

# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2025

## NOTES TO THE NEW ADMINISTRATION



PLUS

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DIPLOMACY**

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# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

March 2025 Volume 102, No. 2

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# Proud to Serve, Proud to Defend the Foreign Service

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

I had wanted to devote this column to service and duty as the new administration came into office. I looked forward to welcoming the new Secretary of State and, as is customary, gathering with colleagues in the C Street lobby to show our support.

We did do that, and I had the honor of escorting Secretary Marco Rubio and Mrs. Jeanette Rubio to the memorial plaques commemorating Foreign Service members who gave their lives while carrying out the foreign policy of the United States. The Secretary laid flowers to remember these brave men and women and reflect on the unique challenges and dangers of our profession.

Secretary Rubio offered inspiring remarks, saying that it is “an extraordinary honor and a privilege to serve in this role, to be here; frankly, to oversee the greatest, the most effective, the most talented, the most experienced diplomatic corps in the history of the world.” He said he wants “the Department of State to be at the center of how America engages the world.”

But as this issue goes to press in mid-February, we are in the midst of a chaotic and highly disruptive effort to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), AFSA’s second-largest member agency. This has sown fear, confusion, and frustration for the

entire workforce, including more than 1,800 USAID officers and their families serving abroad, who are struggling to understand what is happening and why.

It is right and proper for any administration to work to ensure that government programs reflect their view of U.S. national interests and funding needed to protect and defend those interests. AFSA did expect a focus on downsizing the federal workforce, including those at USAID.

What we appear to be seeing, however, is the wholesale upending of the vital role foreign assistance plays to save people from famine and disease, develop economies and self-sufficiency, and, in so doing, engender goodwill for the United States.

Most people don’t know that most development assistance money is spent right here in the U.S. The foodstuffs that USAID buys to feed the starving does not come from foreign sources but from American farmers. The life-saving programs, including the highly successful and bipartisan President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), largely come from American sources and are serviced by American implementers.

AFSA has a statutory right to notice and an opportunity to negotiate changes to our members’ conditions of employment. Yet, we were given no notice of these major and unprecedented initiatives, and our requests to meet have gone unheeded. Based on these factors and the speed with which these changes are being implemented, AFSA felt obliged to take

legal action to protect our members and their families.

We hoped the administration would listen to the voices of the Foreign Service workforce about the dire effects of the U.S. acting impulsively to end so many vital programs at once. Our members are understandably concerned that what is happening at USAID might be replicated across Foreign Service agencies, leading to a loss of U.S. global leadership and ceding the diplomatic and development field to our rivals, particularly China. Along with diplomacy and our military, development assistance is the third side of the triangle that protects and defends America’s interests abroad.

I want to close by emphasizing that both AFSA and the Foreign Service are nonpartisan. AFSA neither endorses presidential candidates nor tells the U.S. president what he should do on foreign policy issues. The Foreign Service exists to carry out the foreign policy initiatives of the president, regardless of party.

We didn’t join just for a paycheck but rather out of a sense of patriotism and duty. I remember the immense pride I had joining the Foreign Service in October 1991, of representing the United States abroad. We ask in return to be treated with dignity and respect and for our knowledge to be utilized to advance America’s security and prosperity.

Please let me know your thoughts at [yazdgerdi@afsa.org](mailto:yazdgerdi@afsa.org) or [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■



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# A Time of Upheaval

BY VIVIAN WALKER AND SHAWN DORMAN

With the Foreign Service community in turmoil since Jan. 20, when the outpouring of executive orders began, this edition of the *FSJ* has been particularly difficult to close. As we go to press, almost four weeks into the Trump administration, the reality on the ground in Washington, D.C., and at embassies and consulates worldwide, is changing rapidly.

Orders directly affecting the Foreign Service and all the foreign affairs agencies have decreed federal hiring freezes, funding freezes, stop-work orders, program terminations and summary dismissals, “deferred resignation” offers, and promised reductions in force (RIFs).

USAID is being dismantled before our eyes, with funding suspended, the headquarters building shuttered on Feb. 7, and the entire FS USAID workforce overseas ordered to leave their posts within 30 days. In response, AFSA joined a lawsuit in defense of the association’s second-largest member organization. A federal judge issued a temporary restraining order (TRO), but the case is still in play.

Amid this chaos and uncertainty, we know that the work of professional, nonpartisan diplomats remains essential. The *Journal’s* mission, to tell the story of the U.S. Foreign Service and provide a forum for informed discussion and debate, is critical. For more than 100 years, the *Journal* has served as the

For more than 100 years, the *Journal* has served as the permanent record of the institution and its people. That’s not going to change.

permanent record of the institution and its people. That’s not going to change.

In the January-February *FSJ*, focused on “Transitions,” we looked back at the role the Foreign Service played in assisting every new administration to implement the foreign policy agenda of the president. And in “Liberate the Future,” Career Ambassador Tom Shannon looked ahead, urging the Foreign Service to maintain “a professional mindset that allows us to operate within our current environment without being sucked into the partisan vortex” and embrace the challenge—and opportunity—to play a role in reshaping U.S. foreign policy.

This March edition includes the Focus on “Notes to the New Administration,” initially put together in mid-January. As we had done during previous transitions, we solicited “notes” from the FS community on how the Foreign Service can best serve the new administration. More than 20 people responded with thoughtful suggestions.

Given the emerging climate of fear pervading the foreign affairs agencies, including new restrictions on employees speaking and writing, we took the unusual step of allowing these authors to be anonymous. Some are. We also lost several pieces by authors now unable to

publish due to perceived and plausible risks. But a clear majority of our writers made the decision to stand by their recommendations. And we stand by them.

To capture the ongoing disruption to our members’ lives and careers, we have made last-minute changes in this edition. The AFSA president and the USAID, FCS, and State VPs updated their columns just before press time. We added a story to Talking Points and a two-page spread to AFSA News with the basic outline of what has happened to USAID and AFSA’s response.

Going forward, we will remain vigilant and follow developments closely. And we will also work to advance new ideas on the way ahead for diplomacy and development and the FS career, relying on a wide variety of opinions and voices.

We can’t do this without you. Editorial Board Chair Vivian Walker and I invite you to share your thoughts for inclusion in the pages of *The Foreign Service Journal*, either as articles or through letters to the editor (send to [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org)). We especially welcome short pieces (up to 500 words) that illustrate the value of Foreign Service work.

Thank you for your dedication and service to the United States. ■

*Vivian Walker is chair of the FSJ Editorial Board, and Shawn Dorman is FSJ editor in chief.*



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**LETTERS**

**FS Needs Bold Leadership**

I am writing in response to the December 2024 Speaking Out by George Krol, “The Foreign Service at 100: It’s Time for Renewal.” As a recently retired Career Minister in the USAID Foreign Service, I was moved by Krol’s thoughtful and courageous essay.

The current Foreign Service is not fully equipped to serve our country effectively in an era of increasing international complexity, conflict, and technological change.

In addition to the major functions mentioned by Krol, the modern embassy must also manage both a sometimes fractious interagency and agencies implementing sensitive programs in the host country.

To meet these challenges, the Foreign Service needs bold, inspirational leadership that articulates a coherent strategic vision of U.S. objectives and takes calculated risks to reach them. Exceptional leadership and management skills should be a prerequisite, not a preference, for chief-of-mission consideration.

I was on the faculty of the National War College when our government withdrew its forces from Afghanistan. Surprise and disappointment enveloped the campus, given that many students had served there.

There was subsequently much discussion about the limits of military power and the need to more effectively utilize other elements of the national security enterprise, including diplomacy and development.

If the Foreign Service is to play an enhanced role, it needs to improve its game.

*John Groarke  
USAID FSO, retired  
Washington, D.C.*



**The Professional Diplomat**

Thanks to the *Journal* for John Marks’ excellent December 2024 article, “Social Entrepreneurship and the Professional Diplomat.”

It was gratifying to see the late Ambassador Bill Miller recognized for his outstanding work with Search for Common Ground and his efforts to create a more productive relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Two additional items: The article notes Miller’s being proposed in 1979 as U.S. ambassador to Iran. According to what I understand, when Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Yazdi at the United Nations in October 1979, Vance had a letter in his pocket proposing Miller as ambassador.

At that meeting, however, Vance was so exasperated by Yazdi’s posturing and by his insisting on reciting lists of Iranian grievances against the U.S. that he never gave Yazdi the letter or mentioned the subject of an ambassador.

A month later, following the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Miller accompanied Ramsey Clark on a mission that was to negotiate the Americans’ release. Miller and Clark, who were carrying a letter from Carter to Khomeini, never reached Tehran after the Iranian leader forbade any Iranian official from meeting them.

*John Limbert  
FSO/Ambassador, retired  
New York, New York ■*

**Correction**

In the December 2024 Talking Points, former State Department employee Annelle Sheline was referred to as an FSO. Before she resigned in March 2024, Sheline worked in the Civil Service as a foreign affairs officer. We regret the error.



## Trump Administration Dismantles USAID

Just hours after President Donald Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20, the White House issued an executive order imposing an immediate 90-day freeze on new foreign development assistance obligations and disbursements.

Under the directive, all aid programs were to be reviewed for “programmatic efficiency and consistency with U.S. foreign policy,” with final determinations made by the Secretary of State in consultation with the Office of Management and Budget.

The freeze applied not only to new spending but to all foreign assistance spending, cutting off public health and other programs in progress.

Over the weekend of Feb. 1, 2025, President Trump and Elon Musk (the “special government employee” running DOGE, the so-called Department of Government Efficiency) announced plans to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

In the days that followed, USAID was effectively shuttered, with headquarters locked down and its website taken offline. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has assumed the role of acting Administrator, appointed Trump ally Peter Marocco, who served briefly as assistant to the USAID Administrator during the first Trump administration, to oversee the agency’s restructuring.

On the night of Feb. 4, the usaid.gov site reappeared—with only a notice instructing nearly all USAID employees, both domestic and overseas—to stop work by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 7. Direct hires were given 30 days to leave post and personal service contractor staff were terminated.

The shutdown froze billions of dollars in aid, left thousands of workers scrambling to evacuate U.S. embassies, and

stalled humanitarian and development projects in more than 120 countries. Meanwhile, Musk said on social media that he spent the weekend “feeding USAID into the woodchipper,” insisting that the agency is irreversibly corrupt, though without providing evidence.

“USAID was established by an act of Congress, and it can only be disbanded by an act of Congress,” said Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.), who joined a group of lawmakers attempting to meet with agency employees at USAID’s headquarters on Feb. 4.

Yet, those same headquarters were effectively locked down. Yellow tape and federal officers blocked both staff and elected officials at the entrance. “This is a constitutional crisis,” warned Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.). USAID “is the lead development agency in the world, and no one elected Elon Musk to dismantle it.”

Protests continued across the nation on Feb. 5, with Democratic lawmakers and USAID supporters gathering outside the Capitol building to denounce what Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) has called the “most corrupt bargain in American history.”

In a statement on Feb. 4, AFSA strongly objected to the administration’s attempts to dismantle USAID, noting the many USAID Foreign Service officers who have risked—and, in some cases, given—their lives in service to U.S. interests abroad.

“The sudden transfer of USAID’s functions to the State Department, apparently without congressional notification and no clear plan for continuity, raises serious concerns about the future of U.S. development policy and America’s global standing,” the statement read.

On Feb. 5, AFSA issued another statement criticizing the decision to recall all USAID Foreign Service personnel as “sudden and unnecessary.”



Rally in Washington, D.C., in support of USAID on Feb. 5.

AFSA emphasized that USAID officers are nonpartisan public servants and announced its intention to pursue legal action. On Feb. 6, AFSA joined a lawsuit with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) in a case filed by Democracy Forward and Public Citizen Litigation Group against the Trump administration, challenging the legality of USAID’s shutdown and the mass removal of its workforce.

As a result, on Feb. 7, U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) blocking the administration from placing 2,000 USAID employees on administrative leave, which had been set to take effect at midnight.

He also reinstated 500 workers who had already been placed on leave and ordered their access to email, payment, and security notification systems restored. Nichols delayed the administration’s plan to enforce a 30-day evacuation deadline for overseas personnel, citing its disruption to employees’ lives and the lack of clear justification from the government.

However, the judge declined to pause the funding freeze and scheduled an in-person preliminary injunction hearing for the following Wednesday to determine next steps.

A hearing was scheduled for Feb. 12 on extending the TRO.

## New Secretary Welcomed to State

Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) was sworn in as the 72nd Secretary of State on Jan. 21, the first cabinet confirmation of President Donald J. Trump’s second term.

Rubio, 53, replaces Antony Blinken as the nation’s top diplomat after receiving a



Secretary Rubio during a clap-in ceremony in the State Department's C Street lobby.

rare unanimous Senate vote, with all 99 present members in favor.

At his “clap-in” ceremony at the State Department later that day, Rubio lauded the department’s employees, calling them “the most talented, the most experienced diplomatic corps in the history of the world.” He acknowledged locally employed (LE) staff worldwide, emphasizing their critical role in advancing U.S. missions.

In outlining his priorities, Rubio pledged to elevate the State Depart-

ment’s role in shaping and executing U.S. foreign policy. He emphasized creativity, boldness, and adaptability in addressing the world’s rapidly evolving challenges, saying: “We need to move at the speed of relevance.” Rubio also stressed the department’s mission to promote peace and safeguard national interests, vowing to work toward a safer, more prosperous future.

Rubio reaffirmed his commitment to Trump’s foreign policy goals, outlining a vision focused on strengthening U.S. national interests.

## State Department Transitions

As the new administration takes charge, significant changes are underway at the State Department and the other foreign affairs agencies. More than 50 senior positions at State have been vacated, with employees now serving in “acting” capacities as replacements are considered.

The transition team asked all career diplomats and political appointees in senior positions at the level of assistant secretary and above to resign as the administration seeks to fill these roles with their own picks.

Those asked to step down include Executive Secretary Amb. Dereck Hogan, Director General of the U.S. Foreign Service and Director of Global Talent Amb. Marcia Bernicat, and Acting Under Secretary for Management Amb. Alaina Teplitz.

All three have served across multiple administrations, including both Republican and Democratic presidencies, and have extensive experience managing internal coordination, workforce policies, and global talent initiatives.

Per standard practice, all ambassadors—both political and career—prepare a resignation letter ahead of an incoming administration. Almost always, all political appointees are invited to depart, while many career chiefs of mission usually remain in their jobs.

AFSA is actively tracking nominations, confirmations, and transitions. For the latest updates, please visit AFSA’s confirmation tracker at <https://afsa.org/list-ambassadorial-appointments>.

## Flurry of Executive Orders

President Trump began his second term by signing dozens of executive orders, memorandums, and proclamations, many in front of a live audience at Washington’s Capital One Arena, aimed at reversing Biden-era policies and delivering on campaign promises. Within 72 hours, he had rescinded 78 of President Biden’s directives and issued a suite of new actions that deal with immigration, energy, diversity, and federal operations.

These actions include declaration of a national emergency at the southern border, reinstatement of the “Remain in Mexico” policy, and an order redefining birthright citizenship—a move already facing significant legal challenges.

Trump pardoned roughly 1,500 individuals charged in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot, including several who had assaulted police officers, fulfilling a high-profile but unpopular campaign promise.

Trump declared a “national energy emergency” and withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement. The orders will fast-track fossil fuel projects, pause offshore wind leasing, and roll back clean energy initiatives.

Federal workforce policies saw sweeping changes, including a full-time return to office for federal employees and a freeze to new federal hiring, except in immigration enforcement and military roles.

Trump’s diversity-related orders dismantled federal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and repealed protections for transgender individuals in federal programs and the military. Employees in DEI positions were put on paid leave, and agencies have been instructed to submit plans for compliance within 60 days.

Other orders with implications for the work of Foreign Service professionals



## Contemporary Quote

“During the Vietnam War, U.S. policies were wildly unpopular, but American civil society’s actions—like the Civil Rights Movement—kept us attractive. FSOs today face similar challenges but remain vital in showcasing our values through their work. ... I’ve always been impressed by the quality and dedication of FSOs. Keep your spirits up because the work you do is essential, even in times of policy discontent.”

—Former United States Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph S. Nye, during a Jan. 6 forum on “Public Diplomacy and the Future of Soft Power” co-sponsored by the Public Diplomacy Council of America and George Washington University.

include a directive requiring all U.S. foreign assistance activities to align strictly with the president’s foreign policy goals and putting a halt to assistance spending.

Another executive action calls for an extensive review of federal contracts and grants to nongovernmental organizations engaged in foreign assistance as the new administration looks for programs it deems inconsistent with U.S. interests.

While the administration argues that these measures will better align U.S. efforts with its strategic objectives, critics caution that they may disrupt long-term development goals and strain international partnerships.

A complete list of presidential actions can be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions>.

## Global Engagement Center Shuts Down

The State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC), a central office for countering foreign disinformation, shut down on Dec. 23, 2024, after Congress failed to renew its funding. With a \$60 million budget and 120-member staff, the GEC has since 2016 focused on coordinating U.S. efforts against propaganda campaigns targeting national security and stability.

Despite its record of success, the GEC faced sharp criticism, particularly

from Republican lawmakers and Trump adviser Elon Musk, who accused it of overreach and censorship. Funding for the center was removed from a last-minute federal spending bill, leaving the U.S. without a dedicated disinformation-tracking unit for the first time in eight years.

Its work included calling out Beijing for spreading falsehoods about COVID-19 and Taiwan and highlighting Russian

campaigns to destabilize U.S. influence in Africa and justify the war in Ukraine.

Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) defended the GEC, calling it “indispensable” to U.S. national security. However, opposition within the GOP, bolstered by political shifts after the November elections, led to the center’s closure.

## U.S. Declares Genocide in Sudan

The U.S. government has declared that Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are committing genocide in the country’s ongoing civil war, marking a significant policy shift.

Sanctions were imposed on RSF leader Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) as the group faces accusations of ethnic killings, mass rapes, and systematic destruction targeting civilians. The RSF’s actions have exacerbated what the International Rescue Committee calls “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis,”

## Podcast of the Month: *The Foreign Affairs Interview*

This month, we feature *The Foreign Affairs Interview*, a biweekly podcast that explores the critical forces shaping global politics. Hosted by Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, the editor of *Foreign Affairs* and a former member of the Secretary of State’s policy planning staff, the podcast brings listeners into conversations with influential thinkers and policymakers.

One episode features former U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, who reflects on his tenure managing the increasingly contentious U.S.-China relationship and the challenges of navigating diplomacy in an era of great-power rivalry.

Another recent episode features political scientist Francis Fukuyama discussing the state of global democracy following Donald Trump’s re-election.

Kurtz-Phelan also engages outgoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who reflects on his tenure during a period marked by major geopolitical upheaval, from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to escalating tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

For more information, visit <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/podcasts/foreign-affairs-interview>.

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



with more than 24 million people facing acute hunger and 11 million displaced.

Tom Perriello, U.S. special envoy for Sudan, described the crisis as a “man-made famine” driven by the RSF’s deliberate destruction of crops, warehouses, and farming infrastructure. The U.S. has provided extensive humanitarian aid, leading efforts to establish corridors for food and medicine, but the situation remains dire.

The Biden administration’s declaration makes Sudan only the eighth instance of U.S.-recognized genocide since the Cold War. Previous cases include Rwanda, Darfur, Myanmar, and actions by the Islamic State.

The sanctions targeted RSF-affiliated companies, many based in the UAE, which house Hemedti’s vast wealth. The U.S. accused Russia of fueling the conflict, citing its reliance on Sudanese gold to evade sanctions.

## 50 Years Ago

### The Kids Are All Right

I think our State Department should tell Ambassadors to lay off teenagers. They shouldn’t be tied in with their parents’ official behavior. A father’s efficiency rating should not depend on the way his child dresses. For a kid to be clobbered with the role of the Ugly American and the fear that he may hurt his father’s job if he doesn’t cut his hair is disastrous. It’s too much at that age to carry the United States on his back.

—“Over Here & Back There” by Professor of Psychiatry Sidney L. Werkman, in the March 1975 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*.



## Heard on the Hill



Ambassadors are one of the most important positions. ... Wherever there’s conflict we need good, capable ambassadors there.

—Former Senator Scott Brown (R-Mass.), in a Dec. 7, 2024, *Politico* article titled “The most significant ambassador jobs in Trump’s second term.”

I believe it’s in our national security interest to have our embassies fully staffed and to confirm career ambassadors with the requisite expertise.

—Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), during Marco Rubio’s Secretary of State confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jan. 15.

We cannot do more with less given the challenges of the global moment. We need more investment in U.S. diplomacy and development as instruments of national power.

—Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.), during Marco Rubio’s Secretary of State confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jan. 15.

Instead of being the Department of Diplomacy, which I think it’s supposed to be, [the State Department] becomes just an extension of the Department of War and muscle. ... But really, when bellicose statements come from other parts of the government, I see the State Department as the one that shows up and tries to still have a conversation. ... With regard to the concept of diplomacy and how we make things better ... diplomacy is about engagement, hearing the other side, and understanding their position—not accepting it but knowing what it is.

—Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), during Marco Rubio’s Secretary of State confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jan. 15.

The backbone of our diplomacy is that diplomats abroad, from the Secretary of State on down, ensure that we prioritize and emphasize the right engagements for the future.

—Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), during Marco Rubio’s Secretary of State confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jan. 15.

We should afford young men and women in the State Department and our civilians within the Department of Defense the same type of developmental opportunities that we give our uniformed officers—postgraduate schools and service colleges.

—Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Brian Mast (R-Fla.), during a USIP conference titled “Passing the Baton 2025: Securing America’s Future in an Era of Strategic Competition,” Jan. 14.



## Federal Farewells

“ I’m proud that State now works better—easing some of the stresses of traveling and living overseas, ensuring our tech works for us and not the other way around, helping some of us access mental healthcare without fear of professional stigma. To all of you who enabled these and other achievements—thank you, and keep at it. ”

—Former Under Secretary for Management John R. Bass in a farewell letter on Jan. 20.

“ I believe in the power, in the necessity of U.S. engagement and U.S. leadership. ... I believe in this community—because that’s what it is, a community. Whether you’re an officer, a locally employed staff member, or a family member, you serve and sacrifice. Together, you make things a little more peaceful, a little more full of hope and opportunity. ”

—Former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in his farewell remarks to the State Department on Jan. 17.

“ As I prepare to conclude my term as President, I want to thank each of you for your dedication to our country. You could have chosen to do anything with your talents, but you chose public service. Every day you came to work, poured long hours into hard jobs, and spent time away from your loved ones. You gave your heart and soul to this Nation. I am forever grateful to you and your families for your sacrifices, and all you have done on the frontlines to help realize the promise of America for all Americans. ”

—President Joe Biden, in a farewell letter to the federal workforce on Jan. 16.

“ Remember why we do what we do. Ultimately, our success can be measured not by our title and pay, but by how effectively we help others, whether it be the communities we serve or the colleagues we work alongside. ”

—Former U.S. Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, in a farewell letter to the State Department on Jan. 16.

## Blinken’s Legacy

In his final days as Secretary of State, Antony Blinken offered a candid view of the world he is leaving behind in an interview with *The New York Times*. He cited progress in restoring alliances and in strengthening NATO while acknowledging that unforeseen crises—from the chaotic exit in Afghanistan to new wars in Ukraine and Gaza—reshaped priorities faster than diplomatic measures could keep pace.

Blinken discussed the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, unrest in Georgia, and diplomatic efforts in the Middle East, including the criticism he faced for the department’s continued support of weapons for Israel despite that country’s attacks on civilians in Gaza.

Blinken described these dramas as

part of a broader effort to stand up for democracy while averting new quagmires. Critics remain unconvinced that the right balance was always struck. Yet, his own measure of success seems to rest on one conviction: that diplomacy, for all its strains and setbacks, still offers the surest path to a more stable world.

“Every place I’ve been around the world, everything I’ve heard, even with criticism, intense criticism of our policies, is people want the United States involved. They want us engaged, they want us leading,” Blinken said.

