program that advances the collective or individual interests of its members. In this edition, we feature congressional advocacy.*

AFSA helped Foreign Service families address mobile lifestyle concerns through 2022 legislation focused on spousal employment, including the authorization of locality pay for spouses serving on DETO (domestic employee teleworking overseas) agreements.

And in 2023, AFSA secured a Fly America Act exception for State Department employees traveling with pets if the domestic airline will not take the pet.

AFSA's efforts are necessarily bipartisan—seeking support from authorizers and appropriators on both sides of the aisle in the Senate and the House of Representatives. Key to success is AFSA's ability to speak independently on behalf of the Foreign Service.

With nearly 80 percent of Foreign Service members belonging to AFSA, we are seen as the voice of career diplomats and development officers. We bring to our Hill engagements firsthand insights on frontline diplomacy along with authoritative facts on staffing and conditions of service.

Advocacy on governmentwide issues that affect both Foreign Service and Civil Service employees takes place via AFSA's membership in the Federal-Postal Coalition. That group is made up of 30 organizations, including the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association and the large civil service unions, and represents 2.7 million federal employees and 2.6 million federal retirees, with members in every congressional district.

The coalition sends letters to Congress, with AFSA as co-signer, and holds monthly meetings, with AFSA participation, to plan advocacy efforts. Coalition members frequently meet with lawmakers on various concerns shared by federal employees.

In the past few years, AFSA has expanded its legislative advocacy to the state level. Often assisted by local retirees, AFSA has lobbied several state legislatures on issues ranging from flexibility in driver's license renewals to exempting Foreign Service pensions from state taxation. Those efforts have been focused on states that already provide such benefits to members of the uniformed military.

Facing likely pressures in the coming years, AFSA will urge Congress to reject budget cuts that would cripple the Foreign Service and hinder America's ability to compete globally. AFSA will continue to safeguard the nonpartisan nature of our Service.

—John K. Naland

AFSA National High School Essay Contest: The Winning Essay

Disinformation: A Threat to Every Level of Diplomacy

BY IAN ROSENZWEIG

In his intellectual explorations, Benjamin Franklin, the first diplomat of the fledgling United States of America, committed himself to truth. Franklin created "Junto," a discussion group, "in the sincere Spirit of Enquiry after Truth, without fondness for Dispute, or Desire of Victory." Franklin recognized the value of truth over personal benefit or gain. But today, truth is becoming elusive.

In public life, biased media publish sensationalized content, and social media platforms allow unverified information—from deep fakes to fabricated "facts"—to gain traction. Artificial intelligence, too, has allowed disinformation and misinformation to infiltrate the public sphere.

Beyond depriving global citizens of the United Nations–declared right to information, which is expressed in Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, these disinformation tactics influence intergovernmental affairs. They allow nations to exploit each other and sow seeds of distrust. Accordingly, the UN is seeking to raise awareness about and combat disinformation.

Disinformation is more than a danger to individual relationships between specific nations. It impacts every global conflict and major geopolitical challenge, from pandemics to immigration policy, and is therefore a pervasive diplomatic challenge itself. Diplomats can mitigate the damage that disinformation causes by ensuring truth in their dealings; promoting public trust-building initiatives; engaging in honest, principled efforts; and collaborating to take direct action against those who spread disinformation.

Some international disinformation efforts are targeted toward individual nations, creating public distrust, sowing division, and violating the fundamental expectation that nations be granted sovereignty over their land and people. Election interference provides a prominent example of disinformation efforts.

The Russian Federation and its "Internet Research Agency" (IRA) are frequently cited for disinformation tactics used to interfere in other nations' elections. According to a report from the Policy Department for External Relations of the European Parliament, the IRA "purchased around 400 advertisements on Facebook and Instagram during the U.S. 2016 election campaign," reaching millions of American voters.

The IRA is also presumed to be responsible for disinformation regarding casualties of the Russia-Ukraine war. Other disinformation, although not necessarily of Russian origin, has been flagged in recent European democratic procedures, including the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2016 referendum in the Netherlands on the European Union (EU) Association Agreement with Ukraine. These matters, although originating in national elections, are relevant to the diplomats of the countries involved and to every global power, including the U.S.

