THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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JUNE 2025

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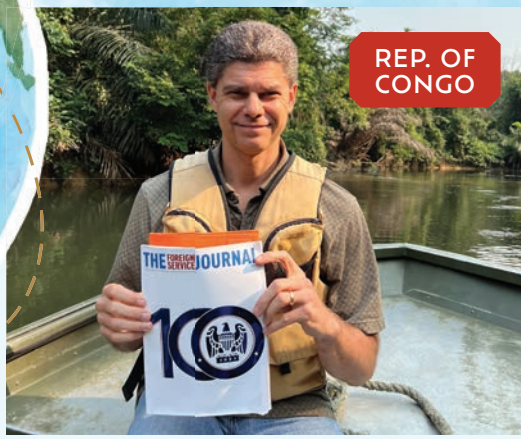

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THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

June 2025 Volume 102, No. 4

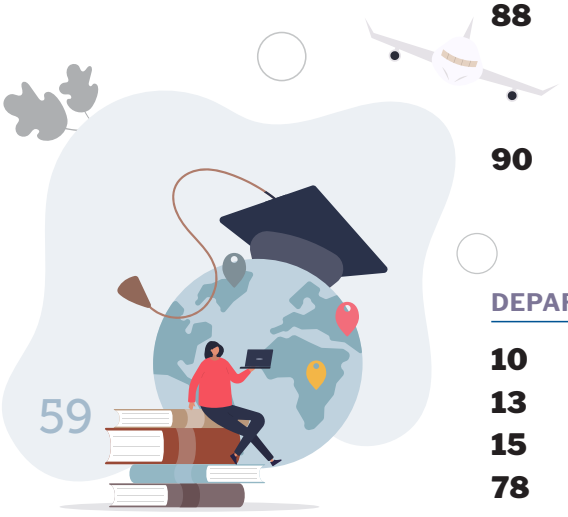
COVER STORY

SERVICE DISRUPTED

FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT



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PERSPECTIVES

DEPARTMENTS

MARKETPLACE

AFSA NEWS

THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF AFSA

As we go to press, a federal judge has granted a preliminary injunction against the executive order stripping Foreign Service members at State and USAID of their collective bargaining rights, thus preserving AFSA's role as their representative as legal proceedings continue.

AFSA Is Here for You, and We Need Your Help

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

I want to devote my column this month to reassuring our members that AFSA is still here for you. As you well know, a head-spinning slew of executive orders issued over the last few months have negatively impacted our members, AFSA, and the institution of the U.S. Foreign Service. But we have been fighting for you for more than 100 years, and we are not going anywhere.

One recent executive order took away collective bargaining rights at State and USAID, where the vast majority of our members work. But we are fighting in federal court with everything we've got to restore those rights. And while this setback has serious consequences for accountability and transparency around any unilateral personnel actions this administration wishes to take, we continue to support and defend our network of active-duty and alumni members.

We still maintain our status as a professional association—that will never change and cannot be eliminated by this or any other administration. Most members who use AFSA's services know us through what we do as a professional association. Want to be sure the voice of the Foreign Service is heard on the Hill? Need legal advice on employment and security clearance issues? Thinking of filing a grievance? Are you the subject of an administrative inquiry or investigation and not sure where to turn? Are you a regular reader of *The Foreign Service Journal*? Will your child apply for a merit or need-based scholarship as part of the $350,000 that AFSA awards annually to college-aged children of members? Want to nominate a colleague for exemplary performance or constructive dissent awards? These benefits—and many more—will remain, regardless of what happens in court.

> There is no better way to ensure that AFSA can continue to serve its members than by paying your dues.

For these activities to continue, however, we need your help. For decades, our six foreign affairs agencies deducted dues automatically from members' government paychecks and retirement annuities. That is how most members have paid their AFSA dues, which are among the lowest of any labor union or professional association, federal or otherwise. Because of the recent executive order, State and USAID stopped collecting these dues as of April 17, including for retirees.

In early May, AFSA rolled out a new way to pay your dues on an annual or quarterly basis directly on the AFSA website. It has taken a while to switch over to this direct payment system because we want to get it right and make it as easy as possible for members to continue to pay their dues.

Even with this new system in place, AFSA may take a hit of 20 percent or more in lost dues revenue as some forget to sign up or choose to let their memberships lapse. But I am hopeful that by the time you read this, most members will have made the switch.

I humbly ask those who have not yet done so to please make signing up for direct payments through the AFSA website a priority. Member dues pay for nearly 90 percent of AFSA operations, and there is no better way to ensure that AFSA can continue to serve its members than by paying your dues.

AFSA is doing its part to find cost-saving measures, such as not backfilling positions due to attrition and putting on hold planned hiring. We are also appealing to those who have provided large-scale donations in the past to help AFSA in its greatest hour of need.

I am confident that one day we will return to a situation where the administration values collective bargaining and understands that a strong AFSA helps create a strong workforce and a strong Foreign Service. In the meantime, we need your support so our incredible AFSA staff can continue to provide you the outstanding services you expect and deserve.

Please let me know your thoughts at yazdgerdi@afsa.org or member@afsa.org.

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

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Standing Up for Service

BY SHAWN DORMAN

The *FSJ* dedicates this month's cover to AFSA's "Service Disrupted" public awareness campaign, which launched on May 9. More than 200 members of the Foreign Service community and allies gathered in Washington, D.C., to join a solidarity walk and share messages of support—to #StandUpForService.

It was an inspiring kickoff to sound the alarm about what is lost when the Foreign Service is pulled from the field, and to build awareness and community. Learn more about the campaign and how to get involved at www.servicedisrupted.org.

Be sure to check out the new website and hear the rallying cry of Ambassador Bill Burns, a Career Ambassador who served six presidents of both parties and most recently served as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the first career diplomat in that role:

I've never known a more combustible moment than the one we face today. Since January 20, 2025, nearly a quarter of our diplomatic corps has been lost. Hiring is frozen. The Agency for International Development has been dismantled. Voice of America has been silenced. And the future of our diplomatic service is uncertain at exactly the moment when we need it most. It's time to be worried.

This isn't about jobs. This isn't about sensible organizational reforms, which in truth are overdue. This is about national security. A weakened Foreign Service means a weakened America. It's time to stand up for the people who have dedicated their lives to making America safe. It's time to stand up against the dismantling of our institutions. It's time to stand up for service.

The *FSJ* is working with AFSA's fantastic communications team to collect and share stories from FS members describing what is lost when offices are shuttered and funds for important work are frozen or eliminated.

Please turn to page 23 to read the second collection of Service Disrupted stories (see the April-May *FSJ* for the first set, all from USAID FSOs). Consider submitting your own story (up to 500 words) for a future edition. Write to us at Humans-of-FS@afsa.org.

So much has changed in the world since the FSJ Editorial Board decided that the June focus would be on economic diplomacy and trade. Working in a more complicated environment for authors and a daily-shifting U.S. trade landscape, we are pleased to bring you a strong set of articles.

We begin with a primer for anyone struggling to keep up with the ping-ponging tariff situation: "Advancing U.S. Interests Overseas in an Era of Rising Tariffs," by former Foreign Commercial Service Officer Dan Crocker. We believe it's the first tariff explainer focused exclusively on what diplomats need to know and what their role in a tariff tit-for-tat should be.

And with all the talk about critical minerals in China and Africa that the U.S. needs for manufacturing, Mahnaz Khan's "Fortifying Minerals Diplomacy: Four Nations, Four Solutions" offers a timely look.

FSO Evan Mangino contributed "FAS: Agricultural Economic Diplomacy in Action" to explain how the Foreign Agricultural Service deals with tariffs and other trade barriers to protect and grow the U.S. economy. And FSO Darrow Godeski Merton looks to Cold War export controls for insights that are relevant today.

In the Speaking Out, Foreign Service Specialist Monica Jean Normil pushes back on the status quo in "Not Just Specialists Anymore," and Senior FSO Robert Hilton's Reflection shows how State and Defense are "Closer Than You Might Think."

The June issue also marks the 30th anniversary of the semiannual Education Supplement. Parents of FS high schoolers—and high schoolers themselves—will appreciate Lauren Steed's look at whether "Earning American Credentials Abroad" is the right move, while parents of younger children will want to read Martin Thomen's explanation of the French school system as they chart their children's academic course.

As always, we'd love to hear from you. Send letters and article submissions (or pitches) to us at journal@afsa.org, and join the conversation on AFSA's social media channels.

Stay safe out there, wherever in the world you are serving. And remember: The work you do makes a difference. Thank you.

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

A Postscript on Vietnam

The April-May 2025 *FSJ* was a knockout. The juxtaposition of the "here and now" in Vietnam with the "back then" illustrates why the Foreign Service is a valuable national asset.

I would like to add to Ken Quinn's recollection of the 1968 Tet Offensive a note about the presence of the only Foreign Service officer inside the chancery in Saigon: Allan Wendt.

Wendt, who would end his career as the first U.S. ambassador to the newly independent Republic of Slovenia, was the embassy duty officer and performed heroically, with a pistol in hand, calmly keeping telephone communications open to the U.S. military.

He also helped carry a wounded Marine Security Guard up to the roof to be evacuated to safety when the helicopter finally arrived. His hair-raising first-person account can be found on pages 37-43 in his ADST oral history: https://bit.ly/Allan-Wendt.

A postscript to Quinn's marvelous account is that the senior official, George "Jake" Jacobson, was an Army colonel who had first served in Vietnam in 1954. After the Paris Accords were signed in 1973, he came back to the embassy to run field operations for agricultural activities in South Vietnam. He was one of the last embassy officers to leave Saigon, on the same helicopter with the then U.S. ambassador in 1975.

Larry Butler
U.S. Ambassador, retired
Topsham, Maine

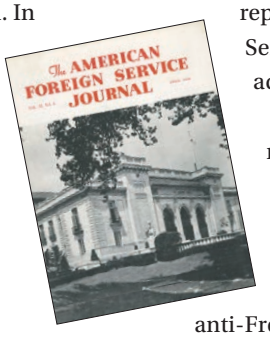
The *FSJ*'s Vital Mission

I would like to congratulate *The Foreign Service Journal* for its outstanding April-May 2025 edition featuring the evolution of U.S.-Vietnam relations. As a boy living in the Philippines, I vividly remember the end of the war in April 1975, including the arrival of thousands of refugees at Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base.

It was a fraught era in many respects, but I enjoyed looking back and reading the articles on the slow and steady building of ties with Vietnam over the past five decades. Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Dzung's piece, for instance, thoughtfully underscored the point that diplomacy conducted in the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation can truly work wonders.

I would also like to thank the *Journal* for its coverage of the ongoing full-fledged attack on the federal workforce by the Trump administration. The articles on the dismantling of USAID and the U.S. Agency for Global Media in the April-May edition were, of course, heartrending in the extreme.

I strongly believe that these two agencies will be fully restored in the future when saner heads prevail. In the meantime, the harrowing impact of this situation on our displaced colleagues and the deleterious effects of eliminating the critical programs that they so honorably administered must continue to be at the forefront of all our minds.



We're living in a tumultuous period, and, now more than ever, the *Journal* is needed as a forum focused on subjects of importance to the Foreign Service community. The insider's perspective it provides is invaluable as well as indispensable. The April-May edition is a sterling example of how successful the *Journal* continues to be in fulfilling its vital mission.

Joseph L. Novak
FSO, retired
Washington, D.C.

A Memory Preserved

In a brief note in the April 1948 edition of the *American Foreign Service Journal*, News From the Department reports on "Staff Corps Employees Killed in Saigon." The two—Mrs. Jeanne R. Skewes, age 32, and Lydia Ruth James, age 30—died on March 7, 1948, while driving a jeep bearing an American flag at dusk on the outskirts of Saigon.

French authorities discovered their bullet-riddled bodies and the burned-out jeep. Mrs. Skewes was a recent entrant into the Foreign Service, having previously worked for the Office of War Information before it was folded into State. She was charged with managing an informational library.

Ms. James worked as a secretary in the consulate general. A former member of the Women's Army Corps, she reportedly joined the Foreign Service out of a "sense of adventure."

French authorities surmised that the Americans inadvertently strayed outside the French security zone and were ambushed and machine-gunned by anti-French, pro-Communist Viet Minh guerrillas.

Whether the killings were deliberate, or a case of mistaken identity, remains unclear. Consul General John Hamlin promised an investigation. A May 29, 1948, press report in *The Evening Star* speaks of an arrest and a claim that the

killers mistook the neutral Americans for French and sought to hide evidence by setting fire to the jeep.

Mrs. Skewes and Ms. James are believed to be the only women Foreign Service members to lose their lives in the decades-long conflict in Vietnam.

Sadly, one wonders why their sacrifice has been overlooked for all these years.

Ray Walser
FSO, retired
Broadlands, Virginia

Surviving a National Disaster

For the past 80 years, U.S. diplomats could proudly say they served the administration of the moment in bipartisan spirit, and the Foreign Service was at the forefront in helping our country build a uniquely peaceful and prosperous international order.

Now the Service is being asked to serve a radical administration without a mandate (the president took less than 50 percent of the popular vote, and his opponent was only 1.5 percent behind him), which threatens to destroy the global order that generations of FSOs helped to create. So, what do they do now?

The younger could resign and seek work elsewhere. The older are near retirement. It is the middle ranks of the Service with whom I sympathize, because they have invested into this profession years of life they cannot reclaim, and they have families to support.

To them this septuagenarian retiree can only advise "hang on," because the nightmare may pass; but in the meantime, remember that your highest duty is not to a particular administration but to the nation.

And if that means subtly doing what you can to at least ameliorate the worst decisions of the current radicals (though actual sabotage is wholly against our ethic), then be of good conscience in doing so. Do what you can at the margins, because our duty is to the country, not to a fly-by-night eruption of fools.

My fear is that, even if this administration proves to be an awful aberration, the break in the continuity of postwar foreign policy consensus that it has caused could prove enduring, such that in the future U.S. foreign policies may oscillate wildly from one administration to the next.

That is no way to keep allies. And it is not a situation that will attract future talent into the Foreign Service. FSOs do not sign up to be hypocrites.

Marc E. Nicholson
FSO, retired
Washington, D.C.

Why We Should Care About USAID

The Trump administration's attempts to gut USAID reminded me how much I respect the agency's work and the Foreign Service employees who carry it out.

In 2004, as a Federal Trade Commission attorney, I served as a technical adviser to Indonesia's competition agency. My six-month stint in Jakarta was administered through USAID, and I attended the weekly meetings of USAID's economic team at the U.S. embassy.

There, I met contractors who were engaged in parallel projects. I also met USAID and embassy staff, both American and Indonesian; and 20 years later, I still recall how impressed I was with them—smart people, dedicated to the mission of helping people and representing the United States.

The contractors reported on their activities to help Indonesia become

a self-sustaining, modern economy. That included my work to upgrade Indonesia's antitrust enforcement but also to conduct such diverse capacity building as streamlining business licensing, modernizing Indonesia's banking system, and fighting corruption and money laundering.

The goal was not to turn Indonesia into a version of the United States but to help the country build a stable democracy and modern economy.

In 2004 Indonesia was emerging from the 1997-1998 Southeast Asian economic collapse. It was five years removed from a 30-year military dictatorship. It had recently held its first nationwide popular election for president.

It was also in the throes of a small but dangerous Islamist insurgency; and, three years after 9/11, there was serious concern about a Muslim-majority country of 250 million people becoming a breeding ground for Islamic extremism.

That was reflected in USAID's presence but also in the presence of similar missions from developed Pacific Rim nations, including Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

Media coverage has focused on USAID's humanitarian and public health programs. Images of starving children, food rotting in warehouses, and closed hospitals and treatment centers show the ugliest immediate consequences of emasculating this agency.

But USAID's mission is broader and more strategic than humanitarian and medical assistance alone. It includes direct financial support and technical advice and training in areas as diverse as socioeconomic development, education, and environmental issues.

It is the boots on the ground worldwide for other agencies, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency. In the global contest of values between democracy and authoritarianism, the best way to help democracy flourish is to provide tangible support to countries, like Indonesia in 2004, that are at their tipping points.

Despite federal court rulings to reinstate USAID programs and staff, the administration's outrageous and unlawful efforts to gut USAID will cause incalculable damage to its mission and the employees, contractors, and organizations that carry it out. The administration's attack on USAID is short-sighted, based on the false belief that USAID is rife with fraud and abuse and support for a left-wing policy agenda.

While there may be programs that should be reviewed for efficacy, those are trivial compared to USAID's success in saving lives, improving health, fostering social and economic development, fighting corruption, and supporting democracy.

However imperfect and inconsistent the United States may be in living up to our ideals, we are still the world's most important advocate for democratic values and the rule of law. USAID's soft diplomacy is a critical part of that advocacy.

Its role in promoting our values and interests may be off the radar for Americans concerned about the price of gas and eggs, but we in the United States are safer and more secure because of USAID's work.

That's why I care, and why I am so grateful for the work that the members of the Foreign Service do.

David Newman
Senior Attorney, retired
Federal Trade Commission
San Francisco, California

The Value of FSOs in the Field

To anyone who might question the value of Foreign Service officers and embassies in the field, I provide this link to journalist Nick Davidson's article, "The Balloon That Fell from the Sky," which recently appeared in *The Atavist Magazine* (https://bit.ly/Atavist-Davidson).

Davidson had interviewed me and other officers familiar with an incident in which a racing balloon carrying two Americans was shot down over Belarus in 1995. Both individuals were killed. It was among three balloons carrying Americans that had crossed into Belarus and were forced to land.

The true hero of the story was U.S. Consular Officer Janine Boiarsky, who deftly, tactfully, and ultimately successfully dealt with the Americans, both the living and the dead, and the Belarusians.

It is a story familiar to many Foreign Service officers who have helped Americans in crises abroad but were perhaps not appreciated by many of our fellow citizens.

Although I had left U.S. Embassy Minsk as deputy chief of mission shortly before this incident and dealt with it from my new position in Washington, I am proud to have served with Ms. Boiarsky, who was the epitome of a dedicated, professional Foreign Service officer.

George A. Krol
U.S. Ambassador, retired
Middletown, Rhode Island

Share your thoughts about this month's issue.

Submit letters to the editor: journal@afsa.org

RESPONSE TO APRIL-MAY 2025 LETTERS-PLUS,
"REQUIEM FOR THE VOICE THAT CARRIED A NATION'S CONSCIENCE"

Pulling the Plug on RFE/RL and Voice of America

BY LISA SORUSH

Steve Herman's "Requiem for the Voice That Carried a Nation's Conscience" in the April-May issue reminded me of my own connection to the important work of the journalists at the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

In 2002, just months after the fall of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan felt like they were able to breathe for the first time in years.

I was a medical student at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. Like many young Afghan women, I believed we were entering a new era.

While a student, I also served as the director of the Afghanistan Girls Cultural Center, a role that allowed me to advocate for women's rights at a time when simply raising one's voice was still dangerous.

I met with female university students in Kabul. The girls came from far-off provinces to study in the capital, but the city wasn't ready for them. With no dormitories and no family nearby, they had to live with distant relatives, often in overcrowded, unsupportive, and even unsafe environments.

I told their stories to anyone who would listen, including President Hamid Karzai. He responded by ordering the evacuation of a building that had been a government-run girls' hostel before 1992, when the Taliban reportedly gave the property rights to Kabul University professors. President Karzai ordered that the building be turned into a women's dormitory once again.

> RFE/RL and VOA have never just been broadcasters. They've been lifelines.

Some people, including the university professors, had negative opinions about women's rights—views not unlike those of the Taliban—and opposed this move. Wazeri, a lecturer in Pashto literature at Kabul University, threatened me and told me to "stop fighting" to open the hostel. "One bullet is enough for you," he said.

It wasn't just a threat; it was a reminder of what pushing for change meant in Afghanistan, a country where the U.S.-NATO forces fought for democracy and women's rights, and sought to rebuild the country after decades of war and terrorism.

When I told one of my classmates what was happening, he introduced me to a journalist from RFE/RL Afghanistan Service, also known as Radio Azadi. When the journalist covered these girls' stories, airing them on the radio, it drew international attention.

This media coverage led directly to USAID's construction of a hostel for women, which now stands as an example of how media and aid help not only to support the freedom of all people to receive a free flow of information, but also to promote a better world for Afghan women.

In that small apartment in Kabul, those young women believed someone would fight for them. And someone did. A reporter with a microphone, a radio signal, and a commitment to the truth.

That single broadcast not only gave voice to the voiceless girls, it changed the course of their lives. That's why the Trump administration's recent move to shut down VOA and RFE/RL is not just wrong—it's dangerous.

Destroying VOA, RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia, and Radio Farda is a risk to national security. These platforms are America's most cost-effective tools for influencing abroad with soft power. They counter disinformation, build trust, and win the hearts and minds of the people—not with weapons but with truth.

Lisa Sorush specializes in conflict analysis, focusing on South and Central Asia. She is a media commentator, an advocate for Afghanistan, an author, and a student in the Executive Master of Arts in National Security Affairs program at the Institute of World Politics.

RFE/RL's Afghanistan service, Radio Azadi, was first broadcast in the Dari and Pashto languages during the fighting in the 1980s. After a hiatus, it picked up again in 2002 to keep people in the loop through all the conflicts and crises.

RFE/RL and VOA have never just been broadcasters. They've been lifelines. In countries where freedom of the press doesn't exist—Afghanistan, Iran, China, Russia, and other authoritarian-style governing powers—these outlets remain trusted sources of accurate, independent information.

Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, Afghanistan's once-vibrant media has been silenced. The United Nations reports that hundreds of media outlets have disappeared. Journalists have been imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. Women's voices have been erased from the mainstream media.

Radio Azadi and VOA remain the only recourse for women in Afghanistan who want to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in international conversations. To cut off these services now betrays those women and hands a victory to the Taliban.

The vacuum will likely be filled by authoritarian state media narratives and disinformation. It is not just about losing radio and TV stations; it's about losing freedom of thought. It will not "fix" anything—it just torches a tool that has been working well for decades.

Closing these stations isn't just a bad move; it is a gut punch to free speech and what America stands for. As the Constitution states, "Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

Shutting RFE/RL and VOA is a giant step toward unraveling democracy and abandoning our credibility as a role model for free speech in a free world.

Rubio Reorg at State

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has unveiled a sweeping reorganization of the State Department, pledging to cut domestic staff by 15 percent and shutter or consolidate more than 100 bureaus and offices worldwide. The announcement was made on April 22 via social media and detailed in documents released by the State Department.

Framing the move as essential to President Trump's "America First" policy, Rubio told employees in a department-wide email that the State Department must shed "bloated bureaucracy that stifles innovation and misallocates scarce resources." Under the plan, which addresses domestic offices and not overseas posts or positions, 734 offices would be consolidated into 602, and 137 would relocate within the department to "increase efficiency," according to a fact sheet circulated internally.

Among the most notable changes: the closure of the Office of Global Women's Issues, the elimination of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the disbanding of several bureaus under the former Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.

Although some functions will be reassigned, the move reflects a broader rollback of the department's traditional soft power tools, many of which had already been weakened following the dismantling of USAID and the U.S. Agency for Global Media earlier this year.

In an April 27 interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," Rubio insisted that it was about aligning operations with purpose, not simply cutting costs. "We haven't slashed anything yet," he said, explaining that bureau heads—many of whom are career Foreign Service officers—would be tasked with proposing staff reductions of 15 percent after internal assessments.

The reorganization aims to prioritize regional bureaus over functional bureaus. It comes as Secretary Rubio assumed a dual role as both Secretary of State and interim National Security Adviser, following President Trump's nomination of Mike Waltz to the United Nations.

White House officials say Rubio is expected to serve in both roles for at least six months, and there are discussions about making the arrangement permanent. Rubio is also serving as acting Administrator for USAID and acting archivist for the National Archives and Records Administration.

Related, President Trump released his Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal on May 2, which would reduce non-defense discretionary spending by 23 percent, the sharpest drop since 2017, and cut $163 billion from federal agencies.

The State Department and USAID would be among the hardest hit. The budget proposes a $50 billion cut to State Department funding and calls for the absorption of USAID into the department.

These cuts come alongside administrative moves already underway through the new Department of Government Efficiency, which is coordinating with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to codify the reductions through a pending rescission package.