## State Co-Hosts Conflict Anticipation Conference

The State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) joined the University of

Notre Dame’s Keough School of Global Affairs to host the second Academic Centers of Conflict Anticipation and Prevention (ACCAP) Conference on Nov. 18 and 19, 2024, in Washington, D.C.

Under the theme “Partnerships for Peace,” the event brought together leading academics, policymakers, and government officials to discuss strategies for addressing global conflict and fragility.

Over the two days, panels explored topics such as the bipartisan Global Fragility Act, climate-related security risks, and strategic competition in fragile regions—emphasizing the need to bridge the gap between academic research and policymaking. ■

*This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.*

# Bridging the Interagency Gap

BY JOHN RINGQUIST

**T**he words “joint,” “interagency,” and “interdepartmental” come with expectations and conjure up images of the challenges inherent in mixing different organizational cultures and the secret language of acronyms.

Service cultures in the military each have specialized jargon and shortcuts that make complete sense to members of that service, but baffle all but insiders.

Outside the Department of Defense (DoD) and its processes, many service-members find the communication and culture gap between the military and other agencies to be a learning curve.

Some of the problems that first-tour Foreign Service members and military personnel experience in an interagency setting stem from unfamiliarity about how the different agencies operate.

These organizational culture differences can be detrimental in an embassy if a deliberate effort is not made to translate and educate from the outset.

## Mars or Venus?

In an embassy, the military is normally represented by the Marine Security Guards, who are directed by a Diplomatic Security Service regional security officer;



*John Ringquist, PhD, is an instructor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He has served as a security cooperation officer, Army attaché, and senior defense official in 11 countries and seven embassies.*

**Organizational culture differences can be detrimental in an embassy if a deliberate effort is not made to translate and educate from the outset.**

the Office of Security Cooperation, normally staffed by a major or equivalent and their deputies (captains or sergeants); and the defense attaché, the senior defense official, usually a lieutenant colonel or colonel, depending on the branch.

Neither the military officers nor their sergeants are first-tour personnel. They are expected to behave in a disciplined and professional manner. They sometimes make mistakes, however. There are a number of areas in which misunderstanding can lead to trouble. For example, the military’s emphasis on aggressive initiative and direct action can be misunderstood. The military is used for direct action (breaking things), so when working with the interagency, military personnel must also learn a new language to collaborate with their interagency counterparts.

When assigned to embassies, military officers and sergeants receive some training on how to work with the interagency, but it is not emphasized. The ruling measure for the military is tact, professionalism, and mission.

But how that translates in an embassy is not necessarily self-evident for a member of the military. Military personnel wear uniforms that display their service résumés by means of the uniform’s cut, ranks, and badges. The uniform is a

“document” that is legible to members of the military, an open guide to tactful, professional interaction.

By contrast, a first-tour Foreign Service officer may appear to a member of the military as a cypher, without similar markings. Civilian attire, combined with the FSO’s job title, may give the military person pause. Should they be addressed as sir or ma’am? Are they senior to me? What are their qualifications? The list can go on.

I’ve put together some recommendations and a collaboration checklist that can fill the interagency gap and smooth the interagency process, at least from a cliff to a hill.

## Recommendations

- Interagency partners should attend the social events held for new arrivals at the embassy or assignment location. Take advantage of the opportunity to meet your counterpart in civilian attire in a low-stress environment.

The social aspect of working in an embassy cannot be ignored. We’re in this together, and it helps to understand why sometimes our counterparts are stressed by certain scenarios.

The annual Marine Corps Ball is a great way to see the military on display as well as civilian formal attire. Ask

about the accoutrements on uniforms. All military members have war stories.

- Ask questions about your counterpart's work. It's not insider threat action to ask, and most military will answer. If they use acronyms, ask them to explain those also. Military members: Stop using acronyms in every sentence.

- Learn by reading. Most members of the military have at least heard of the book *Inside a U.S. Embassy*, but it does not make up for lack of experiential knowledge. I recommend *Career Diplomacy: Life and Work in the US Foreign Service* to military officers so that they have a better picture of their counterparts' career path and, of course, *The Foreign Service Journal*.

Conversely, I recommend *New Army Officer's Survival Guide* and *Army Officer's Guide* for new diplomats. Reading will help. You can also ask the senior defense official about service magazines from their combatant commands and the monthly deliveries of *Army History* and similar publications.

- My final recommendation is for all parties to understand their role. The military has a saying, "One team, one fight," and it holds valid for the interagency effort as well.

Military personnel assigned to interagency teams quickly learn that the ambassador calls the shots for the embassy. They have a military commander and orders, but military personnel must conform to standards of behavior and performance expectations as diplomatic representatives of their country while in a foreign posting.

If a military member has an issue with a Foreign Service counterpart, they should resolve it at the lowest possible level. If the issue originates from a culture clash, the individuals need to work together to deconflict this.

## Collaboration Checklist

- Check your ego. FSOs, if you do not understand, ask. Military, do the same.

- Do your homework. Is there a culture conflict, or is the issue a result of lack of need to know? Not all information can or should be shared.

- Is there a Marine Corps Ball fund? Support it, and wear the polo shirt or T-shirt. Military members at post will appreciate the gesture of solidarity.

- Military, when you attend invitational events or parties, offer to help. Get involved.

- All sides need to know where they are in seniority, not just rank. Ask any sergeant major if a lieutenant knows more than they do because of rank.

- Do not create friction regarding pay and benefits. Military members and Foreign Service members receive different benefits. Military and interagency personnel receive foreign language and danger pay, but Department of State FSOs are also eligible for step increases and can voluntarily transfer leave to another Department of State employee.

- Military spouses who may work in embassies do not have their service-members' rank. Please be nice to them; they are between worlds and can be useful translators.

- If you are interested in military doctrine, news, or current affairs that may involve the U.S. military, please ask. Military personnel are trained to understand that we do not make policy, we follow it. Our filter may help explain illogical military actions.

- Institute a brown bag series to go over topics of interest. Both sides need to know why their counterparts do certain things. For example, why doesn't the ambassador have a say in the military officers' performance ratings?

- A humorous way to deconflict interagency jargon and acronyms is to provide newcomers with a cheat sheet. In my own experience, the sheet can be one of the best ways to open dialogue. Title it: "Department of State to Department of Defense: A Guide to Gibberish."

- Respect goes a long way. Foreign Service officers are a select group of America's finest. So are military personnel. The military servicemembers in an embassy seldom have less than five years of service, eight to 10 years for junior officers, twice that for more senior. Military personnel need to understand that first-tour FSOs have a lot of weight on their shoulders. Go easy and work to reach compromise.



The interagency process can be frustrating, especially with the differences between departments in how they conduct business. The military tends to limit the number of meetings by using a process of task delegation called mission command. The chain of command executes orders. Rarely is there a formal meeting process aside from the generation of courses of action and plans from those conclusions.

The Department of State, in my experience, uses more meetings and teams to tackle challenges. Neither system is wrong; both work, and both require participants to understand the process.

A lesson that first-tour FSOs and military personnel can take away from the interagency process is that communication is key and that open channels are essential. I recommend that whenever possible, everyone take advantage of Friday afternoons to take off the "agency armor" and enjoy an embassy social of any stripe. ■



# NOTES to the NEW ADMINISTRATION



KOTRYNA ZUKAUSKAITE/THE SPOT

**F**ollowing the previous three U.S. presidential elections, and by way of welcoming each new administration, *The Foreign Service Journal* has invited Foreign Service members to offer input and recommendations to the new team.

In mid-November 2024, we asked readers to respond to the following prompt: *How can diplomacy and development practitioners of the Foreign Service best serve and advance America's foreign policy interests for the new administration? What are your specific recommendations?*

About two dozen members of the Foreign Service community around the world responded with a wide range of thoughtful, and sometimes surprising, suggestions for the new administration to optimize foreign and development policy effectiveness. The following are their suggestions.

These notes were all written prior to the inauguration. Because of current events at press time in mid-February, the *Journal's* editors took the unusual step of granting anonymity to authors who requested it. Several authors also requested to withdraw their notes before we went to press.

As always, the views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not represent the views of AFSA or the U.S. government.

—The Editors

## *Set Clear Long-Term Goals*

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After 15 years in government, both working at State and conducting oversight on State and USAID, I can attest to the immense skill, ability, and dedication of U.S. Foreign Service personnel. You are inheriting a workforce that can tackle the most complex and complicated problems in the world. However, I can also attest to the many ways that this skilled workforce has been squandered over time, to the detriment of our national interests and delight of our adversaries.

If we define strategy as the alignment of ends (goals), ways (methods/plans), and means (resources), the issue that most often undercuts the State Department's performance is overly expansive goals—being asked to do everything, everywhere, all at once.

This is not mission creep. It is having goals and objectives so ill-defined or broad that any activity can be seen as advancing them. Without clear end-states, the very proactive Foreign Service will fill the strategic void with activity and plans—as well as ask for more resources to pursue these ever-proliferating activities. Sometimes decried as bureaucracy “doing its thing,” it is more aptly described as the absence of policy leadership.

Similarly, without clear long-term goals, Foreign Service personnel often find themselves pushed to respond to urgent crises rather than more important but longer-term dilemmas. Unfortunately, this careening from crisis to crisis, and a performance system that rewards focus on crisis, has led to the atrophy of strategic planning culture in the Foreign Service, which could theoretically be expected to mitigate some lack of direction at the top.

The resulting lack of coherent strategy does not just waste resources. It also leads the bureaus to work at cross-purposes with each other because they lack an overriding framework to prioritize between conflicting efforts. There is a school of thought that believes cutting resources to State and USAID will somehow result in improved effectiveness. But if we are given the same ambiguous goals that many previous administrations have provided us, it will only make us have to do everything, everywhere, all at once—with even less.

Defining goals and prioritizing them, i.e., deciding which efforts trump others and ultimately deserve more resources, is essential to making State and USAID more effective. Ultimately, even if you do not provide this direction, the workforce is so talented that it will muddle through and rack up some good successes.

However, for the Foreign Service to truly shine and accomplish great things, it needs clear long-term goals that can be strategically implemented across all the bilateral and multilateral relationships we need to advance those goals.

*Greg Bauer*  
*State Department FSO*  
*Arlington, Virginia*

## *Get Outside the Embassy Walls*

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When I served in the Middle East (Dubai, Damascus, Casablanca), many of the kudos I received for my reporting came from my interactions with people “on the street.” While the threat of terrorism and security upgrades have limited how much Foreign Service officers can venture out into the cities and countryside in recent years, I want to encourage the new administration to put the focus back on diplomats having contact with ordinary people.

Talking to the elites may provide some window into how a government ministry functions, but the economy's heartbeat lies in the workers and how they carve out a living. Diplomats belong outside the walls of the embassy or consulate, having exchanges with students, union leaders, activists, and the full range of a society's social strata.

*Michael Varga*  
*State Department FSO, retired*  
*Wilton Manors, Florida*

## *Support Global Health Assistance*

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Our global health programs and assistance play a vital role in not only protecting U.S. borders and improving the lives of millions across the planet, but also in serving as a valuable tool in our diplomacy and the projection of U.S. influence.

On any given day, health professionals from U.S. government agencies including State, USAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Defense, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) work overseas with host government officials to improve the capacity of their countries' health systems to ensure that disease outbreaks such as Ebola and mpox are identified and contained at the source. This both benefits the host country and protects the health and welfare of U.S. citizens.

Our health assistance is also one of the most tangible and effective tools in our diplomatic efforts to project U.S. power and counter the malign influence of our geopolitical competitors. The President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) is by far the largest investment of any country to combat a single disease and continues to save millions of lives; and its impact on improving our diplomatic relations even with countries not inclined to support U.S. interests is immeasurable.

Our adversaries have noticed: In Africa, for example, China and Russia have increased their development activities in the health sectors of various countries and would be eager to fill any gaps should we lose focus and reduce our health assistance.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated the need for a comprehensive strategy to ensure global security and the vital leadership role that the United States plays in this fight. The previous Trump administration demonstrated its commitment to the health security of our nation via its support for Operation Warp Speed.

Supporting our global health assistance activities again will be vital in protecting our people and projecting U.S. power and influence. Failure to do so would weaken U.S. border security as well as provide inroads for our strategic competitors such as China and Russia to fill the void.

*State Department FSO*

## *Build a Professional Culture*

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Project 2025 asserts that State Department employees incorporate significant political bias into their work. I am not qualified to scientifically comment on the veracity of that claim. What I can say, however, is that State as an organization is susceptible to *all* forms of political influence because we do not have a strong organizational culture.

Our weakness, at least at the working level, isn't that we're too political; our failing is that we lack a professional culture. Addressing this more fundamental problem would greatly improve operational effectiveness and, at the same time, go a long way toward assuaging any worries, whether Democratic or Republican, about the focus of State's employees.

At present, we are incentivized to self-promote while pleasing our principal at any cost. We undergo relatively little training beyond language classes, and we treat the backbone of our workforce, locally employed (LE) staff, as an afterthought.

Instituting a culture of leadership at State, through which

we grow leaders in the profession of diplomacy, involves three changes:

*Recognize, value, and empower locally employed staff.* They are 70 percent of the organization. Create offices dedicated and responsive to their issues. It will pay massive dividends.

*Make FSOs earn their commissions.* Foreign Service officers are commissioned after a lengthy application process, followed by five weeks of orientation. Having been previously commissioned an Air Force officer, I believe it is a profound understatement to say that State falls well short of the commissioning requirements of other services. Crib from more stringent services, and make us earn it.

*Build a leadership culture with a significant training float.* The leaders who tell you that they cannot spare people for training are products of a lack of training themselves. The Foreign Service Institute now has a core curriculum, but it's optional.

The truth is that a significant portion of our work is generated at the whims of chiefs of mission and Washington, D.C., principals, who themselves never received much leadership training on their way to the top. Create a training float and incentives to develop professionally, and you will see the whimsical work diminish and the workforce thrive.

*John Fer*

*State Department FSO*

*U.S. Embassy Moscow*

## *Better Articulate Why the U.S. Is the Partner of Choice*

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As China builds roads, bridges, and soccer stadiums around the world, the United States needs to have a clear answer for why foreign governments should partner with us. Partnering with the U.S. has lots of advantages including access to the largest market in the world, military and development assistance, and so on. However, sometimes these benefits are diffuse and can get lost in the shuffle.

One institution needs to take the lead on articulating these benefits to partner countries, and the logical institution to do so is the State Department. The following steps are required:

- **Equip** embassies with true communications teams that can articulate the value that the United States brings. Communication teams at multinational corporations are focused on defining and formulating important corporate messages and not on running their own programs. Embassy public



diplomacy sections should follow this model and focus more on conveying the broad benefits that the U.S. brings to a country.

Everyone working at an embassy should be able to recite off the top of their head the three main ways the U.S. contributes to the host country. These could be economic (the U.S. buys X millions of Y product), security (the U.S. supplies X military product), or development (the U.S. has trained X number of nationals in Y), but they need to be simple and repeatable.

- **Require** every U.S. government-funded project to prominently display the American flag. Encourage private sector and nonprofit actors to make clear that they are a U.S. company or nonprofit.

- **Task** every embassy with documenting the breadth of U.S. contributions to the host country. This would cut across the 27 federal agencies working abroad, international financial institutions, the private sector, and nonprofits. Establish a standard, easily understandable methodology. Prioritize clarity. A foreign official should be able to easily repeat the top lines to a colleague. Don't forget about international financial institutions. For example, the U.S. is the largest contributor to the International Monetary Fund, which gives loans to many countries that allow their governments to function.

The State Department should prioritize understanding and communicating the broad benefits that the United States brings to a country even if it means deprioritizing some of its own programs and reporting.

In the past, countries had limited choices of potential partners. Now they have more options. If we want them to continue partnering with the United States, we need to give them some clear reasons why.

*Seth Luxenberg*

*State Department FS Family Member*

*U.S. Embassy Abidjan*

## *Appoint a Devil's Advocate*

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Please appoint a devil's advocate to review whatever policy proposals or nominations you want to make. It may just prevent echo-chamber decisions that turn out badly.

If the Catholic Church could do it for candidates for sainthood, it might not be a bad idea for the U.S. Foreign Service to play that role for ambassadorships and such.

*Teresa Chin Jones*

*State Department Senior FSO, retired*

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

## *Practice Tough Love Diplomacy*

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Practice tough love diplomacy. Reduce to a minimum or end diplomatic representation in countries where elected governments are overturned by the military.

Top U.S. diplomats assigned to a least developed country (LDC) fight energetically against corrupt activities and the flow of illicit funds—often involving the pillaging of natural resources—out of the host country.

Development aid should be conditional on the satisfactory performance of the host government, and this conditionality should be applied assiduously. The links between U.S. foreign policy and development assistance need to be made clear.

All U.S. missions should communicate forcefully that their major concern is enhancing social justice in the LDC host country and reducing poverty. And make clear that any assistance from the U.S. government can be terminated if there is evidence that it is not achieving its objectives.

The U.S. government should do more of its work independent of contractors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Multiyear congressional appropriations should be considered for certain assistance projects that are performing well. The U.S. government should strive to be a reliable partner.

U.S. foreign assistance legislation and agencies need reform; and perhaps a selective moratorium on providing any more assistance should be executed until these reforms are enacted.

*Mark G. Wentling*

*USAID Senior FSO, retired*

*Lubbock, Texas*

## *Invest in Training*

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To effectively serve and advance America's foreign policy interests under the new administration, the State Department must be able to meet the increasingly complex challenges of a dynamic global landscape. A critical component of this evolution is a serious investment in professional education and training for diplomats—an area in which the United States has room for substantial improvement.

The Foreign Service lacks a comprehensive, career-long training model focused on leadership development, strategic thinking, and the refinement of essential tradecraft. While many foreign ministries around the world have established robust professional development programs that invest in their diplomats'

education over the course of their careers, the State Department has fallen behind.

The current structure provides minimal training beyond language acquisition and initial onboarding, with only intermittent specialized courses (often virtual) throughout a diplomat's career. This leaves our diplomats underprepared to navigate the complexity of modern diplomacy and leadership challenges.

To address the gap, I recommend a fundamental rethinking and overhaul of the State Department's training programs. Specifically, there should be a continuous, structured learning path that spans a diplomat's entire career. This should include mandatory courses on leadership, strategic analysis, negotiation skills, and crisis management, as well as ongoing opportunities to engage in scenario-based training that reflects the evolving global context.

An investment in career-long professional education is an investment in the future of U.S. diplomacy. It ensures that our diplomats are equipped not only with the technical skills to manage foreign policy issues but also with the leadership and management capabilities required to think strategically, collaborate effectively, and influence outcomes.

By building a more professionalized Foreign Service, the U.S. will be better positioned to confront future global challenges and effectively advocate for its interests on the world stage.

A comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to diplomatic training will strengthen the State Department and enable U.S. diplomacy to remain agile, effective, and influential in an increasingly complex world.

*Jessica Kuhn*

*State Department FSO*

*U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires*

## *Energize Commercial Diplomacy*

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Assisting U.S. companies to win business overseas can advance broader foreign policy goals while delivering jobs and opportunity to American workers. Commercial successes also show the American people how their foreign affairs agencies make a tangible impact on their communities.

State can work more closely with Commerce, USDA, U.S. export financing agencies, and others to identify strategic deals and sectors where U.S. solutions can benefit the U.S. economy and advance broader foreign policy goals.

Senior leaders can build on the 2019 Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act (CABDA) by making support for U.S. business a priority not only for economic sections and Foreign Commercial Service teams, but also for consular, public affairs, regional security, management, and other mission sections and agencies with touchpoints in the host-country economy and business circles.

State and Commerce can strengthen tools and resources for small and medium-sized U.S. businesses—and the U.S. states and cities that support them—to expand overseas markets and attract international investment. At overseas posts, chiefs of mission can energize “Deal Teams” to allocate post resources to priority commercial opportunities and create systems to ensure fair, ethical, and accountable support for U.S. companies—both large and small—to win strategic deals and generate American jobs.

*Thomas “Toby” Wolf*

*State Department FSO*

*Arlington, Virginia*

## *Make Creativity the Norm*

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For the past two years, I have been advising a PhD candidate, Andy Carlson, whose thesis deals with creativity during crisis in government. Carlson frames his work with two events. He points, first, to the Apollo 13 “Houston, we have a problem” challenge as an example where a bureaucracy overrode convention and successfully unleashed creativity to achieve the near impossible. At the other extreme, he cites the Mann Gulch fire, where 13 smoke jumpers perished fighting a fire in Montana, largely because they blindly followed conventional protocols.

Working with Carlson has made me reflect on my 35-year career in public service and the times when creativity was unleashed and when it was suppressed. I have observed that to keep up with a constantly changing global landscape and with a selective hiring process, State Department personnel are naturally proactive and creative. But unleashing that creativity requires giving it a place to land.

Secretary Rubio in his confirmation hearing said “the State Department has to be a source of creative ideas” to take the lead on policy issues.

In the field this could come from routinizing creative ideas through front channel reporting. When one officer I worked with wanted to send a Dissent Channel message about a controversial

issue, our ambassador at the time insisted he send it through the front channel instead, ensuring it would get much wider distribution. The ambassador personally forwarded it to key personnel.

And in Washington, white boarding new ideas could replace some of the conventional round-the-room staff meetings. When I worked on Venezuela, the then special envoy gave wide latitude to a very committed staff to develop a broad range of options, often sitting in on brainstorming sessions to take full stock of their ideas.

Follow-on measures from the new Secretary showing that creativity is not only welcomed but required, and will be protected at all levels, would unleash the very best the department has to offer while raising morale and engendering trust.

*Keith Mines*

*State Department FSO, retired*

*Vice President for Latin America, U.S. Institute of Peace  
Alexandria, Virginia*

## *Embrace an Alternative to Political Appointees*

America's polarized politics deepen a perpetual challenge for career diplomats: to represent changing administrations credibly. Many practitioners today are uncomfortable with the incoming administration.

A normal response might be to expand the ranks of political appointees. Any administration might feel better with politically appointed diplomats across the board. But if electoral change comes to mean complete turnover of diplomatic personnel, any leadership's initiatives and intent can get erased without explanation. Any administration can look like a lame duck, and political discontinuity already shadows our national credibility.

This is not in the interest of any political leader, let alone the nation.

The new administration, or any other, has an alternative. The administration can choose to address diplomats as the national servants, fluent in a nonpartisan American sovereign interest, they are. A career diplomatic service must faithfully execute the policies of elected authority. It also adds long-term value for the nation when it carries institutional memory, and a durable, well-grounded sense of "we," the sovereign people, who choose our varying administrations.

Such a diplomatic service requires a common sense of America's suprapolitical core identity and an institutional

The new administration, or any other, has an alternative. The administration can choose to address diplomats as the national servants, fluent in a nonpartisan American sovereign interest, they are.

culture—namely, an intra-service language built on common reference points, confidence that colleagues have reflected deeply on this construct, and a shared commitment to serving elected authority faithfully.

Full realization of such a diplomatic identity would, of course, reflect extended study and deliberation, but the new administration might usefully plant a seed germ with current diplomats in the form of the following exercise. Task every State Department FSO and foreign affairs officer to:

- Read Walter Russell Mead's *Special Providence*, and answer, as anonymous but publicly available data (APAD), what percentage they consider themselves Jacksonian, Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, and Jeffersonian.
- Read *These Truths* by Jill Lepore and *We Still Hold These Truths* by Mathew Spalding, and state, APAD, what six words best capture their definition of America as a nation.
- Read Richard Rumelt's *Good Strategy Bad Strategy, Part I*, and draft, privately, their own "kernel" of the diplomatic service's mission.
- In assigned groups of 10, mixed by rank/seniority but otherwise randomly selected, write and submit, APAD, the group's definition of that mission.

These introductory steps will, provisionally: (1) offer career diplomats a common body of reading; (2) set the stage for discussion of mission; (3) give policy leaders and the public a profile of current diplomats; (4) give practitioners a chance to paint that picture; and (5) provide a data point for any institutional redesign process.