Ideologically, protecting democracy is one of the foremost priorities of the U.S. and its foreign policy. Pragmatically, interference in election initiatives as contentious as Brexit has the potential to reshape international decisions and relationships, thus impacting every nation. And beyond election interference, disinformation campaigns have successfully impacted issues from public health to armed conflict, allowing one nation to dictate other nations' actions by creating public unrest and pressuring governments.

Through preventing the spread of disinformation, nations preserve democracy and sovereignty and protect uninformed and vulnerable populations worldwide.

In addition to influencing national politics and their global impacts, disinformation also creates tension in international diplomatic relations. In 2017, a series of reports regarding apparent Qatari support for terror, including accusations of praise for Hamas and Iran and a ransom payment to al-Qaida, led the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Arab League countries to sever diplomatic ties with Qatar and implement a blockade on the nation.

Qatar referred to the reports, which Qatar claims were uploaded to Qatari news sites via a hack orchestrated by the UAE, as a "smear campaign," and U.S. officials reported that the accusations were "false" and "apparently planted." NBC News reported that the campaign against Qatar was also an effort to damage relations between Qatar and the U.S.—an effort that seems to have been successful given then-President Donald Trump's signaled support for the blockade against Qatar. Normal relations between Qatar and the group of Arab League nations did not resume until 2021.

This crisis highlights how disinformation damages international relationships. Had the U.S. not investigated the accusations of the "smear campaign," its relations with Qatar could have deteriorated. Such a shift could have upended diplomatic dynamics in the Middle East and incited significant foreign policy changes. Similarly, disinformation regarding crime and immigration in Sweden led to tensions between Sweden

Continued on next page

and the U.S. in 2017, which could have further negatively impacted U.S. relations in the Nordic and Baltic regions.

Disinformation can cause such "butterfly effects" in international affairs—ramifications beyond initial intentions can arise from disinformation. Without fighting disinformation globally, the Foreign Service invites more, similar crises to arise, some of which may not be resolved without great harm to the U.S.

Although the fight against disinformation is urgent, it is a formidable challenge that cannot be addressed hastily. The UN has called for greater control and oversight of disinformation. A 2021 resolution passed by the General Assembly tied the fight against disinformation to treaties including the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

It then, among other clauses, "call[ed] upon States to counter all forms of disinformation through policy measures, including education, capacity-building for prevention and resilience to disinformation, advocacy and awareness-raising," and it requested that the Secretary-General "seek the views of States, United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders" and submit a report.

In response, Secretary-General António Guterres released a report in 2022 in which he noted that "any analysis of disinformation needs to be multifaceted" because disinformation wreaks havoc across initiatives and is not confined to isolated issues. His report raises elections, public health, armed conflict, minority rights, and climate change as examples of fields that disinformation can impact. Secretary-General Guterres further emphasized that efforts to mitigate disinformation must not infringe on freedom of expression or allow oppressive regimes to further limit their citizens' rights.

His recommendations for solutions included platform transparency regulations, public information campaigns, media independence, and more media literacy initiatives, all while considering both state and non-state actors.

The existing UN action indicates a commitment to truth, and American diplomats are in a unique position to promote international acceptance of the UN's findings given the international influence of the U.S. Through actively and forcefully adhering to and promoting UN guidelines, ensuring that U.S. diplomats are not engaging in dishonest diplomatic action, and providing American support for UN information campaigns, the United States Foreign Service creates a global environment that recognizes the gravity of the disinformation crisis.

Given that disinformation can influence every single initiative to which the Foreign Service is committed, and given the moral leadership that the U.S. has the capacity to express, it is imperative that U.S. policy pursues truth not just internally but throughout its diplomatic dealings. The U.S. must hold its allies to a standard of truth. Without a guarantee of truth, transparency, and international dealings free of disinformation, the U.S. cannot claim its mantle of moral leadership.

While disinformation has become an even more pressing concern since the aforementioned UN resolution and report because of the rise of generative artificial intelligence, neither the UN nor the global community has taken firm action. Efforts have been limited to remediating damage and building institutional trust, not dismantling the systems that propagate disinformation.

The U.S. Foreign Service has the chance to reignite the spirit of the United States' original diplomat, Benjamin Franklin, and prioritize truth before all else.

Individually, however, the U.S. has been more proactive. Surrounding the 2018 midterm elections, U.S. Cyber Command interfered with the disinformation campaigns of Russia's IRA, sending warnings to its operators, disconnecting servers, and disrupting internet connection. Although such perturbation may not disarm the IRA in the long term or deter Russian disinformation campaigns, sustained and multilateral efforts—coordinated and agreed on by diplomats—have the potential to subvert the disinformation industry in Russia and elsewhere.