The Trump administration's budget proposes a 13 percent increase in defense spending and a 65 percent boost for homeland security, totaling $375 billion—largely for border security and deportation. OMB Director Russ Vought, a key figure behind Project 2025, frames the budget as a push to end wasteful spending and prioritize security and tax cuts.

Together with the State Department reorganization, the budget signals a sweeping, security-centered shift in U.S. governance and global engagement.

Contemporary Quote

> Voice of America showed me the kind of life that was possible if you were free to express yourself, use your mind and imagination, your talents and skills, and pursue your dreams.

—Tennis legend Martina Navratilova, in a declaration to a U.S. federal court in support of one of the lawsuits against Kari Lake and the U.S. Agency for Global Media, April 11, 2025.

Untenured FSO Appointed to Lead Global Talent Bureau

The appointment of an untenured Foreign Service officer to temporarily lead the State Department's Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) triggered a wave of concern and condemnation from current and former U.S. diplomats.

Lew Olowski, who joined the Foreign Service in 2021 and has completed just one overseas tour, was named senior bureau official (SBO), effectively making him the acting Director General of the U.S. Foreign Service.

AFSA criticized the decision, noting that the role has traditionally been reserved for senior or retired career officers with decades of experience. "Placing an untenured, entry-level officer who has only served one complete overseas tour into this critical role, even in an acting capacity, not only disregards

Heard on the Hill

JOSH

Excellence Above All

Mr. Hankinson [a senior research fellow at Heritage Foundation] said it correctly, I don't care what my heart surgeon looks like, I care about whether or not he or she is the best at what she does. So, when you say that "if we only base it on merit, that's a mistake," I disagree. I think having the best and the brightest, regardless of what they look like, is the only thing that should matter.

—Rep. Cory Mills (R-Fla.), during a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing, "Deficient, Enfeebled, and Ineffective: The Consequences of the Biden Administration's Far-Left Priorities on U.S. Foreign Policy," April 8, 2025.

The Price of Retreat

Any member who has traveled around the world and met with world leaders and met with ambassadors knows every time the United States removes a dollar from foreign aid, every time we withdraw and create a vacuum, China is coming in and making more friends than the United States, having more leverage, having more influence.

—Rep. Jared Moskowitz (D-Fla.), during a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing, "Deficient, Enfeebled, and Ineffective: The Consequences of the Biden Administration's Far-Left Priorities on U.S. Foreign Policy," April 8, 2025.

21st-Century Department for 21st-Century Threats

The reason we promote diversity in our diplomatic corps, from the most senior ambassadors to the most junior foreign officers, is because we need their experience, we need their perspective. … Merit counts, it's imperative. But if we say merit is the only thing, then we end up with a State Department that looks like it did in the 1940s. That's not what we want. We want a State Department that is prepared for the challenges of 2025 and the century ahead, with a rising China, a threatening Iran, and a threatening Russia.

—Rep. Brad Schneider (D-Ill.), during a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing, "Deficient, Enfeebled, and Ineffective: The Consequences of the Biden Administration's Far-Left Priorities on U.S. Foreign Policy," April 8, 2025.

Foreign Exchange Programs

These foreign exchange programs are really some of our strongest soft power assets. They are great human capital investments that help promote American values and create lasting partnerships.

—Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), during a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on nominations, April 8, 2025.

that tradition but also sends a clear message about the value this administration places on experience and professional progression," AFSA said in an April 7 press release.

The American Academy of Diplomacy echoed the alarm, calling Olowski "unqualified" and criticizing the administration for circumventing Senate confirmation by installing him as a "senior bureau official," a designation without formal legal standing. "Avoiding Senate confirmation … makes a mockery of the law and generations of diplomats who have served under difficult conditions," the academy said.

Olowski, a lawyer by training and a former senior counselor at the Department of Homeland Security during the first Trump administration, has drawn additional scrutiny for his past writings in conservative publications, many of which criticized U.S. immigration policies.

State Department officials defended his appointment, pointing out that Olowski's appointment is temporary, and that he remains a career officer.

Olowski's arrival comes amid heightened anxiety across the State Department's 70,000-strong global workforce. President Trump, backed by key allies like Elon Musk, has already eliminated thousands of federal positions across agencies and directed Secretary of State Marco Rubio to revamp the Foreign Service to ensure what he called "faithful and effective implementation" of administration policy.

Meanwhile, broad leadership changes continue at State. Notably, Career Ambassador and former Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Tibor Nagy, who was recalled to service by the new administration as undersecretary for management, stepped down after less than three months in the role.

50 Years Ago

Architecture of Peace

The greatest threat to our future security and welfare lies in the disintegration of the international order. We talk of a "structure of peace," yet seldom in history have so many existing structures fallen apart. The United Nations system of collective security has broken down, the Bretton Woods financial system has broken down, the GATT system of open and nondiscriminatory trade has broken down. The survival of human civilization will depend on mankind's capacity to fashion a new international order.

—Richard N. Gardner, from "The Challenge of Multilateral Diplomacy" in the June 1975 edition of The Foreign Service Journal.

No timeline has been announced for nominating a permanent Director General.

Public Diplomacy 2025 Winners Announced

The Public Diplomacy Council of America (PDCA) announced two winners of the 2025 Award for Achievement in Public Diplomacy.

The Northstar team in the State Department's Office of Global Public Affairs won for the "design, development, and deployment of the Northstar AI-powered global media analytics tool."

The tool enables the department to efficiently track real-time news as it occurs, with AI translation of more than a half million news articles and social media posts per day. Former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Liz Allen estimates that it has saved 180,000 annual labor hours and freed up significant amounts of contract dollars.

The U.S.-Saudi Higher Education Partnerships Forum received the award for its work that "markedly enhanced U.S.-Saudi education and research partnerships, positively impacted bilateral relations, and helped support American colleges and universities."

The Partnership Forum was developed by U.S. Embassy Riyadh's cultural affairs office personnel and representatives of the Institute of International Education. It has led to a memorandum of understanding outlining both countries' commitment to educational and scientific collaboration, as well as a Saudi commitment to increase the number of Saudi students in the U.S. by 2,000 per year over the next five years.

PDCA President Joel Anthony Fischman said of this year's winners: "Both sets of recipients demonstrate the creative use of diplomacy in advancing U.S. interests and model the opportunities available to other public diplomacy practitioners in the State Department."

PDCA promotes excellence and honors achievement in public diplomacy professional practice, academic study, and advocacy. Its 500 members include American diplomats, scholars, rising professionals, and retired Foreign Service and Civil Service officials interested in the public dimension of U.S. statecraft and in educational and cultural exchange.

The awards program was established in 1993.

Open Letter Warns of Threats to Democracy

More than 200 former U.S. diplomats, national security officials, and senior government leaders have issued a forceful open letter warning that American democracy is under serious threat. Titled "The Assault on American Democracy: A Call to Action," the letter expresses deep concern over what the signatories describe as President Donald Trump's erosion of democratic institutions at home and weakening of U.S. leadership abroad.

Signed by former ambassadors, assistant secretaries, military officers, and intelligence officials from both political parties, the letter argues that the moral foundation of American power—democracy, liberty, and human rights—is "in grave danger."

The authors cite actions by the administration that they claim undermine alliances, damage the global economic order, intimidate the free press, politicize the judiciary, and dismantle key institutions such as USAID.

The signatories call for immediate action, urging former senior officials, business leaders, universities, media outlets, and legal institutions to publicly defend democratic norms. They warn that waiting passively for electoral solutions risks allowing authoritarian practices to become entrenched.

Site of the Month: Service Disrupted

This month, we highlight Service Disrupted, an advocacy site developed by AFSA to raise awareness about the critical threats facing the U.S. Foreign Service, diplomacy, and development. The site is part of a broader outreach campaign to educate the public and policymakers about real-world consequences of diplomatic understaffing and politicization.

Service Disrupted outlines how hiring freezes, budget cuts, and structural upheaval have led to a sharp decline in Foreign Service personnel, which undermines U.S. economic leadership and diplomatic capacity.

The site effectively breaks down how a weakened Foreign Service can result in increased military interventions, missed economic opportunities, diminished global influence, and a retreat from democratic values on the world stage. Through accessible storytelling and data-driven insights, it makes a compelling case for restoring and strengthening America's diplomatic corps.

Service Disrupted is a timely resource for anyone interested in U.S. foreign policy, global leadership, and the future of American diplomacy.

Read more at https://servicedisrupted.org.

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

"No American should be silent," the letter reads. "Each of us must speak out, mobilize, and defend our way of life. The moment requires nothing less."

See https://bit.ly/42zaeOz to read the full letter.

Trump Order Ends Workplace DEI

The Trump administration has rescinded all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs at the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies, framing the move as a return to "neutral and nondiscriminatory principles" in federal hiring and promotion.

A March 19 executive order signed by President Donald Trump directs the elimination of what the White House described as "discriminatory DEI ideology," ordering agencies to dismantle any programs, offices, or policies created to advance equity or address systemic discrimination.

The order mandates the removal of any language referencing DEI from official agency documents, including Foreign Service promotion precepts, performance evaluations, and position descriptions. Affected offices include the State Department's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which is now slated for closure. According to a White House fact sheet, the decision aims to ensure that "selection and advancement in the Foreign Service be based solely on merit and competence."

The administration's shift coincides with the release of the 2024 Human Rights Report, which notably omitted discussions of LGBTQ+ rights and gender-based violence in several countries, according to a *Politico* analysis. Critics see the omissions—and the executive order—as part of a broader rollback of rights-based diplomacy and civil rights enforcement.

Some Foreign Service advocates have warned that dismantling DEI programs will harm recruitment and retention, particularly among underrepresented groups, and undermine U.S. credibility abroad on issues of human rights and inclusion.

Without consultation with AFSA on the previously agreed-on precepts, the State Department instructed all employees and their raters/reviewers to remove any reference to DEI in annual reviews being prepared for the rating period ending on April 15, 2025.

Ambassador Tracker

As of late April, the administration had slowly but steadily rolled out nominations for senior posts and ambassadorships. The Senate has confirmed a few, but many more have yet to make it through the confirmation gauntlet.

AFSA is tracking 23 appointments to senior positions at the Departments of State, Commerce, and Agriculture. As of April 30, only four of those individuals have been confirmed. Only one of those nominations has gone to a career member of the Foreign Service: Andrew Veprek, who was nominated to be assistant secretary of State for population, refugees, and migration, remains unconfirmed.

There have been 48 nominations for ambassadorships since late January, and every single one of those nominees is a political appointee. By April 30, only 10 of those had been confirmed, to lead posts in China, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Israel, Panama, Türkiye, United

Kingdom, Italy and San Marino, and NATO.

AFSA has expressed concern that political appointees have been named to posts that historically have had career ambassadors, including Lebanon, Kuwait, Tunisia, Estonia, and Latvia.

The Foreign Service Act of 1980 is very specific in requiring that "positions as chief of mission should normally be accorded to career members of the Service, though circumstance will warrant appointments from time to time of qualified individuals who are not career members of the Service."

Similarly, "contributions to political campaigns should not be a factor in the appointment of an individual as a chief of mission."

AFSA will continue to monitor these nominations and will not hesitate to call attention to any attempt to circumvent legal requirements regarding ambassadorships.

Trump Signs Order Creating Task Force on Anti-Christian Bias

President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14202 on Feb. 6, establishing a federal Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias. The order directs agencies across the federal government, including the State Department, to review past activities and identify policies or actions that may have unlawfully targeted Christian individuals or institutions.

Chaired by the Attorney General, the Task Force includes representatives from key departments such as State, Defense, Homeland Security, and Education. It is tasked with recommending corrective actions, proposing new policies to protect religious liberty, and advising the president on potential legislative measures. An initial report is due within 120 days, with additional reports to follow.

The executive order cites suspected incidents during the previous administration, including persecution of Christian demonstrators and an FBI memo regarding "radical-traditionalist Catholics," as evidence of what it describes as an anti-Christian bias in government.

As part of this effort, a memo was circulated at State, encouraging staff to report "information regarding any Department or individual practices involving anti-religious bias during the last presidential administration (2021-2025); and 2) recommendations to the Secretary of State to remedy any anti-religious bias at the Department."

The Task Force will remain active for two years unless extended by the president.

Congo and Rwanda Sign U.S.-Brokered Peace Declaration

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda signed a Declaration of Principles in Washington, D.C., on April 25, outlining a pathway to peace and economic development after years of violence in eastern Congo.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio convened the ceremony, at which DRC's Foreign Minister Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner and Rwanda's Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe signed on behalf of their respective governments.

The agreement commits both countries to draft a formal peace deal by May 2 and refrain from supporting armed groups in the region. It also establishes plans to explore joint security coordination efforts. The Declaration, reached as Rwandan-backed M23 rebels advanced in eastern DRC, is seen as a first step toward easing a decades-long conflict.

100 Years Ago

No Other Home Than My Trunks

How could I ever guess that I was going to need woolen underwear and heavy blankets in Senegal? I have already been on the same latitude in the West Indies, and there I had thought that clothes were to be worn in order to look civilized. Fortunately, I always carry with me all my belongings as I have no other home than my trunks. I had preciously packed in an iron trunk all my heavy winter garments for the day I would have the privilege of returning to America; but it did not take me long after my arrival at Dakar to realize that the contents of the iron trunk were to be my African outfit.

—Raymond Phelan, vice consul, from "Dakar" in the June 1925 edition of The American Foreign Service Journal.

U.S. officials have indicated the agreement could unlock significant U.S. public and private investment, particularly in the region's critical minerals resources. "A durable peace in the Great Lakes region will open the door for greater U.S. and broader Western investment," Secretary Rubio said at the signing.

The declaration builds on previous mediation efforts by the African Union, Qatar, and regional leaders. The United States has pledged to continue engaging both nations to uphold the principles outlined in the agreement and support efforts toward peace and economic integration.

FSI Training Advances Economic Diplomacy

Through partnerships with the private sector and interagency experts, the Economic and Commercial Studies division at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) offers programs focusing on real-world applications—prioritizing trade and commercial advocacy, energy dominance, and cyber and technology leadership. FSI engages industry leaders to provide insights into the challenges facing American businesses and how U.S. government tools can be utilized to anticipate opportunities and ensure reciprocal trade.

Ranging from short webinars on current international economic topics to the flagship six-month economic studies course, the curriculum prepares foreign affairs professionals with foundational economic analysis skills and industry-specific knowledge to advance U.S. economic and commercial interests abroad. Courses, workshops, and webinars include Commercial and Advanced Commercial Tradecraft, Critical Minerals Workshop, International Trade – Policy and Implementation, Cyberspace and Digital Policy Tradecraft, Space Diplomacy Webinar Series, and Emerging Technologies and the Impact on Foreign Policy.

For more information, please see FSI's Sharepoint site or https://sis.fsi.state.gov. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.

Not Just Specialists Anymore

BY MONICA JEAN NORMIL

"What does she do at the embassy?" I asked an acquaintance, a political-economic officer at the U.S. embassy.

"Oh, she's just an OMS," he responded matter-of-factly. Seeing my quizzical expression, he clarified, "A secretary."

That single word—"just"—immediately minimized the role of office management specialists (OMS) without acknowledging the critical work they perform. The word "just" is often used to diminish or downplay someone's contributions, and in this case, it reinforced a perception that specialists play a lesser role in the embassy's mission.

As someone whose career had always been specialized and technically focused, I was taken aback by the dismissive attitude toward what I knew to be a vital support position. This acquaintance went on to explain the cultural separation between generalists and specialists in the Foreign Service.

The year was 2012. At the time, I was a Peace Corps volunteer considering career options after the Peace Corps.

Now, more than a decade later, and having served as a diplomatic technology officer (DTO) for more than five years, I can confirm this divide remains palpable. Specialists continue to face both subtle and overt exclusion across our organization. In conversations with my fellow specialists, many share feelings of being undervalued.

> Specialists continue to face both subtle and overt exclusion across our organization.

Add to that the perceived disparity in upward mobility and in-country benefits favoring generalists, and it's clear that this separation persists. To build a strong Foreign Service team, we must first confront our own internal divisions.

These internal divisions are most visible in three key areas: the way we refer to specialists, the opportunities for upward mobility and professional growth available to specialists, and the admin-technical designations used for some specialists serving abroad.

The Language We Use

Internally and in public-facing materials, phrases like "Foreign Service officers and specialists" are common, reminding us that specialists aren't officers. But if we're not officers, what are we? The language itself separates us and devalues the critical operational expertise we bring to the mission.

Decision-making is often dominated by generalists/officers, leaving out specialists who possess invaluable on-the-ground operational awareness. Many specialists have decades of experience, yet we are frequently left out of crucial policy or mission discussions, treated primarily as implementers rather than strategic contributors.

This division is further reinforced by the occasional use of the "admin-technical" designation, which publicly marks us as different.

Room for Growth and Leadership

This divide isn't just in words; it's reflected in the opportunities available for professional growth. Generalists are often groomed for leadership positions such as deputy chief of mission or ambassador, while specialists remain in support roles. As a diplomatic technology officer, I've had the opportunity to challenge this norm by going beyond the technical box I was placed in.

I've taken on leadership roles in conversations that are mission-critical, leveraging my technical expertise to inform decision-making and demon-

Monica Jean Normil is a diplomat, globetrotter, and author with a passion for connecting cultures through food and storytelling. As a diplomatic technology (DT) officer in the U.S. Foreign Service for more than five years, she shares her unique journey to inspire and empower others to explore the world and embrace our differences. Jean Normil's works, including Road to Table: Cooking My Way Around the World *(2021) and* Riley Explores Being a Diplomat *(2022), showcase her dedication to fostering global connections and creativity. She currently serves as the Africa DT rover covering 46 sub-Saharan countries.*

strating that specialists are vital to policy success. My experience proves that specialists have the skills to contribute beyond their designated roles, yet these pathways to leadership are not always clear or accessible.

> Many specialists have decades of experience, yet we are frequently left out of crucial policy or mission discussions.

Admin-Technical Designations

Serving overseas with an "admin-technical" designation further compounds this divide. This label signals, in no uncertain terms, that these specialists are not viewed the same as generalists. The admin-technical designation also financially disadvantages some specialists. For example, in some countries a specialist with an admin-technical designation cannot claim any tax exemptions. These specialists pay taxes in the host country on goods and groceries, while in these same countries, FSOs do not pay local value-added (VAT) taxes.

Also, with that designation they may not have the same diplomatic immunity as generalists in the case of accidents, fights, or other matters. It marks us as separate and lesser in the eyes of those outside the U.S. mission. This designation affects how specialists are perceived both inside and outside the mission, diminishing the critical work we do and creating an unnecessary hierarchy that undermines team cohesion and interferes with mission success.

Challenging the Status Quo

How can we challenge this system without being seen as disruptive?

First, we must unify our language. "Foreign Service officer" should refer to both generalists and specialists, with equal acknowledgment of our contributions, despite the different entry tests each takes and the different ways each group is commissioned into the Foreign Service. Words matter. They reflect the values of our organization and shape how we see ourselves and each other. Updating our recruiting materials and internal communications to reflect this unity would send a clear message that we are serious about inclusion.

Second, we need to create opportunities for specialists to showcase their expertise beyond support roles. As a diplomatic technology officer, I've actively involved myself in conversations and initiatives where specialists are often underrepresented. For example, I've been able to integrate my technical knowledge into broader mission planning and strategic discussions, as well as outward-facing roles with public diplomacy, proving that specialists are not just implementers but essential contributors to policy and mission success.

An additional example is the Secretary's Leadership Seminar at Harvard. In each of its five years of existence, approximately six DTOs have been selected, while each year 25 FS-2s and 25 GS-14s are selected. Specialists have operational awareness that can be crucial in decision-making processes, yet we are often sidelined. Changing this narrative requires a commitment from leadership to recognize and utilize specialist expertise in ways that go beyond support functions.

Finally, we need to promote mutual understanding between generalists and specialists. While serving as the AF rover, I see firsthand the importance of understanding and appreciating your colleagues' roles. In Kinshasa, for example, there was a successful initiative for which staff participated in role exchanges, allowing both generalists and specialists to learn about each other's responsibilities. This not only enhanced mission success but also promoted a sense of cohesion and teamwork.

A Call to Action for Specialists

I urge my fellow specialists to challenge the status quo by stepping into roles and conversations where we're often underrepresented. We have the knowledge, the skills, and the experience to contribute meaningfully beyond the confines of our technical responsibilities. We need to make our voices heard and showcase how operational awareness can enhance decision-making and mission outcomes.

Additionally, we must increase specialist representation on promotion, hiring, and tenure boards, especially those that evaluate specialists. This is not just about fairness, but also about ensuring the Foreign Service benefits from the full spectrum of expertise available.

I would even take it one step further and advocate that at least one specialist should sit on every generalist board. We need to address the divide between generalists and specialists and recognize the invaluable contributions that each group brings to the table.

Words have power, and by changing the way we speak about and to each other, we can begin to change the structures and perceptions that have divided us for far too long. ■

WHAT WE'VE LOST
Firsthand Accounts FROM THE FIELD

In the April-May 2025 *FSJ*, we published stories from our colleagues at USAID whose lives were turned upside down by the dismantling of their agency. We received so much feedback that AFSA decided to launch a new public awareness campaign—"Service Disrupted"—to help Americans understand what our country loses when our diplomats are pulled from the field.

We asked AFSA members to share the important work they were doing when the assault on the Foreign Service began, specifically: What is important about the work you do, and what will be (or has been) lost without you in the field? What are the impacts (losses) to America as the result of your program and/or position being shuttered? What do you want Americans to better understand about your specific work and why it matters?

Member stories quickly inundated our inbox—too many to print. Below we share a few, which have been lightly edited for clarity. Many are printed anonymously; the authors are known to us and come from member agencies and from posts across the globe.

We will continue to share your stories in the *Journal* and on our social media channels as we receive them. If you have one to share, please send it to humans-of-fs@afsa.org.

—The Editors

Saving Lives

I was part of the team in the Bureau for Global Health that delivered life-saving medicine all over the world, demonstrating the goodwill of the American people and creating partnerships abroad to counter foreign malign influence. To ensure this medicine, paid for by U.S. taxpayers, actually reached patients in need, my work focused on supply chain security and countering corruption.

We used USAID donations to prevent corruption and catalyze accountability of public institutions and foreign governments—accountability that would ultimately phase out the need for donated support. Our focus on supply chain security mitigated falsified medicines being put into circulation. Falsified medication can lead to antimicrobial resistance, allowing new superbugs that do not have a cure to find their way to American shores.

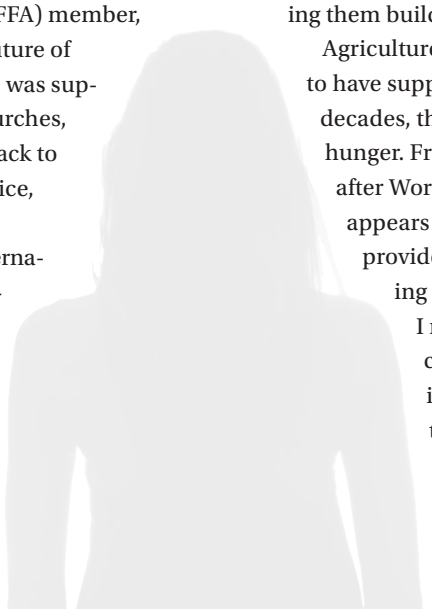
Now, not only are the most underserved and destitute communities in the world dying of preventable diseases, but governments are being supported by adversaries to the United States and are not being held to USAID's standards. The trade of falsified medicines will likely increase, posing a threat to U.S. national security.

USAID's important work created goodwill and gave the United States an advantage in foreign policy negotiations. We no longer have a seat at the table.

Feeding the Future

I was taught from a young age to love land and people. As a child in 4-H, I pledged to use my head, heart, hands, and health in service to my club, community, country, and world. As a Future Farmers of America (FFA) member, I found in the FFA creed a belief in the future of agriculture. Throughout my childhood, I was supported by my hometown businesses, churches, and individuals who taught me to give back to others, to believe in agriculture and service, and to be a leader.