*George F. Paik*

*State Department FSO, retired  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*



## *Tackle Inefficiencies in Foreign Assistance*

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USAID and other U.S. foreign assistance agencies have programs that directly support U.S. business, trade, and investment interests that are easily justified to Congress and American citizens. They complement, but are not substitutes for, programs that address human resource strengthening, building infrastructure, improving regulation, promoting democracy that allows potentially disruptive minorities to have a voice, and strengthening institutions such as those that promote and enforce the rule of law. *These* programs attack the root causes of civil unrest, international terrorism, and mass immigration.

Are there possibilities for greater efficiency and effectiveness in these programs? You bet. They generally don't get their budgets on time from the Hill, causing some contracts to be issued in the fourth quarter in a rushed fashion. Also, too many scopes of work for contractors and grantees have weak performance targets and benchmarks that are easily met. This is the result of multiple factors, including:

1. *Understaffing in these foreign affairs agencies.* Contracting out work, instead of doing it with government employees, is actually more expensive to the U.S. taxpayer. Contractors and grantees tack on overheads, and the U.S. government must hire more people to oversee these contracts/grants.

2. *Congressional annual reporting requirements.* These favor reporting on annual outputs (such as delivery of inputs) rather than on results and impacts (such as immigration lessened, poverty lessened, health improved, and businesses started).

3. *Political appointees.* Reliance on employees with only a two- to four-year horizon to show impact has the effect of downgrading efforts on more sustainable but longer-term effects.

4. *"Co-creation" of programs with contractors and grantees.* This practice often improves the scopes of work but waters down measures of performance that are used to appropriately compensate contractors and grantees.

As history shows, military force can remove bad governments, but it is not a guarantee that a better one will take its place. Consider Gaza, Ukraine, and Syria.

The new Trump administration can again place excellent leadership in place for foreign assistance, as it did in its first administration, and refocus on getting at the root causes of unrest abroad that washes up all too often on U.S. and European

shores to our collective peril. Strengthening ties with Asian partners is crucial to countering China's aggressive locking in access to raw materials, trade routes, and markets.

*Robert Navin*  
*USAID FSO, retired*  
*Vienna, Virginia*

## *Know We're Qualified*

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Americans understand what it means to be called a "DEI hire." Typically reserved for women and people of color, the term implies incompetence and unworthiness for the position or promotion. It negates one's ability, dedication, and success.

Although many of us joined the Civil and Foreign Service through the same hiring process as our colleagues, many have also joined through competitive recruitment initiatives and fellowships promoting diversity. Collectively, we are competent, committed individuals, qualified to serve the American people.

Though I have not heard the term "DEI hire" used at the State Department, colleagues have approached me and other women and people of color doubting our proficiencies and with an expectation of failure. When we succeed, I have also witnessed an inability to look beyond our "differences" to fully appreciate our work.

Despite our skills and desire to promote U.S. policy across the world, we are often treated as "DEI hires." This negatively affects our ability to thrive in our profession and contribute to the mission. Some of us persevere and excel. Others succumb to the belief that our efforts are only to be critiqued, rather than seen as supporting diplomacy. Many of us disengage, grow tired, and give up on proving people wrong. Feeling defeated, we stagnate or leave.

We do not want to be the focal point of the State Department. When we are made an "issue," our presence and our work become a distraction to the overall mission. We want to be judged by the content of our performance, not by historical stereotypes or how we gained employment. If we seek any handout, it's to be given the benefit of the doubt.

As the new leadership enters the corridors of the State Department, we will remain resolute, alongside our peers, in carrying out the work that has traditionally been reserved for Ivy League-educated white men. The new administration should know that we identify not as DEI hires but as qualified Americans committed to serve our country.

*Foreign Service Specialist*

## *Implement Humane Deportation Solutions*

Based on my experience developing policy options for Secretary of State Warren Christopher's policy and resources staff in response to the Haitian refugee crisis of the 1990s, I offer the following ideas for the new administration on how to structure and implement deportation of undocumented migrants in a humane and effective manner.

1. *Set the objective clearly.* Deport criminal illegal immigrants, and others who already are under deportation orders, through law enforcement solutions. Offer voluntary incentives initially for other undocumented migrants to return home.

2. *Design deportation programs* to be implemented within the boundaries of legal statutes and reinstated executive orders; they are far less expensive than deportation schemes that rely on nonvoluntary solutions only.

Note: The cost of a one-time mass deportation program would be astronomical—on the order of \$315 billion, at a minimum. The expense of detaining such immigrants is estimated by the American Immigration Council to be \$167.8 billion. While up to 20 percent of undocumented aliens could “self-deport,” many more could be enticed to leave if some sort of family stipend is offered. Austria, for example, has offered to pay Syrian refugees a stipend of up to 1,000 Euros to return home.

3. *Carefully assess critical U.S. workforce requirements* filled by undocumented laborers that likely would not be filled by U.S. citizens before targeting illegal workers for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) workplace sweeps. For example, the all-important construction industry could be decimated by targeting those workers for deportation. Overall, it is estimated that as many as 8.3 million undocumented migrants are employed in the U.S., or 5.2 percent of the workforce.

4. *Emphasize the voluntary nature of the program/incentives* for illegal immigrants who are not criminals or already under

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deportation orders. Stress early on that vulnerable migrants are being offered financial incentives/stipends to leave voluntarily.

5. *Offer additional financial incentives* to prospective deportees, including criminals/gang members, as a reward for their help in identifying and arresting human traffickers. Collaborate with the Mexican government to identify and imprison such traffickers within Mexican borders.

6. *Work behind the scenes with Mexican authorities* to offer both carrots (e.g., enhanced trade benefits) and sticks (e.g., 25 percent or higher tariffs) for their cooperation in facilitating deportations, preventing new illegal migrant entries into the U.S., and tracking down human traffickers and fentanyl/drug smugglers.

7. *Similarly, work confidentially with Chinese authorities* to offer incentives to facilitate the return of military-age male deportees and others.

8. *Replicate Clinton administration agreements with Latin American governments* to house expelled migrants on their territory. Repurpose Gitmo, the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, to house migrants (as the Clinton administration did with huge numbers of Haitian migrants who fled the country during a previous time of upheaval in the 1990s).

*USAID FSO, retired*

## Support Exchanges to Rural America

The first Trump administration considered public diplomacy critical to U.S. foreign policy, with an emphasis on people-focused and pro-freedom messaging. Continuing to engage foreign audiences to build trust, strengthen ties, and promote cooperation is essential to advancing U.S. interests. Considering the benefits of exchanges with rural America offers a unique perspective on why such initiatives are an essential foreign policy tool.

Exchanges through the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) are indispensable to prosperity and national security. Programs that thrived under the first Trump administration include those that engage targeted audiences in such critical areas as economic development, natural resources, and civic engagement. These programs have an equally important effect on host communities that are not usually accorded the opportunities of international exchange, such as those across rural Montana, Arizona, Kansas, and Nebraska.

While foreign policy practitioners may primarily think of Montana through the lens of Yellowstone (either the show or

the park), consider the importance of our state to national and economic security. Montana is home to Malmstrom Air Force Base, one of just three U.S. bases that maintains and operates the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Our state has critical minerals including arsenic, antimony, bismuth, gallium, tellurium, tin, and tungsten. We are central to the nation's food supply as agriculture is Montana's top industry.

And yet, Montana is just 49th in the nation for international student engagement (per *Open Doors 2024*). Exchanges make an outsized impact in such an underserved area, providing rare opportunities for Montanans to develop cross-cultural competence and a global perspective to better engage in an increasingly globalized society.

In addition, the investment of grant funding in our state supports jobs, new international trade opportunities, and revenue through spending on housing, food, and services. At the same time, international exchange participants better understand America's strength and values through the different perspectives provided by our citizens.

In short, effective public diplomacy through exchanges is essential to foreign policy interests: both to influence global audiences and to bolster communities here at home.

*Deena Mansour*

*Former Public Diplomacy Officer*

*Executive Director, Mansfield Center, University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana*

## Establish a Global Mega Events Unit

The United States has a once-in-a-generation moment to seize the world's attention with its hosting of the 2026 men's soccer World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics. To fully leverage these political, cultural, and commercial diplomacy opportunities, the State Department needs to create a "Global Mega Events" unit to coordinate the department's support for these U.S.-hosted sporting events.

Such a unit would bring together those working on the essentials of the events—protocol, visas, and security—as well as those coordinating political engagement, cultural promotion, and business attraction. Such coordination is especially necessary for the World Cup, which the United States, Mexico, and Canada are hosting across 16 different cities. This unit could also leverage insights gained from U.S. participation in upcoming world's fairs by bringing these global mega events together under one roof.



To do this successfully, the department should also revisit its domestic organization and public diplomacy footprint. As described in my April 2024 *FSJ* feature, “The Department of State’s Reception Centers: Back to the Future,” the State Department should consider creating domestic geographic districts aligned with the 10 federal regions.

A “diplomatic engagement center” in each district would bring together existing offices and personnel to better implement exchange programs; coordinate public outreach and media engagement; create public-private partnerships; liaise with regionally based city, state, and federal officials; and support foreign embassies and consulates.

In advance of the 1984 Summer Olympics, President Ronald Reagan opened a foreign press center in Los Angeles. It helped tell America’s story for almost 25 years until it was closed due to a reorganization and reduction in force.

With the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics on the horizon, now is the perfect time to invest in the nation’s

domestic diplomatic capacity. We should build out our domestic public diplomacy footprint with diplomatic engagement centers in all 10 federal regions, beginning with Los Angeles. L.A. is the nation’s second-largest city, home to the country’s largest concentration of foreign diplomats and domestic personnel outside Washington and New York, and host to the world in 2028.

*Matthew Asada*  
*State Department FSO*  
*U.S. Embassy Accra*

## Retrofit for Great Power Competition

The next Trump administration has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to retrofit our Foreign Service for 21st-century great power competition. While the bipartisan Congressional Commission on Reform and Modernization of the Department of State raises possibilities for long-term legislative reform,



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President Donald Trump and Secretary-designate Marco Rubio can make improvements starting on Jan. 20, such as:

- Establish a laser-like focus on outcompeting China across emerging domains (e.g., space, cyberspace, undersea, polar regions) and issue areas, especially artificial intelligence.
- “Upskill” Foreign Service officers to attain the greater technical and cultural fluency required for this competition (the partnership between the Foreign Service Institute and the Krach Institute for Tech Diplomacy is an example).
- Articulate a body of professional knowledge (“doctrine” or “tradecraft”) for U.S. diplomats and ensconce it in training. The new FSI provost position and the proposal for a State-funded research and development center are opportunities to support this work.
- Consider closing FSO billets to create a training float “out of hide.” Reprioritize workload at posts, and fill critical gaps with Civil Service excursions, interagency detailees, and limited noncareer appointments (LNAs), all of which bring new talent and perspectives into missions.
- Reinstate and lengthen A-100 orientation (up to four months) so that it imparts critical skills to all officers rather than serving as a barely adequate bureaucratic orientation.
- Expand pathways for critical language-trained recruits, especially in Chinese, Russian, Korean, Farsi, and Arabic.
- Normalize entry-level officer (ELO) rotational assignments to ensure generalists receive maximum exposure to work in all cones in two posts and/or Washington during the first five years of their careers.
- Extend most non-ELO tours by one year.
- Strengthen merit principles in recruitment, promotion, and assignments.
- Return the Foreign Service Officer Assessment (FSOA) to an in-person exercise.
- Consolidate fellowships into a single ROTC-style program for recruiting top talent directly from universities.
- Expand opportunities for both paid and unpaid internships.
- Institute an under secretary for consular affairs, border security, and migration who would oversee the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA); the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM); the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP); and the special envoy for hostage affairs (SPEHA), along with any other current or future offices that fit within this remit.

These measures would represent good, practical first steps toward a more effective, leaner, more flexible, strategic, and representative Foreign Service capable of advancing core U.S. interests in an era of intensifying great power competition and

accelerating technological complexity. The imperatives of our current global moment, and the results of November’s election, demand nothing less.

*Drew Peterson*  
*Former State Department FSO*  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

## *Promote Based on Skill*

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My suggestion for the new administration is as follows: DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) was added as a precept to the employee evaluation report (EER) process. End it! The results were ineffective and just used as a talking point, but it was *never* a real initiative. It just took up more time during a time of year when real projects need attention.

If the Department of State wants real inclusion, stop leaning toward the promotion of women to the exclusion of men. The stats show that all across the board, women are promoted at a higher rate than men. This, in my opinion, is the fault of the DEIA effort.

Promote people based on their skill, not their race or gender.  
*Darrin K. Brown*  
*State Department Information Systems Officer*  
*U.S. Embassy Manama*

## *Prioritize Religious Accommodations*

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Over the past few years, the State Department has made great strides in the field of religious accommodations at the workplace. I encourage you to support this important work with institutionalized resources.

The three faith-based employee organizations (EOs) at the department have made significant contributions in this space. The Muslim, Jewish, and Christian affinity groups pushed to codify the first-ever policy on how to request religious accommodations, including a new addition to the FAM (3 FAM 1530) and an ALDAC. We have hosted events to raise awareness and published guides for navigating major religious observances. We have built alliances with other EOs and collaborated with offices across the department to bring attention to the issue.

Our work led to the establishment of a dedicated reflection space for employees to use for meditation or prayer at the Harry S Truman Building. The Muslim EO took further initiative to document the first-ever repository of department-

wide reflection spaces, which is now available on the Bureau of Medical Services' wellness site. These efforts have greatly improved the morale of employees and fostered an inclusive work environment.

The burden of prioritizing religious accommodations often falls on passionate employees who raise their voices and demand change. But volunteers cannot do it alone; we need institutional support. For example, reflection spaces must be established at every mission abroad and in every domestic office. Supervisors need to be aware of, and implement, protections and accommodations for employees expressing their faith, and training needs to be implemented for all department personnel that highlights the importance of religious expression as an important initiative.

The landmark *Groff v. DeJoy* (2023) ruling demonstrates the U.S. Supreme Court's recognition of the importance of religious accommodations in the workplace and places the burden on employers to prove "undue hardship" when denying religious accommodations.

Your leadership in ensuring employee rights are respected will not only benefit our employees but also set a powerful example for the global community, which looks to our nation as an exemplar of freedom and equality.

*Mariya Ilyas*

*State Department FSO*

*U.S. Mission to the United Nations, New York*

## *Support Family Member Employment*

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Previous administrations have made strides in Foreign Service and military spousal employment. Resources such as the Expanded Professional Associates Program (EPAP) and the Foreign Service Family Reserve Corps (FSFRC) give more eligible family members (EFMs) access to employment, but the EFM unemployment rate is still high. A LVL-Up Strategies survey found that 25 percent of EFMs report being unemployed. They cite inadequate job availability and salary misalignment as top challenges at post and when returning to Washington, D.C. (Download the full report at <https://bit.ly/efm-report>.)

Access needs to expand, but these job opportunities also need more flexible processes and policies that allow EFMs to accompany their family from one assignment to the next. Partnering with organizations that can teach employers in government, private, and nonprofit sectors how to build flexible

career roles and programs will help our Foreign Service family members be productive, efficient, and engaged.

In addition, almost a third of overseas EFMs reported working in the embassy or consulate. To remain competitive with other career opportunities, jobs in the mission need to build a holistic review process for candidates that takes into account how transferable skills and experience qualify candidates for higher-paying grades and ranks. Currently, the ranking system is too rigid, and EFMs do not get an opportunity to show how they have grown professionally from post to post.

We look forward to working with the next administration to continue building solutions that provide EFMs with more flexible career pathways to leverage their talent and improve quality of life for the Foreign Service families who serve our country.

*Rona Jobe*

*State Department FS Family Member*

*CEO, LVL-Up Strategies*

*Frankfurt, Germany*

## *Four Steps to Boost Public Diplomacy*

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As the new administration begins to shape its foreign policy, U.S. leadership and economic interests are being globally challenged with new tools and strategies. Adversaries are massively outspending us, employing widespread disinformation to undermine America's standing in their own countries and around the globe. They are creating new anti-American narratives to persuade the world that the United States is unenviable and unreliable. Their clear goal is to generate public pressure on America's global partners to reconsider their support for our shared values.

Today's challenges are consequential. They require dramatically enhanced diplomatic engagement and networks of cooperation around our principal interests and values. To be effective, the United States must engage audiences beyond governments in sustained public diplomacy campaigns requiring flexibility, rapid action, and new public communication tools.

In telling America's story to the world, as we did during the Cold War, we can again supercharge our diplomacy in partnership with the American people, our country's most powerful resource.

I write on behalf of the Public Diplomacy Council of America to encourage the new administration to take the following steps:



- As an early priority, appoint a State Department under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs who enjoys the confidence of both the president and the Secretary of State. The nominee should have the experience and talent to design and move administration initiatives forward across the executive branch and Congress and be able to seriously engage foreign leaders.

- Ask Congress to ensure that the State Department has needed staffing, facilities, and programmatic resources. The department urgently needs more staff and program funding to build flexibility and capacity for rapid action and to launch the new public communication tools it needs to compete effectively.

- Support State Department initiatives to engage all U.S. foreign affairs agencies and America's extraordinary experts and talents in a focused campaign to expose and vigorously challenge foreign government-funded distortions and disinformation initiatives promoting dangerous anti-American narratives in global media.

- Expand and leverage our international exchange programs, which give current and future world leaders in-person perspectives of the U.S., engage the American public in our diplomacy, and bring huge dividends to the American economy.

*Joel Fischman*

*FSO, retired*

*President, Public Diplomacy Council of America*

*Washington, D.C.*

## *Help Us Fix What's Broken*

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Forty-five years after the passage of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, the fundamentals of our system are desperately in need of updating. Successive administrations, both Republican and Democratic, have tinkered around the edges, but all have failed to make the important changes that would guarantee the health and future success of our nation's diplomatic corps.

To get started, our nation's new leaders should launch a serious conversation with members of the U.S. Foreign Service across all six foreign affairs agencies and departments. The conversation should seek to inform the new administration of what is working and what needs fixing.

The fundamental building blocks of our Service are sound, but multiple aspects of the current system call out urgently for change.

We need a system that better matches talents and experience to the needs of the Service and our country.

First and foremost is our so-called Open Assignments system. There is no aspect of the Foreign Service career that causes more unhappiness, cynicism, and attrition than our assignments system. All efforts to reform it have crashed and burned repeatedly in recent decades.

I do not believe that we need to return to a system in which tenured members of the Foreign Service are forced to take assignments they don't want. We avoided that choice during our surges in Iraq and Afghanistan; we can and should avoid it now.

But we need a system that better matches talents and experience to the needs of the Service and our country. That means individual mentoring, career counseling, and assignment support of the kind that is completely absent today. No one is currently trying to match members of the Foreign Service to assignments that best meet their career goals and our country's national interest.

We also urgently need to reform our system of performance assessment, which is almost entirely based on grade inflation and favoritism. We have tried over the years to come up with good alternatives, and we have failed. I would suggest implementing a system based on the U.S. military's performance ratings, including numerical grades as well as narrative assessments.

The more than 20,000 members of the U.S. Foreign Service stand ready to help the new administration succeed. They need help from the new administration to reform and strengthen our Foreign Service for the challenges that lie ahead.

*Eric Rubin*

*State Department FSO/Ambassador, retired*

*AFSA President (2019-2023)*

*Boulder, Colorado* ■



# SUBNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

## A Conversation with Special Representative Nina Hachigian

AFSA was delighted to host an “Inside Diplomacy” online conversation on Dec. 3, 2024, with the first U.S. special representative for city and state diplomacy at the State Department, Ambassador Nina Hachigian. She served in this position until Jan. 20, 2025. The virtual audience of 139 included members of the Foreign Service community, journalists, students, and the public at large. AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi facilitated the discussion along with Deputy Director of Communications and Outreach Nadja Ruzica. The following is excerpted from the transcript of the event, which has been lightly edited for clarity. Find the entire discussion at <https://bit.ly/Inside-Diplomacy-Hachigian>.

ISTOCKPHOTO/SERGEYRZHOV

**AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi:** *Cities, states, and local governments are increasingly significant actors in international engagement, and that’s especially true managing the effects of global challenges such as climate change and migration. What does this mean for our national foreign policy and what has the U.S. government been doing about it? To talk about this, and more, we are pleased to welcome Nina Hachigian. Ambassador Hachigian was previously the first deputy mayor for international affairs for the city of Los Angeles. Prior to that, she served as the second U.S. ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Ambassador, thank you for taking the time to share your insights with us and take our questions.*

**Ambassador Nina Hachigian:** Hi Tom, and thank you for having me. Thank you to AFSA for all that you do.

**AFSA:** *“Subnational diplomacy” has been a popular term of late. Could you please help us define it and explain why we need subnational diplomacy?*

**NH:** Subnational diplomacy refers to the official interactions of cities, counties, states, and regions across international borders. This could be, for example, a state-to-region or state-to-nation

## “Best practice sharing” can be really magical when it’s done well.

connection, or a city-to-city or city-to-nation connection. State-to-nation is happening pretty frequently in the United States these days. Let me give you some examples.

The former governor of Indiana has generated substantial investment in his state because of his very international perspective and reports that others have done the same. He told me, for instance, that dozens of international delegations were going to go to the Indy 500 this year. Elsewhere, the mayor of Phoenix traveled to Taiwan to seal a deal for a semiconductor fab coming to her city. Eleven U.S. cities are going to host the FIFA World Cup games—that will bring in lots of tourists from all over the globe. Jobs, trade, investment—that’s always number one for most mayors and governors.

But there are other reasons, too, like finding solutions to shared challenges. Following terrible floods in Hoboken, New Jersey, the mayor created a partnership with the Netherlands because they have so much experience and all kinds of technology that can deal with floods. That kind of “best practice sharing” can be really magical when it’s done well.

A governor or mayor might want to make connections that are important to a significant diaspora population that they have. I remember the mayor of Allentown, Pennsylvania, telling me that “people bring their places with them” when they come. So he went to visit the Dominican Republic to get a better understanding of this big part of his population. And I know the mayor of Oklahoma City was very welcoming when Mexico opened a consulate in his city.

There are also cultural connections of all kinds: thousands of sister cities, student exchanges, and musical events that enrich the lives of everyday Americans. Another reason to work internationally is to project the values of your city or your state. When I was deputy mayor, I went to a meeting of the U20 (Urban 20), which connects the big urban centers of the Group of 20 countries. Lots of these local actors work in global networks based on different issues.

**AFSA:** *Can you go into a little more detail about transnational challenges like climate change and migration? How does subnational diplomacy interact with those issues?*

**NH:** The United Nations projects that by 2050, two-thirds of the world population will be urban. Cities, counties, states, and regions are becoming the locus of many transnational challenges.

Extreme weather events like wildfires and hurricanes, pandemics, the spread of synthetic opioids like fentanyl, cyberattacks on local infrastructure—local elected leaders are on the front lines of all these very global challenges. Of course, the State Department and other parts of the U.S. government are also working on those challenges. It makes sense to find synergies between work at the national and local levels.

**AFSA:** *The subnational diplomacy unit and your position were established two years ago. What was the vision? And what have been your main accomplishments there?*

**NH:** The team is small, but we’ve gotten a lot done. [In fact, *Forbes* called us a paragon of government efficiency, Hachigian later added.] We’ve had a lot of enthusiasm from the leadership of the State Department that has propelled us.

The vision came from President [Joe] Biden’s objective of a foreign policy for the middle class. You have to reach out to places where Americans live. In our two years, we’ve connected with more than 5,500 elected leaders or staff in all states and territories.

We’ve worked to connect local leaders to the benefits of working with the State Department and having input into U.S. foreign policy. One of the main priorities of mayors, governors, and county officials is economic growth, and they’re all interested in foreign direct investment [FDI]. How can we get a foreign company to set up a manufacturing facility or a research facility here? We help by providing local FDI data to them, for example.

We also tell people about the amazing student exchanges that the State Department runs. There are so many of them, but they are not all well known. That’s something else elected leaders really like.