The U.S. is already engaging in international efforts, including a partnership with Bulgaria announced in September 2023, to counter disinformation. But there is an open opportunity for an international treaty, that incorporates more than two countries, to join the ranks of past landmark UN actions like the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Such an agreement would not only affirm the standards for public information campaigns and honest diplomacy outlined by the Secretary-General's report but commit the international community to tangible and concerted work to combat disinformation. While the U.S. alone disrupted the Russian IRA's schemes, an alliance of nations would be able to more decisively and universally inhibit the spread of disinformation.

The U.S. Foreign Service has the chance to reignite the spirit of the United States' original diplomat, Benjamin Franklin, and prioritize truth before all else. With appropriate leadership, the war-torn and divided international community can unite against disinformation, which can derail any international effort, and cooperate to preserve good faith and truth, without which diplomacy cannot function. ■

Campers row across Newfound Lake in August 2023.

COURTESY OF JESSICA POWLEY HAYDEN

TRADITIONS AND COMMUNITY

Summer Camp for FS Kids

A Foreign Service spouse shares all the reasons she sends her kids to summer camp in the U.S. every year.

BY JESSICA POWLEY HAYDEN

A pack of shirtless boys emerges from the woods, carrying banners and chanting. Some are painted head to toe in blue, others in red. The older boys, decked out in blue, start a call-and-response while the younger boys follow along. From out of a pine grove, campers are shouting so loudly, you can hear their voices start to crack:

Down by the river
Had a little walk
Met up with Red Crew
Had a little talk
Pushed him in the river
Hung him up to dry
We can beat Red Crew
Any old time!

It's Crew Day at Camp Mowglis, one of the oldest boys' sleepaway camps in the United States. Started in 1903 on the banks of Newfound Lake in New Hampshire, Camp Mowglis is steeped in tradition. The camp was founded with the aim to teach young men the lessons Mowgli himself learned being raised by wolves in the jungle in Rudyard Kipling's classic, *The Jungle Book*.

Jessica Powley Hayden is a lawyer, writer, and Foreign Service spouse. She has lived in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the Netherlands. She attended several summer sleepaway camps as a child, and her children have attended Camp Mowglis, Camp Horizons, and Camp Hi-Rock.

For more than 100 years, the typical day at camp hasn't much changed. Boys wake up to the sound of a bugle and participate in colors, raising and lowering the American flag every day. Campers have daily chores, learn to use an axe and shoot a rifle, and take part in challenges like across-the-lake swims. The kids also row, sail, hike, and climb. Most importantly, they learn to rely on themselves and their fellow campers. Life at camp is basic, simple, and blessedly tech-free. Traditions are passed down from one generation to the next.

Every summer for the last five years, our family has gathered at this camp to take part in Crew Day activities, one of the biggest events and camp traditions. The campers are split into one of two teams, Red or Blue. Alumni campers

return to the shores of Newfound Lake to cheer on the new generation of rowers. Younger boys take part in the morning races, but the big race is the last of the day, when the oldest boys face off. The atmosphere is electric: It's the Super Bowl, World Cup, and Olympics of camp life.

This year, our oldest son, Alex, has made Blue Racing Crew. He's worked toward this goal since he was a 9-year-old cub. From the shoreline, I spot him on the dock with his crewmates, chanting and yelling and cheering for the younger Blue rowers. Finally, it's his turn. The racing crew boats take off, and the crowds raise their voices in support. The Red Crew has a drum they beat from the shoreline, and Blue a pair of cymbals.

The boys work together to propel their boats across the lake. Blue seems to be out front, but soon Red overtakes them and crosses the finish line, victorious. My son comes out of the boathouse, and while parents and campers encouragingly pat his back, his face has fallen.

Their lives are rich with other experiences that have molded them and made them, I'd argue, incredibly interesting people.

But the loss is just one more part of the camp lesson and tradition. The Red Crew and Blue Crew will meet back in the center of camp, arms draped from camper to camper. As tradition holds, they raise the oar of the winning team up the flagpole. And they will sing about coming back together as one team, brothers and campers, linked together not just now but for the rest of their lives.