These values led me to my work in international development and U.S. foreign assistance, first as a Peace Corps volunteer and staff member, and later as a USAID Foreign Service officer focused on humanitarian assistance, agricultural development, and resilience building.



For the past 14 years, I represented my country in some of the most remote areas of the world. As part of the U.S. government's Feed the Future initiative, I have carried the values instilled in me by my small community in northeastern Kentucky, working hand in hand with other proud Americans.

Launched in 2011 and codified into law by the Global Food Security Act in 2016, Feed the Future invested in food security and agricultural development in developing countries. Through this initiative, America worked to break the cycle of poverty and hunger by improving food systems, nutrition, and livelihoods. In just its first 10 years, Feed the Future lifted 23.4 million people out of poverty, prevented 3.4 million children from stunting, and reduced hunger in 5.2 million families.

Though most of the initiative's results have been erased from today's internet, our work made a difference to the individuals in the countries where I have lived and worked. We provided food assistance—sorghum and split peas grown by American farmers—during times of drought and war. We taught good agricultural practices and introduced drought-tolerant seeds, small-scale irrigation, and agribusiness principles to help poor farmers harvest enough to feed their families. We injected extra capital into village savings and lending groups so that women could borrow money to start small businesses. We constructed dip tanks and provided veterinary training for extension workers, reducing animal diseases.

I have represented the United States in multiple countries, in meetings where my voice—the voice of the American people—is respected, where we set the priorities. In support of those priorities, we helped to open markets for U.S. businesses and offered families a path to economic success, reducing their chances of being recruited into violent extremist organizations. We supported youth seeking opportunities in agriculture, helping them build lives at home instead of turning to migration.

Agriculture can be a path out of poverty, and I am proud to have supported my country in making this happen. For decades, the U.S. led the global fight to eradicate world hunger. From the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Europe after World War II to the Feed the Future initiative that appears to be canceled by this administration, we have provided support and guidance to those in need, sharing our knowledge and excellence across the globe. I remain hopeful that there is a future where we continue these efforts—serving our world, believing in agriculture, and maintaining our status as the leader of the free world.

VOA in Transylvania

The narrow road high in Transylvania cut across a wide upland valley, mountains far in the distance. No fences, no houses, no people except for a lone figure up ahead. A peasant in a sheepskin cloak slogging along the deserted road under an endless gray sky. Hearing us approach, he turned and held up his hand. In mid-1980s Romania, public transportation was scarce, gasoline rationed if available at all. Horses pulled wagons, and people walked. If you had a car, you gave people rides.

So we stopped. Gratefully, the man got in and greeted us.

"You're foreigners," he said, on hearing us reply. Then he froze a second before turning to me, smiling widely.

"I know who you are! I hear you on Vocea Americii!"

One Federal Employee Giving Back

For a few years as a child in Florida, I received reduced-price school lunch. Without that money from the Department of Education, I would have gone to school hungry. My parents were both working full time—as a nurse and construction/factory worker—but it wasn't enough to feed and house our family of four. Yet there are calls to dismantle the Department of Education and cut benefits to hungry kids.

My parents divorced when I was in middle school, and my mom moved in with a succession of boyfriends. I'll never forget the time we left one of those boyfriend's houses late at night after he threatened my mom and sister, and we sat at a picnic table in a public park while mom tried to figure out what to do. I watched my younger sister cry in fear and promise she'd be good as she held on tightly to her dog. We found somewhere to stay that night, but I don't remember us having a dog after that. We moved into Section 8 housing—voucher housing subsidized by Housing and Urban Development—as we worked to get our lives back together.

In high school, I waited tables and saved my tips. I studied hard and received a full scholarship to a local university through the Florida Bright Futures program, given to the top 10 percent of graduating seniors in the state. Many of my friends planned to study abroad, but that wasn't an option for me financially—until my professors found out why I wasn't going and helped me apply for a study abroad scholarship. That scholarship, the Critical Needs Language scholarship from the federal government, paid for me to spend a year overseas learning a language the U.S. government deemed essential. In return, I promised to work for the U.S. government once I graduated.

Thanks to the U.S. government, I had been fed. I had been safely housed. I had been educated. I did not come from privilege, but the government and my own hard work had helped me reach for better opportunities, and you can bet I was going to take them.

After graduation, I moved to D.C. and looked for a government job to repay the debt I owed—not out of obligation, but out of gratitude. I found a position with a nonprofit organization where the projects were largely funded by USAID. The pay wasn't great—barely above poverty—but I believed in the mission, and now I was on the giving end of U.S. government money.

I understood that by helping people improve their lives, we help the United States: People overseas who receive food, shelter, medicine, and improved government services from the United States are more likely to have a positive view of our country, buy U.S. products, and support U.S. policies. They want to work with us and be our partners because we were there for them in a time of need, just like the social safety net was there for my family when we needed it.

Some people claim USAID projects are a waste of money, that the organization is full of fraud. As someone who has spent hours reviewing receipts for $3 taxi expenses, and discussing $2 differences between the receipts presented and the bank statement of the local organization running the program, I can assure you that every penny is carefully accounted for.

After three years at the nonprofit, I got my dream job with the U.S. government. I can still remember the feeling of awe that came over me as I recited the oath of office, which is framed on my desk: *I solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully execute the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.*

Over the past 12 years, I have issued passports to U.S. citizen babies born overseas; prevented people with suspected terrorist ties from receiving a visa to the United States; sat with an elderly woman who lost her husband on what was supposed to be the trip of a lifetime to celebrate their retirement, and then called their children to inform them of their father's death. I have helped arrange emergency travel for a refugee to join

his American citizen children in the United States when their mother was placed in hospice, to ensure they did not enter foster care and become wards of the state. I have explained the "Muslim ban" and "extreme vetting" to foreign governments.

I have explained the U.S. electoral system and the system of checks and balances in countries with monarchies and authoritarian democracies. I have implemented and advocated for policies I personally deeply disagreed with under both Democratic and Republican leaders. I have evacuated U.S. citizens in emergency situations in Burundi, Sudan, Afghanistan, Guinea, Lebanon, and so many other places that honestly I can't even remember anymore.

I do not have a gun, but I am the person who goes into the crisis to make sure you can get out. On a slow week, I work 40 hours; most weeks, I work 50. I do not get paid overtime.

I have missed my only sister's wedding and the births of her two children. My dad is terminally ill, and I am not there. I haven't seen my mom in several years because whatever vacation time and money I scrape together goes to helping my dad. I have given up my right to express my opinion on U.S. government policy, even as I am required to implement it.

This is just the story of one federal employee. But it is not unusual. We come from all over the United States. From families who had nothing other than a strong work ethic, and who instilled in us the value of service. No one will argue that government is perfect: We live it every day and see its flaws. But we also know that the work we do is essential to our nation.

I work hard every day to keep you safe regardless of who you are or what your political beliefs are. I have not received any special treatment to get where I am: I have benefited from programs open to any citizen of the United States in need, and I have more than paid back that debt.

Supporting Press Freedom

My portfolio covers USAID's support for journalists and press freedom in Eastern Europe. USAID's media strengthening programs enhance the integrity, resilience, and plurality of the news and information space across the region. We help citizens to be more informed about their health care and education decisions; members of the private sector to make data-driven decisions on running their businesses and contributing to the economy; communities to hold their leaders and policymakers to account; and countries to be more stable, better governed, less corrupt, more open to business, and better aligned with American interests and values. This, in turn, makes America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

One example is our support of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), which was the lead partner in Eastern Europe on the Panama Papers investigation. The largest collaboration of journalists to date, the project involved more than 350 reporters from 80 countries who analyzed and verified the data from more than 11 million leaked records, including emails, financial spreadsheets, passports, and corporate records. Journalists were able to cross-check it with other public databases and politically exposed persons records to then follow the money trail.

The findings were published in 2016, exposing how hundreds of political and financial elites and celebrities moved their licit and illicit wealth through hard-to-trace companies and tax havens. Reporting by OCCRP and its partners revealed how associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin shuffled more than $2 billion in stolen public funds through banks and shadow companies.

This is just one example of OCCRP's work, which has earned nearly 300 local, national, and international reporting awards, contributing to the seizure or freezing of at least $10 billion in assets and nearly 500 arrests, indictments, and sentences since 2009. That year, USAID was OCCRP's first public donor, and OCCRP estimates that for every $1 in U.S. government funding, it has returned $100 to the U.S. taxpayer in fines levied by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the U.S. Treasury against banks and companies for wrongdoing exposed by OCCRP reporting.

The positive impact of USAID assistance to independent media is also shown in Ukraine, where USAID supported the delivery of nearly 1,000 flak jackets and helmets for journalists reporting on the war (including the first set of military-grade vests to get across the border after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022), thousands of first aid kits, and training on first aid and conflict reporting. USAID also obligated $20 million in January 2025, before the current administration's stop work order, to help replenish such equipment and training, which was needed after three years of war.

The funding also would have gone to help reporters continue to track tens of thousands of kidnapped children taken from Ukraine to

Russia, cover war crimes and atrocities, and provide lifesaving information to communities on the line of contact. That support was terminated as part of the review process on foreign assistance.

Finally, USAID provided support to newsrooms in the Western Balkans to improve their financial, digital, and legal security, including to the storied outlet in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Oslobodjenje*, which published every day during the siege of Sarajevo from 1992 to 1996. On a visit in 2022 by then–USAID Administrator Samantha Power, who had covered the war as a journalist in the 1990s, staff at *Oslobodjenje* told her that it was harder to be a journalist now than during the war, not only because of the economic, political, and technological headwinds they face, but because of vexatious lawsuits meant to drive them out of business. Power's visit came as USAID announced its creation of a global mutual defense fund, Reporters Shield, to help reporters facing the rising threat of strategic litigation against public participation lawsuits, or SLAPP suits.

USAID's support of independent media in Eastern Europe and around the world has provided a powerful, cost-effective way for the United States to support those on the front lines of freedom. Such efforts have strengthened democracies and allies of the U.S., ensured a more level playing field and stronger economies for American businesses to invest in, and made the world safer and more secure.

Helping Americans Abroad

In 1995 I was a first-tour consular officer at the U.S. consulate general in Krakow, when we received a call from Jagiellonian University about an elderly U.S. gentleman who was residing in their dormitories. Retired and single, he had come to study Polish in a language course for foreigners. The course had ended, the dorms were closing for the summer, but no matter what they told him, "the gentleman will not leave and just sits all day watching TV." As the American Citizen Services (ACS) officer, I went to see him.

He was a gentle, old man, quiet and reserved, who could answer simple questions, but that was all. He did not understand that it was time for him to leave and return home. When we asked for his passport, he took us to his room and pointed at his dresser. In one drawer we found countless pieces of paper covered with scribblings and notes that made no real sense, but no passport or plane ticket. We had virtually no information about the man save his name. He did not know his address, names of relatives, telephone number, and so on. In the drawer, however, we found a large key, and the Polish staffer said it looked like a bank lockbox key. The gentleman had no idea what the key was for or where he got it.

In just its first 10 years, Feed the Future lifted 23.4 million people out of poverty, prevented 3.4 million children from stunting, and reduced hunger in 5.2 million families.

After visiting numerous banks, one of them said it was theirs, but the lockbox could only be accessed by the key owner, or a court order to open it. Fortunately, the bank accepted the gentleman's student ID card, and there we found his passport, traveler's checks, a plane ticket, and an envelope with a return address.

After tracking the address, we were able to contact his son. The gentleman had had a series of small strokes while in Poland, befuddling him. Once contacted, the family needed our help to get him back to the U.S. Unable to travel alone, he needed an escort to fly, which none of the family could do. A consulate spouse agreed to accompany him to London and put him on a plane to New York. Afterward, I received a personal letter from his son, thanking us profusely for our help retrieving their father.

Our consulate had only eight FSOs at that time, handling 300 nonimmigrant visa (NIV) requests daily while covering many other responsibilities. This was a rare case but not unusual, and certainly not an exercise that could have been handled remotely or by AI. It's just one example of how U.S. diplomats are always willing, able, and needed to help U.S. citizens in distress overseas.

Don Sheehan
State Department FSO, retired
Arlington, Virginia

Foreign Assistance Helps U.S. Businesses

Over the past two years, I led USAID efforts to support countries facing debt distress and macroeconomic crises. We advised more than 25 governments on strengthening tax systems, cutting costs, and improving oversight in sectors like banking.

In 2024 in Bangladesh, where $17-30 billion was looted from banks by former political leaders, USAID became the first bilateral agency to deploy an adviser focused on banking sector reform—introducing oversight mechanisms common in the U.S. to help recover assets and prevent future losses. Now that USAID has been shut down, Bangladesh is forced to turn to other partners.

This work isn't new. USAID has supported economic governance for decades, with bipartisan backing. During the first Trump administration, for instance, USAID helped Burma's civilian leaders avoid $6 billion in port project costs, saving the country money and denying the People's Republic of China (PRC) leverage.

Why should the U.S. care? First, fiscally sound countries are better investment environments for U.S. businesses—offering stable exchange rates, low inflation, and reliable infrastructure. Second, sound economic management is foundational to poverty reduction and a principle behind the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Scorecard, yet a place where USAID has led due to our on-the-ground presence. Third, addressing issues that matter to foreign leaders strengthens partnerships—and counters PRC influence, enhancing U.S. global standing.

Family Members Serve Too

Let us honor the sacrifices that are mutually shared by our patriotic USAID families. My wife gave up her career so she could support us at hardship and danger posts. In service to our great nation, my family has endured three evacuations, including once when we had to reassure our toddlers that Santa would still deliver their presents despite the need to flee across the Congo River. Elsewhere, our kids remember the sounds of explosions while sheltering in bomb shelters and the heavy doors of the armored vehicles that frequently took them to school.

Our USAID family members have proudly served our country alongside us. They are the real heroes and deserve better.

Anchored in Hope

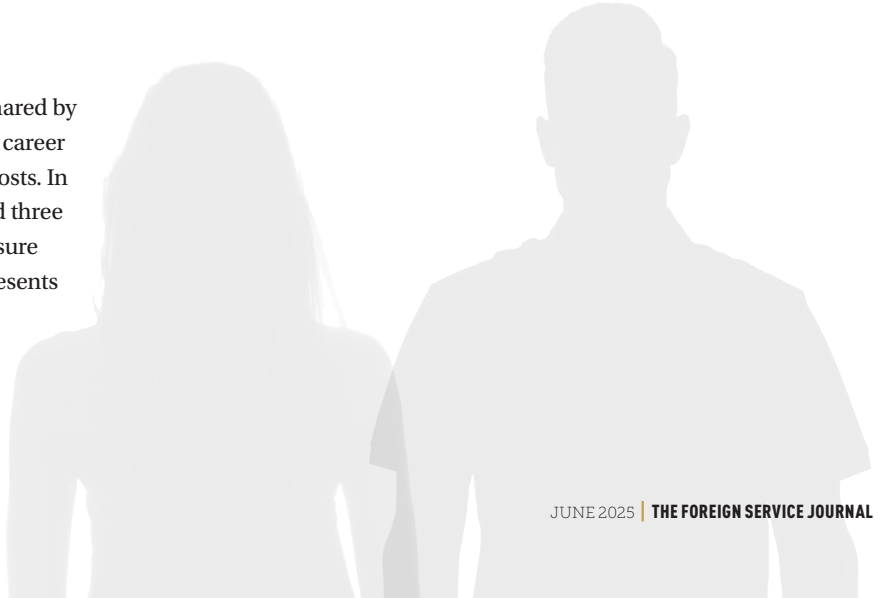
The dreaded news has finally been confirmed—I have been placed on administrative leave. Despite the frustration, the sting of betrayal, and the uncertainty that looms over me, I remain, against all odds, hopeful.

The past few weeks have thrown more at me than I could have imagined. I have endured betrayal by my own government and the very institution I swore to serve. I have had my allegiance questioned, my integrity scrutinized—as if my commitment to this country and its values were conditional, as if my identity disqualified me from belonging. I have been told, to my face and behind my back, that my mixed-race heritage makes me an abomination. I have watched with anguish as the world spirals deeper into crisis after crisis—war, injustice, climate catastrophe, humanitarian disasters—each one a reminder of how much is at stake.

Through it all, my hope has been tested like never before.

To say my soul has been crushed over the past few weeks would be an understatement. The weight of everything—past and present—has pressed down on me with unrelenting force. And yet, here I stand.

Three years ago, I achieved what felt like a lifelong dream: I became a Foreign Service officer with USAID. It was more than just a job—it was a calling. The mission, the purpose, the commitment to something greater than myself—it all resonated deeply. But what made it even more meaningful was my first post: the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Returning to my birthplace, the country that shaped so much of my cultural and social identity, felt like fate. It was a dream come true, tinged with the inevitable fear of the unknown, but grounded in an overwhelming sense of pride. I had made it. I had stepped into a new chapter, one filled with purpose, responsibility, and the opportunity to have a real impact.

That first year at post was one of the best years of my life. Sure, I had my fair share of complaints about the traffic in Kinshasa. But even that, in hindsight, is something I miss. What I wouldn't give now to be stuck on that shuttle at the end of a long day, sitting in gridlocked streets with my friends and colleagues, trading stories and laughter. What I wouldn't give to walk into the office and see the warm smiles of my Congolese colleagues, people who exemplify the best of humanity, working tirelessly to tackle some of the country's most pressing health challenges.

But in the blink of an eye, it was all ripped away.

In January, I was evacuated under harrowing circumstances due to civil unrest. I was forced to leave behind the life I was building, the work that gave me purpose, and the people who had become my second family. The trauma of that moment still lingers, not just because of the chaos and fear, but because it stirred something even deeper: memories of another evacuation, one that uprooted me from what was then Zaire in 1991. I was just a child then, unable to fully comprehend what was happening. But now, as an adult, experiencing it again in eerily similar ways, the wounds have reopened in ways I never anticipated.

Returning to the United States under this veil of suspicion, under the shadow of my own government questioning my intentions, has shaken me to my core. This is not just a personal struggle; it is part of a broader, insidious pattern of psychological warfare being waged against those of us who have dedicated our lives to public service. It is an attack not just on me but on my colleagues, on marginalized communities, on anyone who dares to challenge the status quo and push for a better world. The consequences of this assault will be lasting, far beyond my own experience.

And yet, despite my rage, my hurt, and my profound sense of disillusionment—I remain hopeful.

Some may call it naivete. Others may attribute it to my Catholic upbringing, the ingrained belief in resilience, in faith, in the notion that light can still break through the darkest of nights. But I know it is more than that.

We have a moral obligation—not just as public servants, but as human beings—to stand up for what is right, to protect those who cannot protect themselves, to build a world that is just and equitable.

I have seen resilience in action, lived it, breathed it. I saw it in my parents, in the way they endured unimaginable hardships yet never wavered in their resolve. I see it in the communities I have chosen and the ones that have chosen me—people who stand firm in their convictions, who fight for justice, who embody the very best that humanity has to offer. These are the people who give me strength, who remind me that hope is not just a sentiment but an act of defiance, a conscious choice in the face of despair.

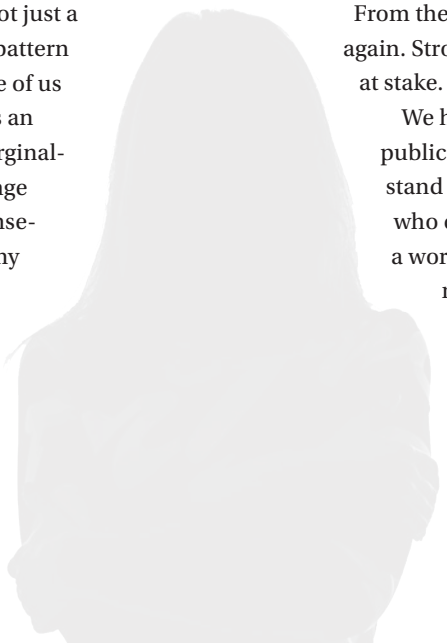
I do not know what will happen next. The path ahead is uncertain, filled with more questions than answers. But I do know this: I will not go down without a fight. I refuse to let this moment define me, to let it strip me of my purpose, my voice, or my determination. I will not be silenced, and I will not turn away from the work that matters. Because that work—the fight for justice, for dignity, for humanity—is bigger than me. It always has been.

From the ashes of what remains, we will rise again. Stronger. Wiser. More aware of all that is at stake.

We have a moral obligation—not just as public servants, but as human beings—to stand up for what is right, to protect those who cannot protect themselves, to build a world that is just and equitable. And I refuse to do anything less than that.

Hope is not just an emotion. It is a force. It is a choice. And today, as I stand on uncertain ground, I choose it once again.

Erin Aseli Fleming
Foreign Service Officer



Advancing U.S. Economic Interests Overseas in an ERA OF RISING TARIFFS

When tariff policy is a primary tool of economic statecraft, U.S. diplomats have a unique role to play.

BY DANIEL CROCKER

Economists and other experts are writing extensively on the advisability of the current administration's use of tariff policy as a primary tool of economic statecraft. Some have spelled out the history of America's use of tariffs, while others debate the feasibility of the new tariffs. Far fewer deal with how career U.S. diplomats can successfully advance U.S. national interests abroad at a time when the administration is seeking to use tariff policy aggressively.

For career diplomats, gathering information and reporting to Washington, D.C., on developments and trends in the host country, including responses to U.S. policy, is a basic responsibility. Under the circumstances, this field reporting role will become proportionately more important, particularly because implementation of tariffs can often cause disproportionate changes, especially in the developing world, where economic and political stability are significantly more fragile.

Historically, economic statecraft has been an important instrument of warfare, so it is essential for U.S. diplomats to dig deep to understand and share what is happening on the ground, the impacts, and the secondary consequences of changes in tariffs.

To do so effectively, however, two important shortcomings need to be addressed: First, U.S. diplomats need to improve the competence and quality of their intelligence gathering; and sec-

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ART–ISTOCKPHOTO/HANSCHE

ond, the State Department needs to establish a unified, cloud-based solution to the process of reporting back to policymakers.

Reordering Global Trade

Since 2016 tariffs have been used by two successive administrations in an increasingly aggressive manner to restrict imports and protect favored sectors. And now the Trump administration has ratcheted up the use of tariffs so dramatically that it is fair to see it as an attempt at a wholesale reordering of global trade. In some cases, countries may make a deliberate decision, at least initially, to seek to embrace the U.S. and offer more trade and investment concessions. In many other cases, countries may seek to retaliate in subtle ways or pivot to other foreign patrons.

U.S. implementation of tariffs may well come as a shock to a host country. It is worth noting here that the benefits of soft power inherent in the post–World War II U.S. leadership of trade liberalization meant that many countries had nearly tariff-free access to the world's richest consumer base for decades.

That, in turn, has resulted in hundreds of millions of people globally being lifted out of poverty—primarily in China, which has turned into a global export powerhouse, but also in smaller countries like Bangladesh, where women once reliant on subsistence agriculture can now earn a living making T-shirts for companies like Nike. (Such jobs also allow the U.S. government—and companies like Nike that are concerned with reputational risk—to insist on better labor conditions.) More obvious examples are the U.S. appetite for goods like coffee and bananas, neither of which can be grown naturally in the continental United States.

The U.S. may have had mixed motives in having outsourced most labor-intensive activities—companies, after all, seek to maximize profits in large part by minimizing their cost of manufacture—but the results of poverty alleviation were undeniably historic. And U.S. policymakers could naturally claim some moral global leadership by facilitating poverty alleviation. Buying from the world may have been the U.S.'s most impressive and enduring foreign aid program, even at the cost of rapid and concentrated job dislocation domestically. It is precisely the length and stability of this former U.S. position—from World War II to 2016—that is now creating the conditions for a rapid chill in bilateral and regional attitudes toward the U.S.

Consider how rapidly the situation has changed. In 2011 the U.S. Senate ratified free trade agreements with South Korea, Panama, and Colombia. All three had national security dimensions. Just four years later, two extraordinary economic and security trade agreements had been negotiated and were all but ready to be ratified by the Senate—the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Both would have created major regional trading blocks and, not coincidentally, would have checked China's growth and influence. However, both leading presidential candidates in 2016 ran in opposition to implementing them—in large part reflecting voters' sentiment that too many jobs were being lost to outsourcing.