But the bread and butter of our work is answering *their* questions. We get pinged all the time by mayors and governors across the country on a wide variety of issues. We’ve briefed governors in advance of their meeting heads of state, for example.

In terms of how we help foreign policy, there are five ways that I think about it. First, local elected leaders help the State Department in terms of their expertise and their implementation in a range of areas. We’ve talked about job creation; but they also make local-level decisions that affect decarbonization, like procuring electric school buses that are healthier for kids. When we brief local leaders for engagements that they will have with



Special Representative Nina Hachigian speaks on a Symposium on Strategic Subnational Diplomacy panel with Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly on Jan. 16, 2025, in Washington, D.C.



China, we say that they have the option of discussing what fentanyl is doing to their communities, to reinforce the message that the State Department and the White House are giving China.

Second, subnational diplomacy can help enhance bilateral ties. Local leaders can share best practices and grow a relationship through practical, nonideological conversations. The U.K., Germany, and others have cultivated ties with states in the United States. The president of Armenia gave opening remarks at a forum we organized. We are planning trips for 2025 that we hope will strengthen national and local ties. In some countries, ties at the national level are frozen: In those cases, subnational diplomacy is the most active bilateral interaction that we have with elected officials.

Third, the State Department's capacity in subnational diplomacy focuses attention on the space that our competitors and our adversaries are exploiting. Domestically, the People's Republic of China [PRC] takes advantage of the fact that our political system is decentralized to gain influence when national-level relationships are sticky. With China House, we offer briefings for local leaders before they interact with their counterparts from the PRC to suggest ways for them to reduce risks in those interactions.

Many of our allies have similar challenges at the local level, so we're holding a symposium on strategic subnational diplomacy with allied countries to train city, regional, and national officials on the skills to navigate foreign engagement at the local level and encourage them to share best practices. Local action can

also support multilateral diplomacy such as the Summit of the Americas, which rotates every three years. The United States was the host starting in 2022, and we held a city summit for the first time, with hundreds of mayors joining. I think that was the first time the State Department had ever hosted a city summit, but it continues to pay dividends.

And next we are going to release a "Green City Finance Guide" for cities in Latin America so they can implement a program called Cities Forward, which pairs U.S. and Latin American cities to share best practices in sustainable development.

Finally, subnational diplomacy can introduce us to future national leaders early in their careers. For example, Secretary [Antony] Blinken met the mayor of Mexico City at the Summit of the Americas, and she is now the president of Mexico.

*AFSA: In your view, is the Foreign Service positioned for work in subnational diplomacy? Why should we have diplomats posted around the U.S., and why would they want this type of job?*

**NH:** In terms of whether we're well positioned, we're getting there. If I could have the Foreign Service Institute do a course on subnational diplomacy, I would. It's a learned set of skills. But Foreign Service officers are used to bouncing around the world, working in different places and totally different contexts—they learn quickly on the job.

Our mayors and governors are vastly underresourced and don't have international expertise in their staffs. European cities, Asian cities, and Latin American cities have bigger staffs and

## Making local officials more resilient to PRC approaches, fentanyl, cyberattacks—these are bipartisan issues.

budgets, and they therefore get the benefits of hosting big international events, bringing in tourists, or collaborating on shared challenges.

The Lewis Local Diplomat program we have started is trying to fill that void. It makes sense to have Foreign Service officers posted locally here [in the U.S.], and it's a great training opportunity for them as well. (The Pearson program used to do this, but Pearson fellows are all detailed to Capitol Hill now.)

We've had great enthusiasm from Foreign Service and Civil Service officers about getting a chance to have a unique experience in the State Department, to see the immediate impact of their work.

**AFSA:** *The incoming administration has promoted a more "America First" vision. How would you pitch the work of your office to the new administration? Critics of subnational diplomacy efforts have said it is being implemented in a partisan way. How would you address that?*

**NH:** First of all, I take extreme issue with the accusation that our work has been partisan. That is just not true. We work to engage with local leaders of all parties.

And in terms of the argument to keep it going: Subnational diplomacy is a tool. Mayors, county supervisors, and governors want to know whom to call when they need help, and it makes sense to use the federal government to help them.

Making local officials more resilient to PRC approaches, fentanyl, cyberattacks—these are bipartisan issues. The incoming administration may not make climate and democracy a focus—those were the priorities of the Biden administration. You need



Special Representative Nina Hachigian.

to look at the intersection of what local officials want and what the priorities of the new administration are.

**AFSA:** *We'll turn to the audience for questions. Here's one: The Foreign Commercial Service [FCS] strategically places Foreign Service officers and trade specialists throughout the U.S. to promote trade and commercial diplomacy at the subnational level. How is your office interacting with them?*

**NH:** We encourage local diplomats in the field to find the local Commercial Service office and get to know them. We suggest mayors and governors talk to their local Commerce office. We also work with the SelectUSA team to encourage local leaders to go to that annual event. We're very happy that FCS is out there.

**AFSA:** *How would you recommend college students or recent graduates get involved in foreign affairs at the state level? And how can retired diplomats participate?*

**NH:** For the first question, I would say an internship is a good place to start—and many of them are paid in cities or states. My office always wants interns as well, so that's another good place to start. And there are several internship programs that the State Department runs—specify that you want to do subnational diplomacy. Just getting a sense of the way these places operate, which is very different from the federal government, is really good knowledge and will set you up later to move into subnational diplomacy.

It's interesting that you mentioned retired Foreign Service officers, because I have many times thought that, but we have

Special Representative Nina Hachigian greets guests at the Symposium on Strategic Subnational Diplomacy in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 16, 2025.



In some countries, ties at the national level are frozen: In those cases, subnational diplomacy is the most active bilateral interaction that we have.

not had the bandwidth to really capitalize on it. But I think there's a lot of potential there. If you're retired Foreign Service, I would encourage you to make contact. You can email our office at [subnational@state.gov](mailto:subnational@state.gov).

**AFSA:** Does your office also engage with other subnational actors such as universities and civil society organizations?

**NH:** We do definitely engage with civil society and universities when we visit new places. But there are other parts of the State Department that more directly engage with civil society and universities, so I would say yes and no.

We engage with organizations that work with local leaders. For example, the Strong City Network works on polarization and violence, and there's an organization that works on gender equity for cities. There are a few that work on climate. We work with all those organizations as well as membership organizations for local elected leaders in the United States, like the National Governors Association, the Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, or the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

**AFSA:** How would you like to see city and state diplomacy grow in the next five years?

**NH:** The big challenge is just the resources at the local level. The other barrier is mayors and governors being concerned that they will be criticized for going overseas. They are concerned about the political backlash. I think what we've been able to do is show that this is part of their job and why. I want that stigma to go away. The United States in some ways is really at the beginning of this journey. I just want to see it continue to grow.

**AFSA:** What have been some of the surprises in your tenure, and what does success look like in this space?

**NH:** I did not expect the level of interest by mayors and governors, honestly. Everyone's interested. Mayors and governors are really interested in serving their residents through international engagement.

And in terms of what success looks like, it just looks like more subnational diplomatic action by cities, counties, and states, for all the reasons that we've talked about, because of all the ways it can benefit those places. ■



# The Puzzling Story of Manuel Rocha, U.S. Diplomat and Secret Agent for Cuba

**What motivated this U.S. ambassador to betray his own country during his decades in the Foreign Service?**

BY DAVID C. ADAMS

Some diplomats would consider an early career posting to U.S. Consulate General Florence a stroke of good fortune, if not necessarily the fast track to ambassadorship. But when second-tour Foreign Service Officer Manuel Rocha arrived in 1985 to the capital of Tuscany, home to some of the masterpieces of Renaissance art and architecture, his marriage was floundering, and he languished. So when the U.S. ambassador to Honduras, Everett “Ted” Briggs, asked him to move to Tegucigalpa, he jumped at the chance.



*David C. Adams is an award-winning freelance reporter for The New York Times and other publications. He is also the Caribbean correspondent for the Committee to Protect Journalists. In the 1980s, Adams covered the civil wars in Central America and lived in Honduras between 1987 and 1988, where he coincided with Manuel Rocha.*



Manuel Rocha sent this photo to former CIA officer Fulton Armstrong in November 2016 with a note: “In Havana last Thursday.”

COURTESY OF FULTON ARMSTRONG

Manuel Rocha's yearbook photo from Taft, an elite boarding school in Connecticut.

Rocha's decision to abandon Italy for Central America is just one piece of the puzzle confronting investigators as they assess the damage he caused to U.S. interests by betraying his country to work as a secret agent for communist Cuba.

Rocha was sentenced to 15 years in jail in April 2024 after he pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the United States and acting as an agent of a foreign country for decades while serving in the State Department.

### A Career in Latin America

Rocha spent almost his entire career in Latin America, rising to be ambassador in Bolivia after assignments in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Cuba, and Honduras. While he had opportunities throughout his career to provide Cuba with valuable intelligence, the two years he spent in Honduras from early 1987 to early 1989 were potentially among the most rewarding to his spy-handlers in Havana.

Rocha was still a junior diplomat with barely six years of service under his belt when he was handpicked by Ambassador Briggs as political-military officer during a crucial period in the covert, U.S.-funded "Contra" war against the Soviet-backed Sandinista government in Nicaragua. U.S. military and economic aid to Honduras to back its struggle against the Sandinistas saw the U.S. embassy in tiny Tegucigalpa mushroom into one of the largest in the world, packed with aid workers, military trainers, and CIA officers.

In his memoir, *Honor to State*, Briggs recalls that he got to know Rocha while serving in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, later renamed the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. "I got to know Manuel as a private citizen who was interested in what we were up to. He had my confidence. I have to wonder if he was playing me," Briggs said.

Rocha was one of several Spanish-speaking officers Briggs had specifically asked for, along with John Penfold, his deputy chief of mission, and Tim Brown, the officer assigned to handling the Nicaraguan Resistance, the official name of the rebel Contra army. Rocha's post put him at the heart of sensitive embassy work, including security assistance and access to



Honduran military bases for logistics and training of the Contra army. It was in Honduras that Rocha began to build his reputation—or “legend” in spy terminology—as a conservative Cold War warrior.

### From Harlem to Yale

That contrasted with his younger days at Yale as a left-leaning student who spent a summer program in 1973 in Chile, where he was allegedly recruited by Cuban agents, according to court documents. A rare, brown-skinned Hispanic recruit in the State Department, Rocha was born in Colombia and moved at a young age to the U.S.,

where he was raised in Harlem by his single mother, who worked as a seamstress. He won a scholarship to Taft, the elite private boarding school in Connecticut. There, he encountered racism, he later told the Taft school bulletin.

Rocha went on to study at Yale, Harvard, and Georgetown, but never gave any outward signs of resentment toward his privileged white American colleagues. If that were his motive for becoming a Cuban agent, he masked his loyalties well. And if he harbored any left-wing sympathies, he hid that too.

He was briefly married in college to an older Colombian woman, whose identity and possible role in his recruitment remains a mystery. During his PhD studies at Georgetown, Rocha had an internship at the liberal Inter-American Foundation (IAF), a congressionally funded alternative development organization. It was there he met his second wife, Deborah McCarthy, and they joined the Foreign Service together, Rocha via a special expedited program to recruit those from racial and ethnic minority groups.

Rocha's first job was Honduras desk officer in the office for Central American affairs, where he is remembered as a lively and entertaining colleague who revealed little about his personal life and was highly attentive to his superiors. When the then-ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, was doing the rounds in Washington, Rocha was his dutiful assistant, helping arrange his schedule. Rather than be intimidated by Negroponte, one of the department's leading conservatives, Rocha threw a party for him at his modest apartment in Arlington.

Rocha pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the United States and acting as an agent of a foreign country for decades while serving in the State Department.

“I could never understand how a junior officer could do that. I was just like, wow! But he pulled it off. I wonder now if he was being pushed by the Cubans,” said Peter Romero, the desk officer for El Salvador at the time.



Manuel Rocha at breakfast in July 2023, a few months before his arrest.

Negroponte was impressed by Rocha’s pluck but also wondered where it came from. “I always thought he was a bit of an odd duck,” Negroponte told the *Journal*. “He had that Rodney Dangerfield syndrome—I don’t get no respect.” He was a weak writer in English but made up for it with strong social and analytical skills, developing useful local contacts and delivering valuable information to his bosses, according to several former colleagues.

Rocha was transferred to Florence to join his wife, who was assigned as the financial economist at the U.S. embassy in Rome. He struggled in Florence, and his previously arranged transfer to Rome came under doubt. He was also unfaithful and drinking heavily, former colleagues say. He then got the call to go to Honduras. His move to Tegucigalpa ended the marriage.

### The “Contra” War at a Turning Point

Honduras was a treasure trove of U.S. secrets. In 1986 covert White House funding for the Contras erupted in a major scandal for the Reagan administration. There was also a scandal over CIA ties to the Intelligence Battalion 3-16, a Honduran army unit accused of political assassinations and torture of political opponents.

By the time Rocha arrived, the Contra war had shifted from covert to overt, with \$100 million in congressional funding. In 1987 U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz ordered the creation of the Special Liaison Office (SLO), a unique embassy unit formed to keep a close eye on the Contras. Because of the sensitivity of its work, it was walled off from the rest of the embassy, according to David Lindwall, one of two officers in the SLO. “This upset a lot of officers in the traditional political section who were not even allowed to read our cables,” said Lindwall. “That said, Manny Rocha never hit me up for info on the Contras. He was about the only political officer who didn’t,” he added.

It is possible Rocha had other means of access. While not directly involved in the Contra effort, Rocha was intimately involved in delicate negotiations with the Honduran government, including secret access to military bases where logistics for the Contras were being handled, including the supply of surface-to-air “Red Eye” missiles. The Red Eyes changed the course of the war by grounding Nicaragua’s fleet of Soviet Mi-24 helicopter gunships, helping push the Sandinistas to the negotiating table in 1987 and leading to the end of the war.

Rocha also participated in some important meetings with top Contra officials and the Honduran military, according to



Colonel Rene Fonseca, a retired Honduran military officer who was the political liaison for the armed forces. “He was very attentive to every piece of information the Contras put on the table to the Americans. He never spoke, he was always taking notes,” Fonseca said. “He sat at the end of the table with a spiral notebook.”

Fonseca recalls three of four meetings with top Honduran military intelligence officers and senior Contra leaders. “They would show maps where their forces were located and go over the results of operations,” he said. “Now, I wonder if that information was being passed to the Sandinistas,” he added.

Briggs doesn’t recall attending Contra meetings with Rocha. “He may have escorted a number of congressional delegations to the Contra camps. But he would not have had access to rarefied intelligence with the Contras,” he said.

Fonseca also socialized privately with Rocha. “He was very reserved, circumspect about some things, but he could be very outgoing too,” said Fonseca. “He would invite me to his house. I imagine he hoped he would get good information from me.”

A rare, brown-skinned Hispanic recruit in the State Department, Rocha was born in Colombia and moved at a young age to the U.S., where he was raised in Harlem by his single mother, who worked as a seamstress.

### Privy to Insider Information

Rocha would have been privy to the regular flow of insider embassy information of value to Cuba’s friends. The embassy comprised a large military group, with a presence outside the capital at the Palmerola Air Base. The U.S. military also used a smaller, more secret base, El Aguacate, to train and supply the Contras.



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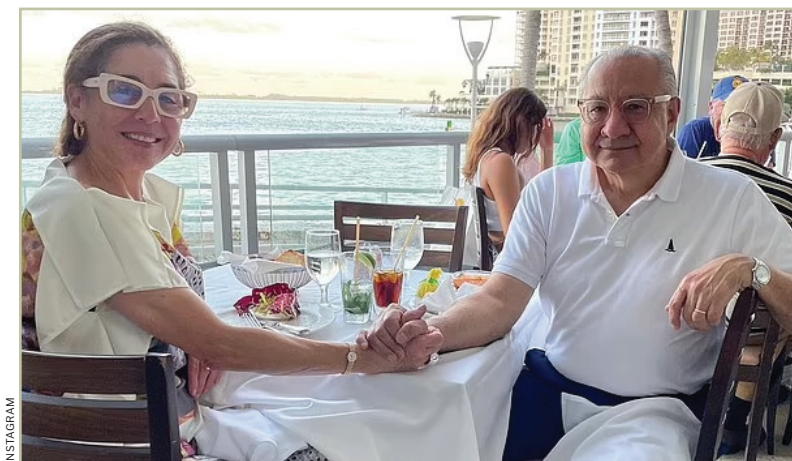


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Manual Rocha and his third wife in an undated photo from Instagram.

The CIA had two stations in Tegucigalpa, one standard team inside the embassy and another paramilitary team at a separate location in the capital, known as “The Base,” that was dedicated to the Contra effort. “It was very easy for him [Rocha] to move around in that big embassy. He didn’t have to schmooze in dark bars or call attention to himself. It was a cesspool of good and bad information,” said Fulton Armstrong, a former CIA officer and Central America analyst who knew Rocha. “Maybe his primary function for his handlers was to sort out which was good and bad,” he added.

This author spoke to three exiled former Cuban agents who said that any information Rocha supplied his handlers certainly made its way into the hands of the Sandinistas. After the Sandinista revolution in 1979, Nicaragua’s General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) hired a group of Cuban intelligence officers under Andrés Barahona, a legendary colonel in Cuba’s Ministry of Interior. Barahona was given a Nicaraguan identity, Renan Montero, and placed in charge of foreign intelligence activities, according to Enrique García Díaz, a former Cuban intelligence officer who defected in 1989. “The Cubans controlled everything,” said García.

While Cuban agents handled classified information they suspected came from sources inside the U.S. government, Rocha’s identity would have been a closely held secret, said Jose Cohen, a cryptology expert who worked in Cuban intelligence until he defected on a raft in 1994. “I could tell there were people working in the U.S. government with access to very sensitive information. But I didn’t handle cases. It was very compartmentalized,” he said.

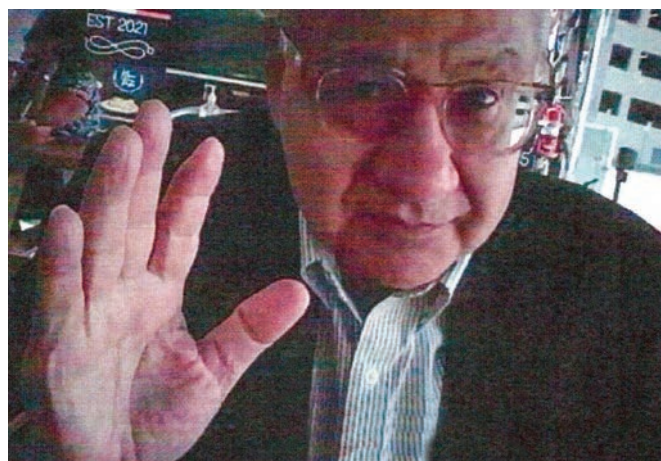
It’s unknown how Rocha delivered information to his Cuban handler. Sending coded messages on shortwave radio

Negroponete was impressed by Rocha’s pluck but also wondered where it came from. “I always thought he was a bit of an odd duck,” Negroponete told the *Journal*.

to arrange drop-off times and places was one method the Cubans used in other cases, according to retired FBI Agent Peter Lapp, author of *Queen of Cuba*, about a Pentagon intelligence analyst, Ana Belen Montes, who evaded capture for 17 years.

### A Personality Change in Honduras?

Some who knew Rocha noticed a change in personality in Honduras. “He became very hard-nosed,” said Maria Otero, who knew Rocha at IAF and ran into him again in Honduras after she was posted there for a microfinance organization. Otero, who later joined the State Department, recalls how Rocha unexpectedly knocked on her door in Tegucigalpa late one night wearing a beige trench coat. She was at home planning how to quietly leave the country with three small children after her husband, Joe Eldridge, a Methodist human rights advocate, had offended the Honduran military chief by penning an op-ed linking him to drug trafficking.



An image contained in an affidavit in support of the criminal complaint filed by the Justice Department shows Manuel Rocha meeting with an undercover FBI agent.



Instead of offering his sympathy, Otero recounts, Rocha told her, “How stupid can your husband be? Doesn’t he know they murder people in this country for that sort of thing?” To her dismay, he added: “If you need help with all this, don’t call me, don’t reach out to me.”

Some embassy colleagues found Rocha arrogant but good company. Lindwall recalled Rocha as “aloof and a fancy dresser—carefully tailored suits, a handkerchief sticking out of his suit coat pockets, expensive ties, cuff links. I thought it was a bit over the top for Honduras, but most of us chalked it up to his being a ladies’ man.”

Others recall him as ambitious and eager to advance his career. “I just thought he was an aggressive climber. And I didn’t trust him, but not because I thought he was working for anybody else,” said John Penfold, the embassy’s deputy chief of mission.

Briggs recalls Rocha coming to see him one day on a personal matter. He told Briggs his marriage was ending. “He got all teary and very emotional. It was affecting his work, and he was miserable,” said Briggs.

“I bucked him up and told him, ‘You are a great officer, you’ve got to get over this, and we’ll give you some slack,’” the ambassador said.

### A Swift Kick to the Gut

When Rocha was departing post, Briggs hosted a farewell party for him in the Front Office. “Briggs was not one to lavish praise on anyone, but he talked about Rocha as if he was the embodiment of every virtue and skill a young diplomat could ever hope to aspire to,” Lindwall recalled. “I had never heard an ambassador speak so effusively of a staff member. I took it for granted that Rocha must have been one of the best of the best,” he added.

News of Rocha’s December 2023 arrest spread quickly among his old colleagues. “We all feel like we have received a swift kick to the gut,” Amb. Briggs told this reporter. “My colleagues and I have racked our brains about what he did,” he said, adding, “Manuel was the antithesis of a Cuban revolutionary.” ■

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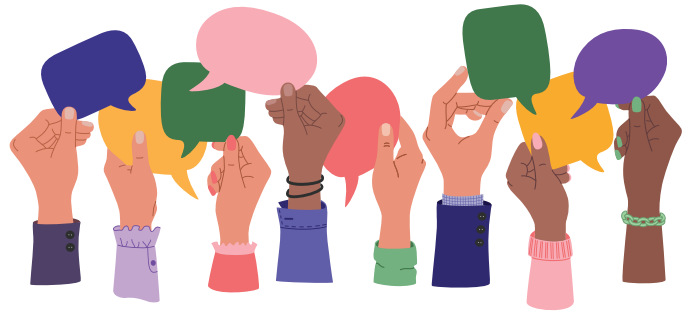
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# Cultural Competency for Effective Communications

**A focus on cultural competency among Foreign Service members can prevent misunderstandings that have the potential to trigger broader conflicts.**

BY CHARLES MORRILL



*Charles Morrill is a Foreign Service officer currently serving as the deputy management counselor at U.S. Embassy New Delhi. He holds a PhD in linguistics from Indiana University and an MBA from Boston University.*

The Minister Counselor took a deep breath, leaned back in his chair, and said in a Southern drawl, “I do not like it when I am *inter-rupted*.”

“The pause was so long I thought you had passed out,” muttered his subordinate, a fast-talking New Yorker, under his breath.

Everyone filters messages through the lens of their own culture as they interpret the paralinguistic cues and prosodic features, including contextualization, that help them infer meaning. Even between people who share the same ethnicity, race, class, and gender, there are abundant opportunities for misunderstanding. What one person perceives as a normal give-and-take in a conversation, the other may interpret as rudeness or disrespect.

As the Foreign Service becomes more inclusive, there will inevitably be greater opportunity for cross-cultural misunderstandings. And, of course, the very nature of diplomacy requires near-constant communication with people of very different backgrounds and with different goals for the conversation.

In her book *Get Along, Get It Done, Get Ahead: Interpersonal Communication in the Diverse Workplace*, Geraldine Hynes argues that managers need to develop what she refers to as “cultural competence.” After diversity and inclusion, Hynes notes that cultural competency is the third attribute that organizations need to take into consideration when recruiting and promoting effective leaders. Nowhere is this more true than in a global, multicultural setting such as an embassy.