There are many ordinary American traditions my Foreign Service kids will never experience. They haven't always celebrated holidays in the same place or been in the same school for yearly milestones like an elementary promotion or field day. We don't go to the same small-town Fourth of July parade every year.

Yes, their lives are rich with other experiences that have molded them and made them, I'd argue, incredibly interesting people.

And while they've had countless Instagrammable moments in locations from Athens to Reykjavík, this lifestyle comes with a cost, often in the form of consistency, stability, and traditions. Throughout all our moves, our evacuation from Ukraine, and the COVID-19 pandemic, one tradition for our kids has stayed constant: summer camp.

Many friends have asked how we can send our kids away for so long in the summer. It's not cheap. It means my summer trips to the U.S. involve driving thousands of miles up and down the East Coast. And yes, it means we've missed out on taking some summer family vacations. But what we get in return has been magical.

Life at camp is basic, simple, and blessedly tech-free. Traditions are passed down from one generation to the next.

Our kids have a community—a camp home—to which they will return for the rest of their lives. It is a spot on the map that is theirs and theirs alone. They have learned skills that we simply could not teach them on our own. (My daughter has learned to water ski—one sport that I swore off after a particularly bad day in the lake as a teen.)

Camp has provided a sacred bubble for them to be children, completely divorced from the athletic and academic pressures that infiltrate most adolescent extracurriculars.

And there is really nothing better than seeing them, so dirty and smelly, running up to embrace you on the last day of camp. A little taller. A little tanner. A little more confident. And, certainly, a lot more independent. ■

EXCERPT FROM THE MARCH 2022 *FSJ* SUMMER CAMP SUPPLEMENT

Why Summer Camp for FS Kids

BY TIBOR NAGY

Beyond describing how summer camps can mitigate some of the special challenges FS kids face, I'd like to offer a brief overview of America's current camp scene and how interested parents can find an appropriate camp.

Things to Consider

Costs. In general, parents can expect to pay between $300 and $1,000 per week for a traditional overnight camp. Specialized camp costs may be higher, depending on staffing, needs, etc. [Editor's Note: For 2023, average weekly costs are more than $2,000.]

When Are Kids Ready? With some camps, age 7 would be the youngest age, but 8 is more common. From my experience as a counselor and staff member, the greatest determining factor is when kids want to go. …

Transition to Staff. For traditional overnight camps, 16 is the usual age limit for campers. From that point, they would move up to counselor in training (CIT) and counselor. Salaries today are quite competitive, and it's a super job while attending college. …

Accreditation. Accreditation by the American Camp Association signifies that the camp's operations have been thoroughly peer-reviewed, including such critical elements as adequacy of staff training, the quality of the facility, staff emergency preparedness, etc. … Check out www.acacamps.org.

How to Find a Camp? Today, an internet search can take you to any and every accredited camp. The choices can be overwhelming, but here are a few helpful sites:

- https://www.find.acacamps.org/
- https://www.campchannel.com/
- https://www.camppage.com/ …

I recommend that every Foreign Service family with kids consider a U.S. summer camp as a highly positive tool to help their children develop and nurture essential life skills, self-confidence, lifelong friendships and a sense of being "American."

Tibor Nagy retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in 2003 after a long career, which included 22 years in Africa at eight postings, with two ambassadorships and three stints as deputy chief of mission. He now teaches for Texas Tech. The complete article appeared in the March 2022 FSJ.

The Odyssey of a Scholar and Public Servant

A Life in the American Century
Joseph S. Nye Jr., Polity Press, 2024, $29.95/hardcover, e-book available, 254 pages.

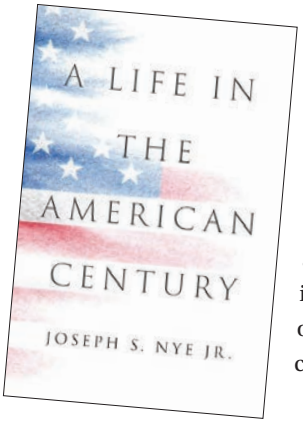
Reviewed by Joseph L. Novak

Joseph Nye has been one of America's premier theorists of statecraft and foreign policy for decades. From his perch at Harvard University, he has written a score of well-received books and numerous articles. He has also rotated in and out of high-level government positions, including at the State Department. *A Life in the American Century* provides an absorbing chronicle of his rise to the halls of power and influence.