This is an opportunity to educate foreign interlocutors on the general nature of the U.S. balance of powers.

Dealing with Uncertainty

Today's situation puts U.S. diplomats in a tricky position for the simple reason that the implementation of many of the new tariffs has been unstable, with sudden escalations and reversals. U.S. diplomats will need to articulate and defend the shifting policies on tariffs to the host country government, the public, and key business leaders.

This is an opportunity to educate foreign interlocutors on the general nature of the U.S. balance of powers. It is not incorrect, for instance, to note that the Constitution largely gives Congress the authority to impose tariffs—and that Congress, over time, has authorized the executive branch to deploy certain processes to determine if tariffs, generally narrowly scoped, are appropriate to apply. By design, there is a tension between Congress and the executive branch in determining and executing tariff policies. And the Supreme Court has something to say in its judicial review of the constitutionality of any action.

At the time of this writing, in mid-April, the administration's imposition of sweeping tariffs is being challenged by a U.S. consumer goods company represented, quite ably, by Mark Chenoweth and his team at the New Civil Liberties Alliance. The lawsuit charges that the administration is exceeding their authority by imposing tariffs on the basis of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

When this case reaches the Supreme Court, a ruling may well result in an annulment of these tariffs. U.S. diplomats should feel comfortable explaining to their foreign contacts that the Supreme Court's decision is binding on the administration. And given the economic impact of the tariffs on China in particular, which, as of the date of this draft, are at approximately 150 percent, the

A Note on Two Special Sectors

Two areas affected by tariffs deserve a special note. The first is extraction, of both fossil fuels and of metals and critical minerals. U.S. diplomats stationed in countries that are either dependent on external sources of supply (e.g., Germany) or are reliant on export earnings from extraction (e.g., Nigeria) will want to pay special attention to the secondary consequences of any disruption created by applying tariffs. And U.S. diplomats will need to be cognizant not just of the impact of U.S. tariffs but also the European Union's (EU) phase-in of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, which will eventually apply a tax on imports of "carbon-intensive" manufacturing. In the case of a country like Nigeria, its exports of fossil fuels may be subject to tariffs as well as its manufactured goods. Nigerians will immigrate to other countries if local economic conditions are dire. Similar issues for critical minerals and mining stand out in such jurisdictions as Bolivia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The U.S. has been transformed into an exporting powerhouse, largely by the fracking revolution and innovative fast-tracked liquification facilities for LNG (liquified natural gas) exports by such companies as Venture Global. Countries tempted to implement retaliatory tariffs may hesitate if they are dependent on imports of oil and gas. Or they may not: China, for instance, has shrewdly and quietly targeted U.S. LNG imports. U.S. diplomats can and should report on the state of play of energy and what countries are doing to seek alternatives to the U.S., because energy infrastructure is a core component of sustainable economic development and therefore political stability.

Computer chip fabrication is another standout sector. There is considerable uncertainty about the extent to which the current administration will continue offering financial incentives to build more fabrication facilities in the U.S. At the same time, the administration may seek to apply tariffs to chip imports to incentivize more inward investment. To certain countries, most notably Taiwan, there is a considerable tension here as the island's global leadership in chip manufacturing is seen as a core competence and perhaps even a safeguard against China's military movements. U.S. diplomats serving in countries with fabrication or chipmaking equipment capacity (e.g., the Netherlands) will want to gather intelligence on how particular companies are responding to tariffs.

—D.C.

Supreme Court will presumably take up the case as expeditiously as possible.

Yet all this creates general economic uncertainty: It would be highly illogical for investors to make major decisions in any country, including the U.S., without knowing whether today's broad tariffs will hold. If they do, it might make sense for investors to shift more manufacturing to Central America or Mexico, both of which have free trade agreements with the U.S. But such investments take years to get off the ground. And the administration may then apply new tariffs to any country that is a waypoint for Chinese-owned manufacturing activity.

There is another dimension to the uncertainty that U.S. diplomats must navigate. Quite simply, what is the purpose of the tariffs? Is it an attempt by the U.S. government to gain concessions from foreign countries? If so, is it clear to each foreign country what concessions will win them relief from the tariffs, or are they permanent? And if they are permanent, are they intended to reshore that manufacturing activity to the U.S., or shift the activity to another country that the U.S. would prefer to purchase from? U.S. diplomats will need to seek consistent answers to these questions from their agencies back in Washington, D.C., but remain flexible if the answers are overtaken by events and change without notice.

If the Supreme Court *does* declare the administration's use of IEEPA to apply sweeping tariffs unconstitutional, then U.S. diplomats should expect to see a swift pivot toward the use of more narrowly scoped and time-honored tariff processes such as in Sections 201, 232, and 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which are spelled out by Congress and undertaken by the U.S. Trade Representative, the U.S. International Trade Commission, and the Department of Commerce.

Those processes involve deliberative reviews of claims of damage or harm to national security and have survived legal challenge. They invite more precision, and a reversion to their use to determine tariffs may cause less overall bilateral disruption; but U.S. diplomats will still need to be able to articulate and defend them in front of constituencies adversely affected by their implementation in a foreign country.

Investment in the U.S.

Through the SelectUSA program, currently housed at the Department of Commerce, U.S. diplomats have been responsible for promoting foreign investment into the U.S. In many ways, the pitch has not changed. The U.S. is the world's richest consumer market. Rule of law for businesses is strong and encourages innovation and risk-taking. Finance is world leading. Energy is reliable and cheap. Taxes, at both the state and federal level,

are competitive. And the U.S. offers a highly competitive and productive labor pool.

It might appear at first glance that the pitch is now more compelling. After all, the application of tariffs would make the import of a good more expensive and investment in making it domestically more competitive. But the picture is not so clear. First, labor is expensive, so any labor-intensive manufacturing shift to the U.S. would need to factor in much higher costs for labor or automation to remain competitive.

Whereas the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) made a North American platform appealing, particularly to automotive companies that could source more labor-intensive parts from Mexico and do higher-value system integration in the U.S., the recent application of tariffs to Mexico and Canada make this trade agreement look less stable. And it is up for renegotiation in 2026. At any rate, USMCA is phasing in a stringent requirement for preferential tariff treatment—namely, that labor for a specific minimum percentage of a vehicle's content is paid at least $16/hour on average, which makes Mexico's labor costs appear less competitive.

But most important is the fact that industry is not sure which tariffs will stick. A manufacturer selling to U.S. customers must take into account two scenarios: The first is how much it costs to import a finished product (e.g., a car) from another country. The second is how much it will cost to import all the needed subcomponents—all the way up through steel, aluminum, and critical minerals like cobalt—to build the same car domestically. That cost now depends enormously on tariff levels country by country.

U.S. diplomats will need to pitch the U.S., nonetheless. One prudent approach might be to emphasize the enduring attractions of investing in the U.S. rather than address tariffs on both finished goods and inputs, since they are highly subject to change in the coming years and should not therefore be dispositive in an investment road map.

Stepping Up the Reporting Function

In this environment, the most consequential thing U.S. diplomats can do to help further U.S. interests is step up the competence and quality of economic intelligence gathering for policymakers in Washington, D.C. At post, diplomats should be seeking detailed answers to questions such as the following:

- Has anti-American sentiment picked up on social media or via foreign leaders' speeches?
- Is there a new level of antipathy toward U.S. requests for support on such things as sanctions against Russia or Iran, or important votes at the UN?

There is another dimension to the uncertainty that U.S. diplomats must navigate. Quite simply, what is the purpose of the tariffs?

- What are local and foreign businesses saying about the investment climate?
- Are important sectors (e.g., a textile factory in an export zone, or a banana plantation) suddenly laying off workers because of a drop in orders from the U.S.?
- Are there new investments popping up, especially by third-party countries like China that are hit hard by higher tariffs, which could be cover for changing the country of origin to shop for lower tariffs?
- Is there a change in political stability, either because unemployment is rising or because opportunistic opponents are blaming the current leadership?
- Is there a change in the foreign government's treatment of U.S. investment in the country? Are audits or charges of corruption suddenly rising, or are there new delays in approval of permitting?
- Are there new pressures for emigration? And if so, are they flows to the U.S. or EU?

To be successful in information gathering and sharing to inform U.S. policymakers, I believe that two shortcomings need to be addressed.

The first is **individual competence at intelligence gathering**. Department of Commerce diplomats have largely focused on small and medium-sized company export promotion—not a priority for the administration these days—and have not typically seen themselves as essential to transmitting intelligence back to D.C. They have unparalleled connections, however, to the U.S. and foreign business community. State Department officials, meanwhile, are well versed in reporting back to D.C. but have often stayed focused on the relatively insular world of bilateral, government-to-government engagement.

In a world where trade and investment decisions are made by the private sector and are highly sensitive to tariff levels that have not been seen in a century, State Department diplomats will need to foster more external contacts. Additional technical skills can be taught through FSI—forensic auditing, for instance, to determine the ultimate ownership of a newly arrived steel

company. Public diplomacy officials are already well tuned to pick up the public and social media moods and are therefore well prepared to report.

The second shortcoming has to do with **getting the information back to policymakers**. This is a governmentwide problem that exists across multiple agencies represented at post. Although the embassy team functions under the direction of the chief of mission and should be collaborating in the service of a common goal, much falls apart in the process of reporting back to agencies in D.C. Generally, policymakers there who need to have actionable and relevant information are consigned to picking it up in a piecemeal fashion as they can.

For this reason, I believe strongly in a single, unified, and best-in-class U.S. government cloud-hosted solution that all agencies represented at post must use for reporting purposes. Such a system would synthesize once-atomized cable-based reporting in real time with translated and annotated foreign press and social media synopses, in order to present an AI-enhanced knowledge base for all agencies to draw from. The use of AI, in particular, would eliminate the practice of cable reporting that has often devolved into translation of public source foreign media with a slender commentary wrap. That then allows U.S. diplomats to focus on the highest value-added activities of human intelligence reporting.

The reporting would be coupled with comprehensive profiles of foreign intermediaries in the public and private sectors showing all touchpoints for U.S. government engagement. Such a system would simultaneously present the latest 30,000-foot view of the state of play in any given country—but also allow for deep data dives into individual profiles, all of which are constantly being refined by new data flows. The game of telephone (which quite literally represents some of the current reporting) is no longer adequate for this critical role for our U.S. diplomats.

We have entered a new era for the U.S.'s posture and image abroad. And learning how to support it and to report back on its impact may well be the greatest contribution to national security a U.S. diplomat can make. ■

Fortifying Minerals Diplomacy

FOUR NATIONS, FOUR SOLUTIONS

The Quad—an alliance of the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia—is emerging as a strategic force in critical minerals diplomacy while countering China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

BY MAHNAZ KHAN

President Donald Trump's Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy," released the day of the inauguration, indicated that the new administration is prioritizing U.S. mining and mineral processing and, in particular, non-fuel minerals including rare earth minerals. Further, the order mandates the Secretary of State to pursue opportunities along these lines through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad.

An alliance of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, the Quad aims to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific through military cooperation, economic security, and technological collaboration while promoting a free and open regional order. Initially formalized in 2007, the Quad remained largely inactive until it was revived in 2017 during President Trump's first term, and now, all signs suggest it is poised for a stronger resurgence.

Notably, no other executive orders have outlined alternative frameworks for securing critical minerals. And just one day after the inauguration, Secretary of State Marco Rubio convened a high-level Quad meeting, where leaders reaffirmed their commitment to economic and technological security while fortifying supply chains against mounting global threats.

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The missing link lies in greater diplomatic coordination among Washington policymakers and the U.S. Foreign Service stationed in Quad nations to bolster each other's critical minerals security.

A Natural Fit for Critical Minerals

Why is the Quad emerging as a strategic force in critical minerals diplomacy? The answer lies in its members' supply chains, trade alliances, and business investments.

Supply Chain Synergies. The Quad nations are naturally positioned to strengthen global critical minerals supply chains, each contributing a key piece of the puzzle.

Australia leads the world in lithium mining, producing 37 percent of global supply, a resource vital for electric vehicles (EVs), drones, and battery storage. The country also holds the world's largest zinc reserves (28 percent) and is a crucial source of germanium and gallium, both essential for semiconductors—the foundation of modern electronics, from smartphones to advanced defense systems.

While Australia has a competitive advantage in extraction, Japan is a leader in mineral processing, refining rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt, and nickel, all of which are essential for high-tech industries. Meanwhile, the United States and India are focusing on expanding domestic mining and refining operations, with government-backed initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on Chinese-controlled supply chains.

Further down the supply chain, the United States boasts an advanced industrial base for semiconductor and battery production, while India is rapidly expanding its own capacity in these sectors. Together, the Quad nations are uniquely positioned to leverage their respective strengths in building a secure, resilient, and self-sufficient mineral supply chain.

Trade Alliances. The Quad nations share more than just supply chain synergies; they also maintain strong trade alliances that reinforce their economic cooperation. The United States has a free trade agreement with Australia, a critical minerals agreement with Japan, and recently initiated negotiations for a multisector bilateral trade agreement with India following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's February 2025 state visit.

Besides the U.S., Quad nations have trade alliances with each other. Australia and India are linked through the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, while Australia and Japan benefit from the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement. Additionally, India and Japan maintain trade relations through the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. All four Quad members also participate in the Minerals Security Partnership, a U.S. State Department initiative focused on securing global mineral supply chains.

These deep trade ties not only enhance economic resilience among Quad nations but also position the Quad as a viable counterweight to China's mineral dominance.

Quad-Backed Business Investments. Quad partners are making strategic investments in one another's critical minerals supply chains, with a particular focus on strengthening the U.S. industrial base. The U.S. Department of Defense is backing Lynas Rare Earths, an Australia-headquartered company, to establish a rare earth processing facility in Texas using Australian-mined materials. India is also deepening its footprint in U.S. supply chains, with Epsilon Advanced Materials investing $650 million in a graphite processing plant in North Carolina to support lithium-ion battery production. Meanwhile, Japan is reinforcing rare earth access through a supply chain agreement between California-based MP Materials and Sumitomo Corporation, ensuring a stable flow of rare earth elements for electric vehicle motors.

The U.S. Role in Fortifying Quad's Mineral Diplomacy

The Quad has the potential to establish a powerful critical minerals trifecta by integrating supply chains, securing strategic investments, and strengthening trade alliances. The missing link, however, lies in greater diplomatic coordination among Washington policymakers and the U.S. Foreign Service stationed in Quad nations to bolster each other's critical minerals security. It is important to drive investment and deepen partnerships to ensure mining and processing remain within Quad economies or the larger Quad supply chain—to establish a mineral supply chain independent of China.

Here are four recommendations on how the U.S. can support these goals:

Develop Lithium Processing Capacity Within the Quad. The U.S. should help to facilitate the development of alterna-

tive lithium processing hubs within Quad nations as global demand for lithium is set to surge: It is projected to rise by 90 percent over the next two decades, according to the International Energy Agency. Lithium, vital for EV batteries, grid storage, and defense applications, is currently dominated by China, which controls 60 percent of the world's lithium refining and processing. Despite being the world's largest lithium producer, Australia exports 99 percent of its lithium concentrate to China because it lacks a domestic processing infrastructure.

To break this dependency, Quad nations should invest in lithium refining and lithium-ion battery processing capacity within the Quad. Japan, with its advanced lithium refining expertise, is already making strides. Toyotsu Lithium Corporation recently launched Japan's first lithium hydroxide plant, while Sumitomo Corporation is partnering with Liontown Resources to create an integrated supply chain from Australian lithium mines to battery production. India, too, is stepping up, with government-backed incentives fueling private sector investment in lithium refining to support EV battery manufacturing.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is ramping up domestic processing, with companies like Tesla, Stardust Power, and Piedmont Lithium set to scale up lithium processing and battery production this year.

Collectively Invest in Africa to Create an Ethical Cobalt Supply Chain. The U.S. should coordinate with Quad leaders to accelerate private and public sector investments in Africa's cobalt sector to counter China's dominance in cobalt refining and ensure an ethical supply chain. To reduce reliance on Chinese processing, the Quad should invest in alternative refining hubs—either within Africa or in their own territories—while ensuring these supply chains prioritize fair labor practices, environmental responsibility, and transparent governance. Although both Australia and Japan have cobalt refining capabilities, the scale is inadequate to challenge China's grip on the cobalt supply chain.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accounts for three-fourths of global cobalt mine production, but more than 80 percent of its cobalt mines are controlled by Chinese firms. Worse, DRC's cobalt industry is plagued by forced labor, hazardous conditions, and severe environmental degradation, mainly as a result of Chinese practices. The cobalt supply chain has been

further destabilized by the DRC government's recent four-month export ban on cobalt, imposed in response to plummeting global prices, which has disrupted supply chains and heightened uncertainty in the market. Meanwhile, the resurgence of March 23 Movement rebels, a Tutsi-led paramilitary group, near the Rwandan border could potentially extend to threaten cobalt mining operations, adding another layer of geopolitical risk.

Although the Quad has yet to establish large-scale cobalt investments in the DRC, the U.S. can play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration. Leveraging funding mechanisms such as the Development Finance Corporation, the Export-Import Bank (EXIM), or any other restructured financial initiatives under the current Trump administration, the U.S. can help lay the groundwork for responsible investment in Africa.

Coordinate Quad Funding Streams to Collectively Invest in Critical Minerals Projects. The U.S. should coordinate with Quad partners to strategically align their financial resources to develop processing infrastructure both domestically and in mineral-rich regions. A coordinated investment strategy—driven by public and private capital and reinforced through U.S. diplomatic engagement—will ensure critical minerals are sourced, processed, and traded within trusted Quad alliances.

The Quad Investors Network (QUIN) is a critical private sector investment avenue. This independent, membership-based forum brings together leading industry figures, government entities, capital market participants, and academic organizations from Quad nations to mobilize funding for critical and emerging technologies. QUIN has already facilitated investments like India's Epsilon Advanced Materials' $650 million battery materials plant in North Carolina, strengthening the Quad's ability to control its own battery supply chains.

Alongside private investment, each Quad nation has dedicated government-backed financial mechanisms that, if aligned, could significantly reduce investment risks and accelerate project development. Entities like the U.S. Export-Import Bank's China and Transformational Exports Program (CTEP), or any newly structured or established financing entities under this administration, can assist in developing alternative supply chains by offering competitive loans and export financing to counter China's dominance.

Japan and India also play an important role in securing critical minerals assets through the Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC) and Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL). JOGMEC, a state-backed Japanese entity, funds overseas mining projects, facilitates joint ventures, and provides financial assistance to secure stable supplies of rare earths, cobalt, and nickel—resources vital for Japan's advanced manufacturing sector. KABIL, a joint venture of Indian state-owned enterprises, was created to identify, acquire, and develop critical minerals resources abroad to reduce India's dependence on China. KABIL is actively engaging in partnerships in Africa and Latin America to secure lithium and rare earth elements essential for India's growing EV and defense industries. Australia also actively invests in critical minerals projects abroad through its $4 billion Critical Minerals Facility, managed by Export Finance Australia (EFA).

By pooling financial resources through both government-backed institutions and private investment networks, Quad nations can collectively lower investment risks, scale up mineral processing within trusted networks, and build an independent supply chain outside China.

Form a Quad Minerals Agreement or Quad Minerals Security Pact. The U.S. government should lead efforts to formalize a Quad minerals strategy to counter China's weaponization of critical minerals. Such a strategy could utilize two primary plurilateral trade approaches: a Quad Minerals Agreement to strengthen trade relationships or a Quad Minerals Security Pact to push back against China's market manipulation.

The Quad Minerals Agreement would function as a formalized plurilateral critical minerals trade agreement to enhance collaboration among Quad countries. This agreement would streamline trade, investment, and supply chain coordination to secure access to battery dual-use minerals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel while reducing dependency on China.

Alone or in addition to the above, a Quad Minerals Security Pact could serve as a collective response mechanism to counter China's coercive trade tactics. Inspired by a recommendation from the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's latest report to Congress, this pact would allow Quad nations to coordinate countermeasures against China's flood of subsidized, underpriced mineral exports that destabilize global markets. A loose precedent for such an effort exists—when the U.S., EU, and Japan jointly sued China at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012 over its export restrictions on rare earths, tungsten, and molybdenum. The WTO ultimately ruled against China in 2014, proving that coordinated action can push back effectively.

As the race for critical minerals accelerates, the U.S. Foreign Service's role will be pivotal in transforming the Quad's critical minerals strategy from an ambitious initiative into a tangible reality—one that builds a resilient, independent supply chain free from China's grip.

FAS
Agricultural Economic Diplomacy in Action

Agricultural exports account for more than 20 percent of American farm income, and the Foreign Agricultural Service keeps them growing.

BY EVAN MANGINO

On National Agriculture Day in March, President Donald Trump described farming as "the bedrock of our economy and way of life." And as agricultural export sales contribute more than 20 percent of U.S. farm income, exports are essential to the economic viability of more than 1.9 million American farms. So, it came as no surprise that White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt called out the egregious tariff rates some of our closest allies levied against U.S. agricultural exports ahead of President Trump's April 2, 2025, tariff announcement.

Foreign markets generally apply much higher tariff rates on agricultural products than on nonagricultural products, and they generally charge much higher agricultural tariffs than the United States. When trade relations get "scratchy" between countries, agricultural products—including perishable, high-value products like fresh fruits and vegetables—are often the first point of retaliation.

Food is intrinsic to national identity and culture, which are tied to the agricultural history of a place. Agriculture is often the economic foundation for rural populations, and, as so many of our immigrant ancestors understood firsthand, food security is national security. Given those reasons, it's no wonder many countries turn trade protectionist about agricultural imports, which render U.S. agricultural exports incredibly important and yet quite vulnerable to disruption.

Evan Mangino is a Foreign Service officer with the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). He started with FAS as a summer intern in the Grain & Feed Division in 2006. He has since served as an agricultural attaché in Tokyo, Ottawa, and, most recently, San José. The views and opinions provided herein are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the U.S. government.

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COURTESY OF EVAN MANGINO

The author (left) with Iowa pork exporters at the FOODEX trade show in Tokyo, 2017. Japan was the United States' number one pork export market by value in 2017.

As a nation, who do we call on to protect and expand American agricultural exports? To break down foreign protectionist barriers? To ensure American farms are economically sustainable for the next generation to inherit? The answer is the roughly 1,000 men and women of the Foreign Agricultural Service—including 150 Foreign Service officers working in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world—who make the world safe for U.S. agricultural exports every day.

Barriers to Trade

American agricultural exports are the lifeblood of the Foreign Agricultural Service. FAS employees get up every day to keep U.S. agricultural products flowing into foreign markets. And we play what feels like a never-ending game of whack-a-mole, knocking down barriers to U.S. exports in one market only to have more barriers pop up in other markets. Trade policy is generally considered complex, but modern agricultural trade policy would shame Byzantium.

On top of basic tariffs, tariff-related measures like tariff-rate quotas and special safeguard measures can trigger market-halting tariffs if exports exceed a certain volume or value threshold. Foreign markets also layer on so-called technical barriers to trade, like restrictions on container sizes or labeling requirements.

And on top of those, trade partners apply sanitary (animal) and phytosanitary (plant) barriers to trade, some of which are scientifically reasonable (e.g., no importing pork from a country with African swine fever) and some of which are just gross protectionism in disguise (e.g., setting a "zero tolerance" for Salmonella in raw pork, when no one eats raw pork).

With all these overlapping layers of foreign market protectionism, it is both a wonder and a testament to FAS diplomatic skill that U.S. agricultural exports reached $176 billion in 2024.

Market Access and More

FAS Foreign Service officers are diplomats by profession and often economists by training, but some agricultural trade barriers are so absurd they can test the limits of our composure. Take, for example, the Canadian supply management system. This Canadian social contract severely limits imports of U.S.

COURTESY OF EVAN MANGINO

An importer with industrial bales of U.S. cotton at a Korean-owned cotton yarn spinning facility in Costa Rica, 2023. The author's work to reduce inspection rates for U.S. cotton shipments into Costa Rica made U.S. cotton shipments more profitable.

dairy, egg, chicken, and turkey products in order to guarantee profit margins for a tiny number of Canadian producers, while leaving the rest of the Canadian agricultural sector subject to the vicissitudes of competitive markets. But this is not the only "philosophical" trade barrier we deal with overseas.