## Listenership, Intonation, and Indirectness

Another communication expert, Georgetown University professor Deborah Tannen, writes in *“That’s Not What I Meant!”* that cross-cultural communication is not only about “pacing and pausing” but also about when to talk, what to say, and how we say it. Body language and eye contact are nonverbal, paralinguistic cues that often convey more powerful messages than the actual words spoken.

For many Americans, looking directly at your interlocutor when listening conveys **listenership**, indicating that you are engaged, paying attention, and that you respect the speaker. A typical American speaker will scan their listeners, seeking nonverbal cues, particularly through the eyes, that the message is being received. If the eyes are averted, this feedback confirmation is missing.

In many cultures, however, it is considered disrespectful to look directly at a person of authority. Before they even utter their first word, their culture has molded them to do the exact opposite of what an American might do: to convey respect by looking away when being spoken to.

Studies have shown that for those from cultures in which directed gaze conveys listenership, the lack of gaze when looking away conveys that the person is not paying attention. Not understanding this cue, an American speaker might repeat their words, often louder and in simpler terms, which could come across as angry, condescending, or perhaps even bigoted. When roles are reversed, many Americans bristle if a speaker stares at them intently, perceiving them as domineering, pompous, and overbearing.

Listenership is important, but so is **intonation**—the differences in pitch, volume, and rhythm that convey special meaning beyond the words themselves. Even when ostensibly speaking the same language, people differ dramatically in how they subtly use intonation to convey meaning and emotion. John Gumperz, a pioneer in the field of sociolinguistics, provides the well-known example of South Asian cafeteria workers who asked customers if they wanted gravy with their meal using a falling intonation, which was perceived by British customers as meaning, “This is gravy; take it or leave it”—a rude commentary, rather than a simple question.

**Indirectness** in speech is also a major cultural attribute of language that can contribute to a breakdown in communication. Tannen says indirectness is linked to a need to foster **rapport** while ensuring **defensiveness**. Rapport is the ability to be understood without explaining oneself fully, or to get what one wants without specifically asking for it. Defensiveness is the ability to

save face by reneging if the message is not received well, to say “that is not what I meant” or “you misunderstood.”

For many, indirect speech is strongly associated with tact, which is at the very heart of diplomatic speech. As Winston Churchill quipped, “Tact is the ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that they look forward to the trip.” Indirect speech fosters good rapport, even if the underlying message may be offensive.

## Build Your Cultural Intelligence

The bedrock of cultural competency is cultural intelligence: the ability to understand and interpret cultural differences. But it does not suffice to be knowledgeable about differences in cultures and comfortable working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Cultural competency is about being self-aware, empathetic, and emotionally intelligent. So, what are some ways we can improve our cultural competency?

*Improve your cultural understanding.* Educate yourself on the cultures of those around you, be it your fellow Americans or the local staff at an overseas mission. Specifically, find out about the general speech patterns: Do they avert their gaze when a superior speaks? Are they known for indirect speech? Do they raise their voice when signaling a desire to speak?

Improving your cultural intelligence does not just require learning about others; it requires learning about yourself. All humans are predisposed to their own culture, which manifests itself as a bias. If you are aware of your own biases, you will be less likely to project them negatively onto innocent bystanders.

*Practice active listening.* Body language, gaze, and other nonverbal cues can convey a wealth of meaning beyond the actual words spoken. If we are culturally intelligent, however, we are aware that the paralinguistic cues can easily be misread or misinterpreted. Use the “ACE” formula to better ensure no miscommunications:

- Affirm what you hear the other person say by paraphrasing; then
- Comment on this by saying if you agree or disagree; then
- Expand by adding your perspective.

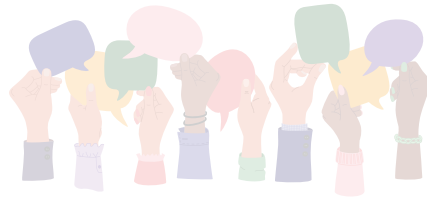
Finally, breakdowns in communication can inevitably happen even between those with a high degree of cultural intelligence and self-awareness. While we can minimize misunderstandings through active listening, they cannot be avoided entirely. When they happen, we can engender goodwill by not laying blame on others. Assume instead that you are at least half of the problem; after all, communication goes both ways.

Use your empathy and emotional intelligence to suppress



frustration, understand your own feelings, and manage how you respond. A humble and good-natured response can defuse conflict, whereas anger and scolding can exacerbate the situation and lead to irreparable damage to the relationship in the long term.

EEO complaints can sometimes be traced to a simple lack of cultural competency on the part of one or both parties in the complaint. Unchecked, perceived slights fester and grow as communications and relationships break down. In a global and increasingly diverse Foreign Service, leaders and managers must develop their cultural competency by actively learning about cultural speech patterns of their co-workers and contacts, become more self-aware of the cultural biases that we all possess, and exhibit greater empathy and emotional intelligence to defuse misunderstandings before they lead to a breakdown in relationships.



## Indirectness in speech is also a major cultural attribute of language that can contribute to a breakdown in communication.

As *New York Times* columnist and Columbia University professor John McWhorter, author of numerous works on the unique speech patterns of African American English, puts it: “Language is a powerful form of social identity, as it connects our communities and helps us express our unique experiences.” Regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity, the way an individual speaks is part of their social and cultural identity, and Foreign Service members need to understand and embrace these differences to create connections. ■

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# Poznan 1995

## Requiem for a Diplomatic Post

**The “new American way of diplomacy” following the Cold War saw the closure of provincial posts around the world.**

BY DICK VIRDEN

In the mid-1990s, I was serving as the country public affairs officer at U.S. Embassy Warsaw when officials above my pay grade decided to close our consulate general and associated United States Information Service (USIS) branch post in Poznan. The United States had won the Cold War and deserved a peace dividend, the thinking went. We could do without a presence in western Poland. Keeping our consulate general in Krakow, in the south, would be sufficient representation outside the Polish capital.

From my perspective at the time, the decision seemed penny-wise and pound-foolish. It doesn't look any better today, given Poland's role as a pivotal frontline NATO state in the struggle to protect Eastern Europe from Moscow's push to restore its empire. The United States now has 10,000 troops stationed in the country, but we have diplomatic posts only in Warsaw and Krakow.

For decades, we have been closing provincial posts in favor of operating from heavily fortified embassy chanceries.



*Dick Virden is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer. His assignments abroad included tours in Poland (twice), Thailand (twice), Brazil (twice), Romania, Vietnam, and Portugal. He is a graduate of the National War College and served on its faculty.*

No doubt this new American way of diplomacy is safer and less costly. But it also risks leaving us out of touch with daily life in places like Poland, the Arab street, or in outlying cities, towns, and villages elsewhere around the globe.

Nor does it help advance our foreign policy goals that the agency charged with leading the effort to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics has disappeared into the Department of State, which has other goals. The country founded out of a decent respect for the opinions of humankind apparently decided what others think is no longer a priority.

Edward R. Murrow, the legendary broadcaster (and former U.S. Information Agency director) famously said that in communication, it's the final three feet that count. Personal contact remains vital today, even with the advent of social media. It's one reason why posts like USIS Poznan had so much to offer: they were closer to the people.

As Americans once again rethink our country's role in the world, some even question the wisdom of backing friends and allies such as Ukraine. As we reevaluate, however, we should consider not only what our efforts cost but also what they're worth.

What follows is my report at the time—written for *USIA World*, the agency's house organ—about the value of USIS Poznan, and what was lost when this post and others like it were shuttered.



COURTESY OF URSZULA DZIUBA

This sunlit building housed the U.S. consulate general and associated United States Information Service (USIS) branch post in Poznan from 1959 until 1995.

### USIS Poznan Closes, Leaves Proud Legacy [A Report by Dick Virden, 1995]

On the Poznan-Warsaw train, Dec. 1, 1995—We closed the U.S. Information Service in Poznan today. A small band of Polish civic leaders and American officials did the honors on a cold, sunny morning in the courtyard of the building that has housed USIS, and the consulate of which it was part, since 1959.

There were fine speeches by the ambassador, governor, mayor, and consul general. The mayor said the Americans had always been there since he was a boy; he hoped they might come back one day, not because the difficult times of the past had returned, but for just the opposite reason. He had in mind a Polish economic boom that would make Americans see value in being on the spot.

Speaking for the 25 employees of the consulate and USIS, Public Affairs Specialist Urszula Dziuba talked with dignity and eloquence about the pride Poles took in representing both America and their fatherland, in going to work every day in an office where values like integrity, fairness, and mutual respect were honored.

**One reason why posts like USIS Poznan had so much to offer: they were closer to the people.**

Poles share America’s passion for freedom, Ms. Dziuba observed, “the more so since it was present in our daily work.” The paradox, she added, is that “it is freedom that is now taking the Americans away from us.”

When the speaking was done, a memorial plaque was unveiled. It reads, in Polish, as follows: “This building in the years 1959 to 1995 proudly served as the headquarters of the consulate general of the United States of America. In the most difficult years of the Polish nation, the consulate was a living symbol of the engagement of America in the return of freedom and independence to Poland. A grateful nation and government of the United States of America dedicates this plaque to the Polish employees of the consulate, who throughout those years faithfully served the cause of Polish-American friendship.”

The craftsman who chiseled the handsome plaque, Mr. Eugeniusz Holderny, refused to accept any payment for his work, saying it was his contribution to the Americans, who had liberated his father from Buchenwald.





At the USIS Poznan closing ceremony on Dec. 1, 1995, from left, Ambassador Nicolas Rey, Mrs. Louisa Rey, and Urszula Dziuba, who would become the consular agent, listen to Poznan Consul General Janet Weber. At right front is Dr. Włodzimierz Lecki, the governor of Wielkopolska from 1990 to 1997; the late Wojciech Szczesny Kaczmarek, mayor of Poznan from 1990 to 1998; and Poznan University Professor Jadwiga Rotnicka, who was the president of Poznan City Council from 1991 to 1998.

ROMUALD SWIATKOWSKI/GLOS WIELKOPOLSKI



Marine Guards Cpl. Demetrius A. Vance (left) and Sgt. Robert M. Guider lower the flag at the closing of USIS Poznan. Ambassador and Mrs. Rey and Consul General Weber look on.

ROMUALD SWIATKOWSKI/GLOS WIELKOPOLSKI

Then it was time to lower the flag. A Polish military band played the national anthems of the two countries. U.S. Marines folded the American banner with painstaking care while a shivering crowd stood at attention and tears welled in more than one pair of eyes.

The consul general handed the flag to the mayor, who said it would have a place of honor in the city museum, where an exhibit of grainy black and white photos portray the bloody Poznan riots of 1956, when Poles filled the city's streets and hundreds died demanding "bread and work."

With the presentation of the flag, the consulate and USIS closed, but the official American presence in the city will not totally fade away. A "consular agency" will be established in the person of Ms. Dziuba, who will continue to assist USIS, as well as the State and Commerce departments.

The American library will stay, too, housed in a new home in the central library of Adam Mickiewicz University, one of Poland's best.

USIS and the consulate opened in 1959, in the wake of those 1956 riots that were one of the first signs of resistance to the unwanted communist system imposed on Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, as the region was then called.

For the next three decades, the USIS staff did what USIS posts do everywhere, though with the added complication of authorities who regarded Americans as a hostile element to be watched closely. During crisis periods, like the martial law years of the early 1980s, Polish citizens could deal with the Americans only at their own peril—and they chose to do so. In 1963, the night John F. Kennedy died, many gathered with lit candles outside the consulate gates to show their solidarity.

Some of the Poles who participated in today's ceremony found it ironic that the Americans, who shared the hard times, are leaving now that democracy and capitalism are taking root in Poland. They've learned about America's budget woes and realize that large budgets are made up of small bits (closing this USIS post saves about \$200,000 per year). But many clearly felt saddened and diminished by the decision, nonetheless.

One of Poland's first post-communist prime ministers was Hanna Suchocka, who had been chosen by USIS Poznan to be an international visitor (IV) years earlier when she was an unknown member of the Poznan University law department.

Other Poznan IV selections are currently serving as members of Parliament, government ministers, high court judges, members of the National Broadcast Council, university rectors, and directors of radio and television stations. One alumnus is head of the National Bar Association, and another has just published an encyclopedia of American film. Field posts have



**Post Reports**

## POZNAN

### USIS Leaves Proud Legacy

By Richard A. Virden



On the Poznan-Warsaw train, Dec. 1, 1995, we closed the United States Information Service in Poznan today. A small band of Polish civic leaders and American officials did the honors on a cold, sunny morning in the courtyard of the building that has housed USIS, and the consulate of which it was part, since 1959. There were fine speeches by the ambassador, governor, mayor, and consular general. The mayor said the Americans had always been there since he was a boy, not because the difficult times of the past had returned, but for just the opposite reason. He had in mind a Polish economic boom that would make Americans see value in being on the spot.

Speaking for the 25 Polish employees of the Consulate and USIS, Public Affairs Specialist Urszula Dziuba talked with dignity and eloquence about the pride Poles took in representing both America and their fatherland—and the

From left, Cpl. Demetrius A. Vance and Sgt. Robert M. Guider lower the flag as Mrs. Lisa Ray, Ambassador Nicholas A. Ray, and Poznan Consul General Janet Weber look on.

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Then it was time to lower the flag. A Polish military band played the national anthem and the American banner with some while a shivering crowd of Poles and tears welled in more eyes.

General handed the flag to a young man who said it would have a place in a city museum, where an ex-black and white photos portrait of the city's streets and demanding "bread and

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Some of the Poles who participated in the ceremony found it ironic that Americans, who shared the hard time leaving now that democracy and liberalism are taking root in Poland. I heard about America's budget deficit small bits (closing this USIS post about \$200,000 per year). I clearly felt saddened and disappointed by the decision nonetheless.

**Many Triumphs**  
One of Poland's first post-1989 prime ministers was Hansa, who had been chosen by USIA as an International Visitor (IV) when she was an unknown law professor at the Poznan University Law School. Other Poznan IVs, currently serving as members of government ministries, high members of the National Council, university rectors, radio and television news anchors, are head of

The first edition of *USIA World* in 1996 contained the author's report on the closing of USIS Poznan.

# USIA WORLD

United States Information Agency Volume 13, Number 1, 1996



## Fulbright 50th Anniversary Events Begin

COURTESY OF URSZULA DZIUBA

## GŁOS TOWARZYSKI



### Lzy pani konsul

**— Wolność zabrano nam Amerykanów. Te słowa wypowiedział w miasteczku 1 grudnia, Urszula Dziuba, pracownik Konsulatu Generalnego USA w Poznaniu z najbliższym stażem, bo od 1975 roku.**

W słowach tych było trochę żalu i zarysował historyczny kontekst, w tym czasie z boku stał i słuchał słów swej matki, Tadeusz Lisowski, były poseł Porozumienia Centrum, były poseł Sejmiku województwa wielkopolskiego.

Prezydent Pomorza Wojciech Straszewski, z słowy: "Straszewski historia zanikającego wielkopolskiego konsulatów, emigracji i wieloletniej korespondencji (w latach 1989-1990) osób, które tu przyjeżdżały, przez Służbę Bezpieczeństwa".

Słowa prezydenta Kaczmarska najbardziej przypadły mi do gustu i są dla mnie z osobistym doświadczeniem.

Porozumienia Kaczmarski, rektora UAM, profesora Jerzego Fedorowiczego, komendanta wojewódzkiego policji w Poznaniu Józef Napierkowski, Wąsowski, co przyszedł — Adam Wąsowski, wojewódzki polityk, dziennikarz — czyli, że ambasador mówi jakby wstąpił ich oczekiwaniom.

O godzinie 11:45 przy dźwiękach hymnu narodowego USA flaga amerykańska została zdjęta z muru i przekazana na ręce prezydenta Wojciecha Straszewskiego Kaczmarski. Wcześniej ambasador odłożył pa-mietnikową tablicę na ścianie konsulat.

W rezydencji pani konsul powieszono sześcioramienne lampki, a wina i przekąski w rękach wy-mienieli aważ o polityce.

Spoglądając w tym momencie na teatrze przewodniczącego Zarządu Regionu "Solidarności" Józefa Pałomskiego, dowodzący IV

Poznan's local newspaper (left) also broadcast news of the closure.

always been better than embassies at spotting talent at an early age, and Poznan excelled at it.

USIS Poznan can claim many other triumphs: the creation of strong bonds between American universities and Polish counterparts in Poznan, Wrocław, Torun (birthplace of Copernicus), and elsewhere in western Poland. Visits by jazz greats from Dave Brubeck to Wynton Marsalis and many other cultural presentations belied regime claims that America was a decadent, dying civilization.

When the first NATO exercise ever on the soil of the former Warsaw Pact was held a few miles outside Poznan in 1994, the 600 or so journalists who parachuted in for the occasion managed largely because USIS Poznan staffers were around to help them and military press officers find everything from telephones to the parade ground.

The behind-the-scenes work that made "operation cooperative bridge" a public affairs success was typical of the low-key effectiveness of USIS Poznan, which began as an outpost of the Cold War but went beyond conflict to form friendships, deepen understanding, and sustain the love of democracy, freedom, and independence that eventually prevailed in Poland.

Whatever the future of American relations with western Poland, those who served with USIS in Poznan—among them, Urszula Dziuba, Janusz Buszynski, Irena Horbowa, Roman Jankowski, Barbara Torlinska, Sławak Woch, Jawiga Chojnacka, Czesław Jankowiak, Len Baldyga, Jack Harrod, Larry Plotkin, John Scott Williams, Patrick Hodai, Richard Lundberg, Doug Ebner, Janet Demiray, Daniel Spikes, Sharon Lynch, Thomas Carmichael—know their work there mattered.

USIS Poznan leaves a legacy to cherish. ■

## In Defense of the U.S. Foreign Service and USAID

*These are unprecedented times for the Foreign Service community.*

*In response to the administration's efforts to dismantle USAID, on Feb. 6, AFSA joined a lawsuit in defense of this member agency to halt the imminent, irreversible damage to USAID members of the Foreign Service. Our actions seek to mitigate that harm and hold the administration accountable to lawful, orderly processes.*

*Here, for the record, we reprint the introduction to the lawsuit. To read the complete lawsuit filed on Feb. 6, see <https://bit.ly/AFSA-lawsuit>.*

**AFSA & AFGE**

v.

**Donald Trump, U.S. Department of State,  
U.S. Agency for International Development,  
U.S. Treasury Department,  
Marco Rubio, and Scott Bessent**

### Introduction

This action seeks declaratory and injunctive relief with respect to a series of unconstitutional and illegal actions taken by President Donald Trump and his administration that have systematically dismantled the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These actions have generated a global humanitarian crisis by abruptly halting the crucial work of USAID employees, grantees, and contractors. They have cost thousands of American jobs. And they have imperiled U.S. national security interests.

The first of these actions came on January 20, 2025, when Defendant Trump issued an Executive Order [No. 14169] titled "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," directing an immediate "90-day pause in United States foreign development assistance for assessment of programmatic efficiencies and consistency with United States foreign policy." Defendants State Department and Rubio then directed the immediate issuance of stop-work orders on USAID foreign assistance awards. USAID grantees and contractors reeled as they were—without any notice or process—constrained from carrying out their work alleviating poverty, disease, and humanitarian crises. Defendant Rubio subsequently was named by Defendant Trump as Acting Director of USAID and announced that he would consult with Congress on "potential reorganization" of the agency.

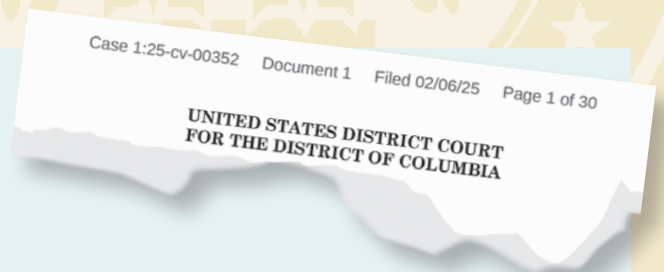
Shortly after assistance funding was frozen, over one thousand USAID institutional support contractors—and thousands more employees of USAID contractors or grantees—were laid off or furloughed. The humanitarian consequences of defendants' actions have already been

catastrophic. USAID provides life-saving food, medicine, and support to hundreds of thousands of people across the world. Without agency partners to implement this mission, U.S.-led medical clinics, soup kitchens, refugee assistance programs, and countless other programs shuttered to an immediate halt.

Days ago, Elon Musk and other members of the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) gutted what remained of the agency. Members of DOGE reportedly demanded access to classified USAID systems without requisite security clearances; USAID security officials who attempted to block them were placed on administrative leave. Musk posted on February 3 that he spent the previous weekend "feeding USAID into the wood chipper," and that same day, USAID headquarters shut down. More than 1,000 employees—including some in war zones—were locked out of their computer accounts. The [usaid.gov](https://www.usaid.gov) website now indicates that "all USAID direct hire personnel will be placed on administrative leave globally" on Friday, February 7, 2025, at 11:59 PM.

Not a single one of defendants' actions to dismantle USAID were taken pursuant to congressional authorization. And pursuant to federal statute, Congress is the only entity that may lawfully dismantle the agency.

Given the severe ongoing harms suffered by plaintiffs and defendants' intent to inflict imminent future harm, plaintiffs now file this Complaint and will seek a temporary restraining order directing Defendants to reverse these unlawful actions and to halt any further steps to dissolve the agency until the Court has an opportunity to more fully consider the issues on the merits. ■





AFSA has been issuing press releases as well as frequent updates and guidance for members. Here are excerpts from AFSA communications through Feb. 12.

**Jan. 23 Message to Members:  
Executive Orders and Our Commitment to You**

We understand that recent Executive Orders and memoranda affecting the federal workforce have raised questions and concerns within our community. Our leadership, legal, and policy teams are analyzing each document to assess its immediate and long-term impact on the Foreign Service. ... Once we have clarity on specifics, we will provide updates.

**Jan. 29 Message: Know Your Rights**

Reductions in Force (RIFs) in the Foreign Service are rare and must follow detailed procedures set forth in the Foreign Affairs Manual (3 FAM 2580), or for USAID, the ADS chapter (ADS 454). ... Employees who wish to contest their separation through the grievance system must file a grievance before they go off the rolls.

**Feb. 3 Press Release:**

**AFSA Objects to Decision to Dismantle USAID**

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) strongly objects to the administration's decision to dismantle the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This will undermine U.S. national security, may subvert congressional authority, and demonstrates a lack of respect for the dedication of the development professionals who serve America's interests abroad. ... Created by Congress in 1961, USAID is a vital instrument of U.S. foreign policy. USAID promotes U.S. national security through development and humanitarian programming at a fraction of the cost of military engagement.

**Feb. 5 Press Release:**

**AFSA Objects to Sudden Recall of USAID Personnel**

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) strongly objects to the administration's sudden and unnecessary decision to recall all U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Foreign Service personnel from overseas. ... USAID officers are nonpartisan public servants and dedicated professionals who work on the front lines of global humanitarian crises, often in dangerous and high-risk environments. ... The programs they implement play a critical role in countering violent extremism, reducing migration, and preventing the spread of public health emergencies. Removing them without a clear plan will not only create instability but also cede ground to strategic competitors like China.

**Feb. 6 Message: On USAID & Additional Online Resources**

The situation at USAID is unfolding rapidly, and AFSA is working hard to support and protect our members. ... AFSA has created

Taping over a USAID sign, Washington, D.C., on Feb. 7.



G. EDWARD JOHNSON/WIKIMEDIA

a virtual “Go Bag” checklist, complete with key resources to help you stay prepared for the unexpected [visit <https://bit.ly/AFSA-go-bag>]. This dynamic resource will be updated as circumstances evolve. ... Retirement Related Questions: In response to member questions, we have put together a detailed PowerPoint: Benefits at Retirement, Resignation, and Involuntary Separation [visit <https://bit.ly/AFSA-retirement>]. ... This and previous AFSA messages have outlined policies and procedures established by federal law. AFSA expects foreign affairs agencies to comply with these laws.