Nye begins by evocatively describing his rustic early years growing up in New Jersey. Born at home in 1937, he describes his family as a "mix of immigrants." He lived on a farm adjacent to a town that had "one stop light, one church, one grade school, one gas station, one small village store which doubled as the post office."

He thrived in school and went to college at Princeton. He won a Rhodes Scholarship and subsequently enlisted in a doctoral program at Harvard. It's a profoundly American story of a young person who, with talent, perseverance, and some luck, moved up the ladder.

As an academic, Nye went on to earn renown for formulating the concept of "soft power," which he defined as "the ability to get what one wants through attraction rather than coercion and payment." He also popularized the neologism "smart power" (i.e., "the successful combination of soft and hard power").



A Life in the American Century touches on these subjects, but Nye's other works are a superior source on their theoretical underpinnings and real-life applicability. In a self-deprecating manner, he mentions how President Barack Obama, when told that the author had just written a new book, quipped, "Everybody knows about Nye's soft power."

Much of the book is given over to reminiscences about his stints in public service. Nye, in pellucid prose, describes his time as deputy under secretary of State for security assistance, science and technology during the Jimmy Carter years. Based on sustained interactions with the Hill on a wide variety of issues, he discerned that "we spend more time negotiating with Congress than with other countries!"

Recent biographies of Carter by Jonathan Alter and Kai Bird have given the former president's administration high marks in some areas. Nye concurs, asserting: "If Carter's foreign policy were a stock, we might predict its price among historians to rise over time."

During the Clinton administration, Nye served as chair of the National Intelligence Council and then as an assistant secretary of defense. His discourse on his time at the Pentagon is particularly gripping. Whether it was jetting off to sites around the globe or attending a swirl of meetings in Washington, he was always on the go and dealing with crises.

Nye's verdict on Bill Clinton? He "was a superb politician with an important ability to relate to people and pull them together." Clinton also correctly warned, in non-hubristic fashion, that "we cannot police the world."

Nye's years in the government came to a close when he accepted an offer to serve as the dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in 1995. In the 2000s, one notices a gradual shift in his overall intellectual focus toward the consequences of globalization, including how to deal with China's expanding economic clout.

Nye avers that the U.S. government over the years has had to learn the hard way that "our power always had limits."

Nye is a charter member of the foreign affairs establishment, and his autobiography is chock-full of references to the bewildering array of organizations he has been affiliated with. A sampling: the Aspen Strategy Group, Atlantic Council, Bilderberg Group, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Council on Foreign Relations, Ditchley

Foundation, Trilateral Commission, World Economic Forum (Davos), and so forth.

He also served on various governmental advisory boards and participated in "Track 2" diplomatic efforts. While no doubt worthy enterprises, the rundown of all the gatherings can be overwhelming at times.

The title of Nye's memoir refers to a catchphrase associated with Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines. Luce envisioned a world in which the United States emerged from isolationism and transformed itself into a superpower.

Luce's wish, made in 1941, came true in the course of the World War II and Cold War eras. In giving a nod to Luce, the author is not making any sort of statement in favor of an American imperium. While it has done much that is positive, Nye avers that the U.S. government over the years has had to learn the hard way that "our power always had limits." Examples given: the interventions in Vietnam and Iraq.

The author lightens his text by painting a series of fascinating vignettes. As a student in the late 1950s, he was enthralled by the "gothic spires" of Oxford while suffering from the "cold and damp" of England. During a visit to Libya in 2007, he vividly recounts meeting with Muammar Qaddafi in the "surreal" setting of a Bedouin tent. The voluble autocrat gave him a signed copy of the "little green book," the compendium of his self-serving theories of government.

Samuel Johnson, the celebrated man of letters, once stated: "The true art of memory is the art of attention." Nye's finely etched recollections, based in large part on the journals he has kept for 50 years, bear out this adage. His ability to deftly interweave the details of his personal journey around brief accounts of the epoch in which he lived results in a riveting narrative.

In presenting this vibrant tapestry, Nye also manages to display humanity and considerable wit. At the same time, his insights on the changing international scene and observations on the top-tier figures he met along the way are invaluable.

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.

A Former CIA Officer Writes What She Knows

The Peacock and the Sparrow: A Novel
I.S. Berry, Atria Books, 2023, $18.99/ paperback, e-book available, 308 pages.