FAS also wages something akin to a crusade on behalf of U.S. food and agricultural products derived from advanced breeding techniques. A number of our trade partners use consumers' inchoate fears and misunderstanding of emerging agricultural technologies to justify protectionist trade barriers on genetically engineered or gene-edited products. FAS champions innovation and peer-reviewed scientific research to make sure U.S. producers have technological tools available to adapt to changing

COURTESY OF EVAN MANGINO

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue (center) and the author (fourth from right) conducting North American agricultural diplomacy with young agriculturalists from the United States, Mexico, and Canada, and with Canadian and Mexican diplomats at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, 2017.

conditions, to increase production, and to promote soil health. And we regularly engage our trading partners to ensure that science—not philosophy—is the basis for market access decisions.

While market access may be the proverbial bread and butter of FAS, it's not our only contribution to U.S. agricultural export success. Not by half. Do you have any idea how many 40-ft. containers and bulk-freight ocean liners it took to move $176 billion of agricultural exports in 2024? The following example using delicious, U.S. grain-finished beef might help paint a picture.

In 2024 we exported about 1.3 million metric tons of beef and beef products worth $10.5 billion. If a 40-ft. refrigerated container holds about 25 metric tons, then we shipped more than 50,000 containers of beef overseas. And if each container holds 20 pallets, and if each pallet held 50 boxes of beef, then that means we shipped more than 50 million boxes of beef. That's just beef! Each of those boxes had a sticker tying that shipment of U.S. beef to the specific U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) export certificate for that shipment. But with that many boxes of beef being exported and inspected upon arrival in foreign markets, it is a mathematical inevitability that mishaps with stickers, certificates, and other paperwork would occur.

When a U.S. exporter reports such a mishap, the FAS network of Foreign Service officers and 350 local staff members across 95 offices in 75 countries answers the phone. If FAS weren't there, that beef would be sent back to the United States (with the exporter paying thousands in additional freight costs), or, even worse, it would be destroyed at the foreign port of entry.

FAS overseas staff personally know officials in the export market's agriculture ministry. Oftentimes, FAS has brought those ministry officials to the United States to learn about the U.S. food safety system. USDA sister agencies like the Food Safety and Inspection Service may have trained those same ministry officials on risk assessment or international standards. FAS relationships with ministries of agriculture in more than 100 countries around the world lead to creative solutions to get detained shipments out of customs and into customers' stomachs, preserving tens of millions of dollars of U.S. agricultural exports every year.

Trade Shows and Trade Missions

Food and agricultural exports are big business. In 2024 global food and agriculture trade totaled more than $2 trillion, and U.S. exporters face stiff competition for every sale, even in countries where we have obvious geographical and cultural advantages.

I don't know what the average American envisions when they think about "agricultural trade," but they probably think about commodities (e.g., corn, soybeans, cotton, rice) in big volumes on boats with cool size designations like Panamax or Supramax. But commodity exports represent only about half

of our total agricultural export value. The other half is made up of high-value, consumer-oriented products that fill containers and come from across the country—apples from Washington state, barbecue sauce from Missouri, ground turkey meat from Minnesota, Oreo cookies from New Jersey. And key to selling these products overseas are trade shows and trade missions.

FAS "endorses" some 30 trade shows around the world every year. In foreign countries, we support U.S. exhibitors through financial partnerships with trade associations that help reimburse some of the costs associated with participating in the trade show. FAS also groups all U.S. exhibitors in one section of the trade show floor to take advantage of economies of scale for pricing and marketing—it's easier to find U.S. products when you know all the Americans are in one place.

If you've never been to a food trade show, it is something to behold. Picture a couple of side-by-side airplane hangars filled with 10 ft. x 10 ft. stalls, each of which houses a food or beverage company hawking their wares, looking for new customers, and keeping up with current clients.

FAS employees get up every day to keep U.S. agricultural products flowing into foreign markets.

FAS also endorses a handful of food trade shows in the U.S. every year, sometimes buying plane tickets to send foreign buyers to those shows. These buyers often would not have attended the U.S. trade show without FAS financial support, maybe staying at home or maybe accepting a more generous offer from another agricultural export competitor or the European Union (EU), which outspends the U.S. government by a wide margin in promotion of their food and beverage exports. Some studies have shown that the EU, for instance, outspends the United States by a margin of 4:1.

Whether the United States ever attempts to match competitors dollar-for-dollar in promoting agricultural exports is

For a small or even a mid-sized U.S. company, selling products overseas is orders of magnitude more complicated than selling in the next state over back home.

beside the point. What does matter is the remarkable return on FAS investment of U.S. taxpayer funds in developing agricultural export sales in foreign markets. A 2022 study estimated that return at $24 of exports for every $1 invested.

FAS also invests in agricultural trade missions (ATM) that send U.S. companies to promising markets, combining immersive education for U.S. exporters with tailored business-to-business meetings. In 2024 the FAS ATM to Vietnam generated an estimated $31 million of sales from a total FAS investment of less than $300,000. The 2024 ATM to South Korea generated an estimated $68 million of U.S. agricultural export sales with an FAS investment of $500,000—that's a better than 13,000 percent return on investment!

COURTESY OF EVAN MANGINO

Dairy cows bred from American Brown Swiss cattle in front of Nicaragua's Mount Momotombo during a U.S. Livestock Genetics Export, Inc., training and market development activity, 2023.

In 2024 FAS offices across sub-Saharan Africa recruited 63 buyers from 13 countries for the first-ever FAS reverse trade mission (RTM) to the National Restaurant Show in Chicago, where U.S. exporters booked an estimated $21 million of sales from an FAS investment of just $450,000.

Market Intelligence Free of Charge

For a small or even a mid-sized U.S. company, exporting is a major undertaking, because selling products overseas is orders of magnitude more complicated than selling in the next state over back home. U.S. companies need their product (and all their packaging and marketing material) to connect with new customers across cultural, linguistic, and culinary gaps. And U.S. companies will not only have to comply with U.S. food safety rules but also demonstrate their products meet the export market's rules. Exporting is not for the faint of heart, but thousands of U.S. food and beverage companies seek sales volume growth in foreign markets every year. And FAS on-the-ground expertise in those markets helps them succeed.

FAS overseas staff write thousands of reports every year on agricultural export market developments, which are available free of charge on the FAS GAIN platform. These reports help U.S. businesses better assess their prospects for success and understand local market structures, consumer patterns, marketing trends, labeling laws, and so much more. FAS overseas staff also build relationships with the major local importers in foreign markets. FAS makes sure those buyers come to the U.S. exhibitors' space at a trade show. FAS staff provide translation services and facilitate business-to-business meetings that lead to U.S. export sales.

The USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service is known as the eyes, ears, and voice of American agriculture overseas. American agricultural diplomats and their teams of dedicated local staff are on the ground, advancing American agricultural interests in every export market that matters. We're keeping the lanes of trade open, and we're helping U.S. companies reach their customers and their goals of greater export sales. FAS and its overseas offices are essential to the economic success of the American farmers, ranchers, producers, processors, and foresters they serve. ■

COLD WAR INSIGHTS FOR Evidence-Driven Tech Competition Today

The traditional approach of deploying export controls may have sufficed in the past. But will it prove effective against more innovative foes like the People's Republic of China?

BY DARROW GODESKI MERTON

Victory has a thousand fathers, and the outcome of the Cold War is no exception. While scholars largely agree that the Soviet Union was unable to keep pace with the United States because of economic stagnation, they often link this stagnation to their own favored explanations, ranging from the inefficiencies of centrally planned economies and neglect of the consumer sector to economic overextension through costly subsidies to client states.

As technology competition between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC) intensifies, analysts have increasingly examined the role that U.S. export controls played in the Soviet Union's slide from parity to obsolescence, seeking to glean insights relevant today. Although massive differences exist between the technological ecosystems of the USSR and today's PRC, the Cold War provides the most direct historical comparison available for evaluating the efficacy of export controls.

To "engineer policy" effectively, policymakers must start by defining clear objectives and then continually assess those objectives against real-world outcomes. If we want to build a better evidence-based policy process for technology competition, the Cold War offers a vital, if imperfect, test case. It forces

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us to ask: What exactly are export controls meant to accomplish, and what does the historical record tell us about whether they achieve those aims?

Conceptual and Legal Foundations of Export Controls

In 1958 Nobel Prize–winning economist and strategist Thomas Schelling defined export controls as a tool of economic warfare meant "to reduce the military strength of another country sufficiently to warrant any costs (including the cost of reduced military strength) that the measures may cause to the country that imposes them." This strategic objective remains largely the same today, but Schelling's formulation draws from the groundbreaking Export Control Act of 1949 (ECA), which first introduced peacetime export controls.

The 1949 ECA established three key objectives for imposing export controls: safeguarding national security, advancing foreign policy goals, and addressing short supply. Short supply was only briefly a concern in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and so the rationale of export controls quickly bifurcated into the two categories of *national security* and *foreign policy*, with priority placed first on goods and technologies of clear military utility and, secondarily, on ostensibly civilian items that could, by fortifying an adversary's industrial base, indirectly bolster its military capabilities.

In the ensuing 75 years, there have been only modest refinements to these legislative underpinnings: The Export Administration Acts of 1969 and 1979 incorporated economic considerations like foreign availability and U.S. business competitiveness, while the 2018 Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) further expanded priorities to include preventing terrorism, strengthening the U.S. industrial base, and promoting human rights and democracy. These changes reflect an understanding, articulated by Representative Jonathan Bingham in an influential 1979 *Foreign Affairs* article, that export controls, much like sanctions, can function not only as instruments to weaken adversaries but also as signaling mechanisms to influence their behavior. Yet, throughout this evolution, the core strategic logic established in 1949—that export controls are first and foremost a tool to maintain a qualitative military edge—has remained fundamentally intact.

Although PRC officials have accused the U.S. of using export controls to hobble China's economy, the statutory authorities and policy rationale behind U.S. export controls remain centered on military-related technology, not the broader drivers of national power. The 2018 ECRA stresses the need to "preserve the qualitative military superiority of the United States," while the Department of Commerce under both the first Trump and the Biden administrations has emphasized that the top aim of export controls is blocking U.S. technology from aiding China's military modernization.

The Unbearable Unmeasurability of Export Controls

Because the strategic logic of export controls has changed little since the Cold War, that era is the obvious benchmark for assessing their impact. Unfortunately, there is not much hard evidence, from either contemporaneous accounts or retrospective analyses, on the effectiveness of U.S. export controls targeting the USSR.

The CIA was "consistently bearish" on the effectiveness of export controls because the United States often failed to multilateralize export controls, CIA economist James Noren wrote in 2001, and the USSR usually found substitutes inside the Soviet Bloc.

Despite an "enormous appetite" in Washington for insights on illicit Soviet technology transfer, the CIA struggled to evaluate or measure these efforts, Noren acknowledged. The uncertainty was shared outside the agency: A 1979 Office of Technology Assessment study concluded that while "most observers" agreed Western technology had aided the Soviet military, "there is no agreement on the degree or significance of any such contributions."

A 1986 CIA report estimated that the Soviet semiconductor industry trailed the U.S. by eight to nine years, a gap the USSR narrowed by importing Western technology, but judged that export controls were only "possibly" a factor in this gap, assigning greater blame to Moscow's own production and management failings. The same conclusion applies across most sectors: Analysts widely attributed the USSR's broader technology gap to bureaucratically stifled technological diffusion rather than to U.S. restrictions.

In 1985 economist Morris Bornstein concluded that Western technology transfers to the USSR yielded only modest productivity gains because Soviet industry struggled to absorb them. In one vivid example, a 1975 survey found that years after Xerox sold 4,000 photocopiers to the USSR, many of the machines went unused as 85 percent of Soviet design offices still hand-copied designs with tracing paper. As a 1969 CIA assessment put it, "Even when new plants and equipment are imported, licenses acquired, or foreign technologies merely copied, the modus operandi of the Soviet system delays their introduction and reduces their effectiveness."

Perhaps the strongest indirect evidence for the effectiveness

of export controls is how arduously the Soviet Union lobbied against them. Soviet efforts to disrupt Western solidarity were often successful, since the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom), the forum established by the U.S. to coordinate export control policy with allies, was a nonbinding arrangement.

The most notorious breach, the Toshiba-Kongsberg scandal, supplied the USSR with $17 million of Japanese computer-controlled machine tools to produce quieter submarine propellers. When this came to light in 1982, Washington imposed sanctions on Toshiba to the tune of $30 billion amid congressional claims that the breach jeopardized U.S. national security. Indeed, if more stringent controls could have averted a relatively small transaction causing tens of billions in damages, it would be a compelling case for robust export controls. The $30 billion estimate, however, was primarily based on a hyperbolic claim that the entire U.S. nuclear submarine fleet would need to be replaced, leaving the actual magnitude of the damage unclear.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A 1950s Soviet propaganda poster reads: "Soviet means it's excellent!"

From Intuition to Evidence

Export controls have served as a key policy tool—or, to borrow the blunter vernacular of the 1950s, a potent weapon of economic statecraft—for 75 years. Yet their effectiveness has seldom been rigorously evaluated. Without precise metrics, deploying export controls resembles artillery fire without forward observers: potentially powerful but dangerously imprecise.

As Schelling wrote, export control policy is a double-edged sword: It inflicts harm on both target and implementer. This underscores that striking the right balance—making sure the adversary bears the heavier cost—is the crux of effective technology competition policymaking. Consider the U.S. satellite industry. Export controls introduced by the 1999 National Defense Authorization Act aimed at limiting satellite technology transfer to the PRC, but they inadvertently strengthened European competitors. As a result, the U.S. share of the global commercial satellite market dropped from 73 percent in 1995 to just 25 percent in 2005. U.S. market share has since partially recovered to about 50 percent, but this recovery was notably driven by other policy shifts, related to commercial space ventures, not export controls.

Episodes like this one highlight the analytical complexities facing contemporary U.S.-China technology competition. Successful export controls cannot rely solely on strategic intuition; they require continuous, data-driven analysis that accounts for second- and third-order effects, such as Beijing's industrial policy responses, supply-chain adaptability, domestic substitution capabilities, sectoral investment cycles, impacts on American companies' R&D spending, and the relationship between technology inputs and downstream military and industrial capabilities.

The Cold War–era approach of deploying export controls with minimal empirical scrutiny may have sufficed against the Soviet Union's isolated, inefficient technological ecosystem. It will prove inadequate, however, against China's far more dynamic innovation landscape. Policymakers must therefore embrace an adaptive evidence-based framework grounded in predictive models of technology diffusion and rigorous economic-impact assessments. Such a framework will enable decision-makers to answer critical questions: To what extent do controls accelerate technological substitution and innovation within China? Should restrictions aim only to preserve a qualitative U.S. military edge, or focus on U.S. leadership in critical civilian technologies that underpin economic productivity?

Ultimately, only a data-driven policymaking process will strike the right balance of denying critical technologies to competitors while safeguarding America's own economic strength. While Commerce owns the export control portfolio, State should supplement its own modest cadre of technology-focused analysts and reporting officers to collect more evidence on the impact of export controls and loop those findings into policymaking. ■

Calling All Foreign Service Authors

SUBMIT YOUR BOOKS BY AUGUST 22!

The Foreign Service Journal welcomes book submissions for "In Their Own Write," our popular November-December *FSJ* feature highlighting the literary talent of the Foreign Service community. We want to share your works of fiction and nonfiction, biography, poetry, memoir, and more, in time for holiday shopping.

To be featured, your book must have been published between July 1, 2024, and September 1, 2025, and be available for purchase by September 1, 2025. It must not have been included in a previous *FSJ* collection. Current and former members of the Foreign Service and their immediate family members are eligible to submit a book.

We are relying on you, the author, to share information about your book. We will craft your ITOW entry based on your responses to these questions:

1. What is the full title of your book?
2. Who is your publisher, and what is the publication date?
3. What is the list price for your book (hardcover and/or paperback), and is an e-book version available?
4. What is the genre and/or bookstore category? (Choose one: fiction, memoir, history/biography, policy/issues, other.)
5. Who is the primary audience?
6. In 150-200 words, what is your book about?
7. Where can readers purchase your book online? (Please provide the active URL.)
8. Provide a 50-word bio including your position in or connection to the Foreign Service. Please include your agency affiliation, years in the FS, and postings. If you're active duty, please include your current posting, agency, and position. If you are a Foreign Service spouse or family member, please include these details for your Foreign Service connection.

If you authored multiple books last year, we will feature one book—let us know your preference—and list the other titles in your bio note.

Please send us a copy of the book (either in print or, preferably, digital format) along with answers to the above (required) by Friday, August 22.

Digital submissions can be sent to:
journal@afsa.org,
subject line: ITOW + Author Name

Print submissions should be addressed to:
Hannah Harari
AFSA/The Foreign Service Journal
2101 E St NW
Washington, DC 20037

Due to the sheer volume of submissions received, we will only consider the submissions that meet and follow the above criteria.

We also offer advertising space at discounted rates for all authors, whether featured or not. We would love to help you get the word out about your book, whether already published or coming soon! For more details, contact Advertising Manager Molly Long at long@afsa.org.

We look forward to sharing your book with the foreign affairs community.

—The *FSJ* Team

Results: 2025-2027 AFSA Governing Board Election

The AFSA Committee on Elections is pleased to announce the results of the 2025–2027 AFSA Governing Board election. A total of 4,627 valid ballots were received (4,611 online and 16 paper). This represents 25 percent of the eligible voting membership. The following AFSA members have been elected:

Board Officer Positions

President: John Dinkelman
Secretary: Sue Saarnio
Treasurer: John Naland
State Vice President: Rohit Nepal
USAID Vice President: Randy Chester
FCS Vice President: Jay Carreiro
Retiree Vice President:
Hon. John O'Keefe

Board Constituency Representatives

Full-Time State Representative:
Sandra (Castillo) Abrahamsen
State Representatives:
Christina Higgins
hannah draper
Stephanie Straface
Donald Emerick
Connor Ferry-Smith
USAID Representative:
Austan Mogharabi
Alternate FCS Representative:
Joshua Burke
APHIS Representative: Joseph Ragole
USAGM Representative:
Gunter Schwabe
Retiree Representatives:
Julie Nutter, Michael Kirby

There were no candidates for the positions of FAS vice president and Alternate FAS representative. As no write-in candidates reached the 5-vote threshold stipulated in AFSA's bylaws, the new board will fill these positions once its term begins on July 15.

Additionally, due to AFSA's temporary loss of union status at the Department of State and USAID, the three full-time board members elected at those agencies (State VP, USAID VP, full-time State Rep) will serve, for now, on a volunteer basis on their own time and will not be detailed to AFSA on official time.

For a copy of the full list of write-in votes, or with questions regarding the results, please contact the AFSA Committee on Elections at election@afsa.org.

Executive Order Strips Labor Rights from Many FS Members

AFSA filed a lawsuit in federal court on April 7 to block a sweeping new executive order that eliminates collective bargaining rights for a majority of Foreign Service personnel. The order, signed by President Donald Trump on March 27, claims national security concerns as the basis for removing long-standing labor protections from employees across multiple federal agencies, including the State Department and USAID.

AFSA's legal challenge, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, asserts that the executive order is both legally indefensible and politically motivated.

According to the complaint, "rather than consider whether the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute could be applied consistent with national security requirements, President Trump used the pretext of national security to deprive Foreign Service members of their statutory rights under that statute in order to attack the Foreign Service members' exclusive bargaining representative, AFSA, because it would not 'work with him'."

AFSA argues the administration is retaliating against a union that has consistently advocated for the professional, nonpartisan integrity of American diplomats. "This isn't about security," said AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi. "This is about silencing our voice, punishing us for speaking out, and undermining the Foreign Service."

Continued on page 53

CALENDAR

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

June 19
Juneteenth
AFSA Offices Closed

July 4
Independence Day
AFSA Offices Closed

July 15
New Governing Board Takes Office

June 18
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

Contact: wong@afsa.org | (202) 647-8160

Speaking Up About Morale

In every office, corridor, Teams call, and virtual chat group, our members are murmuring about flagging morale at the State Department.

Morale has been negatively affected by uncertainty: the department's budget, the future of our jobs, pauses on programs and initiatives, closures or reductions at post, and directives to report on one another about perceived prior actions or comments misaligned with current administration priorities.

Amidst this angst and uncertainty, colleagues—some known as institutional innovators and reformers—are increasingly silent, tired and tuned out.

I don't have any silver bullets to reverse this trend. However, I can offer some observations about what I am seeing. My message is this: To equip ourselves not to stay silent, we must not normalize our current experience.

I have a history of speaking up. My very first job was at a nongovernmental organization in New York City that was founded by Eleanor Roosevelt, whose mission was to give voice to hundreds of thousands of voiceless children and families in the city.

Eleanor Roosevelt said in 1944: "If silence seems to give approval, then remaining silent is cowardly." I bring that same conviction to the work of giving voice to those who may not be able to muster theirs right now. My advice:

Speak up. Talk about our values, externally and internally. We are a democratic institution sharing our American values around the world—with allies and adversaries alike. Internally, we must engage one another at every level and live those same values of kindness, civility, professionalism, fairness, and transparency.

Stop labeling others, and participate in culture creation. It is far too easy to put labels on others: pro-diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) or anti-DEIA, Christian or non-Christian, and more. Forcing labels onto others in the workplace stereotypes individuals and divides colleagues into "us" versus "them," contributing to the further politicization of the workplace. Stop labeling others and reclaim your own story that drives merit, creativity, and problem-solving. I am proudly a Christian, the first generation to finish college, and hail from a family of farmers.

As an American by choice, I left behind a childhood in a communist regime to become a defender of democracy in the United States and around the world. I strongly believe reclaiming these and other individual assets makes us

To equip ourselves not to stay silent, we must not normalize our current experience.

stronger and more unified as American diplomats. In implementing the current administration's policies, we also swore our oath to serve the American people, and we do this faithfully every day at work, abroad and domestically.

As the late Pastor Tim Keller said: "Work is our design and our dignity; it is also a way to serve God through creativity, particularly in the creation of culture."

Regardless of your own faith or spiritual practice, you play an important part in our Foreign Service community and an important role in creating its culture.

I encourage everyone to reach out to those whom you suspect don't think like you to have a conversation about our institutional culture. In the conversations I'm already having across the department, I let colleagues know I respect their views as we work together to find common ground and to achieve our mission goals.

Create opportunities for others, not just yourself. In every staffing change or reorganization, there is opportunity. That opportunity should be for all. Some are positioning themselves for 6th- or 7th-floor jobs, leveraging insider strategies or political alignment.

While this can happen in any administration, we should make every effort to make room for everyone. Talk to, rather than shut down, colleagues who may have been let go from offices. Reorganizations reflect shifting institutional priorities, not individual failure.

Help each other to understand and navigate these changes and find solid landings. Thank you to the regional and functional bureaus that have absorbed departing 6th- and 7th-floor special assistants and other former bureau leadership officials. Let's continue to take care of each other.

My final word: We are tackling difficult challenges around the world—multi-front wars, natural disasters, gang violence, and threats to our homeland. We must remain united as an integrated State Department, across our rank and file, with continued advocacy for the much-needed resources and staffing we need to weather these storms. We are always stronger together.

Write me at wong@afsa.org if you have questions or would like to share your experiences.

Contact: chester@afsa.org | (202) 712-5267

When Leadership Fails

We moved out of our house today. In the past, moving meant a new adventure, a new start, a new chapter—a mixture of sadness, happiness, and hope.

Today, our adventure is replaced by fear, our start is an ending, and our new chapter is a book closing. There is little happiness, hope seems far off, and we are dealing daily with our sadness—leaning on each other, our family, and our friends.

In less than three months, our lives unraveled in front of us. We all thought surely someone in leadership would step up and stop this senseless destruction. Some did, but most did not, choosing instead to sit and watch. Many told themselves it would be all right, eventually some would be saved, there would be something left, we would continue. They were wrong, and I was wrong.

What happened to USAID is what happens when leaders do nothing.

Congress showed up for the first two weeks. They gathered their pictures and quotes, and then they gave up. Unwilling to really fight, they ceded not only their authority to oversee U.S. taxpayer money but also their critical role as a constitutional check on the executive branch.