**Feb. 7 Press Release:**

**AFSA Files Lawsuit Challenging USAID Shutdown**

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), represented by Public Citizen Litigation Group and Democracy Forward, has filed a lawsuit challenging the unprecedented effort to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). ... AFSA's lawsuit seeks to reverse this destabilizing decision and continue USAID's vital mission.

**Feb. 8 Message: TRO Granted in AFSA-AFGE Case**

On the evening of Feb. 7, U.S. District Court Judge Carl Nichols granted, in part, our motion for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) ... ordering the government to reinstate all USAID employees currently on administrative leave and grant those employees complete access to email, payment, and security notification systems. ... No additional employees shall be placed on administrative leave, and no USAID employees shall be evacuated from their host countries before Feb. 14, 2025, at 11:59 PM. ... While this development gives us more time, there is still more work to do on the litigation. As such, AFSA advises our USAID members to continue to plan for a return to the United States pending further rulings by the Court.

**Feb. 10 Message: Is Administration Complying with TRO?**

Today, AFSA and AFGE filed an emergency motion asking the court for a hearing to determine whether the Trump administration is failing to comply with the Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) that the court issued on Friday, Feb. 7. Some AFSA members have not yet regained access to their emails or other systems necessary to perform their jobs. This indicates that the government is in violation of the court's order. ... Separately, there is a hearing scheduled for Feb. 12 on our motion for a preliminary injunction—an extended stay of the government's actions to dismantle USAID—while the Court considers the merits of the lawsuit. ■

To see all AFSA's member communications on the administration's executive orders and the ongoing litigation to halt the dismantling of USAID, visit <https://bit.ly/AFSA-messages>. Also, don't forget to visit the Resource Hub (<https://bit.ly/FS-resource-hub>), which we are regularly updating with useful information and answers to your frequently asked questions. That page will include up-to-date information for members, including on RIFs.

Thank you to all those inside and outside the FS community for the outpouring of support. If friends and family ask how they can help, please direct them to AFSA's Legal Defense Fund (<https://bit.ly/AFSA-LDF>). This fund provides critical financial assistance to help members as well as assistance to AFSA itself to retain outside legal counsel with specialized expertise.

## New Secretary Pays Tribute to Fallen FS

Following the welcome ceremony for new Secretary of State Marco Rubio in the State Department’s C Street lobby, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi accompanied Secretary and Ms. Rubio to lay flowers and pay their respects at the AFSA Memorial Plaques.

The memorial plaques, maintained by AFSA, honor colleagues who gave their lives in circumstances distinctive to overseas service. First unveiled in 1933, the plaques have evolved to include 321 names as of May 2022, commemorating sacrifices due to violence, natural disasters, disease, and accidents. AFSA continues to manage the plaques, as authorized by a



Secretary Marco Rubio at the AFSA Memorial Plaques.

1933 joint resolution of Congress, and hosts an annual ceremony each May to unveil and honor newly inscribed names.

See the full story about Rubio’s confirmation on page 11, and go to <https://afsa.org/memorial-plaques> to explore the history of plaques and the names inscribed on them. ■

## FSJ Hosts Publishing Panel and Book Market



Former AFSA Governing Board member Steve Herman (left) and AFSA FCS VP Joshua Burke.

On Nov. 14, 2024, the AFSA Publications department and FSJ hosted a book market and publishing panel, bringing together Foreign Service community members and publishing professionals to demystify the journey from manuscript to publication.

Shawn Dorman, AFSA publications director and editor in chief of *The Foreign Service Journal*, opened the panel event by pointing to the unique global perspectives of the Foreign Service community. Their stories, drawn from experiences across continents and cultures,

### CALENDAR

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

- March 10  
**Deadline for AFSA Merit Scholarship Applications**
- March 19  
12-1:30 p.m.  
**AFSA Governing Board Meeting**
- March 26  
12-1 p.m.  
**Election Town Hall**
- April 7  
**Deadline for AFSA Constructive Dissent and Exemplary Performance Award Nominations**
- April 15  
**Deadline for AFSA Board Election Ballots**
- April 16  
12-1:30 p.m.  
**AFSA Governing Board Meeting**
- April 18  
**Deadline for AFSA Financial Aid Scholarship Applications**
- May 1  
**AFSA Foreign Service Day Events**
- May 2  
**Foreign Service Day**

hold the potential to engage both niche and general audiences.

The panel featured an outstanding lineup of publishing professionals: Kate Epstein, an editing coach and founder of EpsteinWords; Dara Kaye, a literary agent with

*Continued on page 54*



## How Will the FY 2025 NDAA Affect You?

Thank you for your continuous, courageous feedback as we navigate these uncertain times. I am prouder than ever to serve alongside you, every day. While I wrote this column in early January applauding the passing of the FY 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), including the State Department Authorization Act, new developments make it unclear whether some of these provisions (noted with asterisks below) will be implemented.

Despite these uncertainties, we are motivated by the inclusion of several key provisions that have long been AFSA priorities.

**Recognizing key wins.** We are encouraged by new and expanded initiatives benefiting both our overseas and domestically based members, including 10-year renewal of the overseas comparability pay (OCP) at two-thirds the level of D.C. locality pay, per diem for local hires, non-competitive eligibility (NCE) for State Department spouses, further expansion of eligibility parameters of the paid internship program, and authorization to extend Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) coverage for up to three years of pre-approved leave without pay (LWOP).

Congressional authorization does not come with a budget for implementation attached, so we understand State will have to assess each initiative that requires

funding. Some have built-in implementation time frames of 18 months, and we remain hopeful funding will be allocated during this period.

**Per diem for new Foreign Service hires.\*** Congress has authorized per diem during the first six months of orientation training for all new hires rather than only those moving to the Washington, D.C., area from more than 50 miles away—a long-standing AFSA priority.

We know the January 2025 class of new hires was not part of this implementation, but we will push for local hires in future classes to be included in the implementation, which is vital to supporting new hires of every socioeconomic background.

**Retention initiative for active-duty members.** AFSA supports FS members who need to take leave for elder care, family, or self-care.

The LWOP program allows active-duty State Department and USAID FS members to take up to three years away from their agencies. The NDAA legislation addresses a major pain point: health insurance coverage after the first year. Now, all eligible FS members can opt in to pay the employee and government contributions of their FEHB insurance program during their second and third year of LWOP.

**Supporting State Department eligible family members (EFMs).** Another

**Count on AFSA to closely examine these issues and urge the department to strike the right balance between efficiency and privacy.**

important expansion is NDAA legislation allowing EFMs of State Department employees transferring from overseas to domestic duty locations to apply for federal positions noncompetitively.

Previously, EFMs needed 52 weeks of eligible overseas experience to gain NCE eligibility. This requirement has been removed to align with benefits already conferred to Department of Defense military spouses.

This expansion is combined with the department's recent increased flexibility allowing for the use of NCE more than once during the three-year eligibility period. AFSA continues to advocate for more EFM opportunities overseas and domestically because doing so allows our institution to tap into a vital talent pool and keeps Foreign Service families together.

**Building the student talent pipeline.\*** Another positive update in the NDAA was the expansion of State Department paid internship eligibility to include those who graduated from an accredited degree program within six months of the internship and allow interns to work less than 40 hours per week.

AFSA supports recruitment from geographically and

socioeconomically diverse groups across the United States, and these changes to the internship program will support Foreign Service outreach and hiring efforts.

**Personnel efficiencies.** AFSA recognizes increasing congressional support for generative AI and other approved tools for administrative efficiencies. AFSA is supportive of technology that may reduce the increasing administrative demands on Foreign Service employees.

We want to see all the proper safeguards, risk mitigations, and workforce education that is needed to ensure the technology is used properly and safely. Whether it is negotiating the use of AI in our performance evaluations process, or other AI uses that affect conditions of employment, count on AFSA to closely examine these issues and urge the department to strike the right balance between efficiency and privacy.

Please write to wong@afsa.org or member@afsa.org about what else you would like to see in future advocacy efforts. ■





## The Fight for USAID

Feb. 13—As I write this, we are waiting to hear whether the judge will grant us a preliminary injunction to halt the recall, administrative leave, and restore funding and systems access. Regardless of that outcome, neither I nor AFSA are prepared to stop fighting for you and USAID.

I don't want to waste any time or energy here rehashing all the negative hyperbole or mischaracterizations of our work.

We know the truth: USAID Foreign Service officers (FSOs) are patriots who implement the policy of the president—every president, regardless of party or political affiliation—and his national security team. We have done so for the past 61 years and continue to do so now, despite efforts by leadership to dismantle the Agency and bring a halt to our critical, lifesaving work.

Since this crisis began, I have been asked by many people, including reporters: Do you and your colleagues still want to work for the administration? My response is always: Yes. We aren't leaving.

We believe in the work we do and the importance of our mission. We make America safe. We protect Americans by reducing poverty, increasing linkages and markets for American businesses, and eliminating the spread of diseases.

This sentiment has been echoed by many of you in your communications to me and AFSA. This is the power of commitment: At USAID, we believe in America, and any administration should welcome our commitment.

While our team of lawyers works through the courts, and with the full support of AFSA behind me, I continue to reach out to the administration on behalf of our members.

In a recent letter to leadership, I wrote: "It is obvious that you have no intention of engaging with anyone on either the strategic rethink of foreign assistance or the future of USAID. While that may be your plan, AFSA fully intends to hold you and USAID accountable to the policies outlined in the Automated Directive Service (ADS) as well as its legal and financial obligations to the Foreign Service."

We have demanded to meet and engage on what is happening to the Service, the nonpayment of vouchers, the reduction-in-force plans, and many other issues. As I wrote, "AFSA expects the Agency to fully follow ADS 454 (Reduction in Force). This policy requires consultation with AFSA," and we are holding the administration to it.

I explained that "posts are reporting that due to the Agency's current refusal to disburse any

**USAID Foreign Service officers (FSOs) are patriots who implement the policy of the president—every president, regardless of party or political affiliation—and his national security team. We have done so for the past 61 years and continue to do so now.**

funds, many FSOs are facing having their electricity and gas being turned off at their official residences as well as the real possibility of being evicted if the Agency defaults paying their leases. Surely, it is not your intention for the USG to be known as a deadbeat who reneges on its financial obligations. We have informed our members that they should file grievances against the Agency over any and all overdue allowances or reimbursements."

I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from all over the world for the work of USAID. This provides some solace. As the American people learn more about our dedication and our mission, their support grows.

Know that AFSA is doing everything it can to fight for you, working nonstop to resolve the crisis. I have no intention of leaving. I will be here, pushing headlong into the wind to support all of you and to safeguard USAID as an institution.

As I told leadership: "You may not believe, or be unwilling to understand, the sacrifices made by FSOs, the high level of integrity FSOs demonstrate every day, our commitment to serving the American taxpayer, or that at the end of the day we are American patriots who believe in the good that the U.S. has to offer, not just to people at home, but also to the world."

I know how important your work is, how great your sacrifices have been, and I will continue to tell everyone about you, my heroic colleagues.

I remain in awe of the work we have done and your continued efforts in the face of this storm. Please keep sending us your stories by completing the form here: <https://bit.ly/USAID-stories>. We will contact all members directly before sharing your stories.

Stay strong, be safe, and regardless of what happens, know that AFSA and I will not stop fighting for you. ■



## Losing to China

The United States is losing the great commercial diplomacy game to China. While Washington focuses on efficiency, Beijing executes a ruthless, long-term strategy to dominate global trade, technology, and diplomacy.

China is not just competing—it is systematically dismantling U.S. commercial influence and replacing it with its own.

China’s state-controlled capitalism, paired with aggressive global expansion, is pushing America to the sidelines. Through predatory trade practices, supply chain monopolization, and commercial diplomacy backed by authoritarian power, Beijing is buying the future, one industry and one country at a time.

The U.S. trade deficit with China stood at \$279 billion in 2023. Meanwhile, American companies face high tariffs, forced technology transfers, and market barriers in China.

China’s control over rare earth elements (80 percent of global supply) gives it economic leverage over the U.S. military and tech sector. While the CHIPS Act appears to be an effective down payment, China still controls more than 60 percent of the world’s chip supply chain.

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has locked more than 150 nations into debt-fueled economic dependency. If we continue

losing to China, we are risking economic decline and handing over control of the future to a strategic rival that seeks to rewrite global rules in its favor.

However, while China has made inroads, America’s commercial diplomats are deploying tools and programs that are helping our nation become stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

The Department of Commerce’s Global Markets (GM) must be fully unshackled from internal bureaucracy and expanded to counter China’s economic warfare. By expanding exports, securing supply chains, and countering unfair Chinese competition, GM helps America to reinforce its position as the leader of the global economy.

In the past year, however, GM has lost nearly 10 percent of our officer corps. More troubling, our locally employed (LE) staff resources are down 20 or even 30 percent in some posts. Meanwhile, the PRC has 10 times the number of commercial officers in several key posts overseas.

We can still win this fight, but only if we act decisively and immediately. Our team of capable, talented, and loyal public servants is here to help the new administration fight and win against a rising China. Below are a few suggested areas of focus for our incoming leadership:

1. *Expand export promotion programs.* Increase funding for GM offices to help more U.S. companies access international markets.

2. *Strengthen FDI through SelectUSA.* Make the U.S. the premier destination for foreign investment, creating jobs and reducing reliance on Chinese-owned industries.

3. *Enhance commercial diplomacy.* Leverage GM’s experience in U.S. embassies, trade missions, and advocacy programs to counter China’s influence in emerging markets.

4. *Tighten export controls on critical technologies.* Ensure that China does not gain access to U.S. innovations in AI, semiconductors, and advanced materials.

China’s economic strategy is designed to undermine U.S. leadership and make nations more dependent on Beijing. But through targeted trade promotion, supply chain security, and strategic commercial diplomacy, Global Markets is ensuring that America remains strong, safe, and prosperous—not just today, but for the decades to come.

The time for half-measures is over. China has a plan to win—and it’s working. America does not have the luxury of time. The question is no longer whether we are losing to China. The question is: Is America going to disarm, or are we willing to do what it takes to win? ■



### AFSA Governing Board Meetings

#### November 20, 2024

The board adopted the Fiscal Year 2025 AFSA budget as presented.

President Tom Yazdgerdi recognized Gunter “Eric” Schwabe as the newly appointed USAGM representative.

#### December 11, 2024

The board agreed to update AFSA’s Employee Handbook to provide clarity regarding leave accrual.

The board agreed to discharge the Centennial Committee. ■

*Publishing Panel and Book Market  
Continued from page 50*

the William Morris Agency; Don Jacobs, senior acquisitions editor at Georgetown University Press; and Michael Kerns, senior publisher at Bloomsbury USA.

Panelists provided insights into the publishing landscape, from the difference between university presses and trade publishers to the role of editing coaches and literary agents.

Epstein discussed the role of editing coaches, explaining how they help writers overcome creative roadblocks and keep projects on track. She likened the writing process to a journey, where coaches help navigate the

twists and turns, ensuring writers stay motivated and productive.

For those ready to pitch their manuscripts, literary agent Dara Kaye described her role as part advocate, part editor, and part negotiator. She emphasized the importance of clarity and a strong voice in proposals, as well as understanding market dynamics.

Don Jacobs and Michael Kerns explored the differences between university presses and trade publishers. University presses, often tied to academic institutions, focus on scholarly rigor and niche markets. In contrast, trade publishers aim for broader audiences, prioritizing marketable ideas



Attendees connect with authors at AFSA headquarters.

COURTESY OF ALICIA FORD



Editor in Chief and moderator Shawn Dorman with AFSA publishing panelists, from left: Kate Epstein, Dara Kaye, Don Jacobs, and Michael Kerns.

AFSA/HANNAH HARARI

and authors with strong platforms. Both cited the importance of crafting proposals that align with a publisher's mission and showcase the book's unique angle.

Authors were encouraged to consider their goals and audience when deciding between publishing models. For those aiming to self-publish or work with smaller presses, panelists highlighted the trade-offs. While these paths offer more control and personalized attention, they also require authors to take the lead in marketing and distribution. Whether working with a publicist or leveraging social media, authors were reminded that their proactive involvement can significantly boost a book's visibility.

The conversation touched on specialized projects like anthologies and reissued works. Anthologies of original content can be viable,

but reprinted collections often face high permissions costs. Similarly, previously published works—whether self-published or released in foreign markets—are challenging to pitch unless they've had limited circulation or significant revisions.

The event concluded with practical advice: Persistence is essential in navigating rejections, and understanding the market is key to success.

Before the panel began, AFSA hosted a book market with a dozen Foreign Service authors, most of whom were featured in the November *FSJ's* "In Their Own Write" collection. Guests were able to meet the authors and purchase autographed copies of their books ahead of the holidays.

The Foreign Service community has meaningful stories to share, and with the right guidance, those stories can reach audiences far and wide. ■



## Wrapping Up the Centennial Year

On Dec. 11, 2024, AFSA and the Foreign Service continued their centennial festivities with a lively happy hour at AFSA headquarters. Despite torrential downpours in the D.C. area, more than 100 guests—members, retirees, and friends—joined to celebrate a century of diplomacy.

Attendees enjoyed a custom cocktail, hors d'oeuvres, and AFSA-themed giveaways. AFSA thanks Chambers Theory for sponsoring the occasion.

The event also marked two bittersweet farewells. Allan Saunders, AFSA's communications manager for more than a decade, was honored for his years of service, and Sue Bremner received recognition upon her retirement from her position as AFSA's longtime



CHAMBERS THEORY/ISAAC BROWN

USAID labor management adviser.

With this gathering, AFSA capped its 2024 centennial on a high note. Now, in 2025,

members remain inspired by a century of accomplishments and ready to forge the Foreign Service's next chapter. ■

AFSA's final happy hour of 2024 honored the Foreign Service's centennial milestone.

### Inside Diplomacy

## Nina Hachigian on Subnational Diplomacy

On Dec. 3, 2024, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi hosted Ambassador Nina Hachigian for another installment of AFSA's *Inside Diplomacy* series, which brings thought-provoking discussions on foreign policy and the Foreign Service to the public.

Amb. Hachigian, the State Department's first-ever special representative for subnational diplomacy, shared insights into the growing significance of local governments in addressing global challenges such as climate change, migration, and economic development.

The discussion illuminated how cities, states, and coun-

ties are increasingly active on the international stage, forging partnerships to address shared challenges and opportunities.

Amb. Hachigian also shared details on recent achievements of her office and the importance of collaboration with local leaders and federal agencies to maximize the impact of subnational diplomacy.

For a deeper dive into the themes and takeaways from this conversation, see excerpts on page 31.

A recording is available at [afsa.org/video](https://afsa.org/video). ■

## FS Wins International Service Award

On Nov. 20, 2024, the World Affairs Councils of America (WACA) kicked off its annual conference with an opening dinner and awards ceremony at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The evening was dedicated to celebrating achievements that strengthen international cooperation, humanitarian awareness, and global prosperity. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of WACA's prestigious International Service Award to the U.S. Foreign Service, an honor marking the centennial of the institution's founding under the 1924 Foreign Service Act.

Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, vice chair of the WACA National Board, former president of the American Foreign Service Association, and current vice provost for global affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, introduced and presented the award.

A veteran of the Foreign Service with a 34-year career spanning multiple continents, Stephenson reflected on the critical role diplomats play in advancing U.S. interests and fostering mutual understanding across the globe.

She noted how this year's conference theme, "Seeing from the Other Side," resonated with the work of diplomats who spend their



From left: Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, Ambassador Deborah McCarthy, ADST President Susan Johnson, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, DACOR President Angela Dickey, FSJ Editor in Chief Shawn Dorman, and Ambassador Jo Ellen Powell.

careers immersed in the perspectives of the nations where they serve.

In her remarks, Stephenson drew attention to the often unseen but indispensable contributions of the Foreign Service. Drawing on Secretary of State Antony Blinken's analogy to the

### Without the quiet but critical work of America's diplomats, the world would look very different.

film *It's a Wonderful Life*, she explained that without the quiet but critical work of America's diplomats, the world would look very different: less stable, less connected, and less prosperous.

She spoke of the sacri-

fices made by members of the Foreign Service and their families, noting the personal toll that comes with serving far from home, often in challenging and dangerous environments.

Stephenson invited representatives of six organizations supporting the Foreign

Service to join her on stage: President of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Susan R. Johnson, American Foreign Service Association President Tom Yazdgerdi, DACOR President Angela Dickey, Editor in

Chief of *The Foreign Service Journal* Shawn Dorman, Executive Director of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation Ambassador Jo Ellen Powell, and Ambassador Deborah McCarthy for the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Next, the WACA Chairman's Individual Award was presented to former FSO Derrick Olsen, president of World Oregon and a WACA board member.

As the evening drew to a close, Stephenson offered a toast to the next century of diplomacy and invited all current and former Foreign Service officers in attendance, as well as their families, to stand and be recognized.

"Together," she said, "we will shape a more connected, peaceful, and prosperous world." ■

## AFSA Global Town Hall

AFSA hosted a global town hall on Dec. 12, 2024, offering members an opportunity to engage with AFSA leadership, hear updates on advocacy efforts, and ask about pressing issues facing the Foreign Service.

The event was moderated by outgoing Professional Policy Issues Director Julie Nutter. Panelists included AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, USAID Vice President Randy Chester, FCS Vice President Joshua Burke, and FAS Vice President Evan Mangino.

Yazdgerdi highlighted recent AFSA advocacy achievements, including the successful extension of overseas comparability pay (OCP) authorization. While OCP remains capped at two-thirds of D.C. locality pay, he noted that this extension provides a solid foundation for future advocacy to secure full parity.

Other legislative suc-

cesses were covered, including provisions in the Fiscal Year 2025 State Authorization Act. Notable measures include safeguarding paid leave for employees in combat zones and high-threat posts and per diem allowances for local hires during their first six months of orientation.

Yazdgerdi also explained that there may be potential cuts to the international affairs budget this year.

Attendees asked about delays in ambassadorial nominations, commissioning, and tenure lists. Yazdgerdi noted that these bottlenecks are due largely to external factors beyond AFSA's control, though AFSA continues to advocate for approval of nominations and lists.

Participants also raised concerns about a possible hiring freeze and the reintro-

duction of Schedule F. Yazdgerdi reassured members that AFSA is monitoring these developments closely, advocating for policies that protect the integrity and stability of the Foreign Service workforce. Note: Executive Orders for both a hiring freeze and reinstatement of Schedule F were subsequently issued on Jan. 21, 2025.

AFSA reaffirmed its commitment to providing robust support to members navigating challenges such as retaliation and other workplace issues. Members were reminded to utilize AFSA's resources and contact the association for assistance using personal email accounts to ensure confidentiality.

Additionally, the town hall emphasized the value of professional liability insurance, with agency reimbursements covering half the cost.

This coverage offers vital protection for Foreign Service professionals in an uncertain environment.

The session also brought good news on programmatic fronts. Provisions for spousal employment and childcare subsidies were included in recent legislation, addressing long-standing concerns about family support. The reinstatement of emergency backup care for domestic State Department employees was another significant win.

AFSA leaders closed the town hall by emphasizing the importance of member engagement and dues support in sustaining advocacy efforts. While acknowledging the uncertainty of the road ahead, AFSA reiterated its readiness to tackle challenges head-on, drawing on decades of experience and a steadfast commitment to the Foreign Service community. ■

## Good Stewardship for Our Members

As we reported in the November 2024 issue of AFSA News, AFSA received its 15th straight "clean" audit, also known as an unmodified opinion, in 2024.

AFSA is proud of its long history of fiscally sound stewardship of our greatest resource: your member dues and contributions. Together, these account for well over

90 percent of AFSA's revenues each year. We believe our greatest responsibility is to ensure that these resources are invested wisely and managed with an eye toward longevity and maximum returns.

Therefore, we are happy to report that AFSA entered 2025 on a strong financial footing. Our members can

be assured that the association is well positioned for any type of unexpected financial setbacks.

In early January, our operating reserve stood at \$3.2 million, which is sufficient to cover between six and seven months of regular AFSA operations. In addition, our Scholarship Fund is now at \$12.6

million, the Legal Defense Fund at just over \$400,000, and the entities that make up the Fund for American Diplomacy, our 501(c)(3) outreach arm, together stand at \$900,000.