Reviewed by John Limbert

Shane Collins' career is not going well. Shane Collins' life is not going well. Nearing the end of his time at the CIA, he is posted to Bahrain to work under a 28-year-old boss who—along with the resident U.S. naval commander—insists that Shane find or manufacture evidence that Iran is the source of simmering opposition to the Bahraini royal family.

But Shane's troubles mean pleasure for the reader, especially ones who may have served in Persian Gulf posts and are, like me, inveterate fans of spy fiction full of flawed characters.

Author I.S. Berry, a former CIA officer who served in Iraq and lived in Bahrain during the Arab Spring of 2012, follows the lead of John le Carré and David Ignatius to show the unglamorous, seedy, and morally ambiguous sides of intelligence work.

She may not have all three elements supposedly required for spy fiction—sex, torture, and good Arabs/Iranians/Russians—but she still tells a great story. Her characters, including the Arabs, are a believable, complicated mixture of good and evil.

The author starts with typical stock characters—the smart, burnt-out, unappreciated CIA officer and his clueless, careerist boss—but builds a fascinating, complex story with multilayered and conflicted characters. Many readers will recognize the narrator, Shane Collins, the spent case officer assigned to Manama for his last tour, from other reading and perhaps from our time in the Foreign Service.

Collins says of his situation: "My prior tour in Baghdad had been the latest in a multiyear descent, a descent made worse by the disappearance of a few hundred bucks from my operation revolving funds and an official diagnosis of early-stage liver deterioration. … Manama was a place where spies came to die. Unless you were 28 and a station chief."

About his boss, a CIA whiz kid, he says: "Whitney had arrived a few weeks after me wearing a cheap heavy wool suit in the scorching June heat. Even before attaining station chief status in Bahrain, he'd been dubbed a 'rising star,' the coveted term bandied about Headquarters, a title he wore with aspirational dignity like a Brooks Brothers jacket that didn't quite fit or that he couldn't afford."

In Berry's skilled hands, these characters are anything but clichés. We come to care about them and their fates. We care about Rashid, the dissident

Bahraini Shia who becomes Collins' source with the codename SCROOP.

We especially care about Almaisa, the mysterious and gifted British Iraqi woman whose exquisite mosaic supplies the story's title. Collins never tells us her real name but calls her only "Maisa," after the name of Modigliani's famous painting of an Algerian woman. Another stock character? Perhaps, but Berry's nuanced picture of this individual is unforgettable.

Anyone who has served in the Persian Gulf states—with their bizarre caste systems and huge wealth disparities—will recognize the accuracy of Berry's picture. In the UAE, there was an oft-repeated joke: "When I die, I want to be reincarnated as a Western expatriate housewife in Dubai." The combination of servants, villas, swimming pools, clubs, lavish meals, and mild winters was irresistible.

Berry, unlike the above-noted housewife, makes us look at the other, nasty side of life in Bahrain—a place where, in the 1970s, the ruler opened his private beach to Westerners but not to Bahrainis.

She writes: "The slums unfurled like a giant moth-eaten quilt as I exited the highway at Al-Maqsha. *Qaryah*, the villages—a country unto itself, whose backroads had become grossly familiar to me, an unwanted second home. Piles of garbage rose from the streets like dying trees. Layers of houses were crammed into alleys: dingy fast-food restaurants and cold stores pock-marked every corner, the emaciated commerce of poverty."

Anyone who has served in Bahrain, Kuwait, or other Gulf states will recognize Berry's unadorned portrait of the underside of the splendid hotels and palaces that fill the landscape.

Anyone who has served in the Persian Gulf states—with their bizarre caste systems and huge wealth disparities—will recognize the accuracy of Berry's picture.

Her picture of that life is not flattering. Nor is her picture of American officialdom.

But she writes beautifully about what she knows and what she has experienced. The reader can expect a great story full of plot twists and characters the author has transformed from the clichéd to the unforgettable.

John Limbert is a retired Foreign Service officer, academic, and author. During a 34-year diplomatic career, he served mostly in the Middle East and Islamic Africa (including two tours in Iraq), was ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and, in retirement, was brought back to serve as the first deputy assistant secretary of State for Iranian affairs. He was among the last American diplomats to serve in Iran, where he was held hostage from 1979 to 1981. He has authored numerous books and articles on Middle Eastern topics.

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Beijing Beginnings

BY BEATRICE CAMP

Flying into Beijing in 1983 after a year at the Foreign Service language school in Taipei required a transit in Hong Kong. It also meant resuming use of the diplomatic passports that were kept out of sight in Taiwan, in recognition of our nondiplomatic relationship there.