Their political calculation was that no one cares about USAID, and while that may not cost them votes, it has already cost America more than any unproven claims of fraud ever could.

Like many, I was happy to see Secretary of State Marco Rubio take the helm at State. So I was devastated later as he sat by and watched one of his most valuable tools be callously "fed to the woodchipper." He knows better—he's said so himself:

- "Foreign aid is a very cost-effective way, not only to export our values and our example, but to advance our security and our economic interests." (2012)
- "We don't have to give foreign aid. We do so because it furthers our national interest." (2013)
- "It is critical that USAID continue to play an active role in providing technical assistance, education and training to support countries' efforts to strengthen electoral systems. USAID's democracy and governance programs are vital." (2018)
- "Anybody who tells you that we can slash foreign aid and that will bring us to balance is lying to you." (2019)

According to PolitiFact, Rubio co-sponsored multiple bills for USAID, including a 2017 bill authorizing USAID to combat substance abuse in the Philippines, a 2021 bill expanding access to education, a 2021 bill to advance global women's rights, and a 2022 bill to protect victims of international human trafficking.

What the U.S. has lost with the demise of USAID will take decades to recover. Our reputation as a reliable partner and respect for our expertise have vanished.

Rubio's shift—from repeatedly praising USAID's value to the U.S. and the world between 2012 and 2023, to declaring it a danger to U.S. foreign policy in 2025 and abolishing most of its staff and programs—rates as a Full Flop, according to PolitiFact's rating system.

These early days have shown that Rubio is no Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, John Kerry, Hillary Rodham Clinton, or even Rex Tillerson—all of whom knew when to say no to their president. We are left wondering if it's political miscalculation or cowardice.

As the dismantling of the U.S. foreign policy apparatus continues with attempts to close the U.S. Agency for Global Media, Inter-American Foundation, African Development Fund, and the U.S. Institute for Peace; expected 20-30 percent cuts to the Foreign Commercial Service; and now deep cuts to State Department—will he stay seated, step up, or step down?

As I write, Rubio is firmly planted in his chair. To date, though, his acquiescence to our nation's full-scale rollback from the global stage and alignment with Russia is a reversal of everything for which he once stood.

As for Congress, Senator Cory Booker talking for over 24 hours and Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez touring the U.S. may be inspiring, but it doesn't stop our declining international status, the emboldening of China and Russia, growing anti-Americanism, or the loss of our jobs and uprooting of our lives.

What the U.S. has lost with the demise of USAID will take decades to recover. Our reputation as a reliable partner and respect for our expertise have vanished.

So, what's next for me? My sadness will lessen over time, new adventures will be had, and new chapters will be written. Everything will be different, but we will move forward.

Take care, stay safe, and always remain unreasonable.

Contact: burke@afsa.org

Gardening Our Community

Out for a jog on a cool autumn day in Chicago several years ago, I came across an empty city lot. With large blocks of century-old concrete, this unbuildable 50-foot stretch in the heart of a neighborhood on the rise had been an abandoned eyesore for decades. Mile after mile, I pondered what could be done with such a prime piece of real estate. Then a quiet thought surfaced: *If you can't build something, grow something.*

A few months and 50 neighbors later, our new community garden was thriving. What began with a simple idea blossomed into a shared space where the entire neighborhood could gather. It brought color and warmth to a city that often felt cold and gray. More importantly, it reminded me of how powerful a community can be—especially when resources are scarce and hope feels distant.

I've been reflecting on that lesson lately, particularly as our own professional community navigates a season of deep uncertainty.

Forty-five years ago, the first seeds of the modern Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) were planted. While our roots with the Department of Commerce reach back a full century, the Foreign Service Act of 1980 gave us the structure we know today, spinning us off from the State Department to form a distinct, specialized corps.

Within the American business community, there was a growing recognition that commercial interests needed more focused attention, separate from broader foreign policy objectives. Demand from U.S. companies helped jumpstart legislative and executive actions to create a Service that serves business.

This reorganization reflected a strategic shift toward prioritization of commercial interests in U.S. foreign policy, recognizing that a strong economy is integral to national strength and global influence. From the seeds planted then, we now have an officer corps of 230 professionals with business, legal, and private sector backgrounds who understand business and know how to read a company's 10K and balance sheet.

But our legacy is at risk.

Today, we face mounting budget constraints that are reshaping the way we work. Officers have been asked to extend their overseas tours by an additional year, and all permanent change of station (PCS) travel for this fiscal year has been frozen.

This affects families, educational plans, spouses' careers, and morale—but because it may save jobs, our corps is bearing it. Behind the scenes, there is increasing concern about potential reductions in force (RIFs), adding more anxiety to an already stretched system.

Now, more than ever, we must commit just as fiercely to nurturing our community.

Concurrently, we're seeing other agencies, particularly State, push into spaces that have traditionally been part of our core mandate. While interagency collaboration can be powerful, these blurred boundaries raise real questions about how we protect and sustain the U.S. business-focused value FCS brings to the table.

Adding to the uncertainty is the fact that we now have a new administration eager to reimagine our role and to attract and support investors more aggressively. But the reality is that we no longer have the resources to match that ambition. The risk is that our credibility and capacity will erode just when we're needed most.

So—how do we show up for one another in times like these?

I've never once doubted the loyalty or resolve of our corps. But I also know the toll that prolonged uncertainty and institutional strain can take on even the most committed public servants. Our strength as a Service—and as a community—has always come from the people who show up, day after day, to serve. Now, more than ever, we must commit just as fiercely to nurturing our community.

It's time to tend the garden of our community.

That means focusing not just on programs and challenges but on each other. Checking in. Sharing honestly. Accepting the challenges that we face. We may be a high-performing professional tribe, but even the strongest tribes need care and tending—especially when resources run dry.

Like my neighborhood garden, our community needs regular attention—and *occasional* pruning—to make room for new growth. I'm concerned that the current, overzealous pruning will result in a diminished harvest of deals for America.

Gardening isn't glamorous. It's slow, messy, and sometimes thankless. But if we stick with it, season after season, something new will emerge. FCS gardeners will close deals and create thousands of jobs. Moreover, we will build a community that knows how to care for itself—even in the harshest conditions.

So, let's start gardening—together.

Labor Rights
Continued from page 49

The case has been assigned to Judge Paul L. Friedman. AFSA filed a motion for a preliminary injunction on April 14. A hearing on the motion for preliminary injunction is scheduled for May 5. The executive order invokes provisions of federal labor law to exclude entire agencies and agency subdivisions from union representation by labeling their functions as primarily tied to intelligence, counterintelligence, investigative, or national security work.

The scope of the order effectively strips collective bargaining rights from nearly all Foreign Service employees under the justification that national security considerations are incompatible with labor-management frameworks.

AFSA contends that the order violates the separation of powers, infringes on the First Amendment rights of Foreign Service members, and exceeds the legal authority granted to the president. "This executive action is the single greatest threat to the Foreign Service—and to our union—in our 100-year history," said Yazdgerdi.

Attorney Richard Hirn, representing AFSA, added that the administration's own fact sheet accompanying the order made no attempt to disguise its political motivations, citing unions' alleged hostility to the president's agenda as the impetus.

This is not the only lawsuit AFSA has filed to halt the administration's destruction of the Foreign Service. On Feb. 6, *AFGE et al. v. Trump* was filed in District Court of the District of Columbia challenging the unlawful dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development; while on March 21, AFSA joined other unions, journalists, and federal workers in *Widakuswara et al. v. Kari Lake et al*, which challenges the unlawful shuttering of the United States Agency for Global Media.

As it continues its legal and legislative advocacy, AFSA is launching a new public awareness campaign, "Service Disrupted." The campaign will spotlight the impact of recent decisions on the Foreign Service and invite members to share stories of how their critical work on behalf of our nation has been disrupted.

These testimonials will be used to engage the public and policymakers on the importance of a professional, nonpartisan diplomatic corps.

AFSA urges its members to stay informed, engaged, and united during this period of challenge to the institution. "We've been through many upheavals before," said Yazdgerdi, "but never one as direct and damaging as this. We're not backing down."

Updates on AFSA's current lawsuits can be found at https://afsa.org/afsa-lawsuit-tracker.

As we go to press, a federal judge has granted a preliminary injunction against the executive order stripping Foreign Service members at State and USAID of their collective bargaining rights, thus preserving AFSA's role as their representative as legal proceedings continue. ■

In Case You Missed It

AFSA has been issuing frequent updates and guidance for its members since the start of the new administration. Below are excerpts from AFSA communications from March 22 through April 7. Please visit the AFSA Resource Hub for the most recent information: https://afsa.org/2025-resource-hub.

USAID reduction-in-force (RIF) notices.
AFSA addressed new notifications from USAID regarding a 100 percent reduction in force. Many affected employees have already begun receiving revised notices. Calling the development a "gut punch," AFSA said it is working with legal counsel to fully assess the implications and identify appropriate actions. Members were advised to carefully check their notices for errors and submit all relevant supporting documentation to USAID's HR Helpdesk.

Performance record concerns at USAID.
With the performance calendar ending on March 31, AFSA is pressing USAID to collect annual accomplishment records, operating unit statements, and performance evaluation forms, and to activate the multisource rating system. These records are crucial for ensuring employees receive full credit for their work and are not disadvantaged in future promotion cycles or in pursuing future employment.

Diplomatic Security exempted from RIF measures.
On March 25, Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed that Diplomatic Security personnel will be exempt from RIF and hiring freeze policies under Executive Order 14210, following guidance issued by the Office of Personnel Management. AFSA welcomed the clarification and will continue to monitor how exemptions are applied.

Continued on next page

KATHY ROBERTS

AFSA Advocacy and Policy Manager Sean O'Gorman with Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin and Senator Tara Durant (R-Va.) at the April 4 signing ceremony for Virginia SB 1244.

Legislative victory for Foreign Service families in Virginia. On March 24, Governor Glenn Youngkin signed Senate Bill 1244 into law, simplifying school enrollment in Virginia for children of federal employees returning from overseas. The legislation, championed by State Senator Tara Durant, allows provisional enrollment with unofficial records and honors previous educational placements. AFSA helped build bipartisan support for the bill by connecting lawmakers with relevant data and family testimonials. The law takes effect July 1, 2025. See full story on page 67 of the April-May *FSJ*.

Update on USAGM litigation. On March 28, a federal judge in Manhattan, U.S. District Judge J. Paul Oetken, temporarily blocked the Trump administration's effort to dismantle the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Government lawyers sought to move the case to Washington, D.C., but the judge signaled it would likely remain in the Southern District of New York. AFSA will provide updates as more information becomes available.

Call for stories: "Service Disrupted" campaign. AFSA is launching a new public outreach campaign in May: "Service Disrupted" is aimed at raising awareness about the effects of recent policy decisions on the important work of the Foreign Service. Members are invited to submit short personal stories (500 words or fewer) explaining their roles, why their work matters, and how recent changes have affected them. Read a selection of recent stories on page 23.

Transition to direct dues payments underway. Following the State Department's abrupt decision to cease union dues deductions from active-duty and annuity pay, AFSA is working diligently to transition affected members to a direct payment system. Plans include options for autorenewal and quarterly payment plans. Members are encouraged to update their AFSA accounts with personal email addresses and mailing information to stay abreast of the latest AFSA communications.

MSPB survey to support legal action. AFSA announced the upcoming release of a Merit Systems Protection Board class action survey aimed at gathering information to assist their legal team in preparing for action related to USAID's RIF notices. Completing the survey does not commit members to participation but serves as an information-gathering tool. Members will have the opportunity to opt in or out of the legal effort at a later stage.

AFSA's continued advocacy despite changes in union recognition. While official labor-management channels have been shut down, and AFSA was asked to vacate its State Department–provided office by April 4, the association continues to operate from its headquarters at 2101 E Street NW. AFSA remains dedicated to assisting members with grievances and disciplinary cases, and will continue to provide guidance on various professional matters.

DEIA core precept and performance evaluations. The State Department's Office of Performance Evaluations (GTM/PE) hosted a series of webinars to discuss the elimination of the DEIA core precept in the 2024-2025 rating period—a unilateral change that violates the negotiated 2022–2025 Core Precepts. AFSA is concerned that we are not being consulted on the procedural guidance (also known as the Procedural Precepts) for the 2025 Foreign Service Selection Boards, which GTM/PE plans to release unilaterally in May. We continue to push back on these procedural violations to ensure a fair, transparent process.

Annual AFSA Memorial Plaque Ceremony. Foreign Service Day is May 1. As we have for decades, AFSA will take part in the annual Memorial Plaque Ceremony on May 2 to honor those who gave their lives in service to our country. AFSA owns and maintains the plaques and ensures that each name inscribed meets the established criteria for inclusion.

Advocacy/retirement benefits. Congress is expected to begin major work on reconciliation the week of April 28. Notably, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee—which oversees federal employee and retiree benefits—has a markup session scheduled for April 30. Many of you have already contacted your elected representatives to urge them to protect these benefits. To support continued outreach, we've created a federal retirement advocacy template that can be found at https://bit.ly/VERAtemplate.

As always, remember to engage with Congress in your personal capacity—on your own time and without using government resources—in compliance with the Anti-Lobbying Act.

FS Retirees Rally to Support Legal Defense Fund

AFSA/MARK PARKHOMENKO

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi addresses a crowd of retired and active-duty Foreign Service members gathered in support of the Legal Defense Fund.

AFSA/MARK PARKHOMENKO

Ambassador (ret.) Sandra Clark speaks about the importance of retiree engagement and member outreach.

On March 19, more than 60 retired and active-duty Foreign Service members gathered at AFSA headquarters for an important conversation about the future of the profession and the vital role of the Legal Defense Fund (LDF). The event featured remarks by AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and Secretary Sue Saarnio, followed by a Q&A session with the audience.

The gathering served as a call to action. AFSA's Legal Defense Fund, established in 2007 in honor of the late Richard Scissors, provides financial support to members facing institutionally significant legal challenges.

Scissors, a longtime AFSA staffer, was deeply respected for his mastery of labor-management issues and tireless advocacy on behalf of AFSA members. Today, the LDF carries on his legacy by helping members—individually or as part of a group—retain specialized legal counsel when AFSA's internal resources are not sufficient.

AFSA leaders emphasized the stalwart commitment of retirees, who have stepped up to support their colleagues with remarkable generosity. As one attendee put it, "We may be retired, but we're not done."

Since the start of 2025, contributions to the LDF have exceeded $291,000, pushing the fund's total balance to more than $600,000. These resources are vital as the Foreign Service confronts growing threats to its mission and personnel. (During the 2020-2021 impeachment inquiries, the fund disbursed $400,000 in legal support.)

AFSA leadership encourages retirees in the DMV area and beyond to stay connected and informed. As new legal and professional challenges emerge, the strength of the LDF will continue to depend on the engagement and support of the broader Foreign Service community.

While not tax-deductible, donations are always welcome, and details on how to contribute can be found at https://afsa.org/donate.

AFSA Governing Board Meeting, February 19, 2025

The board elected President Tom Yazdgerdi to serve as chair of the AFSA Governing Board for the remainder of the term.

The board accepted Zeke Spears' resignation as FAS alternate representative.

The board agreed to form an ad-hoc committee on artificial intelligence, to be chaired by Tina Wong and further consisting of any board members, AFSA staff, and AFSA members the president appoints, to report by the June 2025 AFSA Governing Board meeting.

AFSA Treasurer's 2024 Report

We finished 2024 on sound financial footing. The new year started well, with membership and the accompanying dues rising during the first three months of 2025.

We are now faced with a more fraught set of circumstances. We are moving from a union and a professional organization to one that is almost entirely a professional entity.

Restructuring our finances will follow. But making this challenge more difficult is the executive branch decision not to deduct member dues from the payroll. This applies to both active-duty and retiree members. The executive director and his team are rolling out mechanisms to make direct payment of dues easy.

Nevertheless, we expect a drop in revenue. While predicting the exact effect is an imprecise effort, we may see a drop of up to $1,000,000. We have reserves to cover this shortfall, allowing us to implement contingency plans already drawn up, and we will work on additional cost-cutting measures.

It is critical that our members arrange for regular payments so we can continue to protect your interests. We must have the staff and resources to work with Congress to blunt legislation that may affect health insurance, retirement, and other benefits the Foreign Service has sacrificed so much to attain.

Currently, the Operating Reserve represents approximately 49 percent of AFSA's 2025 operating budget.

Budget Operations

• AFSA's $7.3 million planned operating budget for calendar year 2025 is funded primarily from membership dues.

• AFSA's membership base stood at approximately 16,750 as of year-end 2024.

• That number represents more than 80 percent of active-duty employees across the foreign affairs agencies, plus approximately 25 percent of Foreign Service retirees.

• The Board approved a 2.4 percent dues increase in line with the change in consumer price index levels in 2025.

Scholarship Fund. This 501(c)(3) entity was founded in 1924 to help the children of Foreign Service members pay for college. The fund has grown substantially over the decades and, at the end of 2024, stood at $12.8 million.

In 2024 the Scholarship Fund awarded $242,550 in needs-based financial aid and $152,000 in merit scholarships. Although the fund's asset value increased significantly in 2020, the annual withdrawal amount did not. This practice is designed to ensure that any given year's applicants are not disadvantaged should there be a dramatic market decline.

Fund for American Diplomacy. The FAD's mission is to help educate the American public about the role of the U.S. Foreign Service and diplomacy as a tool of America's influence on the global stage. At the end of 2024, the FAD principal balance stood at $384,624. FAD is envisaged to provide sustained, dedicated support for continuing AFSA's public outreach, and AFSA and its leadership continue the effort to build up its principal value.

The approved 2025 AFSA operating budget dedicates approximately $583,926 to FAD activities, the costs of which will largely be underwritten by transfers from the operating reserve.

AFSA strongly encourages donations to the Fund for American Diplomacy, which is organized as a 501(3)(c). Donations will assist AFSA's continued work to improve public knowledge about the vital contributions made by U.S. diplomats to preserving U.S. security and prosperity.

Sinclaire Fund. AFSA also maintains the Matilda W. Sinclaire Fund, which is intended to support excellence in language achievement. AFSA draws on that fund annually to pay for language achievement awards.

The Sinclaire Fund ended 2021 with $529,450.

—John O'Keefe, AFSA Treasurer

AFSA's financial reserves at the end of 2024:

Operating Reserve	$3,229,725
Scholarship Fund	$12,800,207
Legal Defense Fund	$413,596
FAD Operating Reserve	$384,624
Sinclaire Fund	$529,450
TOTAL INVESTMENT	**$17,357,602**

Tools for Navigating Career Transitions

AFSA recently hosted a webinar for Foreign Service professionals navigating career transitions, especially those facing unexpected departures from government service.

AFSA Retiree Counselor Dolores Brown opened the session by highlighting AFSA's Retirement Resources and Workforce hubs, which provide more than 100 curated documents on topics ranging from voluntary retirement to RIF-related benefits.

This session is part of a broader AFSA initiative that emerged in response to recent disruptions affecting USAID personnel. Brown thanked members of the community for supporting the effort and introduced retired department employee, Diane Castiglione, who, in turn, welcomed the featured speaker, Jo Weech.

Weech, CEO of Exemplary Consultants and an experienced recruitment strategist, acknowledged the various emotions that participants may have been experiencing, due to unexpected changes in their career paths. Thanking them for serving our country, she reminded them that seasoned experience would be valued in a variety of roles. She walked participants through the fundamentals of a modern job search, from building a credible, keyword-optimized LinkedIn profile to crafting résumés tailored to specific roles.

She highlighted the importance of storytelling, encouraging attendees to reframe their professional experience in terms of challenges solved and value added.

Weech demystified the use of AI tools to help edit application materials and provided actionable advice on how to network effectively, identify hidden opportunities, and approach informational interviews with confidence.

The presentation concluded with a Q&A session addressing concerns about ageism, résumé gaps, remote work preferences, and strategies for switching industries. Attendees were reminded that LinkedIn profiles can—and should—be updated regularly to reflect different "career lanes."

A recording of the webinar is available at https://afsa.org/videos. Weech received more than 150 thank-you notes, as participants expressed gratitude for compassion, tools, and "next steps" in their job searches.

Additional sessions on career transitioningare coming soon. Keep an eye out for AFSAnets announcing the details of these future programs. ■

FSJ Wins Silver Trendy Award

The Foreign Service Journal has been honored with a 2025 Silver TRENDY Award for Best Monthly Professional Society Magazine for its May 2024 centennial edition. This special issue marked the 100th anniversary of both the Foreign Service and AFSA, celebrating a century of service and storytelling in the U.S. Foreign Service community.

Presented at the 2025 Salute to Association Excellence on March 13 at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C., the TRENDY Awards recognize outstanding marketing and communications work across the association and nonprofit world.

Sponsored by Association TRENDS, the awards celebrate creativity and substance in association publications, websites, social media, and more. ■

2024 AFSA-PAC Report

During the period from 2023 to 2025, AFSA contributed a total of $10,000, divided equally between Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Because of limited funds, we cap contributions to sitting members on committees critical to AFSA interests.

Since March, we have seen a significant increase in contributions to AFSA-PAC, which has allowed us greater access to a broader array of members of Congress.

We have also used your donations to attend smaller fundraisers where AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi engaged in face-to-face conversations with important lawmakers. This type of work has contributed to our notable legislative successes over the past two years.

As far as our initiatives with Congress are concerned, the coming year is the most important in recent memory. Your continuing support will allow us to work with committee staff, representatives, and senators on legislation to protect our members' interests, health benefits, and pensions. ■

FSJ Editorial Board Hail and Farewell

AFSA and *The Foreign Service Journal* are pleased to welcome two new members to the FSJ Editorial Board: Ben East and Peter Reams. Both bring a wealth of Foreign Service experience and a deep commitment to the craft of writing and diplomacy.

Ben East, a career Foreign Service officer and returned Peace Corps volunteer, joins the board with three decades of international service. His distinguished public diplomacy work has advanced U.S. political, commercial, and security interests around the world, including helping reopen the U.S. consulate in Jeddah following a terrorist attack and leading messaging efforts that boosted international student enrollment in the United States.

A writer and educator as well as a diplomat, East has taught in Paraguay, New York, and Malawi, and is the author of *Two Pumps for the Body Man* and *Patchworks.* His forthcoming nonfiction work, *Profiles in Service*, will spotlight Peace Corps alumni who rose to the rank of U.S. ambassador.

Peter Reams, who retired from the Foreign Service in 2000 after nearly 30 years of service, joins the board with a breadth of policy and management expertise. His career spanned political, personnel, and arms control roles in both Washington, D.C., and overseas, including as deputy chief of mission in Madagascar and Côte d'Ivoire.

His final assignment before retirement was as director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs and the Haiti Working Group. Reams' deep knowledge of diplomacy's operational and strategic dimensions will bring valuable perspective to the board.

The editors extend their heartfelt thanks to departing board members Bob Beecroft, Paul Oliva, and Gaïna Dávila for their dedicated service. Their insight and commitment to editorial standards have strengthened the *Journal* and enriched its pages.

Ben East

Peter Reams

Lisa Heller

AFSA Welcomes Director of Professional Policy Issues

AFSA welcomes Lisa Heller as the new director of professional policy issues, succeeding Julie Nutter.

Ms. Heller joined AFSA after a 34-year career with the U.S. Foreign Service. Much of her State Department career was dedicated to representing the U.S. in China, with a final assignment as consul general at the U.S. consulate general in Guangzhou.

She also served in Islamabad, Seoul, and Kyiv, as well as several tours in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Heller holds degrees from Princeton University, the University of Minnesota, and Virginia Theological Seminary. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, she worked at the Environmental Protection Agency and was a presidential management fellow at NASA.

A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she has introduced audiences around the world to the finer points of Pittsburgh Steeler fandom.

She can be reached at heller@afsa.org.

Earning American Credentials Abroad

Some Foreign Service kids want to stay overseas for college. What to do when a study abroad semester isn't immersive enough?

BY LAUREN STEED

ISTOCKPHOTO/OLEGSNOW

You've grown up abroad, changing schools every few years, and you like that. Maybe you feel ready to take on the world. Your idea of adulting isn't just learning how to live without your parents scheduling your days; it's learning to navigate new languages and grocery stores without the security of an American school or diplomatic visa.