We remain committed to our fiduciary responsibilities and will continue to report on our financial standing as a matter of transparency. ■



## Ending a New-Hire Pay Gap

The issue of unequal pay entitlements for newly hired Foreign Service members, particularly local hires, has been a long-standing concern. For more than two decades, AFSA has worked to ensure fair treatment for all new entrants.

A major victory was achieved with the passage of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), resolving the final disparity in how new hires, especially local hires, were treated. Here's a look at AFSA's journey to this victory.

Prior to 2013, newly hired Foreign Service members would receive overseas comparability pay (OCP), capped at two-thirds of Washington, D.C., locality pay, until they arrived at their first assignment. As illustrated below, during this time, i.e., A-100 orientation and training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), nonlocal hires received per diem, while local hires received only OCP.

FSGB 205-053	A-100 Orientation	FSI Training 0-6 months	FSI Training 6 to 12 months	FSI Training 12+ months
Local Hire	0	OCP	Locality pay	Locality pay
Nonlocal Hire	Per diem	OCP + per diem	Locality pay	Locality pay

AFSA's advocacy over the disparity in pay dates back as far as 1994, when AFSA began hearing reports from its constituents of morale issues among incoming class members who were disadvantaged based solely on their geographic location at the time of hiring. This prompted AFSA to seek an explanation from the State Department about its policy. Unfortunately, the department offered little to explain the discrepancy.

A few years later, in what seemed to be an effort to remedy part of the problem through the assignment and locality pay process, the department sought guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) about the short-term assignment of local hires to their training location. In 1998 OPM issued guidance noting that the short-term assignment of a local hire to their training location, prior to their first official duty station, conflicted with OPM's statutorily authorized regulations. As such, the discrepancy and disadvantage persisted.

### The Grievance Process in Action

In 2012 AFSA was contacted by a new local hire who expected to be in training status for more than one year

prior to his first assignment. The member was receiving OCP but believed that, per the department's own regulations (see 2 13 FAM 102 and SOP a-09), he should be assigned to FSI and receive full locality pay. AFSA filed a grievance on behalf of the member.

On Nov. 20, 2013, the Foreign Service Grievance Board (FSGB) ruled in favor of the grievant, finding that the department had failed to apply its own regulations and that employees required to undergo training expected to last more than one year should be assigned to the training location, thereby entitling them to locality pay.

The ruling clarified that new entrants, regardless of their status as local or nonlocal hires, must be assigned to the training facility, entitling them to full D.C. locality pay. See FSGB Case No. 2013-020.

FSGB 2013-020	A-100 Orientation	FSI Training 0-12 months	FSI Training 12+ months
Local Hire	0	OCP	Locality pay
Nonlocal Hire	Per diem	OCP + per diem	Locality pay

This victory in 2013 was followed by a second grievance involving two new local hires in training expected to last more than six months but less than one year prior to their first assignment. The members were receiving OCP, but believed they should be assigned to FSI and receive full locality pay.

The FSGB ruled once again in favor of the grievants, confirming that the department's failure to apply its regulations resulted in the denial of locality pay to which employees were entitled. The 2017 ruling applied the same logic as the 2013 decision to cases involving six- to 12-month training assignments. The board determined that the department was required to assign such employees to FSI and pay them locality pay accordingly. See FSGB Case No. 2015-053.

FSGB 205-053	A-100 Orientation	FSI Training 0-6 months	FSI Training 6-12 months	FSI Training 12+ months
Local Hire	0	OCP	Locality pay	Locality pay
Nonlocal Hire	Per diem	OCP + per diem	Locality pay	Locality pay

These FSGB rulings set important precedents for the application of locality pay to newly hired Foreign Service employees regardless of their geographic location at the time of hiring. With these significant wins, AFSA next turned its focus on the

final discrepancy: per diem for new local hires during orientation and training expected to last less than 6 months.

### Legislative Fix and the 2025 NDAA

In 2019 AFSA began advocating for a change to allow parity among the new local from day one of their employment, beginning with orientation training. AFSA crafted suggested legislative text to ensure new Foreign Service members hired locally received per diem during their first six months of orientation, or until eligible for locality pay. We met with members of Congress and their staff, explaining this inequity between local and nonlocal hires and urging them to provide parity.

Our hard work and persistent effort finally bore fruit with the passage of the 2025 NDAA, which establishes in Section 7109 that “any newly hired Foreign Service employee who is in initial orientation training, or any other training expected to last less than 6 months ... shall, for the duration of such training, receive a per diem allowance.” The reasonable caveat

for local hires is that the individual may not receive lodging expenses as part of per diem if they have a permanent residence in the Washington, D.C., area, *and* do not vacate such residence during orientation and/or other training.

2025 NDAA	A-100 Orientation	FSI Training 0-6 months	FSI Training 6-12 months	FSI Training 12+ months
Local	Per diem*	OCP + per diem*	Locality pay	Locality pay
Nonlocal	Per diem	OCP + per diem	Locality pay	Locality pay

The struggle for fairness in the treatment of new Foreign Service hires has been long and challenging. With the passage of the 2025 NDAA, however, our perseverance has paid off, ensuring that all newly hired Foreign Service members will now receive the pay and benefits they deserve, regardless of their geographic origin. ■

## AFSA Welcomes Incoming USAID FSOs

On Jan. 24, 2025, AFSA hosted a welcome lunch at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., for the 47 members of USAID’s Career Candidate Corps (C3) Class 45. This cohort includes participants specializing across 13 backstops, including health science, economics, and agriculture.

The AFSA president and AFSA USAID vice president welcomed the class with remarks about AFSA’s role and fielded questions about the resources AFSA offers, including guidance about legal representation and the recent wave of presidential executive orders.

The new officers bring a breadth of experiences, having worked or studied in 93 countries and



AFSA Vice President Randy Chester fields audience questions at AFSA HQ.

speaking 30 languages, from Albanian to Yoruba. Members of the class have contributed to projects across sectors such as countertrafficking, environmental sustainability,

humanitarian assistance, and economic development.

Notable achievements include trekking through the Congo basin to track gorillas, rafting the Zambezi,

and leading initiatives with organizations such as the International Rescue Committee and the UN World Food Program. ■

## Nominate a Colleague for a 2025 AFSA Award

AFSA seeks to highlight achievement, performance, courage, and sacrifice within the Foreign Service community through our awards program, which began in 1968 and has expanded every year since. We are proud to be able to spotlight the best of our community.

AFSA's **Constructive Dissent Awards** recognize Foreign Service members who work within the system to change policy and performance for the better.

Such dissent may be made in any nonpublic channel including meetings, emails to superiors, memoranda, telegrams or via the State Department's formal Dissent Channel. Thus, AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards may be given to, but are not restricted to, employees who make use of the Dissent Channel.

These awards are unique within the federal government and remain the lynchpin of AFSA's awards program. There is no democracy without dissent, and the U.S. Foreign Service must remain a leader in the encouragement of respectful yet provocative constructive dissent.

We invite nominations for the four awards:

- **The W. Averell Harriman Award** for entry-level Foreign Service officers.
- **The William R. Rivkin Award** for mid-level Foreign Service officers.
- **The Christian A. Herter Award** for Senior Foreign Service officers.
- **The F. Allen "Tex" Harris Award** for Foreign Service specialists.

AFSA also invites nominations for the **Exemplary Performance Awards**, which are meant to highlight the professionalism and spirit of service and volunteerism within the Foreign Service community.

These awards honor Foreign Service members, community liaison office coordinators, and family members for their important contributions at work, at home, and in the community. Performance awards include:

- **The Nelson B. Delavan Award** recognizes the work of a



AFSA/DACQUIN SOSA

Foreign Service office management specialist who has made a significant contribution to post or office effectiveness and morale, both *within* and *beyond* the framework of their job responsibilities.

- **The M. Juanita Guess Award** recognizes a community liaison office coordinator who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, dedication, initiative, or imagination in assisting the families of Americans serving at an overseas post.

- **The Avis Bohlen Award** honors a Foreign Service family member whose volunteer work with the U.S. and foreign communities at post has advanced the interests of the United States.

- **The Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy** is bestowed on a member of the Foreign Service from any of the foreign affairs agencies, especially

individuals at the early- to mid-career level, serving domestically or overseas. The award recognizes the promotion of American policies to advance democracy, freedom, and governance through bold, imaginative, and effective efforts during one or more assignments.

Note that we accept awards nominations all year, but the **deadline for 2025 is April 7**. Anyone may send in a nomination; more information including the nomination criteria and guidelines is available on the AFSA website at <https://afsa.org/awards-and-honors>.

AFSA is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that make our awards programs possible through their generous support. Our thanks to the Delavan Foundation, the Ambassador William R. Rivkin family, the Avis Bohlen family, Dr. Sushma Palmer, and Clements Worldwide. We deeply appreciate their dedication to the Foreign Service community.

AFSA's Awards and Plaques Committee has institutional oversight over AFSA's awards programs and the AFSA Memorial Plaques. They also have primary responsibility for the recommendation of award recipients and plaque honorees. Visit <https://afsa.org/awards> for more information or contact [awards@afsa.org](mailto:awards@afsa.org) with questions. ■



## NEWS BRIEF

## ADST Seeks Stories of Service

With support from the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) has launched its Century of Service initiative to publicize firsthand accounts of U.S. diplomats' contributions to communities around the world.

In addition to drawing excerpts from its collection of more than 2,600 diplomatic oral histories, ADST is calling on current and former Foreign Service officers to submit firsthand accounts of when and how they made a concrete contribution to advance the interests of U.S. citizens, businesses, workers, or farmers, or in support of U.S. prosperity, security, and ideals.

Submit your story of service to [CenturyofService@adst.org](mailto:CenturyofService@adst.org). ADST will share these stories on its website (<https://adst.org/century-of-service>) to raise awareness of the work diplomats do on behalf of our nation every day.

Whether you closed a deal, opened a door, saved the day, or simply lived up to what America represents to the rest of the world, ADST is ready to share your story.

Contact ADST Executive Director Tom Selinger at [tom.selinger@adst.org](mailto:tom.selinger@adst.org) with questions. ■

## College Scholarships Available

Applications are now open for more than \$400,000 in college aid to children of AFSA members.

**Financial Aid:** In 2025 AFSA will award more than \$260,000 in need-based financial aid to incoming or current college undergraduates. Last year, 75 students were awarded scholarships ranging from \$2,000 to \$6,000. **Apply by April 18, 2025.**

**Merit Aid:** In 2025 AFSA will award more than \$150,000 in merit aid to high school seniors. Last year, 43 students received grants. Scholarship amounts range from \$1,500 to \$3,500 in categories such as academic merit, art merit, community service, and best essay. **Apply by March 10, 2025.**

The AFSA Scholarship Program is made possible through generous donations from our partners at DACOR as well as individual donations. No AFSA membership dues are used for the AFSA Scholarship Program.

For full details or to apply, visit <https://afsa.org/scholar>. ■



JOSH

### Retiree Corner

## Stay Connected with Colleagues

Foreign Service retirees are encouraged to join one of the 15 foreign affairs retiree associations located around the country. These groups, while independent of AFSA, support the common goal of keeping Foreign Service retirees and other former foreign affairs personnel in touch with each other and the profes-

sion to which they dedicated decades of their lives.

There are groups in California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, the District of Columbia, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington state, in addition to groups covering multiple states in the Midwest and New England. Their

activities vary but typically include outings, local advocacy efforts, and luncheons with guest speakers.

A list of the groups with contact information is included in the 2025 AFSA Directory of Retired Members and on the AFSA website at <https://afsa.org/retiree-associations>.

If you live near one of these areas, please consider contacting the organizer to join. If there isn't a retiree association in your state or area, and you are interested in starting one, AFSA can help get the word out.

Email [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org) for more information. ■

## Stone Estate Donates to Fund for American Diplomacy

AFSA is proud to announce that the estate of the late Ambassador Galen L. Stone II, a decorated WWII veteran and distinguished career diplomat, has made a generous donation of more than \$52,000 to AFSA's Fund for American Diplomacy.

This fund supports programs aimed at educating Americans about the vital work of the Foreign Service and building broad support for U.S. diplomacy.

Born on July 4, 1921, Galen Stone embodied a lifelong devotion to public service. After enlisting in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1942, he landed under fire at Normandy and three years later, at age 24, was appointed military governor in the Leipzig region of Germany, overseeing some 50,000 people.

Following World War II, he returned to Harvard, graduated, and entered the

Foreign Service in 1947.

Over the years, Amb. Stone's postings included stints at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers (SHAPE) headquarters in France, a midcareer assignment in India during two Indo-Pakistani wars, and time in Saigon during the Vietnam War.

Later, he served as deputy chief of mission in Paris, resident representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, and ultimately as ambassador to Cyprus—where he helped manage tense relationships between the island's Greek and Turkish communities.

Following his retirement from the State Department in 1981, Amb. Stone continued in public service as a volunteer and philanthropist with more than a dozen organizations across the greater Boston area. He served as chair of the Board of Overseers of Northeastern University and



Ambassador Stone with his beloved wife of 70 years, Anne Brewer Stone.

COURTESY OF BREWER STONE

trustee of the New England Baptist Hospital.

He passed away on Jan. 23, 2018, at the age of 96, surrounded by family.

The Stone estate's generous donation will help ensure that AFSA can continue telling the Foreign Service

story. If you are interested in including AFSA or the Fund for American Diplomacy in your estate planning, please contact AFSA's Executive Director Ásgeir Sigfússon at [asgeir@afsa.org](mailto:asgeir@afsa.org).

To learn more about the fund, visit [www.afsa.org/fad](http://www.afsa.org/fad). ■

## Changes to Language Testing

In cable 24 STATE 132470, dated Dec. 18, 2024, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) announced a major update to language proficiency testing.

Starting Jan. 1, 2025, FSI transitioned to a single integrated test score based on speaking only, discontinuing its separate assessment of reading skills. This shift aims to better reflect the practi-

cal needs of Foreign Service members while streamlining training and evaluation.

The update is part of FSI's broader Curriculum Alignment Initiative, which focuses on real-world language tasks across 58 languages. The change is expected to reduce training extensions, facilitate timely transfers, and save adminis-

trative costs. Although not involved in the deliberations, AFSA was informed of the change and will closely monitor implementation.

Under the new system, scores will integrate speaking and reading evaluations into a single rating. Officers previously ineligible for Language Incentive Pay (LIP) due to low reading scores will qualify beginning in 2025. FSI has confirmed that

the speaking test format remains unchanged, and no action is required for those with scheduled tests.

This update reflects FSI's ongoing efforts to modernize its approach to language training and testing. Future phases will further integrate evaluations for reading, speaking, and listening. Employees with questions are encouraged to contact their HR representatives. ■

NEWS BRIEF

## Federal Benefits Increase for Some FS Retirees

On Jan. 5, 2025, President Biden signed AFSA-supported legislation repealing two laws that had reduced the Social Security benefits of participants in the pre-1984 government employee retirement systems who had previous or subsequent private sector employment that allowed them to qualify for Social Security benefits.

For the Foreign Service, the changes apply to some participants in the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (FSRDS) covering Foreign Service members hired before 1984. They do not apply to participants in the post-1983 Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS) since their Social Security benefits were never subject to these reductions.

The two repealed provisions are the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which reduced Social Security benefits for some retirees, and the Government Pension Offset (GPO), which reduced some Social Security spousal or survivor benefits.

The new law repeals those reductions retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024. Thus, the Social Security Administration will reimburse benefit reductions taken in 2024 and will stop taking similar reductions in future Social Security benefit payments.

AFSA supported the repeal legislation by joining with the 30 other organizations in the Federal-Postal Coalition to send a series of letters to Congress in 2024 urging action. ■



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★ **FOREIGN SERVICE DAY** ★

★ **May 2, 2025** ★

Email [foreignaffairsday@state.gov](mailto:foreignaffairsday@state.gov) for information.

Please save the date for AFSA's complementary Foreign Service Day programming on Thursday, May 1.



## Centennial Year in Review

AFSA's centennial year was an opportunity to highlight the histories of the Foreign Service and of AFSA; strengthen alliances; and elevate AFSA's profile through a blend of events, targeted outreach, and advocacy.

AFSA events, including the Centennial Gala at the State Department in May, drew strong attendance and helped us establish new high-profile connections.

The AFSA Centennial Honorary Committee included influential figures such as Secretary of State Antony Blinken, former Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and James Baker, and USAID Administrator Samantha Power, each of whom contributed to *The Foreign Service Journal's* May edition and amplifying messages on social media.

In April, Director General Marcia Bernicat was the featured guest on the centennial edition of our *Inside Diplomacy* webinar series, which drew more than 200 attendees, AFSA's collaborations with the Reagan, Bush, and Nixon presidential libraries, all of which displayed exhibits about the Foreign Service, broadened our outreach.

In the fall, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi hosted a centennial event at the Nixon Library, further expanding centennial awareness of the important work of the Foreign Service.

AFSA's membership activities were designed to strengthen connections within our existing community while attracting new members. AFSA held numerous centennial-themed happy hours throughout the year, including one at the Watergate Hotel. Additionally, AFSA sent a centennial-themed "party-in-a-box" to 30 posts worldwide so they could join in the excitement.

AFSA's centennial content and creative initiatives amplified our message digitally and in the press. For example, *The Foreign Service Journal* featured a "100 Words for 100 Years" collection and received dozens of responses for its writing competition on the future of the Foreign Service.

Additionally, AFSA's op-ed initiative mobilized retired Foreign Service members to write about the Foreign Service's critical work, securing placements in 15 publications, including *The Hill*, the *Arizona Daily Star*, and the *Des Moines Register*.

In a May episode of the *American Diplomat* podcast, President Yazdgerdi further highlighted the Foreign Service's contributions. AFSA also published a newly updated edition of the book *The Voice of the Foreign Service: A History of the American Foreign Service Association at 100*.

AFSA engaged a consultant to lead a targeted social

### AFSA's centennial year commemorated a historic milestone and set the foundation for future growth by deepening public understanding and support for the Foreign Service.

media campaign, including toolkits for congressional and diplomatic influencers. Results exceeded expectations: We achieved 467,000 total impressions (a 1,500 percent increase) and 29,000 total engagements (a 4,000 percent increase). Social media teams from the State Department and members of Congress joined our campaign.

AFSA also produced a centennial video that debuted at the gala and developed a landing page with a historical photo gallery, events calendar, and social media toolkit to facilitate continued engagement. Additionally, for the first time ever, AFSA sold diplomacy-themed centennial merchandise like sweatshirts and hats, bringing in nearly \$3,000 in funding to AFSA since March.

In advocacy news, AFSA successfully supported a provision recognizing the centennial as part of the Fiscal Year 2025 State Department Authorization Act.

Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska.) and Chris Van

Hollen (D-Md.), co-chairs of the Foreign Service Caucus, introduced a Foreign Service Day resolution to recognize and honor FS personnel. This resolution passed the full Senate on May 8, 2024.

Finally, Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-Va.) recognized the centennial in a House floor speech on May 22, 2024. There were several other statements recognizing the centennial from members of Congress during committee proceedings in May.

AFSA's centennial year commemorated a historic milestone and set the foundation for future growth by deepening public understanding and support for the Foreign Service.

We appreciate our members who shared our social media posts, wrote for the *Journal*, contacted their congresspeople, bought our merchandise, and more, all in support of our 100th anniversary celebration. ■

■ **César Beltrán**, 77, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer with the rank of Counselor, died peacefully in his sleep on Dec. 13, 2024, at his home in Chaplin, Conn., after a long battle with an unspecified Parkinsonism.

Born in 1947, Mr. Beltrán earned a bachelor's degree from California State University, Chico, and later a master's from George Washington University. He was also a Ford Fellow.

He joined the Foreign Service in 1971 and served 35 years with the State Department and U.S. Information Agency, eventually becoming a member of the Senior Foreign Service. He was a veteran public affairs and communications manager, with expertise dealing at the highest levels of government, academia, and business.

During his career, Mr. Beltrán held counselor positions in Budapest, Warsaw, Santo Domingo, and Moscow.

At U.S. Embassies Budapest and Warsaw, he directed the public affairs offices, including during Poland's successful entry into NATO in 1999. He also helped manage a succession of VIP visits, notably First Lady Hillary Clinton in 2000 and President George W. Bush in 2001, 2005, and 2006.

During Mr. Beltrán's tour in Hispaniola, he developed public affairs strategies for the United States in dealing with the Dominican presidential elections of 1994 and 1996. He also provided public affairs support in Haiti during the 1993 international embargo and the subsequent return of the Aristide government.

In the Soviet Union, Mr. Beltrán managed all official cultural activities and exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (1990-1991) and Russia (1992-1993), including creation of the American Information and Cultural Center in Moscow. Additionally, he prepared strategic plans for the expansion of edu-

cational exchanges and cultural programs for all 15 former Soviet republics.

In 2006 Mr. Beltrán retired to Chaplin, Conn., where he enjoyed a second career as an adjunct professor in communication at Eastern Connecticut State University for 11 years. He also served as a senior adviser to the International Centre for Democratic Transition and on the board of the Mensch Foundation, both based in Budapest.

Throughout his life, Mr. Beltrán was an avid sportsman and was particularly fond of horseback riding, polo, and downhill skiing. He loved traveling outside capital cities to get to know the countries to which he was assigned. He thoroughly enjoyed throwing elaborate Halloween costume parties with his wife, Victoria, a writer and artist.

He is survived by his wife, Victoria Woodruff Northrop.

■ **Ellen Largent Perlman**, 96, the spouse of retired Foreign Service Officer Alvin Perlman, died on Oct. 27, 2024, in the Trustbridge Hospice at the Delray Beach Medical Center in Delray Beach, Fla.

Ms. Perlman was born in Winchester, Va., to Pearle Rinard Largent and Brady Wills Largent. In 1946 she graduated from Handley High School and in 1950 from Westhampton College, University of Richmond, Va.

Ms. Perlman taught school in Winchester before moving to Washington, D.C., where she worked as a researcher and writer at the National Geographic Society and then for Richard Scammon, a political scientist who was appointed director of the Bureau of the Census by President John F. Kennedy.

In 1962 she married Alvin "Al" Perlman, a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Information Agency. Over the next 25 years, they served in India, Indonesia,

the United Kingdom, Romania, and Washington, D.C. She taught English as a second language at all posts.

When he was assigned to Hue, during the Vietnam War, Ms. Perlman "safe havened" in Bangkok.

In 1986 Mr. Perlman retired from USIA, and the couple moved to Winchester, Va., and then to Huntington Point in Delray Beach, Fla., in 1994. There, Ms. Perlman joined the Delray Beach Chapter of the Brandeis University National Women's Committee and enjoyed serving as the editor of its bulletin from 1999 until 2004.

She also presented several study groups, focusing on King Richard III's lineage as well as documenting the achievements of women painters throughout history, an interest that continued for the rest of her life.

In 2002 the Perlmans moved to Abbey Delray South, a life care community in Delray Beach, where they enjoyed close friendships and the many cultural activities of the community.

Ms. Perlman was preceded in death by her siblings and their spouses: brother Rinard Largent and "Snooks," of Winchester, Va.; sister Janet Largent Smith and Jack, of Winchester, Va.; and sister Louise Carpenter and Allen, of Cape Coral, Fla.

Ms. Perlman is survived by her husband, Al, of 62 years; she is also survived by many nieces and nephews from both the Perlman and Largent families.

■ **Lo Pan Pamela Colm**, 95, spouse of the late Foreign Service Officer Peter W. Colm, passed away peacefully on Oct. 19, 2024, at her home in Annandale, Va.

Born on Sept. 20, 1929, in Tamsui, Ms. Colm was a third-generation Taiwanese whose family had immigrated to the island from Fujian Province, China, during the 1800s.