We still have a copy of the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) in-flight magazine from that journey. After a year in Taiwan—surrounded by slogans about retaking the mainland and exhibits demonstrating poor living conditions there—we anxiously read the magazine for clues to what awaited us in the coming two years at Embassy Beijing.

An article, "A Paean in the Blue Sky," praising the passenger service explained that the stewardesses received hundreds of commendation letters about their "quality service" from passengers: "In a collective full of vigor … they worked tirelessly for the happiness, comfort, and safety of hundreds and thousands of passengers." This even included holding a barf bag for a passenger. Somehow the article didn't match our experience.

This alien-to-us world continued to reveal itself, starting with the dark road into town. The PRC had a law against using headlights at night so as not to blind oncoming bicyclers. Traffic on the two-lane road from Capitol Airport that hot August night was impeded by elderly men crouched on the street playing cards under the weak streetlights. The men moved for our car to pass, then returned to their spot.

Bicycles were still the main mode of transportation in Beijing. My husband and I brought from Taipei two powder-puff-blue 10-speeds made by a new Taiwan company called Giant. Our choice was fortunate in many ways: At that time, purchasing a bike in the PRC required a letter of authorization from the buyer's work unit, in our case an official document from the U.S. embassy.

As we commuted to the embassy from our temporary quarters in the Huadu Hotel, curious Beijingers gawked at our glamorous, super-modern rides. (In Beijing, all bicycles were black, one-speed, and heavy.) Although we were initially reluctant to reveal our bikes were from Taiwan, questioners were thrilled they were made in China.

In contrast to our well-heated embassy, Chinese offices were near freezing in the winter, so we learned to dress warmly on official visits. Escorted to a meeting room and served copious tea, we would drink to keep warm. Once bladders reached capacity, it was time to leave. The officials coped by wearing pink silk long underwear, which peeked out colorfully below the cuffs of their blue Mao suits. Soon we all bought such underwear.

But changes were afoot. During President Ronald Reagan's 1984 visit, the White House decision to serve Western food at a banquet dinner flummoxed the Chinese guests, who found plated food confusing and unsatisfying. Plus, as one told me, when you eat it, "an hour later you are hungry again."

COURTESY OF BEA CAMP

The front cover of the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) in-flight magazine, 1983.

Beatrice Camp's Foreign Service career took her to China, Thailand, Sweden, and Hungary, in addition to Washington, D.C., assignments at the U.S. Information Agency, the State Department, and the Smithsonian Institution.

The restriction on diplomats driving more than 25 kilometers from the city center was loosened slightly to allow road trips to Tianjin, the closest major city about 130 kilometers away. Itching to hit the open road, we jumped in our car for steamed buns at an innovative restaurant there, which served food straight through from lunch to dinner—an unusual move.

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On the way we bought a traditional merchant bed that an eager seller had positioned along a narrow lane. As we later learned, "Tianjin people can sell anything to anyone." The once-denounced entrepreneurial spirit was back in force.

Gradually we witnessed more societal shifts, often just in small ways, as the PRC embarked on "socialism with Chinese characteristics." When bananas appeared for the first time, word spread like wildfire, and the diplomatic community all rushed to buy this previously unseen commodity. Three months later, another banana boat arrived from Central America, sparking the same rush.

By the time we left Beijing, bananas were regularly available and headlights had gone from forbidden to required. What did not change, however, was the quirky and unpredictable CAAC service—despite many adventures with the official airline, we were never tempted to send a letter of commendation.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
(signed) Kathryn Owens, Managing Editor

LOCAL LENS

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE, is a sight to behold. The masterful craftsmanship used to construct this enormous work of art is visible on every column and in every floor tile. The crowd on the day we visited was tightly packed, everyone jostling for the best photo angle. As I tried to reposition myself for my own photo, I glanced to my right and saw a breathtaking hallway, spectacularly absent of noise and tourists—save for one lone person at the far end, barely visible. Watching him cross the space in quiet solitude reminded me that sometimes you can find a moment of peace even among others. ■

Carole Fenton is the spouse of FSO Tom Fenton, currently posted to Canberra. Previous posts include Bangkok, Budapest, and Khartoum. This photo was taken in March 2024 with an iPhone 13 Pro.

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