Or maybe you're not interested in spending four years to earn a degree you could in three or spending $200,000 for a degree in the U.S. that could be nearly free overseas. Maybe you'd just rather be one flight away from the post where your family will be stationed.

Whatever your motivation, you're considering applying to universities outside the United States. But you're also worried about taking this road less traveled. And you worry that your international degree might not translate to a career in the United States.

There are several ways to enjoy an American university experience abroad while earning U.S.-recognized credentials that don't require credit translations and credential evaluations.

The most common option is to study abroad for one year or one semester as part of a U.S. degree program. You can go in your third year, as is most popular, or start abroad and move to the main campus after your first or second term.

Or you can opt for a summer abroad, a January term, or even a class trip—travel with the archaeology class for a one-week excursion to a dig site in the Mayan jungle, for example.

You might spend a year aboard a ship, visiting many different ports; undertake a guided internship in an international corporation; or visit a branch site of your own school.

This classic way of experiencing a new culture is easy to plan and offers a soft landing for students who've never been abroad. But it's not cheap: You will still pay American tuition rates. And some Foreign Service kids are ready to go beyond the traditional study abroad format.

In deciding what's right for you, think more about what you want to get out of your college experience and consider the following.

Lauren Steed, PhD, is an independent college consultant with more than 20 years of experience in postsecondary education. A Foreign Service family member, she supports FS families and other Americans abroad in the search for their best-fit educational options. She is the author of College Conversations: 25 Discussions for High School Juniors and Their Families.

1. "I want to explore several subjects before I choose a major."

This student might want to study at an American-style university abroad. Schools like the American University of Paris (AUP) or John Cabot University in Rome are private universities purposefully created to provide postsecondary American education options outside the United States. They predominantly follow a liberal arts model, with the freedom to choose a major after enrollment, and require courses outside your field of study to ensure breadth and depth.

The most common majors are international studies and international business, but you'll find majors in psychology, media, arts, communications, finance, tourism, and more. These schools will have the familiar blend of the international and the American that FS students understand from their international school years.

Some of these universities are quite small, with transient populations. Domestic U.S. students may spend a term at AUP to feel what it's like to live in Paris before returning to their home school. The Irish American University (also known as the American College of Dublin) is one of the few universities in this category to offer a bachelor's degree in performing arts—but it has an enrollment of fewer than 200 students, many of whom study there for one term only.

In general, the tuition at American-style universities abroad is higher than the average tuition in Europe, but some charge significantly less than U.S. tuition rates. At the Anglo-American University in Prague, for example, international student tuition is approximately $6,000 per year.

There are also exploratory years built into degrees in Scotland and at the residential "University Colleges" at certain universities in the Netherlands. Students here start their studies primarily in one broad field, such as global and political studies or psychology, narrowing in on a more particular major, such as East Asian studies, in their second year.

The small size of some of these programs will, as at small liberal arts colleges in the U.S., give students a closer

(Continues on page 64)

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FROM THE DECEMBER 2024 *FSJ* EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

Navigating the Foreign Service Educational Landscape

BY REBECCA MCPHERSON

Whether you are new to the Foreign Service community or have been posted overseas for years, you're likely to have questions about education issues that affect you and your family members overseas. … Understanding where to go and who to talk to is paramount when you are navigating your child's education.

For many FS parents, the first stop is the Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO), formerly the Family Liaison Office. GCLO's mission for the past 46 years has been to advocate for solutions to challenges posed by the Foreign Service lifestyle, to provide programs and client services that cater to all demographics in the community, and to extend these services overseas through the management of the Community Liaison Office (CLO) Program.

Under the GCLO umbrella, the education and youth team functions as a central resource hub providing comprehensive information and connecting FS members to partner offices that can help answer questions and guide clients to what, where, and how to meet the educational needs of their children. …

Heading back to D.C. for language training or an assignment? GCLO's childcare webpage provides information on preschools and daycare facilities in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, including at the Foreign Service Institute and near Main State. It also includes links to free preschools in Washington, D.C., as well as summer camp options.

Supporting children during transitions from school to school and post to post can be a daunting endeavor. Many factors come into play: everything from the size of the school to the course offerings, whether there is an orchestra or volleyball team, and if the student culture is welcoming.

If your child has specific behavioral, social, emotional, or educational needs, and you want to find out which schools overseas can meet these needs, connect with the regional education officers (REOs) in the Office of Overseas Schools. REOs have decades of experience as educators and administrators in international schools and maintain close working relationships with the school directors at the Department of State's assisted schools.

Also check with the Child and Family Program (CFP) at the Bureau of Medical Services, as they determine eligibility and provide authorization for the Special Needs Education Allowance (SNEA).

If you are transitioning back to the D.C. area, the GCLO report "Bouncing Back: Transition and Reentry Planning for the Parents of Foreign Service Youth" can help you guide your children through this process. If you have questions about dual immersion language programs or need to know which public schools offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, take a look at the resources listed on GCLO's website.

The coordinators of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) public school student registration offices understand the challenges that highly mobile families face and can be helpful when navigating the registration process. GCLO meets with and maintains a list of those contacts in its annual School Enrollment Guidance checklist; contact GCLOAskEducation@state.gov to request the list.

Homeschooling and virtual schooling have significantly increased since 2020, and GCLO now includes more than 100 home study programs that have been used by families in the FS community on its website. Familiarize yourself with the allowances available for homeschooling and accredited distance learning programs to help narrow down your choices.

And remember that you can seek support from both the Office of Allowances (AOPRALS@state.gov) and your post financial management officer (FMO), who can guide you through the process of confirming which expenses are reimbursable.

Rebecca McPherson has been a Foreign Service family member for 10 years, serving both overseas and domestically. She joined the Global Community Liaison Office in January 2020, first as the support services specialist and, in September 2021, as the education and youth program specialist. She is currently on a DETO assignment while posted to Angola.

(Continued from page 60)

connection to their professors, helping them get the letters of recommendation they'll need for graduate school or medical school applications while offering the same significant opportunities for leadership that smaller international high schools provide.

2. "I want to be abroad longer than a semester or year, but I might not want to spend all my university education abroad."

U.S. Schools' Overseas Campuses. Students who apply to Northeastern University near Boston are sometimes surprised by an admissions offer that requires them to spend their first semester outside Massachusetts at one of Northeastern's campuses in London or California, or as a visiting student at one of the American liberal arts colleges abroad mentioned above.

Some Foreign Service kids are ready to go beyond the traditional study abroad format.

This alternative matriculation pathway, known as the "N.U. In" program, helps Northeastern manage their housing availability and keeps their on-campus population stable.

N.U. In, Bard's Begin in Berlin, New York University's (NYU) Freshman Year Abroad, and similar programs at other campuses are also offered as an opt-in. Students who choose to spend their first year abroad will benefit from a small cohort of students who are on the same plan and complete the same general studies courses in a smaller setting.

This is not the only way schools use their facilities abroad, however. NYU's Abu Dhabi campus was initially designed to provide an American education to students from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Students can complete an entire

degree at the Abu Dhabi campus in any of 26 majors, with more than 500 courses offered each year.

They can "study abroad" in the United States or at any of NYU's 15 global campuses. Degrees from NYU Abu Dhabi are equivalent to degrees from NYU's main campus, and the program is even more selective than the New York campus, with only 4 percent of applicants admitted.

This selectivity is unusual, however. Admission to the branch campus is often less selective than to the main campus. At the Rochester Institute of Technology's (RIT) campus in Dubai, hopeful engineering majors need only a minimum combined international baccalaureate (IB) of 24 with at least two lab sciences and completion of high school precalculus.

The tuition at American-style universities abroad is higher than the average tuition in Europe, but some charge significantly less than U.S. tuition rates.

At RIT's main campus, engineering applicants must have taken physics and chemistry, and a year of calculus is strongly preferred. Average grades in all courses should be in the upper 90 percent.

RIT-Dubai students can study at the main campus for a year or transfer there after completing their first year. This could be an ideal pathway for an internationally schooled student who is interested in a career-focused science degree.

The "Joint Degree" Option. Another option is to look for a "joint degree," for which students spend time on two or more campuses and earn one, two, or even three degrees in the time it usually takes to complete one.

Students interested in economics or international business will find a

significant number of joint degree options, most of which include coursework on two or three different continents, but you will be able to find a joint degree option for almost any field of study.

You can earn two bachelor's degrees by studying tourism in Dublin, London, and the U.S. as part of Schiller University's joint degree partnerships with the Dublin Business School and the University of Roehampton; neuroscience at Trinity Dublin and Columbia in New York; law at St. John's in New York and Goldsmith's in London; fashion design or marine engineering at the State University of New York (SUNY) and one of seven universities in Türkiye.

And for those who are hoping to get both an undergraduate and a graduate degree in five years, programs in computer science, engineering, and communications are offered via partnerships tied to Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, and Emerson College.

Another option is to look for a "joint degree," for which students spend time on two or more campuses and earn one, two, or even three degrees in the time it usually takes to complete one.

Traveling Universities. A "traveling university" is much more unusual. These programs require that students transfer between campuses regularly. At Minerva University, for example, students spend their first year in San Francisco and then rotate each year to campuses in global capital cities.

Long Island University's Global degree (LIU Global) offers the reverse, three years at various locations abroad, capped with a final year at LIU's Brooklyn campus.

National applications in many countries are straightforward, and the costs are clearly stated.

Both programs are designed to take advantage of the changing locations, connecting students with local internships, on-site research, and immersive language lessons.

At either of these—as at Hult International, Franklin University Switzerland, or Schiller, three other internationally mobile universities—the final degree is accredited in the U.S.

3. "I want deep immersion in another culture, but also want a degree that's accepted in the U.S."

Earning a degree easily recognized in the United States does not require enrollment at an American-style university. At the time of writing, 66 universities outside the U.S. offer degrees in English (or in host-country languages) that are accredited by one of the six Council for Higher Education Accreditation–recognized accrediting bodies in the U.S.

This accreditation can happen at the institutional level, much in the way your international school is accredited in the U.S.; a university may also offer degrees that are accredited for specific circumstances.

Courses from international institutions fully accredited in the U.S. should transfer as easily as courses within the U.S. transfer to other institutions. When applying for graduate programs, these degrees should be considered as equivalent to degrees from similarly accredited U.S. institutions.

The University of the South Pacific, for example, with a main campus in Suva, Fiji, is accredited by WASC, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the same body that accredits schools in California, Hawaii, and many other western states.

Why just go to the South Pacific for a short-term visit as part of your marine science degree when you could spend all four years there, with regular internships and research opportunities on site at some of the most fabulous reefs on the planet—and with an average total cost of attendance under $20,000 per year?

Other options fall into a gray area of accreditation: These are international universities that have partnered with their U.S. counterparts to offer brick-and-mortar domestic U.S. degrees. For example, Arizona State University (ASU) and Cortana Education have partnered to provide ASU degrees at 22 university campuses around the world.

At Sunway University in Malaysia, for example, you can complete a four-year ASU degree in digital media, computer science, psychology, and several other fields, with accreditation provided via the affiliation and oversight of the program by ASU's faculty. These programs provide students the opportunity to live at post, study in person, and still graduate with a degree from a stateside American university.

When the accreditation is at the programmatic (i.e., major/course/degree) level, students will benefit not from transferability to U.S. degree programs but from their eligibility for professional certifications and licenses.

ABET, the accrediting organization for engineering fields, accredits individual degree programs. Successful completion of the degree is a minimum requirement for eligibility to sit for professional and state-level certification or licensing exams in a particular field of engineering.

Similarly, degrees at some universities outside the U.S. may have U.S.-based programmatic accreditation for educator preparation (CAEP), veterinary medicine (AVMA-COE), business (ACBSP, AACSB, or IACBE), nursing (ACEN), and so on.

Graduates of those programs should be eligible to take state or national licensure exams without needing additional coursework; but, as you've likely heard before, it depends on the institution and state. Do your due diligence on eligibility before investing in such a program.

Of course, enrolling at a host nation university comes with some cultural differences. At the University of the South Pacific, for instance, residential students are expected to bring their own mop, bucket, and cooking appliances, but not their own bed linens.

In many European countries, student accommodations are provided by third parties, so your neighbors might attend different universities. And you can choose to live hostel-style with a basic bed and locker in a shared bunk room or have your own private bedroom.

Universities with a high number of international students will often support incoming international students in the hunt for accommodation in the first year, but finding and paying for housing is often one of the most complex parts of attending a local university outside the U.S., particularly if you do not already have access to a local bank account or student ID.

It is not unheard of to stay in a hostel or hotel for a few weeks while searching for your long-term student housing. In

FROM THE JUNE 2021 *FSJ* EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

Getting a Degree Overseas: An Option Worth Considering?

BY REBECCA GRAPPO

Here are some additional resources that will help students and families explore some of the English-instruction degree options available.

StudieLink—This is the application system for Dutch universities.

Dutch Research University Consortium—Information about study options and systems in the Netherlands.

Study in Holland—Website with links to resources related to studying in the Netherlands.

Education in Ireland—About education in Ireland, with application.

UCAS, University and College Admissions Service—Information on how to choose courses of study in the U.K., as well as links to the application.

Study UK—Information related to studying in the U.K.

European Universities Consortium—A group of European universities that offers degrees taught in English and wishes to recruit international students.

Study in Sweden—For students exploring options in Sweden.

American Universities Abroad—A group of American universities abroad that promotes study at their member institutions.

Common App—Designed mostly for American universities in the U.S., this application tool has a growing number of international member institutions.

Rebecca Grappo, M.Ed., and founder of RNG International Educational Consultants, LLC, is an expert on U.S. and international college advising and knows the Foreign Service lifestyle intimately; the spouse of a retired FSO and mother of three adult children, she lived it herself for more than 27 years.

the Netherlands, where students far outnumber the available beds, the government has begun to restrict international student admissions and visas if the student cannot demonstrate that they will have housing upon enrollment.

4. "I want a simple, easy-to-understand admissions process and cost transparency."

Application for postsecondary study in the U.S. has become astonishingly difficult. The Common Application and its various supplements—e.g., additional essays, self-reported (SRAR) transcripts, InitialView interviews, and Glimpse videos—as well as the seemingly incomprehensible financial aid process have made applying onerous. But if you've already filled out the Common App, keep in mind that it is accepted at some foreign universities.

National applications in many countries are straightforward, and the costs are clearly stated. Consider trying something like Concourse or Cialfo's Direct Apply, which allow you to apply to nearly every university in the world simultaneously. Concourse acts as a promoter, showing the student's profile to schools interested in attracting students like them and offering admissions and scholarships directly, with no requirements beyond submitting final grades or AP/IB scores after graduation.

International students applying to host nation universities may find it hard to understand how to apply, or what deadlines and requirements they need to meet. Websites at host nation universities are often much less informative than those of U.S. schools. Schools may have individual admissions offices for each degree program, or they may list only their domestic requirements.

Enrolling at a host nation university comes with some cultural differences.

In some cases, students will need to call individual offices at the school to discuss support options or confirm arrangements. The expectation in Australia, for example, is that international applicants will work with a recruitment and visa agent to navigate admissions, arrival, and enrollment, but this is not a requirement for U.S. citizens.

U.S. federal loans, 529 plans, and GI Bill funds can all be used abroad, but not universally. Different schools, courses of study, student types, and funding sources will affect whether these can be used. Search the current list of federal loan–eligible institutions abroad to confirm whether this is a viable payment option.

Life as a student abroad is different from life as a dependent of someone under chief-of-mission authority. Students need to secure local bank accounts, access local health systems, and navigate the oddities of cell phone plans and online payment-sharing apps when multiple currencies and nationalities are involved.

Universities with a high number of international students are more likely to offer significant support for these start-up hurdles. They may even offer orientation programs or special international students' support offices. Once enrolled, students must be fully prepared to take care of their paperwork, payments, health care, and financial arrangements.

Finally, the most significant difference between an American-style university education and one outside the U.S. is that persistence—the likelihood that a student will return for the second year—at most global universities is lower than the persistence rate in the U.S.

Lower tuition, larger and more impersonal classes, student realizations that their chosen degree isn't a great fit, and testing and performance cut-offs mean that each year the cohort of peers shrinks significantly. While most Foreign Service kids are used to saying goodbye, they might struggle with the "survival of the fittest" mentality that marks the student experience at some institutions.

Before choosing a university education abroad, learn more about the different possibilities for obtaining a degree that will provide the most likelihood of transferability and recognition. You'll find American-recognized degrees at universities around the world, at all levels of cost and global prestige, and in almost every possible field.

EDUCATION AT A GLANCE

Go to our webpage at www.afsa.org/education.

School	Page Number	Enrollment	Gender Distribution M/F	Percent Boarding	Percent Int'L	Levels Offered	AP/IB◆	Standard Application Online (SAO)	Accept ADD/LD◆◆	Miles to Int'L Airport	International Students Orientation	Holiday Break Coverage◆◆◆	Annual Tuition, Room & Board (US $)
ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH													
Fairfax Christian School	69	330	50/50	15	20	PK-12	AP	N	Limited	3	Y	Y	60,100-68,150[abdeg]
Ojai Valley School	67	323	50/50	26	12	PK-12	AP	Y	Y	84	Y	Limited	73,500[bd]
Riverstone International School	69	315	52/48	32	12	PK-12	IB	Y	Y	9	Y	Y	18,000-55,000[b]
Rochambeau The French International School	76	1270	46/54	NA	30	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	26,890-32,505[ab]
JUNIOR HIGH/SENIOR HIGH													
Valley Forge Military Academy	71	125	All Boys	94	11	7-12	NA	Y	Y	20	N	Limited	49,000[abdh]
SENIOR HIGH													
Christchurch School	BC	230	57/43	70	30	9-12	AP	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	68,200d
EF Academy New York	65	250	40/60	98	90	9-12	AP/IB	N	Y	40.5	Y	N	46,200-76,100[ab]
EF Academy Pasadena	65	250	54/46	85	75	9-12	AP	N	Y	32	Y	N	46,200-76,100[ab]
Fountain Valley School of Colorado	76	230	50/50	70	27	9-12	AP	Y	Limited	80	Y	Limited	75,900[b]
Foxcroft School	69	168	All Girls	70	20	9-12, PG	AP	Y	Y	43	Y	N	75,200[b]
Madeira School, The	63	338	All Girls	51	13	9-PG	AP	y	Limited	14	N	N	74,500[b]
St. Andrew's School	67	320	50/50	100	11	9-12	NA	Y	Limited	49	Y	Limited	66,400[bdf]
St. Mark's School	68	375	50/50	75	24	9-12	NA	Y	NA	29	N	Limited	76,199[bf]
OVERSEAS													
Berlin Brandenburg International School	63	900	50/50	10	70	K-12	IB	N	Y	22	Y	N	52,500[c]
EF Academy Oxford	65	125	42/58	100	100	11-12	IB	N	Limited	43	Y	N	65,000[a]
Frankfurt International School	64	1800	50/50	NA	80	K-12	IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	11,744-29,608[bc]
Leysin American School in Switzerland	60	310	50/50	100	85	7-12, PG	AP/IB	N	Limited	75	Y	N	124,000[abd]
TASIS - The American School in Switzerland	69	730	46/54	35	93	PK-PG	AP/IB	Y	Y	45	Y	Limited	118,000
HIGHER EDUCATION: COLLEGE/GRADUATE													
Chapman University	61	15	20/80	NA	20	PG	NA	Y	Y	40	Y	N	54,158[b]

OTHER

AAFSW	64	Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide: Publisher of *Raising Kids in the Foreign Service*. A volunteer organization that supports Foreign Service employees, spouses, partners and members of household. Visit www.aafsw.org; FSHub.org.
FSYF	66	Foreign Service Youth Foundation: A support network for U.S. Foreign Service youth worldwide. Go to www.fsyf.org.
GCLO	66	Global Community Liaison Office: Information and resources for Foreign Service families. Contact GCLOAskEducation@state.gov.

◆Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate ◆◆Attention Deficit Disorder/Learning Disabilities ◆◆◆Dec. 25-Jan. 1 NA, Not applicable
[a]Sibling discount [b]Financial aid available [c]Dollar value subject to exchange rate [d]Aid for federal employees
[e]Gap year [f]Need-blind admissions; will meet full financial need [g]Host families [h]Dual enrollment

What to Know When Considering French Schools

ISTOCKPHOTO/QVASIMODO

Choices abound when considering the French school system for your child. Here are some tips to help guide your decision-making.

BY MARTIN THOMEN

Some U.S. foreign affairs professionals educate their children in the French school system, an option in cities of many foreign and domestic assignments. Choices abound, from public bilingual schools in the Washington, D.C., area to a worldwide network of French-government schools on six continents. Motivations for choosing French vary: For some, it's a bridge to a cultural or family connection, and for others, it's a decision made with future opportunities in mind.

French school families rely on the trusted network of the State Department's Office of Overseas Schools' regional education officers, post resources, and tips from other families, but they face additional challenges and benefits specific to the French school system.

The French School System: Nuts and Bolts

French schools are divided into *maternelle*, *école primaire*, *collège*, and *lycée* with grade levels corresponding to the U.S. grade levels as noted in the table (page opposite).

While some schools may make changes for local conditions, the standard is that to begin in the system, the child must turn 5 years old by Dec. 31 of the year of enrollment to *grande section* (GS). In other words, 4-year-olds turning 5 between the fall school start date and end of the calendar year normally may enter GS.

French schools will accept new students with little or no French language ability through first grade *cours préparatoire* (CP), although most require French language skills for children enrolling in levels beyond CP.

For families considering enrollment in the French system, a good tip is to start in the system as early as possible in the child's education journey.

AEFE and Non-AEFE Options

The government of France created the Agency for French Education Abroad (AEFE) in 1990 to coordinate and manage the network of French schools

FSO Martin Thomen is a desk officer in the Bureau of African Affairs Office of West Africa. His child has been in French Ministry of Education–certified schools abroad and presently attends the AEFE-certified Rochambeau in Bethesda, Maryland.

outside France. There are 580 French schools worldwide with almost 392,000 students, 65 percent of whom are not French citizens, in 139 countries.

AEFE oversight results in a uniformity of curriculum and standards across the network of schools. Students in AEFE schools may seamlessly transfer to other AEFE schools worldwide without the need to translate documents or determine equivalencies across class and grade results.

French-language school choices exist outside the AEFE system as well. These may be local schools in a country or province that is French-speaking or locally run French-language immersion schools, including those in Washington, D.C., and other locales.

Transferring between non-AEFE and AEFE schools may involve meeting requirements of the receiving school for testing in or determining equivalencies of classes transferred.

Montgomery County Schools' Sligo Creek Elementary and Fairfax County Public Schools' Kent Gardens Elementary are examples of non-AEFE French-language immersion schools in the Washington, D.C., area.

Parents considering French-language schooling should determine whether schools in their preferred location are non-AEFE or AEFE-certified and talk to counselors about requirements for district enrollment, testing in, or transferring credits.

School	U.S. System	French System
Nursery, *Maternelle*	Pre-K Kindergarten	Moyenne Section (MS) Grande Section (GS)
Lower/Primary, *École Primaire*	First Grade Second Grade Third Grade Fourth Grade Fifth Grade	Cours Préparatoire (CP) Cours Elémentaire 1 (CE1) Cours Elémentaire 2 (CE2) Cours Moyen 1 (CM1) Cours Moyen 2 (CM2)
Middle, *Collège*	Sixth Grade Seventh Grade Eighth Grade Ninth Grade	Sixième (6ème) Cinquième (5ème) Quatrième (4ème) Troisième (3ème)
Upper/High, *Lycée*	Tenth Grade Eleventh Grade Twelfth Grade	Seconde (2nde) Première (1ère) Terminale (Tle)

French Education Pros and Cons

As with any school choice, positives and negatives exist. Here are some of the pros and cons, based on the recent experiences of U.S. Foreign Service families with children in the French school system.

Pros: AEFE-certified schools provide a direct pathway to completion of the French baccalauréat (*le bac*) exams that are taken over the last two years of high school. Leading universities in the United States, Canada, Europe, and beyond recognize *le bac* as a high-quality and rigorous qualification for university entry.