Ms. Colm grew up in the Lo ancestral home—a traditional compound overlooking the Tamsui River. It had been on the front lines of the 1884 Battle of Tamsui, a significant French defeat during the Sino-French War. Today, the Lo family home stands as one of Tamsui's few surviving riverside homes from that era.

As the eldest of 10 children, Ms. Colm developed strong survival skills early in life. During World War II, she helped her mother move the family to a mountainside cave to escape U.S. bombing but then returned to Tamsui on her own to cook for her father, who had stayed behind to continue supporting the family as a fisherman.

In 1968 Ms. Colm moved to the Washington, D.C., area, where she lived for much of the rest of her life. Her travels took her to Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.

In 1981 she married FSO Peter Colm, who was serving as chief of the political section at the U.S. consulate general in Hong Kong. After his retirement in 1987, the couple moved to Lusby, Md., where they enjoyed crabbing, kayaking, and visits with their grandchildren.

Throughout her life, Ms. Colm was affectionately known as the Boss. No matter where she went, friends and family members recall, she naturally assumed a leadership role, and few dared challenge her fierce authority. She not only oversaw her nine brothers and sisters but also stood up and defended her family against any vendor, clerk, or individual who tried to take advantage of them.

Ms. Colm was predeceased by her husband of 34 years, Peter Colm, in 2014.

She is survived by three sisters and two brothers, four stepchildren, 16 nieces and nephews, and six grandchildren.

Her niece, Li Ping Lo, is a Foreign Service officer serving as the public affairs officer at the U.S. consulate general in Sydney.

■ **Tracy Thiele**, 67, a retired State Department Foreign Service officer, passed away in 2023 and was buried at the Larkspur Conservation area at Taylor Hollow in Westmoreland, Tenn.

Born in 1956, Ms. Thiele graduated from Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pa., with a dual major in history and political science.

In 1990 she joined the U.S. Foreign Service. She served with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) from 1990 to 1999, when she became an employee of the U.S. State Department.

Ms. Thiele served as a branch public affairs officer (PAO) in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China (1991-1993); as deputy PAO in Singapore (1993-1997); and as one of the first PAOs in Hanoi (1998-2000).

Returning to Washington, D.C., she served in the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy (2000-2002) and with the State Department Board of Examiners (2002-2003).

In 2005 she took up duties as chief of the Kaohsiung Branch Office of the American Institute in Taiwan, where she served until 2008.

Ms. Thiele received a Department of State Superior Honor Award and two Meritorious Honor Awards from the U.S. Information Agency.

Ms. Thiele made lasting contributions to U.S. national security and earned the respect and friendship of hundreds of USIA and State Department colleagues.

■ **Robert Joseph "Bob" Palmeri**, 85, a retired Foreign Service officer, passed away surrounded by his loving family at

Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston on Nov. 6, 2024, after a brief illness.

Mr. Palmeri was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., to John Palmeri and Marjorie (Stamm) Palmeri and grew up the oldest of five children in Baldwin, a Long Island hamlet.

Upon graduation from Wesleyan University, Mr. Palmeri traveled to Nigeria and became a chemistry teacher in Ilaro. This experience ignited his passion for international service and fighting inequities through education.

Once he returned to the United States, Mr. Palmeri joined the United States Information Agency arm of the U.S. Foreign Service at the State Department, serving in Nigeria, Congo, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Benin, Senegal, France, and Côte D'Ivoire.

Mr. Palmeri championed American literature abroad, advanced global literacy initiatives, and organized visits of American artists and musicians to share their talents in Africa.

Through his efforts, education became a tool for unity as he opened doors for students—both American and foreign—to pursue knowledge via study exchange programs, striving to lessen inequality and promote cross-cultural exchange.

While in Paris, where he became one of the early directors of the African Regional Services, he met his wife, Virginie, at a Thanksgiving celebration. Their growing family eventually moved to Abidjan, where he served as the director of the American Cultural Center.

After his retirement, the Palmeris decided to remain in Abidjan, dedicating themselves to raising their four children.

While Ms. Palmeri focused her efforts on modernizing Ivorian agriculture through her NGO, Mr. Palmeri began



teaching English. He was eager to share his love of the language and was a great believer that one can learn at any age. Thus, he taught adult ESL classes in addition to starting the English program at his kids' elementary school. He became affectionately known by his students as Uncle Bob.

At the onset of the Ivorian civil war, Mr. Palmeri moved his family back to the U.S. and settled in Yarmouth Port, Mass. There, he remained active in the community as a member of the Yarmouth Energy Committee and a regular at the Yarmouth Senior Center.

A strong advocate for learning and open exchange, he participated in several discussion groups, including with his Alpha Delt brothers, and in online forums reminiscing on his years on Long Island and in Africa.

At home, Mr. Palmeri loved gardening, cooking, and reading. An American through and through, he always carried a copy of the Constitution in his coat pocket.

Those who met Mr. Palmeri remember him as generous, gregarious, and always willing to hear diverse viewpoints and engage in meaningful discussions, even if he disagreed. His former employees recall him as a passionate boss who created opportunities for others and went above and beyond his job responsibilities to support and uplift those around him.

Mr. Palmeri made anywhere he lived his home, immersing himself in the local culture and community. As a result, he was fluent in French and knew conversational Yoruba, Igbo, Wolof, and Arabic, enabling him to connect meaningfully with people from all walks of life.

He is survived by his wife, Virginia; his children, Daisy, Giovanni, Marjorie, and Lucie; his siblings Laura and Laurence

(or Larry); and nephews and nieces, Chris, Mike, Paul, Laurie, and Sarah.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Yarmouth Port Library.

■ **Derek Staughton Singer, 95**, a retired USAID Foreign Service officer, died on Dec. 24, 2024, near Washington, D.C.

Born on Staten Island, N.Y., in 1929, Mr. Singer was a second-generation American.

Long interested in international affairs, he attended graduate school at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where he met his wife, Ruth.

Mr. Singer joined USAID in 1954, serving as CARE country director in Bolivia. He was then assigned to the Mutual Security Mission to China in Taiwan, and from there to Japan. In 1958 he was transferred to Costa Rica.

He was then asked to help open the USAID mission in the Congo. This assignment lasted only five months and, as Singer noted in his oral history with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "was largely spent ducking bullets, because of the civil war in that country."

Upon return from the ex-Belgian Congo in 1961, Mr. Singer left USAID to work with the fledgling Peace Corps. After exploring and negotiating the first Peace Corps programs in South America, he was named country director in Bolivia, where he had earlier served with CARE, and then to Indonesia for a short stint before the looming civil war there forced the program to close.

After training in Washington, Mr. Singer became Peace Corps country director in Tunisia until 1966, when he resigned from the Peace Corps (and the government).



If you would like us to include an obituary in In Memory, please send text to [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org).

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, as well as details of the individual's Foreign Service career. Please place the name of the AFSA member to be memorialized in the subject line of your email.

He went on to work in the private sector for the next 15 years, including a long stint in the Chicago area with PBS station WTTW.

In 1980 Mr. Singer rejoined USAID. He was first assigned to Zaire, where he served for four years, and subsequently served in Kenya, Ecuador, and Cameroon. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1994.

The Singers raised their children around the world: Their daughter, Vicky, was born in Bolivia; son Alex in Taiwan; and their last boys, Ted and Jason, in the U.S. in between postings.

Along the way, Mr. Singer learned to speak Spanish and French, and he even took up studying Russian after receiving his PhD in political science.

Together with Ms. Singer, he acted in community theater productions overseas and enjoyed spontaneous and often belabored puns and wordplay. He developed a pleasure in birdwatching and continued his enjoyment of classical music and world affairs until late in life.

Friends and family remember Mr. Singer as a quiet man who often didn't express his emotions in words. Yet, as they recall, his actions spoke volumes as he supported the world's underclass and his children's and grandchildren's pursuits. ■

## Anatomy of a Pyrrhic Victory

**The Achilles Trap: Saddam Hussein, the C.I.A., and the Origins of America's Invasion of Iraq**  
Steve Coll, Penguin, 2024, \$35.00/  
hardcover, e-book available, 576 pages.

REVIEWED BY GERALD FEIERSTEIN

Steve Coll, the award-winning journalist, professor, and author, has often turned his journalistic fine eye to the backstory of American foreign policy debacles over the past nearly half a century. In his previous works, *Ghost Wars* and *Directorate S*, Coll drew on his deep experience in South Asia (as *Washington Post* South Asia bureau chief based in New Delhi from 1989 to 1995) to report on the U.S. entanglement with Afghanistan and Pakistan in both the pre- and post-9/11 eras.

In his latest work, *The Achilles Trap*, Coll turns his microscope on the U.S. and Saddam Hussein's Iraq up to the moment of the 2003 U.S. invasion. Utilizing Iraqi sources and documents for the first time, Coll weaves together the complex picture of the rise of the sociopathic Saddam Hussein and his thuggish family and friends, the origins and the demise of his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, and his fatal entanglement with the United States driven primarily by mutual antipathy to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At the heart of his report, Coll seeks to answer what has mystified analysts for 20 years: If Saddam Hussein were not in possession of weapons of mass destruction, why did he not allow inspectors to establish that fact, thereby saving his regime and, ultimately, his life? Thus, the Achilles trap.

Both the Americans and Saddam fell victim to their own weaknesses of analysis

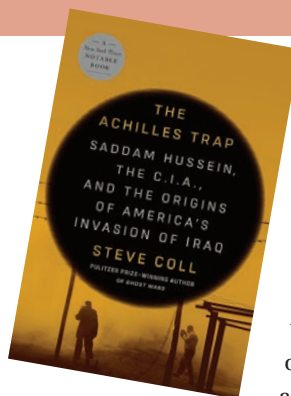
and understanding. The U.S. intelligence community, operating in a vacuum, could not understand Saddam's caginess about his programs if he truly had nothing to hide and therefore concluded that he must be trying to conceal ongoing WMD programs.

For his part, Saddam assumed that the CIA knew all and would certainly know that he had destroyed the entirety of his WMD in 1991, but he could not admit that truth for fear that it would expose his weakness to his mortal enemies. He concluded, therefore, that U.S. insistence that he was hiding something was simply a charade intended to justify regime change in Baghdad.

But the real value of Coll's work is gained by putting his two books side by side. Taken together, *Ghost Wars* and *The Achilles Trap* bookend how two critical decisions of the Reagan administration in the 1980s—support for the jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and for Saddam's war against Iran—laid the foundation for the disasters of the 2000s that continue to complicate and confound U.S. policy in the Middle East, including the rise of Islamic extremism, 9/11, and the two forever wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is not to argue that the fears motivating the administration at the time were unfounded. In the post-Vietnam moment, the Soviet move into Afghanistan was seen as indicative of Moscow's expansionist agenda that, left unchecked, would ultimately threaten vital U.S. and Western interests in the region, including secure access to energy and the stability of U.S. partners in the Gulf and Pakistan.

Similarly, no matter how misguided Saddam's decision to invade Iran, the Reagan administration believed that allowing



Saddam's defeat would embolden Iran, advance its aspirations to spearhead a regional Islamic revolution ultimately targeting Israel, and once again threaten stability and security, including vital access to energy, throughout the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether U.S. policies, no matter how justifiable in the short term, reflected a larger understanding of the region or were constructed to advance enduring U.S. interests, including promoting more open, tolerant societies better able to resist the forces that have threatened the region and U.S. interests ever since.

As the principal officer in Peshawar in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, I witnessed the impact of the rapid loss of U.S. interest in Afghanistan, the marginalization of Western-oriented, pro-democracy Afghan forces, and the rise of the most extreme elements of the Afghan resistance groups, often under the tutelage of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives.

Meantime, as Coll describes the period following the Iran-Iraq War, the U.S. and the West were determined to pursue potentially lucrative projects with the Iraqi regime while sidestepping the consequences of Saddam's brutal oppression of the Iraqi people, exemplified by the use of chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds in Halabja and elsewhere.

But, as Coll notes, "the plan to coax Saddam toward moderation suffered from a void of access and understanding." That lack of understanding, which was mutual, eventually led Saddam to conclude that the U.S. would not intercede to prevent his invasion of Kuwait, and the rest, as they say, is history.

On a side note of significance for the Foreign Service, Coll describes at length Ambassador April Glaspie's July 25 meeting with Saddam, alleged at the time as Glaspie erroneously giving Saddam the "green light" to invade Kuwait.

Coll makes clear, however, that the points Glaspie used in the discussion were long-standing, official guidance. Secretary Baker's refusal to defend Glaspie from the unfounded allegations nevertheless unfortunately and unjustifiably ended her career.

In the end, U.S. policy in Afghanistan and Iraq succeeded in achieving its desired end state. U.S. support for the Afghan mujahideen was instrumental in forcing the Soviet Union to end its Afghan adventure and abandon the Brezhnev doctrine.

The clear determination of the U.S. to prevent Saddam's defeat eventually forced Ayatollah Khomeini to "swallow the bitter pill" of negotiating an end to that war, thereby securing the right of innocent passage for the oil tankers moving up and down the Gulf.

But in both instances, U.S. success was built on the foundation of a misunderstanding of the region and a failure of imagination. Busy U.S. policymakers preferred to manage pressing crises rather than build policies around long-term strategic objectives and demonstrated scant interest in mastering the nuances of far-away places of no immediate importance.

As we look at the unfolding disasters in Gaza and Lebanon, there is not much reason for optimism that anything has changed.

---

*Over the course of a 41-year career in the Foreign Service, Gerald Feierstein served primarily in the Middle East and South Asia, including tours in Pakistan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and as*

*ambassador to Yemen. Since retiring from the State Department in 2016, Ambassador Feierstein remained engaged in U.S. foreign affairs, primarily through his work as the director of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs program and Distinguished Senior Fellow for Diplomacy at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C., until earlier this year.*

## Grandmaster of the Nuclear Chessboard

### America's Cold Warrior: Paul Nitze and National Security from Roosevelt to Reagan

*James Graham Wilson, Cornell University Press, 2024, \$32.95/hardcover, e-book available, 336 pages.*

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH L. NOVAK

In *America's Cold Warrior*, James Graham Wilson explores the consequential life and eventful times of Paul Nitze, an architect of U.S. nuclear strategy who served in multiple official roles from the 1940s through the 1980s. Wilson's deeply researched biography paints a vivid portrait of Nitze and his remarkable legacy of nonpartisan public service.

The author is a supervisory historian in the State Department's Office of the Historian. He previously wrote *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (2014). He has also edited and compiled several volumes of the highly regarded Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series.

*America's Cold Warrior* deftly fills in Nitze's backstory. His family was well-off, and he grew up in Chicago. Soon after graduating from Harvard, he joined Dillon, Read & Co., a top-notch New York financial firm. Wise investments meant

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that Nitze had the luxury of concentrating on his professional career in Washington without the usual monetary concerns.

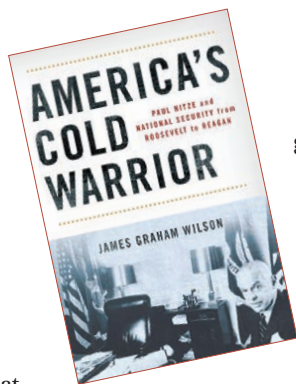
Nitze's Wall Street years came to a close when he received a telegram in 1940 that read: "Be in Washington Monday morning, Forrestal." The stark summons was sent by James Forrestal, a former Dillon, Read colleague. Forrestal, who later became the Secretary of Defense, was an important mentor for the young Nitze. He tragically committed suicide in 1949.

In Washington, Nitze assisted in drawing up the Selective Service Act of 1940. He later served on the pioneering U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, a body charged with probing the efficacy of Allied air power. As part of that assignment, he visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki weeks after the two cities were devastated by atomic weapons.

Wilson cogently examines Nitze's work on the Marshall Plan as well as his successful advocacy for the development of a thermonuclear weapons capacity. Nitze went on to serve as the director of policy planning at the State Department from 1950 to 1953. While there, he oversaw the production of a top-secret report known as NSC-68.

The author correctly underscores the seminal nature of this document, which, in broad strokes, outlined the dire nature of the threat posed by the Soviet Union and called for a buildup of U.S. military capabilities. NSC-68 was declassified in 1975, but its core propositions continued to guide policymakers until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Nitze joined the Kennedy administration in 1961. *America's Cold Warrior* adeptly places a spotlight on Nitze's participation as a representative of the Penta-



gon in the Executive Committee (ExComm) meetings convened to advise President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

While not a central player in the deliberations, he was a hard-liner on the need to remove the nuclear missiles placed in Cuba by Moscow. His service on the "now-fabled ExComm"—to use the author's apt characterization—solidified his reputation as someone who was in the room when crucial decisions were made.

Wilson also shows how Nitze was able to influence the national security agenda even when he was out of office. Fearing that the Soviets were gaining the upper hand at the negotiating table, he publicly assailed the second round of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II). President Carter signed the SALT II accord in 1979, but the U.S. Senate never ratified it.

In 1981 the Reagan administration turned to Nitze for his expertise in nuclear arms control. With geopolitical tensions on the rise, he soon became a major force in the U.S. government on how to negotiate with Moscow.

The narrative on Nitze's effort to resolve disagreements with the Soviets over intermediate-range missile deployments is particularly gripping. While the initiative failed, his "walk in the woods" with a Soviet negotiator in 1982 became famous. It even inspired a well-received play, which in its West End production paired Alec Guinness with Edward Herrmann.

The advent of Mikhail Gorbachev as the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 would lead to a thawing of the Cold War. As succinctly related by the author, however, Nitze distrusted the "self-professed reformer with a sunny disposition."

While he remained wary of Soviet intentions, arms control talks made progress, with both sides signing landmark accords in the following years. Nitze left government service for good in 1989 but remained active as an elder statesman. He died at age 97 in 2004.

The author touches on some of Nitze's other contributions. Along with Christian Herter, a future Secretary of State, he founded the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington in 1943. SAIS merged into Johns Hopkins and was later renamed in Nitze's honor.

As an investor, he also helped establish Aspen, Colorado, as a popular ski destination. On the rare occasions when he was not grappling with weighty issues, he liked to get away from it all on the slopes.

Additional resources on Nitze include his memoir *From Hiroshima to Glasnost* (1989), which contains candid snapshots of such luminaries as Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, Lyndon Johnson, and Henry Kissinger. Another illuminating study is *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (2009) by Nicholas Thompson.

When presenting Nitze with the Medal of Freedom, President Reagan observed that he was "an exceptional individual, a great man and a great public servant." *America's Cold Warrior* provides a richly textured and penetrating account of the many ways in which this unique figure shaped statecraft during a turbulent era. It is a brilliant addition to the Cold War library. ■

---

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



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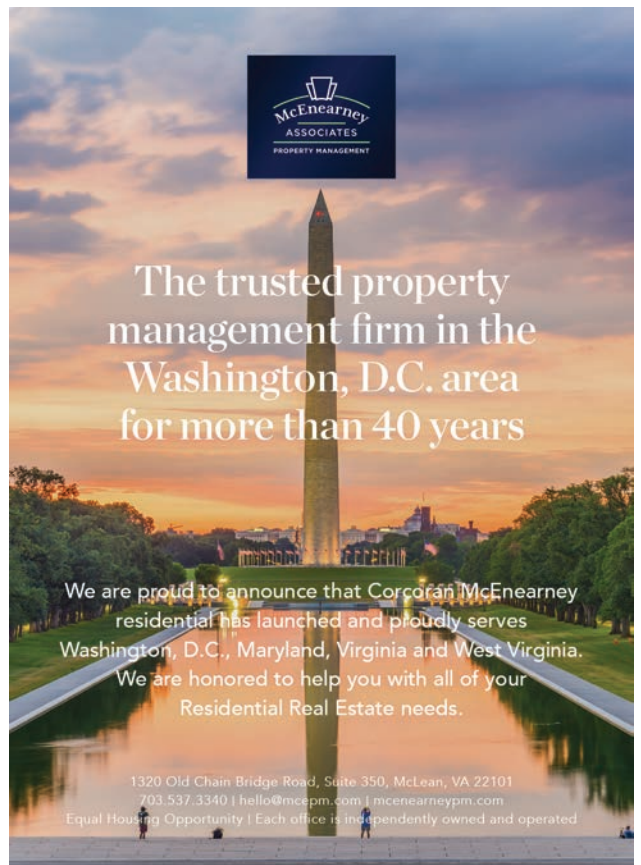


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# NATO Recruitment Tours

BY VINCENT CHIARELLO

As a newly posted Foreign Service officer, reading the “Job Description” gave me a good idea what my work would entail. However, my assignment to Madrid did not follow the usual pattern: Circumstances changed, and as a result, the ensuing four years would prove to be most memorable.

Upon arrival in Madrid in summer 1978, I was informed that a major “Country Plan” objective was to persuade the post-Franco government of the need to combat communism by joining NATO.

Given the public’s skepticism, one way to accomplish that goal was to introduce influential representatives of the media to what came to be known as NATO tours. With the help of embassy personnel, I was to organize those tours.



I contacted the relevant office at NATO in Mons, Belgium, and, with its assistance, civilian and military briefings in various parts of Europe were organized. NATO headquarters would be our first stop, and I requested that, if possible, an appearance by U.S. General Alexander Haig, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, would be greatly appreciated. I was told that was unlikely.



*Vincent Chiarello taught high school history before joining the Foreign Service in 1970. He served overseas in Colombia, Guatemala, Spain, Norway, Italy, and at The Holy See. Now retired, he lives in Northern Virginia.*

## Just prior to my departure from Madrid in the spring of 1982, the Spanish Parliament approved membership in NATO.

Upon our arrival in Mons, the Spanish journalists and I received a briefing regarding the dimensions of the then Soviet threat. During the meeting, General Haig’s aide-de-camp informed me the general might be able to greet the group but would leave shortly thereafter.

General Haig arrived and began to discuss the NATO situation; after 10 minutes, the aide appeared and whispered to him. The general waved him off. The same scenario took place again after 20 minutes.

Finally, after more than 30 minutes, General Haig stated he had to leave, and as he bid farewell, one of the Spanish journalists came up and told him: “If Spain joins NATO, I wish to serve under your command.”



The following year our journalist group was scheduled to attend briefings in West Berlin, and that NATO tour would also include a visit to East Berlin. When a reporter from an influential Spanish daily informed me that he would not be accompanying us, I asked why.

He said that he had supported the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, and the Stasi, or East German security apparatus, kept a file on him: “They have a long memory and keep very good records.”

Prior to our departure, I had received a telegram from the State Department

informing me that “under NO (rpt.) NO circumstances” was I to surrender my diplomatic passport to East German officials.



Checkpoint Charlie was located in an isolated part of Berlin, with little to no traffic in the area. When we crossed over into the Soviet-controlled area, we were met by a “vopo,” or East German police officer. He saluted and approached the passenger’s side of the vehicle where I sat with the window closed.

Bending forward, the vopo waved his hand, and at that, I placed my diplomatic passport against the closed window. He saluted and repeated the waving request. I opened my passport showing my photo and pressed it once again against the closed window. At no time did the vopo ever touch the passport. He then waved us on.

Incidentally, for those who have seen the 1965 movie “The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,” Checkpoint Charlie bore no resemblance to the movie version (see photo). The vehicle carrying us into East Berlin could not proceed with any speed through the checkpoint because of the hard angle turns. At the other end of the checkpoint, the scenario was duplicated. We were met by an East German official and observed a military parade that was going back to West Berlin.

When I returned to a unified Germany 25 years after that working tour to East Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie had become a magnet for tourists, including a museum, and the surrounding parts of the city had been gentrified.



Just prior to my departure from Madrid in the spring of 1982, the Spanish Parliament approved membership in NATO. I like to think those “tours” played some role in the decision.

Indeed, that NATO tours are still going on today suggests their effectiveness at giving journalists from across Europe an insider’s look at Alliance operations—despite the monumental changes of recent decades. ■



Checkpoint Charlie in 1979.

COURTESY OF VINCENT CHIARELLO

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*Michael Roome is an economic officer who recently completed a consular tour in South Africa. He will serve as a political-economic officer at his next post, Costa Rica. This photo was taken in September 2024 with an iPhone 12.*

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