Additionally, many French schools offer high schoolers a track to the international baccalaureate (IB), a local high school degree program, or other university-entry programs such as advanced placement (AP). For instance, Rochambeau, an AEFE-certified school in Bethesda, Maryland, offers AP courses, and graduating seniors earn a dual degree: a Maryland high school diploma and *le bac*.

In many foreign capitals, the tuition of the French school is more affordable than other international schools, allowing for a healthy mix of local and international culture. The French government via AEFE often provides financial support to these schools.

The centralization of the curriculum and grading makes for smooth transitions

Top Tips & Resources

- Get into the system as early as possible in the child's education journey.
- Determine whether schools are non-AEFE or AEFE, and talk to counselors about requirements for enrollment, testing in, or transferring credits.
- Find a map of worldwide schools and more at the Agency for French Education Abroad's website: https://aefe.gouv.fr/.
- Join the conversation with other U.S. personnel with children in, or interested in, French education at https://www.facebook.com/groups/frenchschoolfamilies.
- Talk to the school counselor, Office of Overseas Schools, and post representatives about your school choice.

between posts for students staying in the French system.

Cons: If the parents don't have French-language skills, it can create a disconnect when assisting with schoolwork or volunteering at the school. Similarly, the "playground language" may principally be the host country's local language or French, which can be a challenge for early learners.

Overseas, French schools are not normally the "post-supported" school (they may be a "post-assisted" school). It is important to understand the difference. Because post's management section, Regional Security Officer, and Community Liasion Officer may have more mandatory duties related to the supported school (such as financial support and safety oversight), non-supported schools may naturally have less direct interaction with post. And that may require more parental communication and advocacy on issues that crop up at a post-assisted French school than at a post-supported school.

If you plan to transfer out of the French system or move to a post without a French school, you may need to translate and gain equivalency scores for prior coursework. ■

There are 580 French schools worldwide with almost 392,000 students, 65 percent of whom are not French citizens, in 139 countries.

The Propaganda Apocalypse

Seeing Red: Russian Propaganda and American News
Sarah Oates and Gordon Neil Ramsay, Oxford University Press, 2024, $27.95/paperback, e-book available, 216 pages.

How to Win an Information War: The Propagandist Who Outwitted Hitler
Peter Pomerantsev, Public Affairs, 2024, $30.00/hardcover, e-book available, 304 pages.

Propaganda and Persuasion
Nancy Snow, Garth S. Jowett, and Victoria J. O'Donnell, Sage Publications, 2024, $156.00/paperback, e-book available, 512 pages.

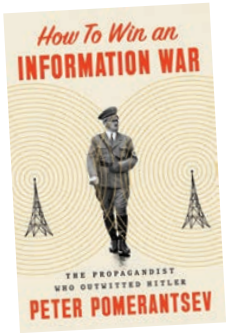
Reviewed by Vivian S. Walker

Propaganda and its threat to democratic institutions in the digital age has emerged as a central problem of our time. Concern about the consequences of targeted information manipulation and influence operations now dominates contemporary political discourse. In fact, we can't stop talking about it. Nearly a decade after RAND's landmark study of the Russian "firehose of propaganda" model, the firehose of alarmist commentary on propaganda, disinformation, and fake news has all but overwhelmed attempts to make sense of their effects.

Fortunately, three new books drawing from a range of scholarly disciplines offer balanced, detailed, and accessible analyses of the nature of propaganda and how to confront it. In *Seeing Red: Russian Propaganda and American News*, co-authors Sarah Oates and Gordon Neil Ramsay offer a groundbreaking analysis of how and why Russian disinformation has penetrated American media and political discourse in the last decade. Using an innovative diagnostic model, the authors also reveal the extent to which Russian disinformation and propaganda, amplified by domestic actors, have "colonized," weakened, and compromised U.S. media outlets.

Oates and Ramsay provide an especially insightful analysis of the erosion of traditional media institutions in the digital age and how the transformation of the information ecosystem has increased our vulnerability to propaganda. They identify the extent to which the unregulated social media environment, algorithm-dominated news distribution models, and the demise of traditional commercial funding mechanisms have each undermined the production of high-quality journalism in the public interest. They then provide ample evidence that the "strong tradition of free speech" has itself become "susceptible to manipulation" in this decentralized and fragmented information space.

Seeing Red also provides an essential primer on the spread of foreign propaganda in American political discourse. Using a set of analytical tools designed to track the presence of Russian-based narratives in U.S. news, Oates and Ramsay demonstrate that Russian and far right domestic narratives use the same key words and phrases to undermine the credibility of American political institutions.



Because these narratives essentially sound and feel alike, it is difficult to distinguish between them—or recognize who is behind them. By demonstrating how these narratives influence and reinforce one another, the authors show how Russian propaganda has not only penetrated the U.S. media ecosystem but reverberates in the anti-democratic discourse of the far right.

As Oates and Ramsay write, *Seeing Red* is a "how dunnit" rather than a "who dunnit." Instead of merely focusing on identifying and exposing specific propaganda outlets or actors, this book offers an evidence-based analytical framework to track how propaganda moves across the media landscape. The "scourge" of propaganda cannot be eliminated; but, as Oates and Ramsay show us, a clear-eyed assessment of its attributes can go a long way in building resistance to its effects.

Evidence-based analysis is one way to combat disinformation effects. Historical example is another. In *How to Win an Information War*, prominent disinformation expert Peter Pomerantsev tells the story of Sefton Delmer, the head of Special Operations for the British Political Warfare Executive during World War II, whose unorthodox countermeasures undermined the propaganda of the Third Reich. A stylish blend of history, biography, memoir, and sociology, *How to Win an Information War* is, like its hero, a bit subversive and altogether compelling.

Drawing on the philosopher Jacques Ellul's insight that "propaganda is the true remedy for loneliness," Pomerantsev argues that the real power of propaganda is not to "convince" or "confuse" (as most contemporary definitions have it) but

rather to "provide a sense of belonging" in an unstable world. He then shows how Delmer subverted Nazi ideology by drawing attention to its failure to make good on its promise of a common purpose and shared identity.

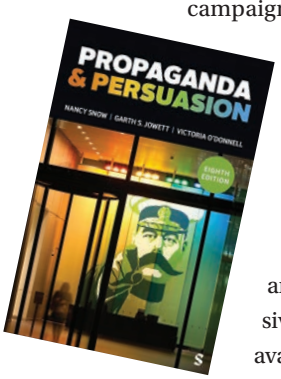
The heart of the book is Pomerantsev's deft retelling of Delmer's crowning achievement, the persona of "der Chef," a fictional renegade Wehrmacht officer whose "secret" radio broadcasts from the British countryside were aimed at weary and demoralized German soldiers and civilians. By routinely (and profanely) calling attention to inconsistencies in Nazi ideology and the behavior of its leadership, der Chef credibly undermined both.

Pomerantsev cites Delmer's ability to tap into and build on his audience's resentment and alienation, finding innovative and unexpected ways to subvert Nazi propaganda. By magnifying the distortions and inequities embedded in the regime's rhetoric, he created an exploitable gap between the German people and its Nazi leadership. Pomerantsev urges contemporary information warriors to do the same, that is, to find new and different ways to assess, engage, and motivate vulnerable audiences.

At the same time, reflecting on contemporary Russian propaganda campaigns, Pomerantsev waxes pessimistic about our ability to create a communication environment where democracy can function. In his telling, online algorithms encourage people to seek association with like-minded believers who prioritize their deepest fears and offer a shared sense of purpose. The penetration and subversion of these closed communities of belief remains elusive.

While *Seeing Red* and *How to Win an Information War* both focus on a fixed time period and an established set of actors, the eighth edition of *Propaganda and Persuasion* (with a new author, Nancy Snow) provides an encyclopedic overview of and introduction to the nature of propaganda—what it is, how its use has evolved over time, and how to analyze its effects. Although designed and marketed as a student textbook, it has much to offer all those who seek a more in-depth understanding of how and why propaganda works.

Unlike much of the current literature on information manipulation and targeted influence campaigns, these books do not, thankfully, succumb to handwringing.



The authors define propaganda at the outset as an "asymmetrical form of communication" that favors the propagandist. Persuasion, meanwhile, is a "symmetrical exchange" of information between "persuader and persuadee." The entire volume turns on an understanding of propaganda as an imbalance of power between source and target.

Chock-full of examples, the book provides tactical analyses and case studies drawn from a broad cross section of disciplines—including history, political science, media studies, sociology, and psychology. *Propaganda and Persuasion* also handily summarizes multiple theoretical treatments of propaganda and tracks important historical shifts in approaches to its classification.

Chapters 1 and 4 offer detailed reviews of, respectively, conceptual and research approaches to propaganda and persuasion. Chapter 2 examines propaganda from the Greeks to the American Civil War, while chapter 3 takes the modern "institutionalization" of propaganda through the digital age. Subsequent chapters weave back and forth between analyses of psychological warfare and weaponized propaganda; propaganda analytics and techniques; institutional and campaign structures; and audience identification and response, effects, and evaluation.

The four case studies in chapter 7 are especially noteworthy. They provide actual examples of targeted influence campaigns, illustrating diverse applications of propaganda techniques. The studies analyze sources and actors, targeted audiences, strategies deployed, and attempts made to counter campaign impacts.

Unfortunately, while this is arguably the most comprehensive single study of propaganda available today, *Propaganda and Persuasion* is often difficult to follow. Many of the important concepts and definitions are repeated across multiple chapters. A handbook, by definition, should be easily navigable, but this one requires quite a bit of spadework to arrive at its genuinely useful insights and explanations.

As all three books tell us, there is no definitive corrective to the enduring presence—and power—of propaganda and disinformation. However, unlike much of the current literature on information manipulation and targeted influence campaigns, these books do not, thankfully, succumb to handwringing. Instead, each of them offers fact-based, contextualized approaches to defining propaganda's

scope, nature, and impacts, and each provides tools and methodologies to address them.

By highlighting the vulnerability to disinformation created by the collapse of traditional media systems, the siren call of "belonging" at the heart of most influence campaigns, and propaganda's enduring presence in human history, these books contribute to a reasoned understanding of propaganda as well as improved resilience to its effects.

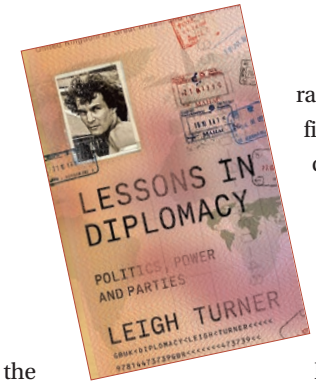
A retired Senior Foreign Service officer and a former executive director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, Vivian S. Walker, PhD, serves as chair of The Foreign Service Journal *Editorial Board, an adjunct professor in Georgetown University's MSFS degree program, and a faculty fellow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

A British Take on Foreign Service

Lessons in Diplomacy: Politics, Power and Parties
Leigh Turner, Policy Press, 2024, $29.99/ hardcover, e-book available, 256 pages.

Reviewed by Barbara Stephenson

After a 42-year career in the U.K. Civil Service, the vast majority of that in the U.K. Foreign Office as a British diplomat, Leigh Turner, former British ambassador to Ukraine and Austria, retired to write his book, *Lessons in Diplomacy*. Part memoir, part how-to guide, part classic foreign policy, the book is more a collection of chapters than a sustained, coherent work. This has the virtue of enabling the reader to pick any entry point and start reading.



As an inveterate U.K. watcher with multiple U.K. tours under my belt, I found the third chapter, on Brexit, a particularly compelling and rewarding read. In a mere 10 pages, Turner combines firsthand accounts of working on economic and monetary union with the European Community, as the European Union (EU) was known back in the 1980s, with pithy, insightful analysis of the underlying tensions that led to Brexit.

Turner sees Brexit as a mistake and provides painful primary accounts of upholding nonsensical policy positions, as the difficulty of implementing Brexit made itself manifest. But he balances that with a well-founded critique of the push toward "ever closer union."

"I voted against Brexit," he writes. "It weakens both the U.K. and the EU." Then, he adds, given Europe's history over the last 200 years, "I scratch my head at the concept of 'European values.'"

I don't agree with Turner's downbeat conclusion about the future of the EU, which is tackling governance challenges—especially for emerging technologies—that seem to have no other home across the democratic world. Still, Brexit was such a profoundly polarizing issue, one that ruined dinner parties and tore families and friends apart, that it is rare to find any treatment that is remotely balanced. And Turner's third chapter, "How to Fail at Geopolitical Change: Brexit," may well be the finest account of its length I have found anywhere.

I also recommend Turner's fourth chapter, "How (Not) to Introduce Democracy," which opens with rich firsthand accounts of the decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, when the Soviet Union went from seeming like it would last forever to collapsing. Drawing on contemporaneous letters home and a journal, he makes the social and economic chaos of Moscow in the early 1990s vivid.

One sample: "My chronically unreliable Lada Niva is familiar with jerrycans but has yet to know the nozzle of a petrol pump," Turner writes. He then describes bribing Sergei to sell him a jerrycan of gas, at a 1,000 percent markup, to get his Lada, containing his three-month-old child, back to shelter in minus 20-degree weather.

Turner also weaves economic data into these accounts. For example: "Between 1990 and 1999, Russia's GDP slumped from $517 billion to $196 billion—barely more than Poland's." This provides context and strengthens the impact of the graphic anecdotes, giving readers a window into why the *Financial Times* hired him to write "several dozen pieces."

As for the remainder of the book, readers can pick and choose topics of interest. The index is useful for locating anecdotes and observations about topics as varied as Brexit, diplomatic immunity, drinking alcohol, and Hill, Fiona—making it easy for Foreign Service readers to locate the bits that interest them, given the wide-ranging experiences that all diplomats seem to share.

Those shared experiences—of nearly running out of gas with a baby on board, of seeking a post in Africa or Latin America and ending up in Bonn, of meeting celebrities and managing visits of elected officials—will make the book a comfortable, easy read for most *FSJ* readers, as it deals with a world we know well.

For me, the most painful part comes in the conclusion, when Turner describes the "hammer blows that have rained down on the Foreign Office." In just a couple of paragraphs, he describes how the "merger between the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID), coinciding with Brexit and a global COVID-19 pandemic that forced diplomats worldwide to work from home for months, paralysed what was left of the decision-making machinery of both departments."

He concludes: "Wags argued that no hostile power in their wildest dreams could have hoped to create such a combination of measures to handicap British foreign policy in promoting the security and prosperity of the United Kingdom as Brexit and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) merger."

As an American diplomat who admired and learned from British diplomats in the early years of my career and for the remainder of my career turned to the U.K. as the first partner in addressing just about any challenge the globe tossed up, I cannot help but comment on the implications for American diplomacy of the "hammer blows" to U.K. diplomacy that Turner describes.

One of Turner's really insightful concepts, "load-bearing relationships," is of great practical significance for diplomats. Writ large, the weakening of British diplomacy means the load American diplomats must bear has grown heavier—just as the challenges the globe tosses up show no signs of abating.

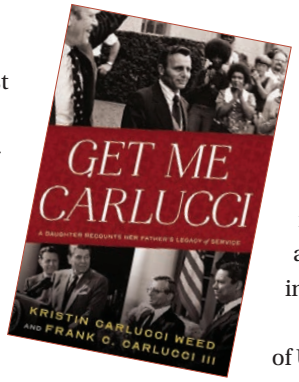
Turner's book, while not necessarily worth reading in its entirety, has useful nuggets scattered throughout. At its best, it is witty, in the manner of some of the great British diplomats I know; at its weakest, it has a plodding, paint-by-numbers feel. But given the task ahead, American diplomats can use all the helpful tips they can find.

Ambassador (ret.) Barbara Stephenson served nearly 34 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, including as junior U.K. desk officer, Consul General Belfast, and the first female deputy chief of mission/chargé at the U.S. embassy in London.

A Great American Life

Get Me Carlucci: A Daughter Recounts Her Father's Legacy of Service
Kristin Carlucci Weed and Frank C. Carlucci III, Disruption Books, 2023, $29.95/hardcover, e-book available, 280 pages.

Reviewed by Eric Rubin



Was Frank Carlucci the most successful and accomplished Foreign Service officer in the 100-year history of the modern U.S. Foreign Service? He has some competition, including former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. A dispassionate assessment, however, would almost certainly give the nod to Carlucci.

In a career spanning nearly four decades, Carlucci rose to the pinnacle of American public life, serving as secretary of Defense, national security adviser, deputy national security adviser, deputy secretary of Defense, deputy director of the CIA, and U.S. ambassador to Portugal during the Carnation Revolution of 1974.

Like former President Joe Biden, Carlucci grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and his family was of modest means. His rise to power began as an undergraduate at Princeton, then as an MBA student at Harvard.

After graduation, he went on to serve in the Navy and in 1956 joined the Foreign Service. Carlucci played an important role at the U.S. consulate general in the Belgian Congo, which became the U.S. embassy upon Congo's independence in 1960.

Despite his youth and lack of seniority, Carlucci quickly came to the attention of Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon, respectively. What followed was a series of increasingly important assignments. To put it simply, Carlucci impressed pretty much everyone he worked for, and met.

Carlucci's rapid ascent through the ranks of the Foreign Service led to his nomination as U.S. ambassador to Portugal after only 18 years of service. His success in navigating the unstable political crisis that followed the collapse of the Caetano dictatorship brought him more good press and positive attention among policymakers in Washington.

Reaching the highest levels of U.S. officialdom followed. He became a favorite of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Carlucci's keen eye for talent led him to recommend then–Brigadier General Colin Powell to President Reagan as deputy national security adviser. Powell succeeded Carlucci as national security adviser and went on to a distinguished career of his own.

Biographies of public officials tend to fall into a few categories. The first is academic, scholarly biographies that aim for a dispassionate assessment of a public figure's life and accomplishments. The second is the genre of tell-all biographies

that aim to sell books with salacious tidbits and hitherto-unknown gossip. The third, into which this book falls, is biographies by family members and close friends.

Frank Carlucci is fortunate that his daughter, Kristin Carlucci Weed, chose to finish the memoir he started before his death, weaving together his words and her recollections. The result is a fascinating, candid, and probing look at a beloved father and great statesman.

They are both candid about the factors that led to the failure of Carlucci's first marriage, and about the toll that his frenetic career took on his own health and emotional well-being, as well as on the health and well-being of his spouses and children.

What emerges from this narrative is the tale of a truly talented and deeply patriotic American who came of age during the Cold War and dedicated his life to serving his country and striving for world peace.

While Carlucci clearly had high standards for himself and his staff, he also emerges from the pages of this book as a committed mentor and a champion of countless colleagues who worked with and for him.

This story is, in many ways, a period piece. It is not conceivable that a Foreign Service officer could rise this far and this fast in current conditions. An entry-level FSO is not likely to be known to a president of the United States, as happened when the visiting prime minister of the Congo asked Kennedy, "Where's Carlucci?" The president sent for him, and the rest is history.

We are indebted in so many ways to the generations of Foreign Service officers before us who navigated the treacherous shoals of the Cold War and helped to achieve the peaceful end of that conflict. We are also indebted to Frank Carlucci's daughter for picking up the mantle and sharing the story of her father and his achievements. This is the story of a great American life. ■

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

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State and Defense: Closer Than You Might Think

BY ROBERT HILTON

My two-year tour as foreign policy adviser (POLAD) to the chief of staff of the U.S. Army was what the Army would call a "broadening assignment." I returned to the Department of State with new skills, knowledge, and perspectives that will help me do my job better, to the department's benefit.

I also acquired a deeper appreciation for how diplomacy and the military can collaborate to achieve our shared objectives—because our organizations are more similar than people think. Many—both inside the government and out—assume the gap between State and Defense is larger than it is. In my view, while there are differences, the similarities are greater.

The first notable difference is the kinetic option available to the military. In diplomacy, we lack the ability to achieve our goals through force. As a diplomat, I wouldn't challenge a foreign minister to arm wrestle, nor would it be effective if I did. When diplomacy reaches its limits, when statecraft cannot resolve or deter a situation, policymakers may call on the military.

The Army's fundamental purpose is to fight and win our nation's wars. As a diplomat and an American, I am grateful that, if ordered to do so, the military has the potential to bend our enemies to our will.

As a diplomat, I wouldn't challenge a foreign minister to arm wrestle, nor would it be effective if I did.

The second difference is one of scale. The Department of State often laments that there are more lawyers in the Department of Defense (DoD) than diplomats at State. Conversely, military members sometimes ask why their organizations are called on to perform functions that State or USAID might be doing. The short answer: resources. The sheer size of the military, and the Army in particular, allows it to achieve great things.

For example, when I became General James C. McConville's POLAD in June 2022, he described for me the Army's role in developing and distributing the COVID vaccine. I subsequently observed the Army establish mechanisms to channel billions of dollars in weaponry and training to Ukraine, build a floating pier off Gaza, and fix a bridge in Baltimore.

The Army accomplishes big deeds with its people and capabilities. State does a great job with the resources we have, but we can't compete with the scope of the military.

What Brings Us Together

Our differences are, however, less important than what brings us together. First: our need for and concern for our people. I often heard U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Randy A. George, General James McConville's successor, remind his senior team in the Pentagon to consider the impact on the soldier down range of every decision they made.

General McConville's slogan, "People First," encompassed active duty and reserve and National Guard, veterans, civilians, family members—all of whom make up the vast enterprise of the U.S. Army.

At State, we are beginning to think of all our different categories—generalists and specialists, Civil Service, locally employed staff, and our families—as one team, which is essential if we are going to work together to achieve our policy objectives.

And, of course, we all put our spouses and children and pets through the process of uprooting, moving, and replanting every few years over the course

Robert Hilton is a member of the Senior Foreign Service who during a 35-year career has served in the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia. This column is derived from remarks he gave at the end of his POLAD tour, when he received the Army's Superior Public Service Medal from Chief of Staff of the Army General Randy George. He is now senior adviser to the under secretary of State for arms control and international security.

U.S. ARMY

Today's geopolitical environment in which diplomacy and defense operate is depicted in this U.S. Army graphic.

of two or three decades of service. Members of the military grapple with the same issues we do—schools for our children, employment for our spouses, elder care from continents away. Senior leaders must prioritize our people to enable both warfighters and diplomats to perform their duties effectively.

The Full Range of Challenges

Both institutions work within three common environments. First, we both operate in a resource-constrained environment. Again, I acknowledge the tremendous funding disparity between State and DoD, but neither organization receives enough taxpayer money to do all the things it is asked to do by policymakers. Trade-offs are unavoidable; it isn't possible to do everything, everywhere, all at once.

Second, both organizations operate in the same challenging global arena for the same ends: protecting our nation and promoting our national interests and ideals. U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence Lieutenant General Anthony Hale created a slide to illustrate the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment in which the Army works (see above).

Diplomats address these same challenges. They are at work in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous physical and policy environments around the world, routinely dealing with hardship and danger.

Finally, and most important, diplomacy and the military are tools used by and subordinate to elected policymakers. The American people elect a president who appoints the Secretaries of State and Defense, and we are obligated to implement their decisions, whatever we may think.

At the State Department, we don't have a phrase like "best military advice" (a phrase disliked by some in the military, I know), but we should. At least, that's what we practice. We provide best diplomatic advice to elected and appointed leaders, who make decisions that we then execute, not always happily or comfortably, but professionally.

I rejoined State with increased admiration for the U.S. Army and a strong belief that we are on the same team, striving to achieve the same goals for our great nation.

LOCAL LENS

A local man practices the classic Chinese ribbon dragon dance at sunset along the Bund, a mile-long stretch along the Huangpu River, in Shanghai. An important part of Chinese cultural celebrations and festivals, dragon dancing is believed to bring prosperity and drive away evil spirits. The ribbon dragon dance form has become a popular pastime for active elders looking for a traditional twist to their workout routines. ■

West Follmer is a Foreign Service officer currently serving in Beijing. This photo was taken with a Nikon Z6II.

Please submit your favorite, recent photograph to be considered for Local Lens. Images must be high resolution (at least 300 dpi at 8" x 10", or 1 MB or larger) and must not be in print elsewhere. Include a short description of the scene/event as well as your name, brief biodata, and the type of camera used. Send to **locallens@afsa.org**.

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